

Action Aid Australia Ltd

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Local Children at Jumana River School

Jumana River Development Project School

Lutfar Rahman

This article has been written by a local person working on this project.

Kazipur is a boarder area of Shirazgonj district beside the river Jamuna. The people of that locality were illiterate. They are living in a char (sand bar) but they have to move to another char. The river compels them to do so. That is why the government and NGO's are not interested to work in this neglected and marginalized area. After observing this situation Symbiosis Bangladesh saw the need to establish a pre school here. There are 3 classes from class -I to class III with three teachers. To meet the interest of the children and guardians of this area, Symbiosis added class IV and V and another teacher. At present there are four teachers in the school. Before the children of this area did not understand what is school. Children only knew helping their parents with cows, goats and sheep, going to the field each day, early in the morning. They had to help their parents with work. Children were collecting dry cow dung and cutting grasses on the river bank and carrying them to the market on foot or by boat. In this way the children contributed to the family income and sustenance.

The families often had to transfer their houses on the char because of the threat of river erosion. There seemed to be no benefits in education. The guardians of the children were often not interested in the children receiving an education because of the cost and the loss of income from the labour of the children. At the beginning of 2003 this was the situation but the present scenario is totally different.

Now the children are going to school and get educated from the Symbiosis Pre School. The project staff and teachers are continuing to build the interest and enthusiasm of the students and their parents. The parents are realizing that education is vital for their children's future and it is vital for progressing in life in the modern world. The uneducated person has very low status and role in society. They are neglected in the society, country as well internationally. Now days the guardians are sending their children to the school, encouraging them and cooperating with them for their studies. By taking Symbiosis pre school assistance the children are not only studying but also performing sports and cultural activities. They have become much more aware of issues such as behaviour, politeness, dress, cleanliness and sanitation. At present the number of students is as follows; class one has 40 students, class two has 20, class three has 16, class four has 16 and class five has 12 students.

In conclusion we can say that development of that area is remarkable. We are hoping that this program can be expanded.

SEDS 2007

Lyn Pickering

The visit to India this year occurred rather quickly. It almost did not happen as I had an unexpected trip to hospital in late November/December and this slowed us both down for a time

Tanks

Field trips to the 2006 watershed programs in three villages enabled us to see the advances in the selected communities. Action Aid Australia has de-silted twenty six tanks (or small dams within the larger tank), since 2000 as part of the Watershed Management program. The tank sizes are dependent on local contribution and support, and also on local soil conditions, with the recent tanks being dug to three metres. Two metres depth is the regular size for many tanks due to soil type and the size varies around 50 x 60 metres.

Tanks in India are large depressions (similar to our reservoirs) with a four metre wall at the lower end which was originally constructed in the 14th century by the ruler of the day. Over many years the tanks or water catchments have silted up, which has meant the water storage capacity has diminished. Severe droughts during the past 15 years have seen tanks dry in early summer, causing undue hardship on many village communities. Tanks can range in size from several hundred metres, up to 1 kilometre in length. There are 400 tanks within the SEDS area of work.

The Action Aid project has targeted communities who show a willingness to contribute to the program. The village selected is requested to do the following

- Form a Village Organisation (VO) if not already in operation
- The VO must have a large percentage of women members, who in turn are members of a Women's Self Help Group.
- Support the watershed program either by donating some funds for the work, or by carrying out volunteer labour to clear the selected site of the tank of weeds, or some of the repair work to bund walls.

Action Aid Australia and SEDS has had very good communication over the past 15 years and this has strengthened each year. That same communication process of SEDS staff within their

area of developmental work has meant that communities are now coming forward with requests to be selected for a desilting program.

Women's Self Help Groups

The flow on from a program which brings clean drinking water, trees and fish to these needy communities has been the growth and development of the Women's Self Help Groups. The women are now seen as significant contributors to the Village Organisations (VO). Regular training programs are conducted at SEDS or within the villages in family health issues and small business management.

We visited a village where they did not have a VO, however some of the women were working well, although individually. They had picked the tamarind seeds, and were taking off the outer shell in preparation for the market. It was interesting to sit outside a small house and listen to the discussion which went on between Rajen, his field officer, and the village women. Some of the men were there and one man tried to stop the women from speaking. As it was the women who appeared to be doing all the work Rajen was able to negotiate a good outcome. The women agreed to talk more together, with a view to setting up the first Women's Self Help Group in this community.

Sponsored Children

The Village Organisations, through the women's groups also have been instrumental in identifying and selecting children from needy families who require assistance to send their child to school. This has been done in many cases with consultation with the local teachers. We now have 155 children attending school who may have been denied this opportunity. Many more have passed through the system and have reached Year 10 at school, a vast improvement on earlier times.

Local Market Development

Another strategy in local communities has been to look at Local Market Development. A two day conference on this issue was hosted by SEDS, and supported by a European donor. Other local NGO's came and Ian and I were invited to attend. SEDS had already been working towards local market development, and had targeted five villages. This project was presented by Rabbani and Venkana, two key SEDS staff members.

The ground peanut crops have been suffering over recent years due to drought, and the five selected villages were asked to consider diversifying their crops. Many farmers within the target villages did just that and have been growing sunflower which is not as dependant on rain as the peanuts.

Marketing is the next step, and the Conference attendees discussed the various areas where the NGO's could be involved. Many of the NGO's saw this of being more benefit to them at the local level, rather than a larger country or international area, although this may be considered long term. SEDS have already begun the process of finding trainers in local market development to talk to the Village Organisations at their regular meetings.

This trip like all others was worthwhile in terms of visiting project sites, monitoring the children's progress, and it was valuable to meet and discuss issues with the SEDS team, and also other NGO's working in other areas of development. We were again impressed with what we saw.

Join Together and Help Do Something about Climate Change!

EARTH HOUR

7.30pm to 8.30pm - Saturday March 31, 2007

Earth Hour is a fabulous opportunity for you and your family to do something about climate change. At 7.30pm on March 31st 2007, companies, government departments, individuals and families will turn off their lights for just one hour. It sounds simple, but it is very, very dramatic. We hope that during the first Earth Hour, the savings in green house gas emissions will be the equivalent of taking 75,000 medium sized cars off the road for one whole year! Now that's something worth doing.

How to Join

Sign up to Earth Hour and Pledge to turn off your lights on March 31st from 7.30pm to 8.30pm by logging onto www.earthhour.org . You will receive all the information you need to make Earth Hour a great success.

ENTERTAINMENT BOOK - GREAT VALUE AT \$60

The Entertainment Book will again be launched in mid April. It is a restaurant and activity guide that provides **special 25 to 50% off and 2-for-1 vouchers** from many of the best restaurants, hotels and arts, cultural and sport attractions in Melbourne and its surrounds.

Action Aid has run this small fundraiser for five years, with **\$12 from every book sold going to our projects**. We thank our members for your support over the years.

A second book designed for the Geelong, Bellarine, Surf Coast and Ballarat areas is also available. Similar offers are available. For more information, or to order, please email Lyn Pickering on lipickering@bigpond.com, phone the office on 9704 6315 or just post a cheque to the office. Delivery will be arranged once books are received.

Personal Stories

How is Aina Today?

Written by TTIS staff member



Aina is a participant in the Action Aid sponsored Bangladesh Symbiosis TTIS Project.

Aina is a woman who came from a village in the sub district of Sorishabari in Jamalpur District. At one time her economic and social situation was very bad. Her father became old and also was unable to work. Her mother used to teach the Quran (the Muslim Holy Book) to the community. She was maintaining her family by this money. Aina did not have any brother to support the family. So the family of Aina was neglected in their community, a poor family without social status.

Aina married once and had one child. However it was very difficult for her to adjust with her husband and her father-in-law's household while she was living with her husband. She lived in an environment of hostility and constant threats from her in-laws. Finally her husband divorced her. As a result she became desperate. She started working door to door doing domestic duties in their community. Housewives in the community did not treat her well. However they used to give her lots of work that she was not capable of doing. Also they were not giving her salary in a proper time. By this way she was becoming depressed day by day.

One day she met a staff of Symbiosis TTIS project in Sarishabari, Jamalpur district. She asked the supervisor named Mrs. Laki, how to take admission and how to learn sewing training from our project. Then she agreed her proposal and one day she came to TTIS office with her mother. Aina's mother and the Trainer discussed the training and Aina received Tk. 200(\$4) per month as a training honorarium. She was receiving training attentively two times in day. She finished the training course within four months. After receiving the training she got a job in a tailor's shop. The owner only used to provide her food and no remuneration for her labor. Her per day's income was very small. That is why she could not maintain her family. Later she decided to open her own tailoring shop. But she didn't have enough capital to buy a sewing machine. Finally again she contacted Symbiosis TTIS and shared her problems. She told us that her father does not like to work outside in the community.

Then we have discussed with her parents and after explaining it to them we sent her to Narayanganj to work in Garments factory as a Garments worker after discussion with a known person in Narayanganj who was also working in that factory. After training she began by earning three thousand taka per month (\$A60). After a certain period working in the Garments factory she moved to a knitted sweater Factory and now she is earning six thousandTaka per month (\$A120).

Aina is now much more aware of life and society. She has saved sixty thousand taka (\$A1200) in her Bank. She also have eighteen feet long corrugated iron house which cost her forty thousand taka (\$A800). She has also bought a tenth of an acre of land near her house the market price of which is eighty thousand taka (\$A1600) at present. She has also remarried and is now leading a happy married life with her husband. She is also taking good care of her parents and her parents are happy to see her success. She became an example to her community of how to overcome poverty. A learner of TTIS, Aina is self-sufficient today.

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I would like to help Action Aid’s work in the following way:

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Bangladesh (Symbiosis) Vocational Training for Women TTIS

India (SEDS) – Watershed Management Project

India (SEDS) - Womens’ Self Help Groups

India (SEDS) – School Development

India (SEDS) – Medical Fund for sponsored children

India (ABWU) – Special projects

India (ABWU) – Medical Fund for sponsored children

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India (S.E.D.S.) in Central Southern India

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