

SHAMERTO

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Stories of Smiling Faces: SHAMERTO

Sustainable Skills and Employment in
Small Scale Agro Food Processing Project

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PREFACE

Bangladesh is on the course for the Middle Income Country status by 2021 and agriculture remains the largest employer in the country by far. 47,5% of the population is directly employed in agriculture and around 70% depend on agriculture for their livelihood (GoB 7th Five Year Plan). However the contribution of the agricultural sector towards the GDP is failing despite the sector's potential when looking at the food manufacturing industry. The yield per hectare of cultivable land has increased considerably however due to the lack of industrialization initiatives, the contribution towards the GDP continues to decrease. This underlines the significance of transforming the agriculture sector into a food manufacturing sector.

There are risks along graduating from the Least Developed Countries, including high youth unemployment. The economic growth does not translate into jobs, with a working-age population that is expected to grow by more than 2.2 million annually over the next ten years and with a continuously decreasing employment growth.

Shamerto - Sustainable Skills and Employment in Small Scale Agro Food Processing Project is working with the skills sector in the development of competency standards and course curricula, and a decentralized assessment system under the National Technical and Vocational Qualification Framework (NTVQF).

Shamerto builds the capacity of Training and Employment Service Providers (TESP) who then train job seekers on agro-food processing and provide them with job placement services. As a result, poor and extreme poor men and women and disadvantaged people get access to gainful jobs in agro-food processing Small Micro and Cottage Enterprises (SMCE). Besides, some of the trained people are operating small scale processing enterprises and create new employment opportunities on their own.

Shamerto collected stories of men and women trained graduates who are either placed in professional employment or started their own business. The case stories are illustrative examples of significant changes that occurred so far. I express my gratitude to the EU for co-funding the project. I also thank the partners and institutional stakeholders who provided their sincere efforts to achieve these results.

Kaspar Grossenbacher
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PROJECT BRIEF

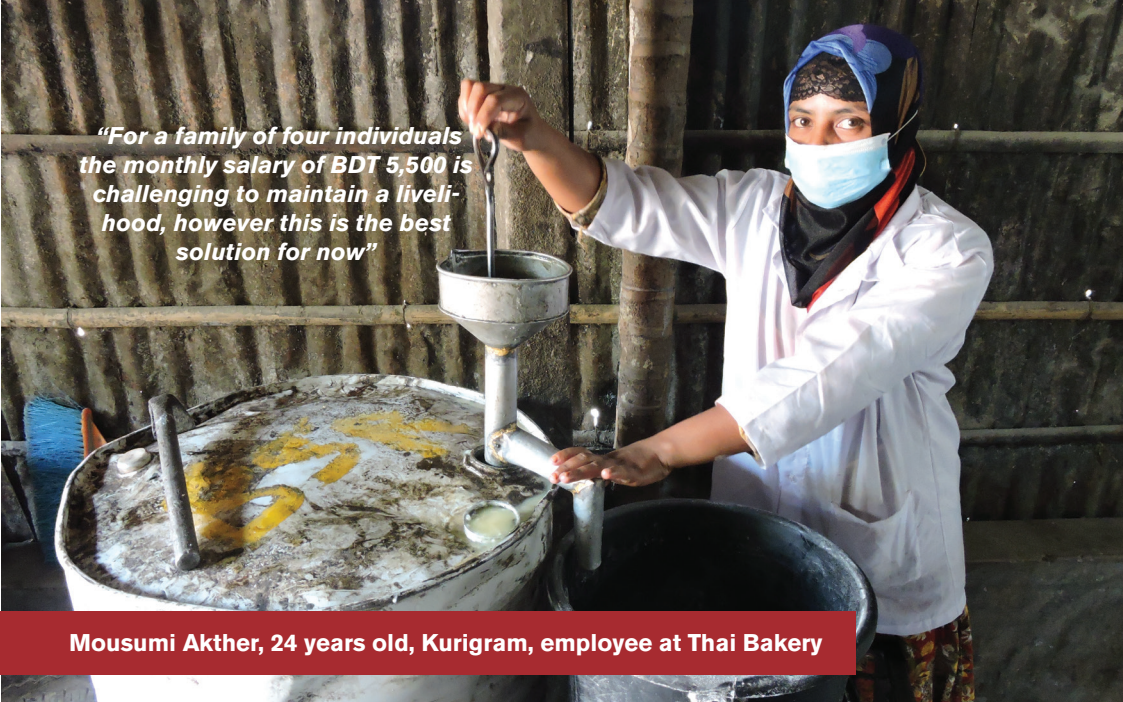
SHAMERTO means “ability” in Bangla. The skills development project is designed by the consortium of Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, Traidcraft Exchange, Bangladesh Agro Processors' Association (BAPA), Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) and 7 District Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) and funded by the European Union. The project aims to increase gainful employment of workers and job seekers who will be trained, counselled and receive satisfactory job placement. Simultaneously the competitiveness and capacity for employment of the targeted Small, Micro and Cottage Enterprises will be enhanced through better integration in selected sub-sector value chains and improvements in the business environment.

Shamerto builds the capacity of 12 institution-based and 39 industry-based Training and Employment Service Providers (TESP) which train job seekers on agro-food processing and provide them with job placement services. Besides, some trainees are expected to initiate small scale processing enterprises and create employment opportunity for others. The project introduced a result-based financing approach compensating TESP's based on successful job placement.

The project supports the agro food processing enterprises to improve efficiency and integration in seven value chains. In addition, Shamerto supports the Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB) and Agro Food Industry Skills Council in developing competency standards on seven demanded occupations: baking (wheat value chain), Chanachoor and Jhuri processing (pulse, spices, ground nut, wheat and rice value chain), puffed and flattened rice processing (rice value chain), food grain machine operator (rice, wheat, pulse, mustard and spices value chain), rice processing (rice value chain), food packaging and food preparation (restaurant cooking).

Shamerto also sensitizes SMCE and job seekers from disadvantaged communities on the benefit of skills training, channeling customized labour market information to the specific target groups, and disseminating information on training and job placement opportunities with the help of a range of communication tools. The Business Intermediary Organizations (BIO) create awareness on the potential of industrialization in the selected product sub-sectors among Small, Micro and Cottage Enterprises (SMCE), value chain actors, as well as the consumers, which stimulates initiatives and opportunities for business growth and job creation.

Shamerto is working with the national skill development system actors to develop standards and curriculum on demanded occupations and certification systems in the frame of the National Training and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF).



“For a family of four individuals the monthly salary of BDT 5,500 is challenging to maintain a livelihood, however this is the best solution for now”

Mousumi Akther, 24 years old, Kurigram, employee at Thai Bakery



“Why do I have to move to Dhaka if I can do the same in my village? If I invest this time and labour at home then I can benefit from baking. My family members are here too”

Rohima Akther Nipa, 23 years old, Kurigram, self-employed

Monsumi Akther is the breadwinner of an all women family of four members. She lives with her mother and her 2 year-old daughter. She completed her secondary school until she was 17 years old. Since her divorce in 2016, Monsumi moved back with her mother who lives in the family house on khas land. She was a housewife before, and after the separation with her husband she worked with a local NGO. She lost her job due to a lack of funding and searched another employment opportunity at a local factory or as a housekeeper.

She learnt about the opportunity to be trained in the agro-food sector through a TV advertisement. Monsumi and another woman from the community contacted the Decent Job and Training Institute (DJTI), a skills training and employment service provider, to get trained and job placement support. Monsumi was enrolled for one month of baking training with DJTI. She succeeded in the assessment and is now recognized as a competent baking level 1 worker. Monsumi found an employment at Thai Bakery and Confectionery in Kurigram shortly after she completed the course and started in April 2018 with a monthly salary of BDT 4,500 which increased to 5,500. On top of her monthly salary her employer provides breakfast and lunch every day, including one soap weekly and BDT 50 weekly for immediate needs.

“For a family of four individuals the monthly salary of BDT 5,500 is challenging to maintain a livelihood, however this is the best solution for now” says Monsumi. In the future, Monsumi wants to open a bakery in the village, buy a piece of land and improve her family’s standard of living.

Rohima grew up in a very poor family of five members in Kurigram. After a massive river erosion the household lost their homestead and other assets. The financial situation got more challenging, the father couldn’t continue paying for Rohima’s education beyond class 8 and he decided to arrange Rohima’s marriage when she was 14 years old. At present, Rohima lives with her husband and their 4 years old daughter in Vetorbond Sorkarpara, Nageshwari, Kurigram. Rohima and her father-in-law run a tea stall where she started working 6 years ago serving tea and preparing rice cakes. Rohima’s husband had to find another employment to sustain a living for the family and worked 5 years in Dhaka as a rickshaw puller. Rohima heard about the opportunity to get trained in baking from a relative and was selected with other 24 participants.

She learned to make biscuits, dinner rolls and muffins. After the training she started diversifying her products and from rice cakes she produced biscuits, dinner rolls and muffins. She produces 100 muffins, 25 dinner rolls per day and supplies 3 shops in addition to her own. She earns an average of BDT 300 per day. Before being self-employed she worked two weeks in a bakery in Dhaka and realized she could earn a living with her baking business in the village. In addition to the tea stall business in the village, her husband was previously a rickshaw puller in Dhaka during 5 years. In January 2019 he decided that he would no longer work in Dhaka. “It is better to be involved in the business here in Kurigram than to pull a rickshaw in Dhaka where I was earning little money”, says Shafiqul Islam, her husband.

What Rohima liked the most about the training is the safe practice hygiene and the food preparation with hand gloves. From February 2019, she is expanding her activity and supplies baking items in two schools nearby for 150 students. Her husband, mother in law and sister are involved in the new business. Rohima would like to apply for a micro-credit scheme to buy a micro oven for BDT 35,000 in which they will be able to bake much more. Shafiqul is very happy about her wife doing well. “I want a better life for my family, and want to be able to pay for my children’s education”.



“Women job placement is very challenging and we face discrimination, this is why we are eager to establish our own business initiative”

Jubo Forum Federation, 14 members between 19 years to 32 years old, Kurigram entrepreneurs



“This job is a boon for me and it will help me to free up my mortgaged land, and finally on that piece of land my own house will be built”.

Kohinoor, 35 years old, Kurigram, employee at Thai bakery

Jubo means “youth” in Bangla. The Youth Forum members completed the baking training in Kurigram. Out of 25 participants 14 members decided to stay in Kurigram and apply their new skills. Looking for an employment in Dhaka would have been easier as there are more options. However, the youth group was convinced to stay in their village. “We are eager to establish our own business and want to be role model as self-employed in our communities”, says Md. Rysul Islam Noman, President of the Youth Forum.

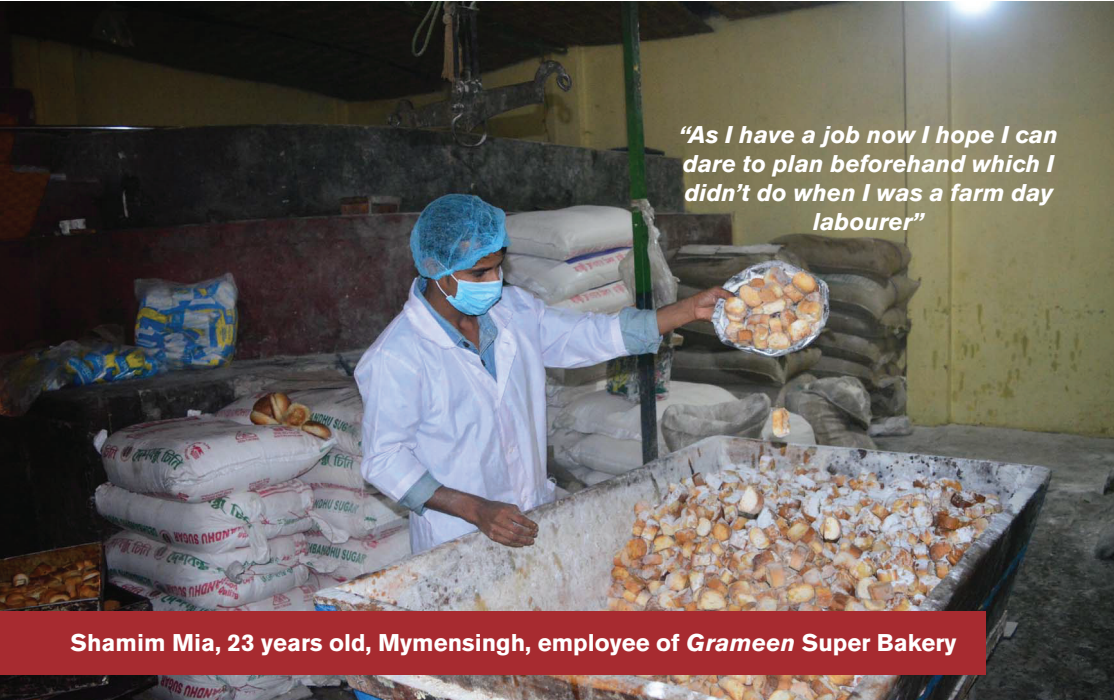
Meanwhile Decent Job and Training Institute (DJTI) announced a 26 days long skill training on baking. Accordingly *Jubo* Forum selected 14 members from their association and communicated with DJTI to enroll them as trainees. They successfully completed the baking level-1 training in Kurigram. Soon after the training the 14 members bought an oven together, each contributed BDT 4,600. They are planning to produce 5000 cakes and 7000 biscuits. *Jubo* Forum developed a strategy to run their business through 10 distribution channels and three school canteens. Their motto is to produce tasty and quality food.

Six women are part of the Youth Forum. “Women job placement is very challenging and we face discrimination, reason why we are eager to establish our own business initiative” says Krishna Rani Roy, 23 years old. They started working 7 days in rotation. “We want to be self-reliant. We are all educated and wish to open a modern bakery”, says Rysul. Finding a job in their respective field of study was challenging and they want to be an example for the next generation. At present they produce 500 cupcakes and 100 dice cakes. They sell their merchandise through three commission agents and make on average BDT 12,000 per month. At this stage they don't share their profit yet but rather reinvest the money earned in a common fund to develop their business in the near future.

Kohinoor, her husband and son live in Kurigram on a piece of government *khas* land. She is an employee at the Thai Bakery. Few years back the family borrowed BDT 60,000 from different micro finance institutions to arrange the daughter's marriage. In addition Kohinoor and her family leased out 10 decimal of their own land to a relative for BDT 40,000 under a traditional Bangladeshi practice called *bonduk*, a type of mortgage. The agreement is that as long as the amount of BDT 40,000 is not repaid they would not regain ownership on their land. This practice puts those leasing their land in a difficult situation: if they can't repay back the amount of BDT 40,000 they have no other solution than to sell their land. This can be seen as a trap.

Before being engaged at the Thai Bakery and Confectionery, Kohinoor worked in the garment industry. She lost her job due to the closing down of the industry. She needed to find a new employment to bear the cost of the loan from her daughter's marriage and complement her husband's income of BDT 6,000-7,000 per month as a mason's helper.

Her nephew informed her about the training on baking and subsequent job placement support with a local training service provider. Without hesitation she went to the Decent Job and Training Institute and joined the baking training course. She was offered a job at Thai Bakery soon after the completion of the training with DJTI. She earns BDT 5,400 monthly. With this amount she was able to repay the family loan and support her son's education. “This job is a blessing for me and it will help me to free up my mortgaged land, and finally on that piece of land my own house will be built”. Kohinoor is aware she made better money in her previous job, but is happy she succeeded in re-entering the job market.



“As I have a job now I hope I can dare to plan beforehand which I didn't do when I was a farm day labourer”

Shamim Mia, 23 years old, Mymensingh, employee of Grameen Super Bakery

Shamim got married few years ago. His wife is a housewife and their daughter is four years old. As the daughter is approaching the school age Shamim and his wife are starting to think about her education. Shamim wants to give his daughter the chance to go to school unlike him. He needed a permanent job to secure an income to support his family and pay for his daughter's future education. His income as day labourer was uncertain and earned between BDT 4,500 to 6,000 per month depending on the season.

Ataur Rahman, training coordinator at the Centre of Excellence Agro Food Skills Foundation (CEAFS), a training and employment service provider, informed Shamim about the opportunity of a baking training and employment placement. Shamim was very happy to hear about the offer, and received the level-1 training in Mymensingh, aligned to the National Technical and Vocational Qualification Framework. He succeeded in the assessment conducted by the Bangladesh Technical Education Board and is now competent in Level-1 baking. Shamim was then placed in a job by CEAFS at Grameen Super Bakery in Myenmensingh district.

He is in charge of dough making, packaging, shaping the items, weighting baking ingredients. His monthly salary is BDT 7,000. Shamim feels his career will progress in the baking sub sector. “As I have a job now I hope I can dare to plan beforehand which I didn't do when I was a farm day labourer”, says Shamim.



She completed the training successfully and GUK placed her in a job at Super Tasty Food Enterprise in Gaibandha.

Shajeda Begum, 36 years old, Gaibandha, employee of Super Tasty Food Enterprise

Shajeda, her husband, their four daughters and her mother in law live in a disaster prone village in Gaibandha. Shajeda was a housewife with no formal education. She used to make a little bit of money rearing their cow. Their house was located in a river erosion prone area and the mighty Jamuna river encroached their agricultural land and homestead in 2016.

The river erosion was followed by a devastating flood and they lost their house, their inherited land and one cow. They are currently living in another house where they do not own the land. Saiful Islam, her husband, works as a daily labourer and seasonally migrates to Dhaka for 3-4 months every year to work as a rickshaw puller when the demand for agriculture labour declines. They lost their cow in the flood which further worsened their meagre income and asset base, and Shajeda couldn't earn a little income from rearing the cow anymore. Shajeda was urgently looking for an income generating activity to help her family cope with the hardship.

Through her relatives, Shajeda learned about the opportunity of a training with Gono Unnayan Kendra (GUK), a training and employment service provider in Gaibandha. This offer motivated her and she was hopeful. She completed the training successfully and GUK placed her in a job at Super Tasty Food Enterprise in Gaibandha. Her monthly salary is BDT 4,300, and with her husband's income of BDT 7,500 per month they are leasing a piece of land for crop production. She has now a monthly deposit scheme at Grameen Bank and has already renovated their house with both salaries. She wants to continue her job and be a full-fledged baking skilled worker.



"I feel delighted that through the earning from my own job I managed to continue my education"

Jewel Mia, 20 years old, Jamalpur

Jewel Mia studied his bachelor of arts at Dewanganj College. His father was the breadwinner of the family and died in 2017. As a first-year student Jewel was fully dependent on his father's income and he and his mum were struggling to sustain a living since the only earner of the family passed away.

His father left behind 1.56 acre of land among other assets. Jewel and his mum leased out 65 decimals of land to bear the cost of living. However, with the money from the lease and the production from the remaining land they were struggling to cover the education and family expenses. Jewel wished to continue his education on top of his work, and knew it would require extra efforts. Jewel was attracted by the terms and conditions of the baking training. After he completed it, the training and employment service provider placed Jewel at Olympic Food Industry in Narayanganj for five months. Due to a medical treatment he had to leave his employment temporarily. His salary was above BDT 7,000 per month.

The salary depends on overtime and attendance bonus. Jewel will be able to take leave to attend his graduation examination. As a trained worker he feels privileged and receives appreciation from his superiors. "I feel delighted that through the earning from my own job I managed to continue my education", says Jewel.



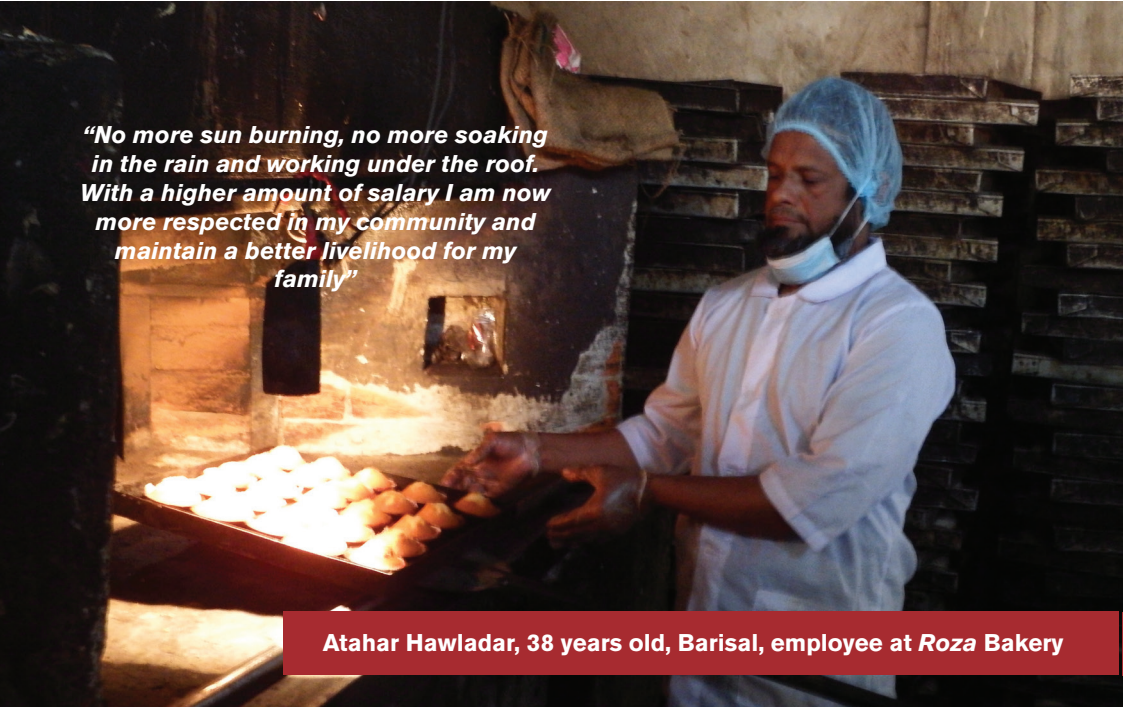
"She is very confident she will pursue her experience in the industry and become a master craftswoman."

Jharna Begum, 29 years old, Barisal, employee at Roza Bakery

Jharna Begum lives with her husband Malek Jomaddar and their two sons and two daughters in Barisal district. Malek earns a small amount of money as a rickshaw puller. On top of the difficult livelihood situation Jharna's sister in law is disabled and this is an additional burden for the family. Jharna has a primary level education and initially wished to work as a domestic worker to support her husband.

She heard that one of the bakery owners of *Bakerganj* was providing training with follow-up support for vulnerable women and men. Prantojon, a Training and Employment Service Provider (TESP) provided the training in *Bakerganj*. Jharna was enrolled in the level-1 baking from June to July 2018. After completing her training, she participated in the assessment organized by the Recognized Training Organization (RTO) and was competent for the baking level-1 Certification of Bangladesh Technical Education Board. With the support of the TESP she was placed at *Roza Bakery* and started her job as a baking worker earning BDT 4,000 per month. This job was better than the housekeeper even if the salary wasn't attractive.

Her elder daughter will pass the Secondary school examination in 2020 and she's confident she will be able to pay for her education. This would not have been possible before. Her job gave her hope, as well as for her daughter to continue her studies. In *Roza Food* she assists the master craftsman and she is very confident she will pursue her experience in the industry becoming a master craftswoman. She wishes to help her husband to buy an auto rickshaw so that he will be able to increase his earnings with less physical labour.




“No more sun burning, no more soaking in the rain and working under the roof. With a higher amount of salary I am now more respected in my community and maintain a better livelihood for my family”

Atahar Hawladar, 38 years old, Barisal, employee at Roza Bakery

Before being employed in the food sector, Atahar used to work as a daily labourer. His job was very demanding physically, working under the sun and the rain. The long hours of work in the field left him with a poor health. He continued to work against his will, about 15-20 days a month. His average wage of BDT 5,500 per month and additional earning from his wife was very little to sustain a living for the family of four members. His older son is studying at higher secondary, his daughter is 5 years old and his wife a support staff at the local college.

Atahar heard about the training and job placement support from *Prantojon*. He was very enthusiastic and completed the National Technical and Vocational Qualification Framework level-1 baking worker. With the support of the TESP he joined *Roza Bakery* in June 2018 as a baking assistant under the supervision of an *Ostad*, a skilled worker who independently manages the whole cycle of baking. In only four-month Atahar was promoted as an *Ostad* with the responsibility of baking cakes and processing biscuits and breads. He succeeded himself this role thanks to the certification he received.

“No more sun burning, no more soaking in the rain and working under the roof. With a higher amount of salary I am now more respected in my community and maintain a better livelihood for my family”, says Ataur. His monthly salary and benefit stands at more than BDT 8,000. He has now scheduled working hour with better conditions, including weekend and leave facilities.



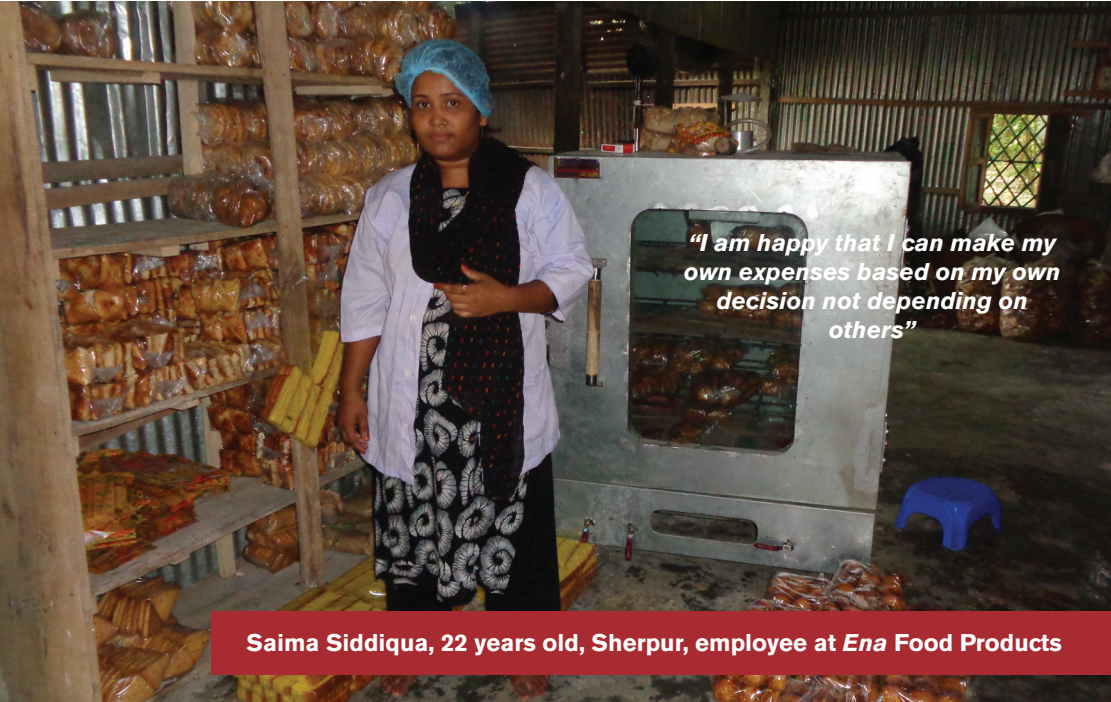
“I feel honored and proud to have an income and be responsible financially for my father and brother”

Afsana Khondokar Esha, 22 years old, Barisal, co-trainer with *Shilpo Kutir* and self-employed

Afsana completed her SSC examination in 2013 and wasn't able to continue due to her father's financial inability to support her education. Since five years, she hardly worked, except doing few hours of tuition in the neighborhood and earning BDT 1,500 per month to support her youngest brother in grade 3. Her father is a carpenter and works part time, an average of 15 days per month. His income barely meets the basic need of the family of three members. Through an advertisement on the local TV channel, she heard about the different food processing trainings in January 2018. She communicated with the training service provider *Shilpo Kutir* in Barisal and managed to register for a month baking training with the objective to find a longer-term employment opportunity. The training was compliant with the Bangladesh National Technical Vocational Qualification Framework level-1.

When she finished her training, *Shilpo Kutir* recruited Afsana as a co-trainer for the baking training starting in March 2018. She conducted 3 batches of training so far. She earns BDT 8,000 per month, and in addition to her current job she started her own baking enterprise at home. She bought a micro oven and baking equipment with her savings. At her newly established home-based baking enterprise she mainly bakes fruit cakes, cupcakes and birthday cakes. She supplies the products to nearby schools, shops and neighborhoods. Depending on the amount of orders she gets she hires her fellow trainees in the production process. She earns an additional BDT 3,000 per month on average.

Now she contributes to the family's expense and continues paying for her brother's education expenses. For the first time she offered her father and brother gifts for the Eid festival. She was very enthusiastic. A glow of happiness shown with a broad smile on her face when she explained the story. “I feel honored and proud to have an income and be responsible financially for my father and brother”, says Afsana.



"I am happy that I can make my own expenses based on my own decision not depending on others"

Saima Siddiqua, 22 years old, Sherpur, employee at Ena Food Products

Saima Siddiqua lives with her parents in Sherpur. She is a mother of a five years old son and is separated from her husband. She became dependent of her parents since mid-2017 and she was urgently looking to find a job and be self-dependent. She received the baking training and employment service from Montage Training and Certification, one of the Training and Employment Service Providers. Initially she was placed with Bondhu Bakery in Sherpur for one month. Her first income was BDT 200 daily. On top of her wage she receives meals and snacks at work.

In September 2018 with the help of Montage she joined Ena Food Products, a high end processing industry located in Gazipur District. She works in the production department and is responsible to weigh items, cross check the expiry date of the packaged products etc Her skills, knowledge and attitude towards health, hygiene earned the appreciation of the production management team of Ena food. Having completed her SSC level and the level-1 baking training she has been given additional responsibilities and informal supervisory tasks only within a short span of 4 months.

Her average monthly salary and benefit is BDT 5,800. She is happy with her current salary and industry environment and expects to develop her career after completing her probationary period. She wants to send her son to a good school. "I am happy that I can make my own expenses based on my own decision not depending on others" says Saima. She wants to continue working to overcome the challenging situation she faced with her previous marriage.



"My happiness is that from the status of a dependent in the family I have become a contributor in managing my family"

Kajoli Rani Das, 27 years old, Jamalpur, employee at Ma Moni Bakery

Kajoli Rani was a victim of child marriage and got married when she was 12 years old, a student in class six. She has two sons. Her husband works in a restaurant with an average income of BDT 7,000. The household entered a loan cycle without productive investment facing the difficulties to sustain when paying for the basic necessities: food, clothing, treatment and the children education. Kajoli and her family were in a situation of deficit.

Kajoli Rani learned about the training and job offer services in the baking sector from her fellow community people who received the same training. Kajoli Rana and few other fellow trainees were the first women to be recruited in the bakery. She works at the local Ma Moni Bakery and weights the products, cross checks the expiry date of these, does the packaging, maintains the factory clean, helps the Ostad for dough preparation and to mix the ingredients.

Her salary is now BDT 5,400 per month. She mainly uses her income for the family expenses and to repay BDT 20,000 of loan taken for the family expenditure which was equivalent to BDT 650 weekly installment repayment. "My happiness is that from the status of a dependent in the family I have become a contributor in managing my family", says Kajoli.

About HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation

HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation is a non-profit membership association, and part of an international network of independent HELVETAS member organisations working in the field of development cooperation. It is present in about 30 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation which originated from the merger of HELVETAS with Intercooperation in 2011 has been active in Bangladesh since 2000.

Our vision is a just and peaceful world in which all human beings live in a self-determined way in dignity and safety, are able to satisfy their basic needs, have access to indispensable resources and services, and take care of the environment.

Working areas and thematic competences of HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation are:

- Water and Infrastructure
- Sustainable and Inclusive Economies
- Education and Skills Development
- Governance and Peace
- Environment and Climate Change

HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation Bangladesh started working in 2000 at the request of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation to manage its Sustainable Land Use Programme. Since then, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation's portfolio has grown to include skills development, local governance, livelihoods and market systems development, environment and climate change and humanitarian response in the Rohingya Camps.



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