The Torch Bearers of KSF

“Being able to touch the lives of rural women is one of the most important aspects of my life” – says Roksana Akhter, the Assistant Coordinator of Training and Education, KSF Cooperative. Since 2006, she has been working relentlessly with KSF Coop to change the lives of the people of Panchagarh. This journey has changed her entire outlook on life and livelihood.

She was born in Manikganj and brought up in Chittagong. Her early childhood was full of activities. She completed her education in Chittagong. She moved to Panchagarh in order to work for KSF Coop. Since her early years she had interest in education program. She never lacked enthusiasm in teaching children be it her niece or neighbor’s kid.

She dwells in the philosophy of KSF – natural and responsible in every aspect. She practices organic farming methods to grow vegetables, fruits and medicinal plants in her kitchen yard. The most precious earning in her life; she notes- “the intensity of respect and affection” from the KSF members. She feels that Gemcon is fortunate to have a visionary founder like Chairman Kazi Shahid Ahmed. Its his initiative a farsightness that has shaped up today’s KSF cooperative. “He is an extraordinary person who never lost his very ordinary self” – her very own note about about KSF Chairman. Roksana is very grateful to all her colleagues and members of coop for their support which inspired her throughout her six years tenure in KSF. As she leads the KSF staff meeting’s inaugural song “we shall overcome”, the hundreds of gleaming women’s face come to her mind, who at the end of each day, inspire her to take on the next hurdle of life.

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Timeline KSF

- 2011
  - Organic Vegetable Cultivation & Supply Program
  - PKSF (LIFT) partnership

- 2010
  - Natural Composting

- 2009
  - Vermi Composting

- 2008
  - Pre-Primary School

- 2007
  - Registered in Joint Stock Company
  - Tea Cooperative Program
  - Organic Farming Program
  - Biogas Plant

- 2006
  - Dairy Cooperative Program

- 2005
  - Started its journey
Organic Food Tips

Food that is grown up without the help of chemicals and other pesticides definitely contributes to good health.
• Organic food is mostly valued because it reduces the side effects of pesticides.
• Researchers have shown that organic food has higher amounts of beneficial minerals, essential amino acids and vitamins.
• New research verifies that some organic produce is lower in nitrates and higher in antioxidants than conventional food.
• To keep our environment and health safe and active, organic food is the indispensable answer.

Champions’ March: Shahar Banu

Shahar Banu is seen as a pioneer in Shahebijot village of Tetulia, Panchagar. Being one of the first women to start dairy farming for milk production independently and subsequently became the leading dairy producer in the village. Three years ago, KSF offered Shahar Banu a high yielding cattle variety along with technical support in feed, vaccine and livestock management. She has doubled her stock from 4 to 8 cattle and was able to sell milk and dung to KSF. “I invested my extra earnings from dairy cattle earning into better food, schooling and health care for my two children,” Shahar Banu says, when asked how the project has helped her. She points to the healthy cattle in the cow-shed.

According to Shahar Banu “The improved quality of cattle and scientific rearing methods increased the quantity of milk and the price of the cows as well.” Shahar Banu says proudly - “This has changed my status in the village. Now the community can see how women can provide for their families too,” she says. The enthusiasm of her peers to get new high yielding variety of cow makes her happier, as she can see the sea of changes that are going to happen in their lives too.

Kazi Shahid Learning Centre

The pre-primary school “Kazi Shahid Shikhan Kendra” at Madhupara under Ambarkhana Union of Panchagarh district is run under the Education Program of KSF Cooperative. This learning center aims to create a warm, comforting and stimulating environment for children that will encourage them to learn.

Since young children are ready to learn and their early experiences are crucial in facilitating their learning. From this standpoint, KSSK is running on an experimental basis where a total of 32 children (boy 16, girl 16) are currently enrolled. The curriculum is designed to provide, basic literacy and numeracy to the poorest rural children (four to six year olds) who do not have access to the formal education system. One of the crucial aspect of the curricula is the emphasis on Art and Cultural and Communication activities.
Facilitating a Movement *

A research organization ChangeMaker conducted an independent evaluation study on KSF’s impact in the community in April 2012. The evaluator focused on the cow rearing program of KSF which contributes in increasing income of members. They found - increased rate of participation in this program has a significant impact on the productive economical growth of those people. Data on individual’s economic status, lifestyle, social status and over all wellbeing were collected and analysed.

Different social and human indicators such as access to modern facilities, technology and social development factors were taken account of in their report. ChangeMaker reveals some interesting facts. For instance, they found that after joining KSF, people from different occupations now have the same identity; they are entrepreneurs. Majority, about 74%, thinks that now they have are equipped with knowledge about cow rearing. The main Challenges as per ChangeMaker are- providing access to services on time, and the forward linkage of value chain of principal produces - milk and cow dung.

ChangeMaker noted the beneficiaries’ perception about KSF - an organization that believes in “environment and nature friendly approach”. It also expects that the success cases in the community would influence the people of entire community and adjoined locality to adapt a profitable and sustainable cow rearing model. As they remarks in a case study that “Shahar Banu’s (a beneficiary) success will be followed by many others across the area, having a real impact on poverty reduction and improved livelihood”.

*Excerpt of the evaluation of KSF by an independent consultant, the ChangeMaker.