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Promoting green jobs in Bangladesh: Women solar technicians and entrepreneurs

“The solar house system does not only bring ‘light’ to people in my village and our family but also provides a bright future to our son.”

– Nilufa – Bangladesh

Nilufa is a solar technician and entrepreneur running her home-based Nilufa Technology Centre in Chakdewla, an off-grid village in Phulpur, in the Mymensingh district of Bangladesh.



Susanne Lee

How solar technician and entrepreneurship training transformed the life of a Bangladeshi woman

Two years ago, Nilufa could not imagine that one day she would overcome her financial hardships and even own a business. She was financially dependent on her poor family-in-law, with all family members relying on her father-in-law’s meagre income. This situation worsened when her husband and son left her.

Things have changed for Nilufa since she was told about the 15-day Women Technician Training Programme on Solar Home Systems (SHSs) in her village. The training, exclusively targeted at poor women, was provided by the Grameen Shakti (GS), a national, non-profit SHS service provider, in co-operation with the ILO Green Jobs Programme. Attending the course, Nilufa learned how to assemble solar accessories, install SHSs and provide maintenance services to users. “After I accomplished the training, some people in the village contacted me for troubleshooting and maintenance of their SHS. My work then expanded to other neighbouring villages and I started to earn my living as a local solar technician”, she confirmed.

Bangladesh’s green jobs potential in the renewable energy sector

Bangladesh is a low energy-consuming, though energy-starved country. About 60% of the population is not connected to the national grid, and the 40% with access live mostly in urban areas. Under-employment is pervasive, unemployment levels are particular high amongst the youth, and the informal economy is estimated to account for 88% of overall employment. The Gender Empowerment Measure shows continued low levels of female ownership of economic assets.

Promoting green jobs in rural areas provides a win-win situation for Bangladesh. The training of solar technicians provides employment and income opportunities for the under-employed and the unemployed. Simultaneously, it facilitates a low-carbon development path through the promotion of renewable energy. This intervention not only creates employment opportunities and improves the living standards of the rural poor, but it also ensures the applications of new technologies and processes.

In addition to installing SHSs and providing maintenance services to her clients, Nilufa also started to assemble solar accessories for the Grameen Technology Centre (GTC). With support from the GS, she opened her home-based Nilufa Technology Centre. She receives the components to assemble lamp shade invertors, mobile chargers and DC-DC converters from GTC and supplies the assembled items back to GTC. According to Nilufa, "I receive my wages based on the quantity of items I produce. Working as a solar technician my average monthly income is around BDT 10,500 (USD 150)."

Happily, Nilufa's husband returned and is now supporting her to manage the Nilufa Technology Centre. Her income can now support the whole family and enables her to put aside savings for her son's education.

To date, GS remains one of the most active players in the country promoting SHS installations among low income, rural households and providing training to potential women entrepreneurs.



The Green Jobs Programme in Bangladesh 2008-2012

Since 2008, the Green Jobs Programme has implemented several activities in Bangladesh. Between 2008 and 2010, various awareness raising activities on green jobs took place at national and regional level. These helped to improve the effective promotion of green jobs in the country. Baseline knowledge on green jobs was generated through a national assessment and complemented by a sector-based analysis and by a separate study on skills needs for green jobs.

The SHS and entrepreneur skills training activities implemented between 2008 and 2010 were then successfully integrated into the Australian-funded Green Jobs in Asia Project. Implemented between 2010 and 2012 in five countries, this project



aimed at scaling up and ensuring long-term sustainability of the previous interventions. Among others, this included (1) institutionalisation of training curricula (assembling, installation and maintenance) in the National Technical and Vocational Qualification Framework; (2) the provision of sustainable employment opportunities by linking trainees with renewable energy service providers (27 additional service providers) for job placements as solar technicians; and (3) promoting solar entrepreneurship by providing skills for entrepreneurs and access to finance.

The initiatives have contributed to shaping Bangladesh's national policy priorities, namely the National Renewable Energy Policy (2008) and the National Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (2009), and have brought the country closer to meeting the goal of generating 10% of its national power demand from renewable energy resources by 2020.

For more information:

www.ilo.org/green-jobs-programme

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