

Mati Bangladesh Self Defined Rural Development

Annual Report 2008 / 2009

Dear Supporters of Mati,

We are happy to provide you with the latest Annual Report of Mati. Happy reading! The second half of the year has brought difficult times to those who live in our project areas. After the devastating monsoon flooding of summer 2007, and a normal summer 2008, 2009 was characterized by a drought that caused up to 30% loss in harvest yields. In the last harvest of the year many farmers in Mymensingh and Sherpur could harvest only a third of the usual crop yields. So there is a big crisis at present, because winter itself is a season which offers few sources of income. In spite of these bad news, Mati was able to do a lot in the past 12 months and we look to the future with great hopes.

In General: Mati has worked in 2008/09 in 4 locations: Mymensingh, Borobilerpar and Azmotpur [district Mymensingh] and Huzurikanda [neighbor district Sherpur], achieved the number of 173 women groups, involving 6437 women. In the context of their families, about 30.000 people benefited of our work. 2875 women received interest free credit which allowed them to better their living standard.

News from the projects:

Kitchen Garden Projekt in 15 villages of the area of Huzurikanda.

financed by Misereor, 200 women have learnt in the past 3 years to use the area around their huts for gardening and planting trees. Outcome: two to three harvests of vegetables to enrich the family diet, 10 women started tree nurseries for quality seedlings of local trees for fruit, medicinal use, environmental reasons... Mati has started a seed bank, where women can store or exchange seeds. The number of varieties has continuously grown, traditional knowledge of producing quality seeds revived. For this project, Mati received in 2004 the german UNIFEM price for good practice example.

Mati agricultural program

supports small farming families with advice and small credit. With the help of Brücke e.V. Mati bought a mechanical plough which poor farmers can borrow for free.

Against Global Warming "Breath for the Planet" project

1. Addressed to the rich: Equipped with a mobile exhibit and a film, the "Mati Climate team" organizes events in schools and universities around Mymensingh to raise awareness of what everyone can do to reduce attitudes that affect the climate negatively.
2. Addressed to the poor: Each Mati member receives a young tree (of their choice) to plant in front of their hut "to support the green lung of Bangladesh". 400 trees have been planted that way.

IDAEP – work with extremely poor families

Support: Brot für die Welt and GTZ. 300 families have received intensive support in the areas of nutrition, health, education and livelihood. Each family received a starting capital of 100 euro to realize a business project. The project phase is ended, but Mati extends the accompaniment of these families for another year.

Present outcomes: dramatic improvement of family diet in 87 % of the families, three meals a day in 82%, in 92% family income

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doubled or more, sources of income diversified, those who had daily incomes from rented means (rickshaws, animals, etc.) became owners of these means, more than half of female household heads have now their own income, can move outside the home and has more impact on family decisions; families obtained latrines and water pumps, hygiene improved, the rate of child weddings in these families sank from 21% to 5 %, before: none of the children had graduated from high school, now several girls have entered college.

In the second half of 2009, 100 more families will be accepted in this program thanks to ongoing financial support from BfdW.

Mati Health programs

Together with “Bangladesh National Society for the Blind” (BNSB) two “Eye Camps”, one of them in the Mati School where 640 children got eye checkups and treatment (Vitamin A). Some children received glasses and in some cases eye operations. The second camp took place at the local market.

Mati Health Fund (from private donations)

to allow prompt and non-bureaucratic medical support for the poorest: arrange quick and affordable treatment, accompany the sick to the hospital where treatment has to be paid in cash, provide necessary medicine. Ca. 15 persons receive financial or logistical support for treatment, 120 people receive necessary medication through our offices.

(This year the fund was provided by two Germans who celebrated a “round” birthday and had asked their guests for donations for Mati. Result 695 and 605 euro!)

Giving a face to poverty: The story of Shohag

“Shohag is 13 years old and lives with his family in Mymensingh. He does all the things that other children of his age do: play, laugh, make jokes. However his life is different from his friends’. When he was 5 years old,

Shohag fell gravely ill with typhoid fever which made him lose his eyesight. He can only distinguish between light and dark. That is why he doesn’t go to school.

We met Shohag in the park, begging, and start talking with him. He tells us about his family. We learn that his father, Hiru Mia, is badly indepted and has no way out of his situation. He works as Rikshaw driver and is about 65 years old. It is very difficult for him to earn enough everyday to feed his family. Often he has a fever or cough or is just too weak to drive a Rikshaw. That’s why the family is deeply in financial trouble.

In order to find out more about the situation of his family we visit Shohag at home and chat with his parents. They tell us that they are deeply in debt and see no way how they can ever pay off this amount of money. The problem had started bit by bit. Borrow a few taka here and there to buy a little food or to pay the rent for the hut. Every month they have paid the money lender back as much as they could. But then one day the sum had already climbed to 2.500 taka (25 euro), and the money lender wanted interest: for each day that Shohag’s father couldn’t pay back the complete sum, he demanded 100 taka (1 euro). The money lender knew very well that the family wasn’t able to pay back the sum under these conditions. It became for him a sure source of income. As a rikshaw driver the father could earn at good days about 150 taka. After the 100 taka interest there wasn’t much left to live on. A kilo rice costs 35 taka these days, a kg spinach 20. With a kilo rice however you cannot feed a family of five. For the family began a terrible time. The father only drove the rikshaw to pay the interests and for food nothing much was left. When he wasn’t able to pay, he hid from the money lender. But then he must pay 200 the following day. That was the moment when Shohag decided to go begging to bring at least some food home. This kind of money lending business is widespread in Bangladesh. Once trapped in this vicious cycle, the poorest have no means to rid themselves of this dependency. Often they make new debts with other people or organizations to pay old ones and sink deeper

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and deeper into the dependency of loan sharks.

We talked with Shohag's family how Mati could help them. The mother Jahanara decided to become Mati member and received an interest free loan with which to pay back the money lender. With some pressure from Mati the money lender gave up part of the debt, because he had already earned quite a lot at the horrendous interest rate he had imposed. Jahanara pays now every week a sum of money back to Mati. This amount is fixed with regard to the family's financial situation. The parents are grateful that their son doesn't have to go begging anymore.

Not long after we had got to know this family, Shohag's eyes became infected so badly that an immediate operation became necessary. Thanks to the cooperation of Mati and the BNSB eye hospital in Mymensingh we were able to clear the way for speedy help. Our former Swiss volunteer, Marie Schnoz from Zürich, who had herself met Shohag, collected 200 euro at her workplace to enable Shohag to pay for his operation.

For the future, Shohag's father wishes his son to learn a trade or to go to school, just as his younger sisters should. Mati contacted a school for the blind in Mymensingh which is ready to shoulder the schooling expenses for all the siblings. Shohag will soon have his entrance exam.

He has his own ideas about the future: He wants to become a social worker in order to help people who are in a similar situation as his parents. He particularly wants to support his own family. And, well, sometimes he wishes he could regain his eyesight, to be able to learn to read and write like all of his friends! But this wish may soon become true in the school for the blind.

For myself, personally, the nicest moment with Shohag was when he sat in the courtyard of Mati, a huge smile on his face while stroking a tiny kitten which we had placed in his lap."

Mati Training programs: PC-training

Supported by Dritte-Welt-Laden Ludwigsburg with 3400 euro in 2009, Mati in Mymensingh repaired old and bought 6 new PC for the training program for young people from underprivileged conditions. Additionally the Dritte-Welt-Laden also finances the salary of the teacher for 12 months. Thanks. Two groups are now on, the courses last 3 months and each time 30 young people can participate, pass an exam at the end and receive a certificate that they can use to find office work in one of the local firms. In 2009, 393 participants have finished successfully this training. 40% of the participants are women.

The German Embassy finances the computer training in Borobilerpar. Before, Embassy already financed sewing room for women who don't have a machine at home. Now, new room with 17 computers. First course in held in June.

Work with ethnic minorities

In a pilot project of nine months, supported by Oxfam, Mati works with 106 families in two indigenous communities to strengthen their sense of being a cultural community and to provide them with access to public services in education and health institutions.

All families belong to the Hindu minority and are socially discriminated by their belonging to certain trades: tanners, garbage collectors, sewage cleaners. Their communities are weakly structured or organized. Mati organized together with these families various social and cultural groups in their neighborhoods that allow them to do something for their communities: group to help children with homework, theater group, committee for community self-administration.

This project is just in the starting phase.

Solid Waste Management: Pilot project in Mymensingh conducted together with GTZ Dhaka

After presenting the city authorities of Mymensingh and GTZ with a voluminous study of the garbage collection scenario in Mymensingh in October 2008, contracts with

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GTZ and some other partners have been signed by the end of 2009 to implement a pilot project for the collection and usage of compost material (85% of all collected garbage) in 3 districts of Mymensingh. Thus the quantity of garbage to land on the dumphills would be considerably reduced.

Mati also took up again the garbage collection for 100 households in Sankipara. 30 to 50 children and youths between 5 and 25 years support this action and encourage their neighbors to keep their environment clean.

“Soup-kitchen” Sankipara

Since 2006, in Sankipara where the main Mati office is, every Thursday people are invited to a free meal taken together. Those who come are mainly mothers with children and old people. In the first weeks 30 people came, now there are regularly over 100 guests. An old woman told us once: “To eat at Mati is a feast. Each week I look forward to it.” The meal together is a good way to stay in contact with people in our neighborhood and to meet them on an equal level. The meal costs about 10 euro and is sponsored by W.B. from Neustadt, Germany.

Mati School in Huzurikanda:

In 2009, 249 students in classes 1 to 7, plus a play group.

The 5th grade class has again achieved the best results of all the schools in the district. Weeks before, the teachers had made a plan to prepare the students for the exam and offered daily four extra hours (in their free time!) of teaching. Students and teachers are very proud of their achievement, because it's rare in Bangladesh that the poorest students are the best. We will duly celebrate the results in a big party!

Here thanks to Dr. U. Keysselitz, who celebrated his birthday on behalf of Mati School and sent a 1700 euro donation.

School meals:

All students receive twice a week a hot and vitamin rich lunch (rice and vegetable stew).

For the kids who often only have two meals a day at home, the meals taken together at school are a highlight of their schooldays.

Sponsor schools and –classes:

The call for donations for Aisha has been generously answered by the sponsor class of the Kenzingen Highschool who collected 1156 euro for Aisha who needed urgently an operation at her badly burnt right hand to be able to regain her movements. Another class of Beelitz has accepted sponsorship of a girl from Huzurikanda.

School support program Ashar Alo (ray of light)

Private sponsors from Germany, Luxemburg, Switzerland and Ireland, have allowed many children from very poor conditions to take up schooling again. Their number is growing. Last year 89 children received a monthly stipend which parents spent mainly for extra tutoring and food. Most of the sponsored children are girls. The criteria besides the needs of the family are not so much the individual achievements of the child, but its expressed wish to go to school. Mati workers maintain regular contact with the families to be present when problems arise, but also to check on the adequate use of the stipends. Besides the stipends that are paid directly to the children and their mothers, Ashar Alo contributes to other necessities (uniforms, books and school fees). The school support program has proved to be an excellent instrument to protect the girls from early marriage and children in general from getting into exploitative working conditions.

Volunteering

volunteers have come from Germany, Switzerland, Japan and USA, they stay usually 3-12 months, help in the

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office with research and gather data in the field. They support the teachers in the Mati School and get to know the daily work, joys and worries of a small NGO.

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Projects for the next twelve months:

With the diocese of Limburg, in the next three years we will offer activities to strengthen the community of Sankipara, especially the women and children: Discussion groups, youth meetings, learning cinema, streetlibrary, exhibits and cultural festivals.

With Misereor, in the next three years a project to strengthen the rights of

small farmers: help them to get organized, to articulate and present their needs to the local farming authorities; help protect the regional biodiversity of the seeds.

With the foundation Stiftung Brücke we start a model project for the MDGs: development from the bottom up demonstrated as an example in one village: by the inhabitants with the support of Mati.

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