

SELF CONFIDENCE: A WAY OF SOLVING PROBLEMS

'Chickna' is a beautiful Kol village in the district of Rajshahi in northern Bangladesh. The ancestors of the Kol villagers once owned nearly all the land near the village. Unfortunately, they were compelled to leave their homes and flee to India during the Liberation War in 1971. After the war, they returned from India but had lost all their belongings and agricultural land. They were only able to reclaim the shelters on their homesteads.



I visited this village for the first time in 2015 after starting work with SIL Bangladesh. Before starting the Health, Education and Livelihoods Project (HELP), SIL carried out a family survey and I was surprised to see that there were only three students who were studying in Class Eight out of 28 families. I was hesitant about choosing a school girl to be a

volunteer for the SIL programs. But as there was no alternative, sixteen year old Sonaly Kol was selected by the villagers to attend the Learning Circle volunteer training. Later she also received training for the Generation Next Group (GNG) and started to work with young people. It was definitely a turning point for the whole village.



After coming back from the training, she started a Learning Circle group among the women and motivated them to implement their learning from the books they studied together. Sonali's integrity and sincere effort, along with the active participation of the group members, led to lively discussions of new topics each week in the Kol language. Although the written material is in Bangla, the facilitator has the freedom to explain the content in the participants' home language. Each topic stirred their minds. Changes began to take place in each member's personal and family life. They began to dream. Some of them started farming livestock with poultry, cows and goats. Some also began planting vegetables to increase their family's income.

"Poverty didn't stop Sonali and her group members. They have developed the confidence to believe that they can solve their own problems."

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**... SNAPSHOTS ...
WHAT'S PLANNED FOR
THIS MONTH**

Mar 11-17, 2018: MLE Teachers Training among Kol and Koch community.

Mar 18-21, 2018: Staff Orientation and project advisory committee (PAC) meeting under CREM and HELP projects.

Self Confidence: a way of solving problems ...(CON'T)

Geographically Chikna is situated on relatively high ground and people suffer from a lack of water during the dry season when the water level falls due to irrigation. After working all day, the women used to travel almost a kilometer to carry water on their heads from a deep tube-well. This troubled Sonali. One evening she discussed the issue with the young people in her group and decided to contact the local chairman. But the question was 'Who will ring him?' . They hesitated and became discouraged for a while. Conscious of the women's concerns, the village headman Mr. Lalchan Kol and his assistant Mr. Ram Kol assured them that they would help. The following day around twenty five to thirty men and women, led by Sonali, went to the chairman of Mohanpur local council to describe their difficulties. After listening to them, the Chairman not only linked them with two local NGOs who run projects on safe drinking water, but asked the NGOs to visit the Chickna area as soon as possible. A solution was found when NGO workers made an immediate visit to the village and provided a tube-well. They made an agreement that the villagers would contribute to 10% of the costs.

Sonali and her group started to think about how to raise the 10%. They set a small amount for each family and everybody was happy to contribute. They didn't have to wait for long. Within a week, a technician came and set up the tube-well. In this way the people of Chikna village solved the problem of accessing safe drinking water. Poverty didn't stop them. Sonali and her group members are very pleased with the outcome. They have developed the confidence to believe that they can solve their own problems if they are united and approach the chairman to ask fearlessly for their rights.



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