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Amader Gram ICT4D Project



"ICT is playing an essential role in day to day life"
- Dr. Dora Rapold, Swiss Ambassador in Bangladesh

The Second Gyanmela (Knowledge Fair) has been taken over through enthusiasm and spontaneous participation in Sreefoltola, a remote village at the Southern part of Bangladesh. *Gyanmela*, an innovative fair for knowledge, attempted to demonstrate how rural development can be achieved utilizing the power of information and communication technology (ICT). The Fair was organized on January 20-21, 2006 by Amader Gram ICT4D Project in Sreefoltola village under Rampal Upzila (sub-district) of Bagerhat district.

Dr. Dora Rapold, the Honourable Ambassador of Switzerland in Bangladesh, inaugurated the Fair as Chief Guest at the yard of Sreefoltola High School at 10:00 am on 20 January. *"ICT is playing an essential role in day to day life and also creating employment opportunities"* said the Ambassador in encouraging such initiatives; she further ensured continued support from Swiss Government to such activities. Prof. Mahmudul Haque, Director General of National Museum, Karar Mahmudul Hassan, former Secretary of Bangladesh Government, Mustafa Jabbar, Chief Executive of Ananda Computers Ltd, Rownak Mahmud, Upazilla Nirbahi Officer and Kazi Wahiduzzaman, Executive Director of Nobolok, Khulna spoke at the occasion.

Reza Salim, Project Director of Amader Gram project presented the activities of the project and objectives of the fair. **Mr. Walter Fust**, Chairman of Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC), was awarded by the organizer as the **Best Global Knowledge Worker** while Mr. Rafiqul Islam Khokan, Director of a local NGO, Rupantar received the Gyanmela award. The inaugural

session concluded through the fabulous stage performance of *pat gaan*, a musical drama in a popular local form. The performance was made on the concept of people's Right to Information.

"Stream of crowd came to visit the wonder of technology on the last day of Gyanmela" was the heading of the news on the fair published in Prothom Alo, a Bangla national daily newspaper having the highest circulation! Altogether twelve schools from various villages of Rampal participated in the fair. The most interesting and inspiring part was the visiting through the stalls of the schools as they could successfully uphold their knowledge and skill in using the ICTs. Amader Gram project stall could draw the attention of the most by showing how the schools can be brought under a wireless network. A demonstration was made by a student of tenth grade, to show how the schools under the inter-school wireless network would be able to share/exchange of various information such as their lesson plan, result, success as well as the students' opportunity to communicating regarding their studies; a web based project named **e-village Rampal** was also exhibited in this stall. Besides local schools, some NGOs and Government institutions participated; local vendors participated with their various home made cakes, sweetmeats, hand crafted items as they do in the traditional village Fairs. The competition events included Math Test, Chess, Keram, painting, music, dance, poetry recitation where the students of various schools of the area took part. The award ceremony provided the crowning touch to the days' entertainment.

The Sreefoltota school ground turned into a hub of all fun, recreation and knowledge! It was kept open from 10 am to 5 pm for both the days. The fair was held for two days as the one daylong first Knowledge Fair ended with the demand of a two daylong fair. The villagers irrespective of age, gender and social status came, socialized, enjoyed various foods, appreciated their resources, bought products, had rides on ferries wheel without which a village fair remains incomplete! But the uniqueness of the knowledge fair lies with the vendors who participate with the source of the knowledge that also exhibits the power of technology that helps to fight poverty and achieve development. Here technology blended well with the simple and fun full components of the local fair as the vendors were the inhabitants where the hurdles of illiteracy, gender, veil or poverty was not a bar at all. The fair could pull the crowd more on the last day, villagers from about 25 villages visited the fair.

The closing session was chaired by Alhaji Nurul Huq, Headmaster of Sreefoltola High School, where Mr. Sultan Ahmed, Headmaster of Perikhali PU High School, was present as the Chief Guest. Finally the fair ended amidst thousands of confident faces inflamed by knowledge.

Written by: Goury Chowdhury
E-mail: info@amadergram.org