

IMAGINE Activity Report for K2A

The IMAGINE(Inclusive Markets Advance Growth, Inspiring New Endeavors) grant from K2A aimed to establish market linkages for women to create a sustainable source of income from their handcrafted products. The primary goal of IMAGINE was to integrate the handicrafts produced (including apparel, home decor, and tailoring services) into mainstream markets to ensure market access. Therefore, the key objective of IMAGINE was to develop the necessary infrastructure in the area to support market development and establish a skilled artisanal manufacturing team.

October 2024

Training in Matarbari

From October 20th to 24th, the ARISE team conducted a 4-day training with 35 displaced women artisans from Matarbari. ULAB-CSD collaborated with Mahehaz Chowdhury, a zero waste designer and founder of Broque for this training session where they also included a Master Tailor Raihan and a professional tailor Kusum, who has 20 years of experience.

Together they trained the women to integrate Traditional Nakshi designs into various products like coasters, cushion covers, table runners, bookmarks, tote bags, and various other products. The aim was to develop their inherited Nakhi stitching skills into polished expertise to make a long-term alternative livelihood. This piloting a brand, which represented the women and could start a potential for their livelihood. Therefore, the ULAB team came up with the brand Matarbari Tales. To launch this brand the team researched a range of products with competitive prices and aimed to present it to measure its success at the Dhaka Flow festival after 2 months.

Over four days, the women learned about fabrics and sample designs, receiving materials to practice their stitching. Tailors provided continuous guidance, correcting any shortcomings. By the third day, they tackled more complex designs, initially feeling intimidated but gaining confidence after attempting them. On the fourth day, most products were completed, and the training concluded with an interactive feedback session, where participants shared their experiences and key learnings.

November 2024

Training in Dhaka:

Following the 4-day training session, from 14th to 17th November, 6 women from Matarbari were invited to Dhaka for another training on Appliqué and Patchwork, this was facilitated by the designer Shawon Akhond from JothaShilpo. The women learned various patching techniques that could be integrated with Nakshi designs.

They also visited various brands like Aarong and Jatra, which are iconic for their rural and traditional designs and craftsmanship. The women learned about the demand for these skills and were highly motivated to continue their stitching as a source of livelihood.

All the design covers made by women were made into a finished product, fully ready to be launched and sold at the Dhaka Flow Festival.

December 2024

Dhaka Flow:

After a year of research and engagement in Moheshkhali and Matarbari, the ULAB-YPSA ARISE project proudly unveiled a transformative initiative: Matarbari Tales. This handicraft brand stood as a testament to the resilience of displaced women, offering them a pathway toward sustainable livelihoods through traditional craftsmanship.

Matarbari Tales was born out of a series of workshops and training sessions where 30 women artisans mastered intricate stitching techniques. This initiative aimed not only to revive traditional art forms but also to establish market linkages, ensuring a reliable income source for these women.

To amplify their reach, Matarbari Tales participated in the Dhaka Flow Festival, held on December 6–7, 2024, at the Gulshan Society Lake Park. Known for celebrating wellness, community, and creativity, the festival provided the perfect stage to showcase their handcrafted products, including tote bags, pouches, bookmarks, coasters, and more.

Two artisans from Matarbari together with the community mobilizer, joined the event, sharing their deeply personal stories of displacement and their journey toward economic independence through stitching. These narratives resonated with festival-goers, shedding light on the broader issues of displacement due to the Matarbari Coal Power Plant construction.

The success of Matarbari Tales at Dhaka Flow underscores the importance of platforms that blend commerce with community impact. By supporting initiatives like this, we preserve traditional crafts and create sustainable livelihoods for marginalized communities.

Challenges: Managing sales and customer engagement at a large-scale event was a new experience for the artisans. They initially were nervous about interacting with customers. However, with guidance from the ULAB team, they quickly adapted and gained confidence in interacting with customers.

Technical skills challenges: Designing products /concept challenges with the artisans group in Matarbari: (this part will be about how the team lacks a designer mindset and needs training to think like a designer. Taking designer from Dhaka is expensive and unsustainable as has been observed from the experience in this project).

Logistics and Coordination Challenges: Coordinating travel arrangements for the artisans from Matarbari to Dhaka presented some difficulties, as for many it was their first time in the capital city, and had never traveled such a long distance before. However, with proper planning and support, they successfully participated in the training.

Some artisans initially found it difficult to adapt to the complex designs and required extra guidance from the trainers. However, continuous hands-on support helped them gain confidence. Additionally, ensuring all participants had access to the required materials posed minor logistical issues, which were resolved by the organizing team.

IMAGINE Fund Utilization Report		
Date	Detail	Amount in CHF
Oct 2024	Training session in Matarbari: 01	
	Payment to 3 trainers from Broque Fashion	400
	Materials for training	250
	Production costs	750
	Printing, stationery, setup for Training	150
	Compensation to 35 Artisans for handmade work	700
Nov 2024	Training session in Dhaka: 02	
	Payment to the Broque Designer team	300
	Payment to Jothashiplo Training team	500
	Courier Services	150
Dec 2024	Dhaka Flow Fair:	
	Dhaka flow, stall rent, and set-up	150
	Cost of Matarbari Artisan team to Dhaka for fair: Accommodation and Travel	180
	Final Product making costs for Dhaka flow	100
	Marketing & Promotion- Social media, photoshoot, sales setup	140
	Payment to Documentarian for Documentary on women	180
	Dhaka Flow Fair: Showcasing artisans' work locally/nationally	700
	15% ULAB overhead cost	350
	Total	5000