

Jute: an eco-friendly alternative for a sustainable future

This four-year project will reduce poverty in Bangladesh and India by encouraging a switch to more environmentally sustainable practices in the jute industry.



What is the problem or need the project is addressing?

The jute sector is vital to the economy and poor rural communities in both Bangladesh and India. It provides direct employment to almost 1.4 million people in Bangladesh and four million in India.

Jute is one of the few crops that grow in flood prone areas. Its cultivation is also low cost and low technology, and is therefore accessible to poor communities, providing a vital source of cash and food security.

For many years jute provided vital export earnings for both countries. However, in the 1980s-90s, the emergence of cheaper synthetic substitutes caused the market for jute to shrink rapidly. This decline had a severe effect on the millions of people who depend on jute for their livelihoods.

The decline also had a severe effect on environmental sustainability. Although production of jute goods, particularly dying and retting, has some negative impact on the environment, the positive environmental and economic impact of jute is immeasurable. Jute is rich in nutrients which prevent soil degradation and ensure agricultural sustainability. Jute also has huge recycling potential and is 100% bio-degradable. In contrast, production of synthetic substitutes only negatively affects the environment.

The specific problems the project aims to address include:

- Lack of technical and design support for small enterprises producing jute products
- Lack of relevant market information
- Pollution involved in jute production and processing
- Little sharing of learning between India and Bangladesh
- Lack of awareness of the benefits of jute products and therefore low demand
- Unfavourable policies (particularly in Bangladesh)

What is the project doing?

This project is supporting small businesses to reduce the polluting aspects of their jute processing and to implement health and safety standards for workers. It will also encourage increased purchases of jute products as a more eco-friendly option to man-made fibres, and as a low cost, low technology livelihood option for poor communities.

The project will benefit at least 500 small businesses producing jute products in Bangladesh and India, which employ over 25,000 people. It will also benefit producer groups who supply these small businesses. With an average family size of five, this project will benefit over 200,000 people.

Project activities include:

- Providing training on eco-friendly production of jute products and access to eco-friendly technology
- Supporting local service providers to develop appropriate technical and business services for small enterprises producing jute products
- Establishing Business Facilitation Units that will facilitate the flow of market information
- Working with consumers to create awareness of and demand for jute products instead of synthetic products
- Supporting producers and other stakeholders in the jute industry to lobby government for more supportive policies
- Sharing learning between India and Bangladesh

By encouraging the sustainable production and purchase of eco-friendly jute products, this project has huge potential for ensuring environmental sustainability and reducing poverty.

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What impact has the project had?

The project is still in its early stages, but preparatory activities such as staff recruitment and setting up of

project offices in India and Bangladesh have been completed. A baseline study has been undertaken so we can assess project impact, and project promotion activities carried out.

Local service providers in India and Bangladesh have also been selected, and they have completed the first phase of their training in business counselling, service delivery, and market access. The Business Facilitation Unit in Bangladesh is up and running, and we are close to establishing the one in India (this one will be web-based rather than a physical unit).

By the end of the project we expect impact to include:

- Increased capacity of small businesses to produce and market eco-friendly jute products
- Increased sales of eco-friendly jute products
- Increased income for poor producers



Our local partner

Traidcraft Exchange is implementing this project with [TARANGO](#), Bangladesh and [Margdarshak](#), India. TARANGO is a fair trade organisation that works with jute farmers and producers (with a special focus on women). Margdarshak is a non government organisation that supports poor and marginalised communities to improve their sources of income and livelihood.

How is this project funded?

The project is funded by the European Commission ([SWITCH-Asia](#)), grant-making trusts, and donations from generous individuals.

