

## JUTE BAGS FROM BANGLADESH

### **Nasiima is a survivor, despite overwhelming obstacles.**

Nasiima's husband used to have a steady job at the brick factory some distance from their home in Saidpur, Bangladesh. But one day, returning home from work on the train, he lost both arms when he was accidentally pushed from the doorway of the moving car. For a year he received about 48 a month as compensation from the brick factory, but that was not enough. He became a beggar.

Gradually the family sold off all its household furnishings and ate only one meal a day. Finding clothing for the children was almost impossible.

In 1980 Nasiima heard about Mennonite Central Committee's Action Bag Handicrafts employment project in Saidpur. Employees are selected on the basis of need. Nasiima applied and was hired.

From the beginning, Action Bag personnel told her the job was temporary. Nasiima was paid for every jute bag she made, and money was deposited in a savings account as her portion of the projects's profits. When she had saved a certain amount she would be released from the project and another women would be hired in her place. An investment counselor met with Nasiima and advised her to begin thinking of ways she could use her savings to start a business.

About a year later, Nasiima was ready to leave. She and her husband invested the money in a sewing machine, a firewood business and a goat that supplies milk both for the family and for sale.

With the money from her business ventures Nasiima was able to buy a small piece of land and build a house. The family now eats three meals a day. They can afford better clothing. One son is in school. There is a new sanitary latrine near the house and the next project will be a well.

Up the 180 women, most abandoned, widowed or divorced, earn their living through Action Bag. For many it is their only opportunity to provide food, clothing and education for themselves and their children. Nasiima appreciated the start she got from Action Bag. "Now I am able to earn enough to live," she said.

Based on information from Ten Thousand Villages and ActionBag News