

Paid content

About **theguardian**

Giving rural women a chance at entrepreneurial success



Paid for by

New Business Call to Action member, Bata Shoe Organization, will increase market share and double sales representation in Bangladesh

Bata Bangladesh, the local company of the family-owned global footwear and accessories manufacturer and retailer Bata Shoe Organization, has joined the Business Call to Action (BCtA) with a commitment to train and employ 5,000 low-income rural women as independent sales representatives.

The Rural Sales Programme, Bata's social enterprise, plans to expand to 40 rural districts and reach 10 million new customers with its affordable footwear products by 2020. BCtA is a global initiative that encourages companies to fight poverty through inclusive business models, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other international organisations.

"The development of women's entrepreneurship is a concrete method to enhance the income-generating capacity of women by promoting economic empowerment over the long term. In line with its corporate vision and values, the Bata Bangladesh inclusive business model is focused on empowering underprivileged women in rural communities to become entrepreneurs and earn an independent income by selling affordable shoes manufactured in Bata's own factories in Bangladesh, among other items," said Nicole Voillat, Bata global sustainability director. "We are pleased to join with our fellow BCtA members who, like us, are committed to innovative business models that invest in people, knowledge and core values."

The Rural Sales Program was launched in 2005 in partnership with CARE International's social business, Jita, and was designed to help overcome some of the obstacles to economic development in rural Bangladesh, such as lack of market penetration and a lack of economic opportunities for those without land, many of whom are women. Since its inception, the programme has expanded rapidly, growing from 49 women selling only Bata flip flops at \$1 (65p) in one region, to more than 2,200 women across 54 hubs in 28 rural districts and reaching 375,000 households selling, toiletries, apparel and medicine in addition to footwear. Known as aparajitas – the Bengali word for "woman who never gives up" – the women are now averaging \$80-\$120 (£52-£79) each month in commissions, and as a result are able to improve their material conditions, build a sense of dignity and enhance their participation in household decision-making. Bata will leverage Jita's existing linkages to deliver its affordable products to the most hard-to-reach areas and expand its customer base in Bangladesh by 10 million people.

"Bata's long-standing commitment to investing in developing countries is a prime example of how inclusive business can be an integral – and successful – component of companies' core business strategies," said Suba Sivakumaran, BCtA programme manager. "We are pleased to welcome Bata as a BCTA member and look forward to working with them in the months, and more, ahead."

Bata's Bangladesh Rural Sales Program evolved out of the company's founding commitment to invest in developing countries and support communities through local sourcing, manufacturing and retailing, coupled with employee training and professional development. Bata was the first to manufacture footwear in multiple developed and developing countries, replicating the same business model and establishing a strong economic and social presence while setting high standards for employee welfare and environmental management. In spite of its worldwide presence, Bata is considered by many to be a local company, providing each community with shoes designed to meet their needs at an accessible and affordable price.

Coinciding with the 2005 launch of the Rural Sales Program in Bangladesh, Bata launched a similar initiative in Colombia, Aquarella, a catalogue sales program later scaled up in Bolivia and Peru. More than 12,000 sales entrepreneurs, 97 percent of them women, are now part of Aquarella in Latin America. As part of its BCtA commitment, Bata plans to double its sales force there by 2020.

For further information:

Business Call to Action: Jeanne Finestone at jeanne.finestone@undp.org

Bata: Nicole Voillat at nicole.voillat@bata.com

Content on this page is paid for and provided by Business Call to Action, sponsor of the role of business in development hub

More advertisement features

Topics

Business call to action partnerzone

Save for later Article saved

Reuse this content