

Clubs kick off in Khulna

BBC Media Action's ELT Materials Developer for English in Action, Mabruka Toaha, reports on a visit to some of BBC Janala's Amar Engreji Clubs in different remote corners Bagerhat:

On day one, a mile's walk from the highway through muddy ups and downs took us to a nice two roomed tin shade cottage and the Jagorani Juba Shangha. A year ago, the all-male club was running out of a dirty hut but, thanks to the encouragement of a local NGO, women have been encouraged to join in with activities including English learning and outdoor games and the club has a bright new home. The villagers now know the club as positive ground for the youth and parents are not worried about sending their daughters to the club anymore.

Another club, the Solakura Juba Shangha, stands in a small thatched hut, in an area severely affected by cyclone Sidr in 2007. Here, acres of once cultivable land are still under polluted saline water and the nearest pure drinking water is more than half an hour's walk away. Members meet on two evenings each week with kerosene lamps and their laptop computer (charged at the local market) to practice lessons from the Amar Engreji Club book. Tazmuna Yeasmin Nodi, a young lady from the club said, 'I want to get out of this miserable life. So I need English more than anyone else does.'

The tea stall at Rampal bus stand is always crowded in the evenings – except on Thursdays when the members of Ranshen Juba Shangha sit together to practice English. The large gathering of bus drivers and helpers shift from the tea stall into the club house, bringing lots of eager faces waiting for their turns to practice English with the club members.

In our quick tour, we also found the clubs don't blindly follow the instructions in the books and on the CDs. They customize the materials according to their needs and also have specific requests for things that could help them more. Each club operated in a unique way, yet an eagerness towards language was clearly visible everywhere. The Amar Engreji Club books and CDs were helping members to improve their English and helping to develop leadership skills too, with many clubs nominating a new leader every week.