

# AMADER SHISHU

## KEY FIGURES AND STATISTICS

Percentage of children under the age of 18 in Bangladesh	45
Number of children targeted by Amader Shishu	2058 <sup>1</sup>
Number of orphaned children targeted	800
Number of vulnerable children targeted	1,258
Duration of the pilot programme	June 2008 – May 2011
Duration of cash support period	18 months
Amount of cash given per month	BDT1,500
Total number of union social workers involved	61

Source: 2010 October Briefing paper (Child Protection Section, UNICEF)

## BACKGROUND

Almost half the population of Bangladesh is under the age of 18 and more than half of these children live below the international poverty line of USD1.25 a day.<sup>2</sup> Bangladesh experiences continuous natural disasters, namely floods and cyclones, which devastate communities and increase the vulnerability, risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation, family separation, migration and trafficking of children.



<sup>1</sup> October 2010, briefing paper

<sup>2</sup> The State of the World's Children report 2011, pg 108, 112

Bangladesh is also experiencing one of the fastest rates of urbanisation in the world and it's predicted that by 2015 the country's urban population will reach 50 million, representing around one-third of the overall population.<sup>3</sup>

These trends accentuate the need for a protective environment that ensures the protection of all children - particularly those who are orphaned and vulnerable – from violence, abuse and exploitation. For such an environment to exist, a strong child protection system is needed; one which, through adequate services, laws and policies, can act as an alternative to the many prevailing services, which are often reactionary and primarily focused on institutionalisation.

## **ACTION:**

### **What is Amader Shishu?**

Amader Shishu (Our Children) is a UNICEF-supported social protection initiative, which targets orphans and vulnerable children (OVC). Run in partnership with the Government of Bangladesh, Amader Shishu was developed in the wake of Cyclone Sidr as a means of ensuring OVC remained under the sustained care and protection of their families and local communities.

The project, while based around social protection services, focuses on a monthly social cash transfers of BDT1, 500 (the equivalent of monthly costs per child in government-run institutions), which are given to caregivers of 2,058 OVC over 18 months on the basis that the child regularly attends school; does not get married before the age of 18 and does not engage in hazardous labour.

### **Objectives:**

The overall goals of this project include:

- Reducing child labour and other form of abuse and exploitation
- Developing community based support and care systems that allow orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) to grow up in a family environment familiar to them
- Promoting social and economic development among vulnerable families

In order to achieve these goals, the project has number of specific objectives. They are to ensure that OVC living in disaster-prone rural areas have access to essential services through cash transfer provisions, case management and regular follow-up social workers trained in 'proactive social work'; to enhance the technical and operational capacity of Social Services Officers and to strengthen the capacity of families to protect and care for OVC living in disaster-prone areas through the promotion of income generation activities.



### **Targets:**

Amader Shishu targets children under 18, who have lost a mother/father or both parents. It also targets children under 18 who are involved in hazardous and exploitative work; children separated from their family; children who have dropped out of school; children with a disability and indigenous children. The child's extended family must be poor with an annual income of less than taka 36,000 (US 495 dollars).<sup>4</sup>

### **Monitoring and evaluation**

<sup>3</sup> *Understanding Urban Inequalities in Bangladesh report, 2010*

<sup>4</sup> *This is based on conversion rates in April 2011.*

Union social workers visit families each month to monitor the child's progress and to ensure the money is being spent properly. They report to their supervisors (field supervisors and/or upazilla social service officers), who follow-up any concerns the social worker may have on issues that affect the child's life. There are committees comprising of community members, administrations and representatives from local government at ward<sup>5</sup>, and upazilla<sup>6</sup> levels, who are also playing a vital role in managing and supervising the overall processes.

Through UNICEF-supported training initiatives, government social workers have been motivated towards shifting from a responsive to a proactive child protection approach. In partnership with the Ministry of Social Welfare (MSW), UNICEF has provided a two step training programme comprising of “*basic social service training*” and “*professional social service training*” as well as case management training, participatory monitoring and evaluation training and supportive supervision. Participatory tools such as service mappings and ladder games have been introduced at “parent's gatherings” to orient caregivers on various child rights issues.

## IMPACT



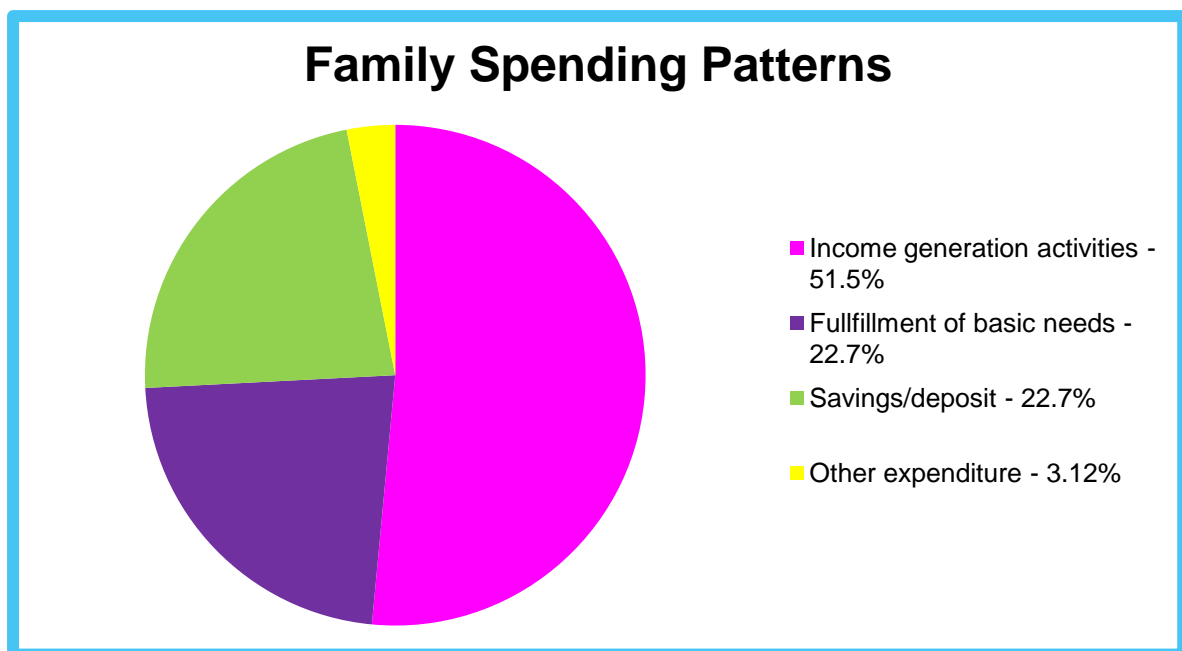
Of the 2,058 children, all 1,675 of school-going age are enrolled in schools and the 383 children under six are waiting to be enrolled. So far, only 13 cases of non-compliance have been reported, where 11 children have dropped out of school to engage in child labour and 2 girls were reported to have gotten married.

Two phases of “action research” have been conducted to monitor the progress of 290 children in 129 randomly selected families, who received the cash transfer (the first, 6 months after cash distribution and the second 12 months after). The studies showed that

<sup>5</sup> The smaller unit of local government

<sup>6</sup> An administrative unit under districts

families were using the cash transfers to pay for basic needs items, invest in income generating activities and for savings. The following diagram shows the results from the second phase of research.



- All the families made direct expenditure on the children, including on food, education, health, and clothing.
- After 12 months spending was directed more towards income generating activities and savings increased.
- All the families used some of the cash for income generating activities such as leasing/purchasing land for agricultural purposes and/or purchasing household poultry or cattle.
- All the families placed a portion of the money in fixed deposits whereby cash cannot be withdrawn for a certain time period after which the amount will be doubled.
- The families' intention in saving money was to ensure future economic security for their children, particularly girls.
- Other expenditure, on things such as funerals, house reconstruction, and loan repayment, remained limited.
- Families prioritized children's schooling rather than involving them in child labour.
- Many of the families successfully increased their monthly income through income generating activities.

Overall, cash transfers were found to be an effective tool for empowering vulnerable families and encouraging family/community-based care solutions that provide positive outcomes for children.

## URBAN CASH TRANSFERS:

In light of the successful implementation of Amader Shishu, a similar program targeting the urban poor begun in March 2011 in Dhaka. The Social Protection Initiative for Vulnerable Children in Urban Areas initiative is being implemented by the Ministry of Women and

<sup>7</sup> October 2010 Briefing paper

Children Affairs in collaboration with UNICEF and its partner organisations and it provides caregivers of vulnerable children with money to invest in their child's future.

Monthly payments of taka 1,500 will be made in two installments of taka 9000 over 12 months. Payments were distributed to the first of 23 families and similar monitoring and evaluation processes apply.

*Mohammad Aslam from Dhaka shows off a clay replica of the Taj Mahal that he made at a UNICEF-supported drop in centre. The 11-year-old is set to benefit from the urban cash transfer scheme and says he will stop working as a cigarette vendor and go back to school once his caregiver receives the money.*



## **FUTURE DIRECTION:**

Amader Shishu has been undertaken with a view to pilot a new social protection scheme that could be adopted and extended by the Government of Bangladesh. Individual case management will be the major tool for the phasing out of cash support for specific families and children. The following criteria warrant discontinuation.

- Monthly income has increased to more than BDT3, 000 (US41 dollars).
- The child has reached 18 years of age.
- Previously landless families now have land to live on outside the embankment and an increased income.
- There are instances of reduced vulnerability.
- Community members have made a decision regarding the situation of families and, supported by the case management carried out by social workers, turn their attention to other more vulnerable children.

The expectation after 18 months of cash provisions is that at least 50 per cent of the cases will no longer be rated as vulnerable and cash provisions will be discontinued. The final phase of research is yet to conclude.

The primary aim is that, by using transformative social protection measures, families will achieve socio-economic empowerment. Therefore, after 18 months of cash transfer, a final round of data collection will confirm changes in the families' economic and social status and changes in children's lives.

*Updated April 2011*