

UNICEF Bangladesh

Newsletter

Issue 17, January 2011

ADOLESCENT GIRLS STEP UP TO BAT

Twelve year-old Happy Dey is playing cricket with some local boys on a muddy field in the beachside town of Cox's Bazar. As Bangladesh plays host to the 2011 Cricket World Cup, the enthusiasm for the sport has hit fever pitch and Happy is using every available opportunity to practise her skills.

Happy is part of a UNICEF-supported 18 member female sports team. The initiative - the first of its kind – is part of UNICEF's 'Adolescent Empowerment' project or Kishori Abhijan and is run by partner NGO, BRAC.

Power in numbers

While scenes of neighbourhood cricket are common in many parts of the world, seeing adolescent girls participating in outside sports is still relatively uncommon in this socially conservative country.

Many adolescent girls in Bangladesh are often expected to adhere to strict "purdah" (veil) - a religious practice where women avoid being seen by men who are not directly related to them. For the young girls on the team, playing cricket together is a way to interact with one another, learn new skills and share ideas.

"The team is not simply a sports team", agrees Srabonti Dey, who is the daughter of a rickshaw puller. "We, as a group, have played many important roles in our community. In the past we successfully prevented one of our fellow schoolmates from getting married before the legal age."

Around one year ago the girls took part in a street march in Cox's Bazar to raise awareness for World Aids Day. Traffic almost came to a standstill as onlookers queued on both sides of the street to cheer the young girls on.



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In many parts of Bangladesh, religious custom prevents girls from participating in outdoor sports. UNICEF's girls cricket team initiative in Cox's Bazaar aims to challenge such attitudes, and give girls a chance to shine.

"It was really an exciting moment", recalls 15 year-old Trisha Dey. "We had just got our red and green sports jerseys and shoes, and we felt so proud wearing them and walking in rhythm with the drum beats holding colourful placards and banners".

"When the girls speak in a collective manner, people in the community listen and respect them," says Ayuba Husna, BRAC Area Coordinator for the Adolescents Empowerment project in Cox's Bazar. "We have used this 'power' on several occasions to raise awareness about issues like, safe motherhood, the importance of vaccinating children, birth registration, drinking safe water, and preventing human trafficking".

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In Focus: Adolescence

This newsletter focuses on adolescent participation in public life and social decision making. UNICEF aims to make young people more aware of their rights so they become empowered to change their lives.

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Q&A WITH UNICEF VOLUNTEER



Anna Barrett,
Associate Program
Officer, Health &
Nutrition Section.

Funded by AusAID, the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) program provides skilled volunteers to organisations working toward the Millennium Development Goals. Anna is currently one of three such volunteers being hosted by UNICEF Bangladesh.

What is your professional background?

I studied child clinical psychology and neuroscience in Melbourne, and specialised in the consequences of childhood abuse and neglect. I've worked mostly as a university teacher and researcher and as an advocate for asylum seekers and refugees.

What attracted you to a placement with UNICEF Bangladesh?

I never intended to work in development, but the poverty and indignity that I saw some children living in during travel to developing countries lead me to change career paths. UNICEF's esteemed reputation and the combination of a great need for and great commitment to development in Bangladesh made it an ideal choice for me.

Can you describe your work at UNICEF?

I support staff in the Child Survival Cluster of the Health and Nutrition Section in monitoring and evaluation. This includes statistical analysis, results-based reporting, and working to strengthen facility and community systems.

What have been the highlights of your time in Bangladesh?

Personal highlights have been little things; like a rickshaw ride through a new part of town, a particularly hospitable gesture from a stranger, or the rare occasion when I manage to say something comprehensible in Bangla.



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Adolescents taking part in a cricket tournament enjoy a laugh at the Sultana Kamal Women's Sports Complex in Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

THE FACTS: ADOLESCENCE IN BANGLADESH

In Bangladesh, an estimated 28 million people are between 10 and 19 years of age. Adolescence is often characterized by inequality within the family and society, which then leads to practices of child marriage and child labour as well as marginalization or exclusion from health, education and economic opportunities.

According to UNICEF's 2009 State of the World's Children report, child marriage occurs most among those living in rural areas and urban slums.

Women must be 18 years of age to legally marry but one third of women in Bangladesh are married before their 15th birthday and 40 per cent of women aged between 20 and 24 have given birth before the age of 18.

Child labour is also prevalent across the country particularly in urban slums. Over the last ten years an average of 13 per cent of children below the age of 18 have engaged in paid or unpaid work.

Boys comprise about three-quarters of all working children and many work in jobs that are hidden from view, such as domestic work, which makes monitoring and regulation difficult.

Health is also an issue with 35 per cent of girls aged between 15 and 19 deemed underweight. When it comes to HIV, less than 0.1 per cent of adolescents are affected but research shows adolescents hold common misconceptions about the disease. Only 16 per cent of girls aged between 15 and 24 have a comprehensive knowledge of HIV in Bangladesh.

The youth literacy rate is comparatively high in Bangladesh with 73 per cent of adolescent boys and 76 per cent of adolescent girls able to read and write.¹

UNICEF believes that given the space to express themselves adolescents can start to affect change in their environment.

¹ State of the World's Children Report 2009
Children and AIDS, Third Stocktaking Report 2008

UNICEF AND ADOLESCENTS

Adolescent empowerment is a key focus of UNICEF's projects and activities. UNICEF and its partners are working towards building the self-esteem, confidence and knowledge of young people to ensure more adolescent participation in social decision making.

The 'Adolescent Empowerment project (or Kishori Abhijan) is one such initiative. Operating since 2001 the program runs around 3,000 adolescent drop-in centers, or Kishori clubs, in 28 districts, which provide a meeting place for more than 100,000 adolescents. At these clubs adolescent boys and girls are given the opportunity to interact with one another and discuss issues that are relevant to their lives.

UNICEF aims to give adolescents a sense of purpose by equipping them with new skills that they can then pass onto others. The Swimsafe program trains village adolescents to become swimming

instructors so they can pass on their knowledge to younger children in order to prevent drowning.

UNICEF also provides young people with an avenue for self expression and has teamed up with a number of media organizations across Bangladesh to advocate for the right of children and adolescents to be heard. UNICEF supports major initiatives such as the Children's Film Festival, the annual Meena Media Awards and Our Voice, a project that gives adolescents an opportunity to voice their concerns to policy makers.

UNICEF has also supported the creation of Children's Express - a news agency dedicated to children and youth – operates in every district of the country provides training to adolescents on child rights, news writing, interviewing and reporting.

In a country where almost half the population is under 18, UNICEF believes in investing in the young people who will become the leaders of tomorrow.

TEENS RALLY AGAINST CHILD MARRIAGE

On a warm spring afternoon in September 2008 63 year Mohammad Wahed Sheikh met with his neighbours to discuss a marriage proposal for his then 16-year-old daughter Mosammet Salma.

The social call at Wahed's small clay-walled home in Paharpur village in Chapainawabganj district, north west of the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka, ended in a fruitful discussion. Both families agreed, without Salma's consent, that she was to be married.

The understanding was a result of months of persuasion by a village matchmaker, who usually arranges marriages in exchange for a fee. Locally known as "ghataks" the matchmakers usually pick a pretty young girl, offer a proposal and follow up with

a series of negotiations between the families of the would-be bride and groom.

This has been the tradition in poverty stricken rural Bangladesh where parents prefer to marry off their daughters early because they believe it will set them up financially. But recently this entrenched custom is being challenged and the change is coming from within. Teenagers, in rural areas, are slowly becoming empowered enough to break the silence and stand-up to the practice of child marriage.

This is due in large part to the UNICEF-supported Adolescent Empowerment project (known locally as Kishori Abhijan), which has been working with the help of partner NGO Centre for Mass Education in Science (CMES) since 2001 to implement a Kishori out-reach centre (ORC) in Paharpur village.

The Kishori project aims to empower teenagers, particularly girls, to participate in discussions and activities about issues that affect their lives. It's hoped through such discussions that young people will become empowered enough to engage further in the social decision making process.

Generally, about 30 local adolescents make a group who meet once a week to explore key topics such as early marriage, human rights, dowry, birth registration, transmission of diseases like HIV/AIDS, reproductive health and drug abuse. Each group is led by a peer leader, who is trained on various social issues supported by materials such as books, posters and other promotional items.



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Salma (18) leads a discussion on the social problems of early marriage and eve teasing at her local Kishori club.



© UNICEF/2011/Jannatul Mawa

Salma (18) with her neighbours Rumi (14) and Seema (12). At 16 Salma was able to fight against being married off with the help of her local UNICEF supported Kishori Club.

“When I was told about the proposal, I was not shocked. I was prepared for such a situation,” says 18-year-old Salma with a smile. Now a peer leader of her local Kishori club, Salma says she talked to her parents and relatives about delaying her marriage. “As I was already aware of my rights I plucked up courage to resist the pending ceremony,” she says.

With the help of other members of the group Salma, who now attends grade 12, launched a campaign in her neighbourhood to prevent her marriage. Together the members went from door to door to convincing Salma’s parents, their neighbours and their relatives to that Salma’s wedding was a bad idea.

Runa Laila, who helps facilitate the Adolescent Empowerment project says stopping Salma’s marriage was a joint effort and everyone in the community played a part, “We talked to the local support group and forums of mothers and fathers and we appealed to them to consider Salma’s future,” she says. This is something Salma’s neighbour, 15-year-old Rima Khatun agrees with, “We pleaded to local business and religious leaders to realize the consequences of teenage marriage.” she says.

Attitudes in the village are slowly changing. Motiur Rahman, a local school teacher who is also a member of the support group says, “It’s a shame that early marriages still take place today. We feel that we have some responsibility in preventing such injustices. So, we organized a formal discussion with Salma’s parents and convinced them to call off the wedding.”

Neighbour Mostari Khatun says, “I was married at age 14 but I now realize the pains of not completing my education before marriage. Being aware of this today I was also opposed the idea of Salma getting married so early.”

Parents of young girls are beginning to understand the benefits of delaying marriage and there are many examples in Chapainawabganj where parents have denied worthwhile proposals. Other community members say if they hear of any child marriages taking place in the village they will report it to the District Magistrate. Moreover, in a neighbouring village, senior members held a formal function where they proudly declared not to let any teenage girl get married before the legal age of 18.

Salma’s wedding was called off eleven days after her parents had agreed to her marriage proposal.

“This was a happy moment for us,” said Salma’s step mother, Fulara Begum, adding, “I respect Salma’s decision to continue her education. The more educated she is the more value she adds to her career. Delaying marriage surely has great benefits.”

Salma is now preparing for her exams. She plans on becoming a teacher and says one day she would like to see child marriage eradicated entirely from her village. □

The Adolescent Empowerment project is funded by the European Union

GETTING EVEN AFTER TEASING

Sitting within a circle of adolescent girls, Shaninur Akhter is open about the experience that cut short her term in high school. The soft-spoken 19-year-old sits cross legged recounting how she came to be a pre-school teacher in her village of Uttarchar Lakha just outside Bangladesh's second largest city, Chittagong.

Up until three years ago, Shaninur attended high school regularly but that all changed when she was involved in an incident of colloquially known as 'Eve teasing'; a phenomena where young women are repeatedly harassed and stalked by young men.

At 16 Shaninur and her friends were repeatedly followed by a group of young boys as they made their way to and from school. "There would be a group of boys who would know when I was going to and coming back from school. They would yell out and make comments at me and my friends as we walked past," she says.

Eve Teasing is well known phenomenon in Bangladesh and can often have serious consequences for the young girls involved such as a damaged reputation and social restrictions. It can also leave young girls with a sense of guilt and confusion and as a result many withdraw from their friends and family.

Shaninur was followed for three months until one day she was approached by one boy who handed her a letter. "He tried to give me a piece of paper," she says. "I didn't want him to come close to me so I resisted. I cried out. He tried to clam me down by touching me on the shoulder, which made me cry out even more." The scene caused a group of villagers to gather round and word soon spread to Shaninur's parents. "I had to tell my parents everything," she says. "Even though I didn't want

to because I knew that nothing good would come of it. I knew they would just force me to drop out of school."

And they did. Fearing their daughter's safety and reputation had been compromised Shaninur's parents insisted it was no longer appropriate for her to travel to and from school. Shaninur joined the Soinnertech Kishori club soon after she was forced to quit school and after some time there she became a peer leader.

Kishori clubs are adolescent drop-in centres run by UNICEF and its partner organisations as part of the Kishori Abhijan project. Kishori clubs aim to give young boys and girls the time and space to interact with one another and to discuss relevant issues that might otherwise be considered taboo; in this case Eve Teasing. It's hoped that discussions will lead to more adolescent participation in social decision making.

Shaninur says her Kishori club gave her an avenue to express herself and trade ideas with other young people in the community. She says without her club she may not have had anyone else to turn to. "I encourage the girls to speak to each other about these issues at the club gatherings," she says. "Because the clubs offer an environment where young people can come together and be open without being judged."

Shaninur is a big advocate of the Kishori Clubs. She says her experiences have taught her valuable lessons that she wants to pass on to others and she believes the best place for that to happen is within the safe four walls of a Kishori club. □

The Adolescent Empowerment project is funded by the European Union.



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Shaninur Akhter, 19 meets with adolescent members of the Soinnertech Kishori Club outside her home in Uttarchar Lakha village outside Chittagong.

Kishori Abhijan study

The Adolescent Empowerment or Kishori Abhijan (KA) project first began in Bangladesh in 2001. It provides avenues for interaction at both the family and community level in order to empower adolescents, especially girls, to become active agents of social change. The project focuses on twelve key topics that are relevant to adolescents, which include early marriage, human rights and reproductive health.

Between January 2008 to June 2010, five rounds of behavioral monitoring data were collected. The findings showed an increase in knowledge, communication and action among all stakeholders on all KA topics.

Key Findings:

- Mothers who reported being aware of child marriage issues increased from 88% to 100% between the first and fifth rounds. By the 5th round 100% of fathers also reported being aware of child marriage issues - up from 78% during the first round.
- Despite awareness being lowest for both parents around health topics such as Sexually Transmitted Diseases, the number of both mothers and fathers who reported being aware of such topics rose dramatically from 13% in the first round to 83% for mothers and 71% for fathers in the fifth round.
- Communication by adolescents on the key KA topics increased from around 70% in the first round to 100% in the fifth round. This means all adolescents surveyed reported having spoken about a key KA issue to a duty bearer.
- Adolescents who reported having taken behavioural and/or communicative action on key KA topics jumped from 33% to 89% between the first and fifth round. Action taken on gender-related topics quadrupled.
- 97% of community influentials reported speaking up on core issues at least once. This could mean communicating ideas through religious leaders, using their authority to influence the family decision making process and addressing small informal gatherings.
- 3,782 out of 3,940 peer leaders (96%) informed community stakeholders about at least one of the project priority issues during meetings.

ADOLESCENT GIRLS STEP UP TO BAT

Continued from page 1

Raising their voices

Members of the cricket team were selected from 15 adolescent out-reach centres or Kishori Clubs run by BRAC in Cox's Bazar. Twice weekly around 30 adolescents meet at their club house, usually a donated one-room tin shed, to discuss issues that affect their lives. It's hoped that through the Kishori Clubs, adolescents will become empowered enough to take part in the social decision making process.



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Team members spend time together at their local Kishori Club.

"Participation in outdoor sports has opened up many opportunities for us," says 12 year-old Jesmin who once barely spoke to strangers and hardly ever came out of her home alone. Now one of the most outspoken members of the team, Jesmin explains "When a girl learns to interact with strangers, moves about her community, goes to markets and shares her personal problems with others, she gradually learns to be independent".

It is not surprising to learn that the cricket team has now become so popular that a group of girls who did not qualify for the original team have now begun forming their own. It is hoped that the two teams will be able to play regular matches against each other, and perhaps even form the beginnings of a league. □

This project is funded by the UK National Committee for UNICEF as part of the International Inspiration project, an initiative that aims to enrich the lives of 12 million children in 20 countries through the power of sport and play.

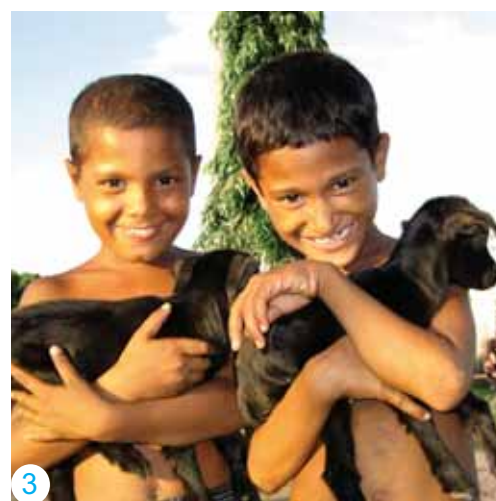
LIVING IN THE URBAN JUNGLE

The first step toward changing people's views about children who live and work on the street, is to give these children a chance to express themselves in the public sphere. The following images are a sample from the collection "Living in the Urban Jungle" produced by 20 urban working children as part of a UNICEF photography project in partnership with DRIK Gallery and the Telenor Group.

1 Oh! My dear parrot, speak up, say my name and I will set you free. Hatkhola, Barisal, Bangladesh, 2010 - Shawlin Akhter, 12



2 My friend Sharmin begs in Shah Ali Mazaar. Child marriages are illegal in this country but she is the victim of a child marriage. She is on the streets with her newborn baby at an age when she should be living with and cared for by her parents. The baby has not seen its father's face as he abandoned Sharmin for not bringing a dowry. Sharmin does not know what the future holds for her baby. Mirpur Mazaar, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2010 - Sima Akter, 15



3 The eternal bond of friendship. Barisal stadium, Barisal, Bangladesh, 2010 - Manoj Baroi, 14



4 I used to sleep here at the Barisal river port. Now I live at a drop-in centre. This child also has the right to live a better life. Barisal river port, Barisal, Bangladesh, 2010 - Dulal Hossain, 12



5



6



7



8



9

5 This mother lives in a slum and has no bathroom to bathe her baby. She has only a dirty pond. Hazaribagh Tannery, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2010 - Md. Foyzal, 13

6 As I passed the railway line, I saw many children running, jumping and climbing onto the roof of a train. I decided to take a photo of a boy climbing down from the roof with a bowl on his head because I don't want any child to put their life at risk like this. Kamalapur, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2010 - Md. Foyzal, 13

7 After their studies the teacher gets the children to sit in circles and play. Within this circle, the children draw and sing. Watching them dancing happily made me feel good. Mirpur PCAR/PMUK Open-air School, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2010 - Sima Akter, 15

8 Our national animal is the ferocious tiger but we have to go to the zoo to see them. These children living on the streets do not have parents, so they have no money to visit the zoo. I sell newspapers here. The children and I play with this clay tiger and dream about the real ferocious ones and our future. Sonargaon Road, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2010 - Md. Roni, 14

9 Nayan, and his father are snake charmers. It is a risky way to earn money but poverty has made Nayan brave. Now he can handle snakes comfortably. Savar, Dhaka, Bangladesh. 2010 - Rafida Akter, 15

HOSPITAL BIRTH AND A HEALTHY BABY FOR DAW SING NUE

"I do not know the reason for my babies' deaths", says Daw Sing Nue, sadly. "Both of them died immediately after delivery". The 19-year old is one mother who knows all too well the pain of losing a child. As a teenager, consecutive pregnancies resulted in two devastating neonatal deaths.

At the age of 18, Daw Sing Nue found herself pregnant for a third time. "I felt very anxious", she recalls, sitting on the floor of the small thatched house she shares with 19 year-old husband, Kya Thui Ching Marma. "Some people in our village were saying that I was cursed in some way and that because of that my babies would always die".

Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child marriage and adolescent motherhood in the world. One in three women starts childbearing before the age of 20 and for every 1,000 live births in Bangladesh, approximately 37 newborns die within the first 28 days of their life.

While the number of births to adolescent mothers has reduced by almost one quarter in the past 18 years, the pace of decline is slow. In rural areas, like Daw Sing Nue's small village in Kyamlong Para, Bandarban, adolescent motherhood remains common.

Even though Bangladesh's maternal mortality rate has dropped by 40 per cent in the last nine years to 194 deaths per 100,000 live births, premature pregnancy remains a key issue and it heightens the risk that adolescent girls will experience complications during child birth.

As part of the Maternal, Neonatal and Child Survival (MNCS) project – run by UNICEF in conjunction with partner organizations and the Government of Bangladesh – a network of local Community Health Promoters (CHPs) work with expectant mothers and

their families to help them make informed choices about maternal and child healthcare issues.

"One day the CHP for this area approached me" explains Daw Sing Nue. "When she heard about my history she was concerned. She convinced me to have a special check-up with a doctor and accompanied me to the hospital".

CHPs track newly married couples and build their awareness around antenatal and postnatal care. They also work closely with other local advocates for skilled maternal care such as Para Centres, which conduct ante- and post-natal classes for mothers, and Community Support Groups (CSGs), which play an important role motivating the families of pregnant women.

Suddenly, one night during the eighth month of her pregnancy, Daw Sing Nue felt unwell and informed the CHP and the Secretary of the CSG, who hurried to her home.

After surveying her condition, they recommended that Daw Sing Nue be rushed to the city hospital. It was raining heavily, making transport difficult, but CSG members eventually managed to organize a baby-taxi (three wheeler) with funds from a small savings account kept by the Group for such emergencies.

Daw Sing Nue's mother-in-law became angry, believing that it would be better for Daw Sing Nue to stay at home and give birth in the traditional way, but CSG members eventually talked her around and Daw Sing Nue was allowed to travel to hospital.

After 3-4 hours of labor, Daw Sing Nue gave birth to a healthy baby girl. After the birth, a neighbor tried to welcome the child into the world in a traditional way - with a drop of Chabgri shikhri (local liquor mixed with the gall bladder of a python) but CSG members discouraged it, instead advising Daw Sing Nue to provide colostrum (nutrient-rich first breast milk) to the baby as soon as possible.

"I am very happy now and very grateful to all those who helped me", says an overjoyed Daw Sing Nue who now attends regular post-natal classes at the Para Centre.

"Traditionally, breastfeeding mothers in my community are told not to eat meat, but the people at the Para Centre told me that eating meat is fine, so I follow their advice. My baby has almost finished all her immunizations too. I want to do whatever is best for the health of my child," she says smiling and cradling her baby in her arms. □



© UNICEF/2010/Naser Siddique

19 year-old Daw Sing Nue cradles her baby girl, Don Ching, aged 5 months.

This project is funded by AusAID

CLIMATE CHANGE SQUADS RAISE AWARENESS

Mohammad Romon, aged 13, checks a rain gauge on the roof of his school in Char Kukri Mukri, Bhola district, and records the measurement in his log book. Romon is one of 40 climate change student squad members at Char Kukri Mukri High School. Together they monitor and record the temperature, humidity and rainfall at the school each day.

Bangladesh's unique geography, high rate of poverty, dense population, and the prevalence of extreme climatic events make it particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Low-lying islands such as Char Kukri Mukri are even more at risk as they are interspersed with rivers and canals rendering them defenseless against rising sea levels.

Natural disasters such as cyclones and floods are already common in the district and are predicted to increase in both intensity and frequency as a result of climate change. "We've noticed that almost every year the water level gets a little higher", says head teacher Shushen Dutta. "Many roads are now inaccessible, making it difficult for some students to come to school".

While the number of people affected by natural disasters often in the millions, the Government of Bangladesh has been successful in reducing the death toll from such events through Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) mechanisms such as early warning systems and improving the adaptation capacity of communities. UNICEF works to promote DRR measures and schools like Romon's are encouraged to develop local DRR plans to identify vulnerabilities ahead of time.

Climate change will affect everyone, but the future of the planet is of particular interest to children, so it makes sense for adolescents to take the lead on climate action. The students in Romon's class have received training and illustrated flip charts on minimizing risks before and after disasters.

They have also learned how to use weather instruments, record daily weather data and interpret this information. It is hoped that the weather data collected by the students will provide valuable information about global warming in their local area.

Just three months into the project, squad members are excited about their new responsibilities and have increased their awareness of climate change. The students say they are now more interested in reading stories about climate change in the newspaper.

Romon is wide-eyed and animated as he describes his understanding of the problem: "Industry releases black smoke and other substances that increase the temperature. This will cause the snow to melt, so there will be a lot of water in the world. When the sea can no longer cope it will rise up and inundate Char Kukri Mukri and other places," he says.

The student squad members are also helping to build the awareness of the Char Kukri Mukri community by discussing DRR and climate issues with their friends and families and holding community presentations at their school. Md Rashedul Islam, 14, a student squad leader, says he loves taking the measurements each day and discussing the findings with his friends. "People listen to us because they know we're on the student squad," he says.

So far, 40,000 students in 400 schools across Bangladesh have taken part in climate change assessments to identify weaknesses in their school's capacity to deal with disasters in the future, and school-based contingency plans have been developed in 167 schools to improve the ability of schools to respond to emergencies. □

This project is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).



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Mohammad Romon (13) and his fellow students check a rain gauge near their school in Char Kukri Mukri, Bhola district.

LOCAL TALENT TAKES FRONT ROW AS FILM FESTIVAL KICKS OFF

Crowds of people packed the auditorium in the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka, waiting for the curtain to open on the 4th International Children's Film Festival.

The showcase may have featured films from around the world, but it was Bangladesh's young budding film makers who stole the spotlight.

Short films made by 48 talented artists from across the country were selected by a special child jury and shown at week-long event. Raihan Ahammed's film "Blind Hope" was one of them. Based on a true story, the film follows the trials and tribulations of a young blind woman living in Dhaka.

It was one of five films chosen to receive an award at the Festival. It came in second place and Raihan received Tk 25,000 for his next project. The auditorium was full and I got really positive feedback from everyone who watched the film," he says.

The 18-year-old is no stranger to film festivals. In 2009 he won a prize at the Stranger Festival in the



UNICEF Representative Carel de Rooy, is handed a pigeon during the inauguration ceremony of the International Children's Film Festival. Mr. Mustafa Monowar, Chairman of the Festival Advisory Committee and renowned Bangladeshi artist stands to his left.

Netherlands for his short film Canvas, which depicted class struggles in Bangladesh.

His win was a result of his participation in the UNICEF-supported OneMinute Jr. workshop, which trains young people to produce one-minute films that are then broadcast on private television channels. With help from UNICEF's partner organisation, Children's Television Foundation of Bangladesh (CTFB), seventeen young people were given the opportunity to produce a short film and it was there that Raihan produced Canvas.

"The workshop was crucial in helping me develop my filmmaking skills," says Raihan. "It also introduced me to a wider network of like-minded people who I still keep in contact with". Raihan filmed, wrote and edited "Blind Hope" with the help of two friends that he met at the OneMinute Jr. workshop in 2009.

This year's Children's Film Festival provided yet another platform for him to display his work. "Since 2009, I have received many international awards, but this is first time I have received an award from my country. This is something very precious to me," says Raihan.

The festival showcased more than 230 films from 40 countries. The festival was simultaneously launched in Dhaka, the southern city of Chittagong and in northern city of Rajshahi.



Raihan Ahammed accepts his award from eminent writer and professor Zafar Iqbal at the 4th International Children's Film Festival in Dhaka.

WINNERS ARE GRINNERS AT THE MEENA MEDIA AWARDS

Twenty-two journalists, documentary makers and writers have walked away winners after taking out first place in their respective categories at the sixth annual Meena Media Awards 2010 held in Dhaka in November.

The awards recognize media professionals – both under and over the age of 18 - who have promoted child rights through their work. The winners were selected from 400 entrants in two major categories: journalistic and creative.

The judging panel - was made up of well-known media personalities – chose from print and electronic media entries, which ranged from poems, to newspaper articles, to short plays to television documentaries and reports.

Winners were given prize money for their efforts. First prize was Tk 50,000. Second prize was Tk 25,000 and third prize was Tk 15,000.

The Meena Media Awards were introduced in 2005 by UNICEF and are named after Meena - a popular animated character who champions the rights of children across South Asia.



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Zannatul Bakiya Keka holds the award she won for Best Television Broadcast reporting for her story on children living with HIV. Keka's story focused on the plight of HIV-positive children who had either lost their parents or were in danger of losing their parents due to the disease.



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Winners at the sixth annual Meena Media Awards pose with UNICEF representative Carel de Rooy (M) and the judging panel following the award ceremony in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU)

Programs with UNICEF:

- Birth registration
- Adolescent empowerment

Funds 2006-2010 (USD): \$8.7 million

The EU funds UNICEF to provide child protection programs in Bangladesh. The new Ambassador and Head of the EU Delegation in Bangladesh, William Hanna, discusses the EU's commitment to working alongside UNICEF for the protection and empowerment of children in Bangladesh.

The European Union is a major donor of UNICEF's Child Protection programs in Bangladesh. Why are these issues of importance to the European Union, particularly in Bangladesh?

We work closely with UNICEF to empower adolescents and promote birth registration. Birth registration provides each individual with a tool to obtain their fundamental human rights. A functional birth registration system also ensures a certain level of protection against human rights violations such as child marriage, deprivation of liberty, commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking and other worst forms of child labor.

What improvements have you seen in the projects you support in Bangladesh recently?

As Bangladesh continues to score better in terms of social and economic indicators, we're pleased to see that our support is having measurable and positive results.

The Adolescent Empowerment project shapes adolescents as agents of change within their communities by supporting their participation in livelihood initiatives to develop income generating abilities. Parents and community leaders also participate to strengthen wider community support for adolescents and promote behavioral change. As a result, adolescents, with the support of their families and communities, have raised awareness on issues such as early marriage, dowry, child trafficking and birth registration.

Have you recently visited any local-level projects and seen first-hand the impact they are having on Bangladeshi communities?

We frequently go to the field to see the direct impact of the projects we support. I particularly remember the visit to the Adolescent Empowerment project in

Rajshahi. It was a real pleasure to see that the project received such a positive response by the villagers who recognized the positive changes brought about by the intervention. Facts and figures presented to me by project officers and also the activities carried out by the girls and boys of the centre, made it clear to me that the project had positively impacted the lives of the rural adolescents, but also those of their families.

What are your priorities in the coming years with regards to work you are sponsoring in Bangladesh?

We work closely with the Bangladesh Government to ensure good governance – the most important foundation for development. Our development strategy seeks to reduce poverty through rapid economic growth, greater inclusion of the poor and increased employment.

Our current development commitment in Bangladesh amounts to almost 900 million Euros, with 198 million Euros allocated to supporting projects in 2011-2013. Our future interventions will particularly focus on health and education, the Chittagong Hill Tracts peace process, local governance, electoral process, pro-poor private sector development, food security and nutrition, climate change and gender.

The EU supports aid projects across the globe. How, in your opinion, is Asia (and Bangladesh in particular) progressing to meet the MDGs?

Bangladesh has made significant ground toward achieving MDG targets. In particular, Bangladesh is on track to achieve gender parity in primary and secondary schools and reduction of child mortality. However, reduction of school dropout rates remains a challenge. According to data from 2008, the country is still far from reducing poverty to the 29 per cent target by 2015. The global financial crisis has had a significant impact and could affect the achievement of MDG targets.



European Union

GIRLS SPEAK OUT ABOUT EVE TEASING

Soinnertech Kishouri Aberjan Club, Uttarchar Lakha village, Chittagong.



Moresheda Akhter

Eve Teasing should definitely be stopped because it gets in the way of our education.

Moresheda Akhter, 16

When my parents found out I was being Eve Teased they pulled me out of school so now when younger girls come to me for advice I tell them not to tell their parents because the end result will be that they are forced to quit their schooling.

Shaniur Akhter, 19



Shaniur Akhter

One of my cousins was repeatedly wooing me. I tried to put an end to it by telling him I was too young and that were related so it's inappropriate. I felt too ashamed to tell my mother so I told my sister-in-law. She advised me not to confront him but rather to keep a safe distance from him at all times.

Sharmin Akhter, 18



Sharmin Akhter



Sumi Akhter



Taslima Akhter

Boys will often yell out and whistle at us as we walk to school. We tell our older sisters who stick up for us and chide the boys. They feel confident in doing so because they're older than the boys and have a sense of seniority.

Taslima Akhter, 14

This is a community issue. Everyone should work together to identify the boys who are behaving badly.

Sumi Akhter, 15



Kohinur Akhter

Eve Teasing has so many negative effects. It makes young girls feel depressed and guilty and they start to lose their motivation to learn. It forces girls to stay indoors and it also reflects poorly on boys because not all of them behave badly towards girls.

Kohinur Akhter, 16

If you give girls the opportunity to play football, one day they may be an asset for our country. For example, Bangladesh is known for its cricket. One day we may be known for our women's football.

Salma Akhter, 12



Salma Akhter



Rasheda Begum

The girls and boys come together at the club and share their experiences of Eve Teasing. When they hear how some of the girls have stood up for themselves they become encouraged to do the same.

Rasheda Begum, 30

Photographs by: UNICEF/2010/Casey McCarthy

1 UNICEF urges action to tackle urban poverty

UNICEF and the Centre for Urban Studies have called on the Government of Bangladesh to put more resources towards tackling urban poverty.

The call follows the launch of a policy paper entitled 'Understanding Urban Inequalities in Bangladesh,' which was presented by UNICEF Representative Carel de Rooy in Dhaka.

The paper challenges the widely held belief that urban dwellers in Bangladesh are socially and economically better off than their rural counterparts.

UNICEF urged the Bangladeshi government to include a socially comprehensive urban development strategy as part of its next Five-Year National Development Plan.

According to the study, Bangladesh is experiencing one of the most rapid urbanization processes in Asia with around 41 million people living in urban areas and 7 million living in urban slums.

2 Call for ethical reporting on & for children

Journalists and other media professionals have been urged to practice ethical journalism by adhering to a code of conduct when reporting on child-related issues.

This comes following the launch of a bi-lingual handbook, which guides Bangladeshi journalists on how to better report on child-related issues.

The launch, jointly organized by UNICEF and the Management and Resource Development Initiative (MRDI), took place following a three month study that monitored the reporting practices of 10 mainstream national newspapers and three television stations.

The study found that media outlets pay minimal attention to children, dedicating less than three per cent of news coverage to child-related issues.

The study also found that the media tends to cover a narrow range of child-related issues and children's issues are covered most frequently when something negative has happened, such as a death.

More than 300 media professionals took part in brainstorming and discussion sessions following the study. Their input was included in the handbook.

3 Amateur photographers tell a tale of two cities

A unique photo exhibition has given an insight into the lives of children living in the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka and the southern city of Barisal.

The exhibition – Living in the Urban Jungle – featured the works of 20 young people who either lived or worked on the streets of the two cities.

The exhibition was a result of a two-month project that saw the adolescents – aged 12 to 16 – receive digital cameras and a 5-day training course on how to take photos.

They were encouraged to take photographs of their urban landscapes and over the course of a week took more than 27 000 images.

The aim of the project was to inspire children to tell their own stories through the use of photography. The project also forms part of a campaign against child labour by attempting to break the negative stereotype that surrounds working children.

4 School feeding program for working children

School attendance and completion rates are expected to improve in major cities across the Bangladesh thanks to a new feeding program being administered by the Government of Bangladesh with support from UNICEF and its partner organizations.

The program will provide micronutrient-fortified biscuits to more than 73,000 students between the ages of 10 and 14, who study in over 3,000 learning centers across Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Sylhet and Barisal.

Those benefitting are enrolled in the Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Working Children (BEHTRUWC) project, which establishes learning centers in urban areas that have large populations of working children. The school day is shortened to two and half hours, so that children can continue to work on either side of their classes.

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