

UNICEF Bangladesh

Newsletter

Issue 14, February 2010

SAVING LIVES BY PROVIDING VACCINES IN REMOTE AREAS OF BANGLADESH

Almost 40 years ago, Ansar Ali was a freedom fighter in Bangladesh's liberation war. Today he is fighting for another cause that is crucial to his country's future - the health of Bangladeshi children.

Once a month for the past 20 years, Ansar has provided his home in Rehai-tara-pur village, Mymensingh district, for use as an outreach immunisation clinic. Women wearing colourful saris stand outside his door waiting for their babies to receive free vaccines against diseases such as measles, diphtheria, polio and hepatitis B.

Health Assistant Mr Nazrul Islam administers the vaccines and provides vitamin A supplements. There are more than 300 similar outreach centres in this sub-district alone. Poor transportation often hinders access to health clinics, so outreach immunisation centres are established wherever there is a suitable space, such as in foyers of apartment blocks or urban slum shanties.

Wearing the traditional Muslim *topi* cap, Ansar's weathered face breaks into a broad smile as he speaks about assisting the clinic on a voluntary basis. "I use the mosque microphone to let people know that the clinic is on. In the rainy season, when the whole village is surrounded by water, I collect people on my boat."

Rehai-tara-pur village is considered a 'hard to reach' area. It is located on a *char* (river island) and there are no roads or even pedestrian bridges to the mainland. The closest health centre is about 50km away in Mymensingh city. The journey is difficult and can involve several hours of walking and boat rides. Villagers dream of having a local clinic, particularly when they have to carry people to the clinic at night.

Mymensingh is one of 15 districts that were identified in 2005 as having chronically low immunisation rates.



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Health Assistant Mr Nazrul Islam reviews baby Aisha's immunisation history, with her mother, Lipa, in Rehai-tara-pur.

The UNICEF-supported 'Reach Every District' (RED) programme was launched to improve immunisation rates in these districts by overcoming common barriers.

In Mymensingh district, the rate of fully immunised one-year-olds increased from 45% in 2005 to 81% in 2009 and is now the highest of the 15 districts. It recently received a Government award recognising its progress.

Mr Hilal Uddin, Mymensingh's District EPI (Expanded Programme on Immunization) Superintendent, says before the RED programme began, there were problems with monitoring and staffing. The district is also home to many hard-to-reach areas, so transportation of vaccines, which need to remain refrigerated, was a challenge. "Previously, one of the reasons for the high drop-out rate was because sometimes the vaccines just didn't turn up, so people were discouraged from returning next time."

Continued on page 5

In Focus: 20 years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

This edition looks at the progress that has been made in Bangladesh's four key programme sectors - education, health, water and child protection - in the 20 years since the Convention on the Rights of the Child was created.

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Q&A WITH UNICEF STAFF

Dr. Md Golam Mostafa, Manager, Early Learning, Dhaka office. **Length of Service:** 25 years. Retired in January 2010.



Tell us about your family and childhood. I was born in Mazgram, a village in Patuakhali district. I live with my wife and 24-year-old daughter. My 27-year-old son lives in the USA.

What was your background before joining UNICEF? After my HSC I studied at the Medical College in Chittagong. After graduation I worked as an intern at the medical college hospital before working for a local NGO. During my time with them I studied a Masters of Community Health and a Postgraduate Diploma in Maternal Nutrition. After that I moved to Saudi Arabia to work as medical officer with the Health Ministry.

What are some of the projects you have worked on? In 1984 I returned to Dhaka and started working with UNICEF, initially just on a three month contract! Back then, UNICEF was supporting the government to train traditional birth attendants on maternal health issues. I worked with government to develop a training package and streamline implementation. I managed the national Oral Rehydration Therapy Campaign and was chief of a field cluster for two years. In 1999, I wanted to become chief of field operations, but instead management gave me the responsibility of integrating early childhood development into our country programme. It turned out to be a blessing in disguise: I have thoroughly enjoyed the work and we have achieved a lot.

What do you enjoy about working at UNICEF? Some people think such a long time with one organisation would be boring, but during the last 25 years I’ve worked on some incredible, groundbreaking projects. I always feel satisfied when I see the work I’m involved in being mainstreamed in a national programme. The work we do benefits the children of my country, so I’m happy to do that little bit extra than is written in the job description. □



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Bangladeshi children interview MP Ms Meher Afroz Chumki, chairperson of the Parliamentary Standing Committee of Women and Children Affairs, on the *Our Voice* programme on BTV. The monthly TV show, supported by UNICEF, allows children from diverse backgrounds to ask questions of the Government.

THE FACTS: TWENTY YEARS OF THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

In November 2009, the world celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC). The CRC is a legally binding document that guides UNICEF in its mission to fulfil the rights of children. It is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history, with 193 parties having signed up. Bangladesh was one of the first countries to ratify the CRC, in August 1990.

In 2009, the Bangladesh Government submitted its Third and Fourth Periodic Report on the implementation of the Convention. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child responded with 100 specific recommendations to ensure the full realisation of child rights in Bangladesh.

The committee emphasised the need for Bangladesh to harmonise its legislation with the CRC, such as ensuring that anyone under age 18 is legally treated as a child. The committee urged

the Government to allocate sufficient resources to children, particularly for quality education and pre-school education. Other key recommendations included promoting alternative measures to detention for children in contact with the law, and providing children in refugee camps with better access to health and nutrition services.

While there is still a long way to go, Bangladesh has made significant strides forward in the face of considerable challenges such as overpopulation, poverty and frequent natural disasters.

Major progress has been made in areas including child survival, immunisation, girls' education, birth registration and sanitation. At the same time, Bangladesh continues to face challenges such as high rates of child marriage, child labour and school drop-outs. More details can be found in the boxes that accompany each feature story in this newsletter. □

AFROZA'S STORY: REFUSING MARRIAGE, CHOOSING EDUCATION

Some 20 young girls clap and sing in harmony under a large tin shed as neighbours cast curious looks. The chorus becomes louder as the girls sing a clear message: 'Girls, don't get married before you are 18'.

The girls in Biprohalsha village in Natore district, some 200km north-west of the capital Dhaka, are hosting one of their twice-monthly gatherings, which are part of UNICEF's adolescent empowerment project, funded by the European Union. One of their main subjects of discussion is child marriage. In Bangladesh, rates of teen marriage are among the highest in the world.

The song has a particular resonance for Afroza Khatun, a 17-year-old college student who leads the group. In the face of custom and community pressure, Afroza recently bravely refused her marriage proposal, setting an example of courage in her village by convincing her parents, neighbours and village leaders that she wanted to complete her studies before getting married.

"Early in September a relative from adjacent Bujangacha village came to see my father to propose my marriage with the owner of a small shop. A day later I told my parents that I wanted to complete my studies in college," said Afroza.

Although it is illegal to get married before age 18, girls are often arranged into marriages soon after puberty. In Bangladesh, two thirds of girls are married before age 18 and one third are married before age 15. The prevailing belief is that as girls grow older they may go astray, making it difficult for their parents to find suitable grooms. The burden of maintaining grown-up daughters - who would live with their husband's family if they were married - is another common excuse.

"We wish to send a clear message to our parents and the traditional village matchmakers that it is illegal for

girls to get married before the age of 18 and illegal to pay dowry," said Nazma Khatun, a student of class nine and a member of the adolescent group.

Every month social workers from BRAC, the NGO that is implementing the project, hold courtyard meetings with different groups of people, such as mothers, fathers and senior members of the community. They discuss issues such as reproductive health, dowry, and the benefits of girls delaying marriage and completing their education. When a girl marries, she often drops out of school to work full time in her in-laws' home, where her bargaining power and mobility may be severely reduced. Even if in-laws are supportive, girls face great health risks associated with early pregnancy and childbirth, such as higher maternal mortality rates, pregnancy complications and low birthweight babies.

Afroza wanted to postpone such a shift until she was older. She and her friends from the adolescent group asked senior members of their community to help her convince her parents.

The first person they went to was Sharathi Biswas, programme organiser of BRAC: "I reminded Afroza's parents about our previous meetings in which they had agreed to respect teenage girls' rights and avoid early marriage."

A local union council member, Md Hazrat Ali Mandol, also intervened on Afroza's behalf. As a council member, Mandol has considerable influence in the society and he strongly supports girls waiting until they are at least 18 to get married.

"I mediated when I heard that Afroza was getting married. It's a shame that people still consider young girls as a burden for their families," said Mandol.

Afroza also had help from a local religious leader, Abdur Razzak, who said: "I had organized a meeting of senior members of the community to condemn those who agree to get their daughters married before the age of 18. In this case, I thought we could easily convince Afroza's father."

Afroza's father Md Akram Hossain recalls how he eventually agreed to his daughter's request: "Refusing the proposal was a big challenge for me. Traditionally, a marriage proposal for a growing girl is welcomed, because it is not easy to find well-off grooms. Early marriage has been a practice in our family from generation to generation."

Akram continued: "I decided to turn down the proposal keeping in mind my daughter's desire for higher education. But I knew I would face criticism and, even worse, this would break relations with my in-laws who



Afroza, 17, (centre) shares a joke with her two sisters, Asma, 21, (right) and Akhi, 13, (left).

had arranged the match with a good deal of hope.”

UNICEF, in partnership with two national NGOs, has been implementing the adolescent empowerment project including adult motivation programmes across Bangladesh since 2001. The programme, which reaches almost 100,000 adolescents, aims to build confidence and knowledge among adolescents, particularly girls, so that they can participate in decisions that affect their lives and even intervene in social and political structures.

Afroza’s marriage could be prevented only because her community was well aware of the laws and rights of adolescent girls. As Afroza walks along the bank of a small pond next to her mud house amid a thick bamboo forest, she talks about her future plans: “I wish to do well in my studies and perhaps go on to higher education. One day I see myself as a teacher, maybe in a leading school in the capital.”

She said, “I know in the meantime many proposals will come along but as long as I have the support of the community and my parents, I am not thinking about marriage for the time being.”

Following the example set by Afroza and those around her, six more proposals were prevented in the surrounding village areas, and hopefully many more to follow. □

This project is funded by the European Union

Progress in child protection

Birth registration. UNICEF led the process of formulating the Birth Registration Act, adopted in 2004, and has worked closely with the Government to implement a national strategy. Birth registration rates in children aged under five increased from 10% in 2006 to 54% in 2009.



Age of criminal responsibility. UNICEF steered the process of increasing the age of criminal responsibility from seven to nine years of age, and continues to advocate to further increase this age.

Legislative and policy reform. UNICEF has provided technical support to bring the Children Act 1974 and the National Children Policy 1994 in line with the CRC and other international standards, a process which is ongoing. UNICEF is also supporting the development of a national Child Protection Policy, steered by the Government.

Key child protection statistics:

Women who were married by age 18: 66%
Children aged 5-14 engaged in the workforce: 13%

Source: MICS 2006; MICS 2009.

PROVIDING VACCINES IN REMOTE AREAS

Continued from page 1

Maintaining this cold chain is challenging, particularly given Bangladesh’s intermittent electricity. UNICEF assists by procuring cold chain equipment such as fridges, cold boxes and generators, and builds the capacity of staff to maintain the cold chain.

Mr Hilal says the introduction of auto-disable syringes, which can only be used once, was crucial in improving immunisation rates. “Before the RED programme, we used to sterilise the syringes and reuse them. There were more side effects, such as infections at the injection site. When we switched to auto-disable syringes, the side effects went down and the acceptance of immunisation improved. The drop-out rate came down significantly,” he says.

Health Assistant Mr Nazrul Islam is expecting 20 children at Ansar’s house today. The day before each monthly clinic is held Nazrul visits the homes of all women with babies aged under one, to remind them of the clinic. He also makes regular home visits to everyone in his area (about 2800 people) to provide health information. In a region where more than 40% of people are illiterate, this face to face communication is essential. Additionally, given that 85% of births occur in homes, his visit also ensures that no child who is the right age for immunisation misses out.

UNICEF-funded pamphlets, posters and banners help spread the word about immunisation. “I know that it’s important to get the babies vaccinated so that they don’t get measles. It’s good for their health,” says Lipa, 25, who walked three kilometres to reach the clinic today, carrying her four-month-old baby girl, Aisha. □

This project is funded mainly by the Australian National Committee for UNICEF

Progress in health and nutrition

Child survival. Bangladesh has made huge reductions in child mortality rates, from 149 deaths per 1000 live births in 1990 to 54 per 1000 in 2008¹.



Immunisation. The rate of fully immunised one-year-olds increased from 52% in 1991 to 75% in 2009². This progress was recently recognised with a special award from the Global Alliance on Vaccines and Immunisation.

Nutrition. *20 million children aged one to five receive vitamin A supplementation each year. *84% of all edible salt is now iodised³. *Despite progress to eradicate poverty, 41% of children aged under five remain underweight¹.

Source: ¹ SOWC November 2009; ² EPI Coverage Evaluation Survey 2009;

³ MICS 2006

PROVIDING DRINKING WATER IN AREAS AFFECTED BY CLIMATE CHANGE

Defying heat and humidity, Maya Begum walks more than an hour from her village to fill two large plastic containers with drinking water for her family of four.

Maya is one of many young housewives who make the arduous trek two or three times a week to Kodomtola village, Swarankhola sub-district in coastal Bagerhat district, some 190km southwest of the capital Dhaka.

In the village, large rainwater tanks were installed with UNICEF support after Cyclone Sidr. Maya comes to collect the water that has been preserved in these tanks. "We don't have any drinking water in our village. The surface water that is available is not safe and the manually filtered water from ponds stinks," Maya said.

Drinking water in the sub-district is hard to find. Salty groundwater is a major problem in coastal areas. In addition, some of the large, seasonal freshwater sources are contaminated by fish feed and saline used by shrimp farmers.

Climate change is expected to make drinking water even scarcer. Natural disasters are predicted to increase in frequency, damaging infrastructure such as tubewells and latrines. Embankments have already been damaged by the cyclones that struck Bangladesh in 2007 and 2009, creating large breaches. Salt water enters through these breaches and floods low-lying areas, increasing salinity in fresh water sources and causing erosion. Additionally, sea-level rises that are predicted to accompany climate change will mean that more communities, and increasingly inland areas, will be affected by salinisation of groundwater.

Md Shamsul Alam, Executive Engineer of the Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE) in Bagerhat, said that more than half of the 3,941 hand-pumped tubewells in Swarankhola are inoperative due to non-use as their water contains high levels of salt, arsenic and iron. "Installing a desalinization plant in Swarankhola would be a costly proposition for the Government," he added.

So, since October 2008, the community has been harvesting rainwater in tanks. Considering construction and maintenance costs, this system is far cheaper than filtering bacteria and other germs from pond water.

With UNICEF support and CARE Bangladesh supervision, local NGO Shushilan has constructed 131 household rainwater tanks in Swarankhola, 27 of them in Kodomtola. Each tank costs 14,000 taka (USD200) – a price perceived as too high for most locals, who earn about 5000 taka (USD75) a month from fishing.

Kodomtola residents say that the rainwater tastes like mineral water and is free of any unpleasant smell. Locals try to ensure that the water from the tank is used only for drinking and cooking because the tank's supply can run low in the dry season.

Local fisherman, Jamaluddin said, "When neighbours come and keep asking us to share it we really have no choice but to ration its use."

Resident Rabeya Akhand added: "Most of the tanks start to go empty in the dry season and we are forced to drink from ponds, using the traditional technology of filtering



A girl collects drinking water from a rainwater tank in Bagerhat, southern Bangladesh.

Progress in water and environmental sanitation

Sanitation. About 80% of people used an improved sanitation facility¹.

Water. After arsenic was discovered in groundwater in the mid-90s, UNICEF mounted a major awareness campaign. The testing of almost five million tubewells contributed to this awareness raising. UNICEF works with the Government developing and installing arsenic-safe water sources. About 85% of the population use an improved, arsenic-free drinking water source¹.

Hygiene. About 18 million Bangladeshi children participated in Global Handwashing Day 2009. This campaign complements inter-personal communication from 10,000 community hygiene promoters working as part of a DFID-supported project which began in 2007 and targets 20 million people. The rates of observed handwashing with soap after defecation increased from 17% at baseline in 2007 to 30% in 2009 in project areas².

Source: ¹ MICS 2009
² SHEWA-B midline report



the water through at least seven layers of used cotton fabric, usually old saris, to remove germs.”

Rainwater harvesting technology is easy to use and maintain. Rainwater runs down the sloping tin roof, into plastic half-pipe gutters fixed to the edge of the roof and down into the tank. Each tank, with a tap near the bottom edge, can hold 3,200 litres of water.

“When UNICEF decided to give free rainwater harvesting tanks in the Cyclone Sidr-hit areas we carried out a community need assessment for water sources in Kodomtola,” said Sachidananda Biswas, Chief of Shushilan’s Monitoring Cell in Swarankhola. “Families were selected on a priority basis, for

example, families with a disabled member would be listed first for the water tank construction,” he said.

UNICEF is promoting the construction of more tanks in the area so people do not have to walk so far to fetch water. UNICEF also has several other strategies to provide clean drinking water, such as supporting the Government to develop new hand-pump technologies that can draw water from a greater depth, and helping communities adapt their water and sanitation facilities to withstand floods and cyclones. □

This project is funded by UKaid from the DFID and the Japanese Government

BANGLADESHI CHILDREN PARTICIPATE IN THE UN CLIMATE CHANGE FORUM IN COPENHAGEN

Bangladeshi teenager Tariqul Islam was selected as one of only eight UNICEF climate ambassadors worldwide to represent young people at the 15th UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen (COP15).

Attendees at the conference in December included Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, US President Barack Obama, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and world leaders from 117 other countries.

Tariqul, 16, from remote Bhola Island in southern Bangladesh, was a key speaker at a briefing by the child delegates on disaster risk reduction, where he explained how natural disasters have affected his life.

“I think the impact of climate change has worsened the situation. Now, the frequency and magnitude of the disasters are more devastating. Sea erosion and river erosion are also big problems for my island. There is a nearby island called Manpura. One third of the island has eroded within the last two years,” he said.

Tariqul was also one of four Bangladeshi youth delegates who attended the Children’s Climate Forum, organised by UNICEF and the City of Copenhagen, in the week prior to COP15. The delegates - Arif Arman,

Miti Annesha, Fatema Akhter and Tariqul – come from different regions of Bangladesh that are expected to be disproportionately affected by climate change.

The four delegates, who were selected through an essay competition, attracted a lot of attention from media and youth participants as they explained how climate change is already impacting their communities.

“Many young people [at the forum] didn’t know about Bangladesh. But they came to know about it from our posters and stories about how children are being affected,” says Tariqul, who was interviewed by several media outlets in Copenhagen including BBC World.

Attending the Forum was a life-changing experience for the delegates, none of whom had travelled overseas before. They now have a network of international friends, and the confidence to act as climate ambassadors in their own communities.

They have each developed action plans to improve their communities’ awareness of climate change, using modes such as social media and school visits. All four delegates are also child journalists (trained through a UNICEF project), so they plan to write stories for local and international press.

The Forum culminated in the adoption of a declaration which was presented to world leaders at COP15. It makes recommendations such as introducing an international carbon trading system, and making climate change education mandatory in schools.

“We commit to personal lifestyle changes that place the common good above our individual desires and current way of life,” the declaration says. “We are prepared to give all we have as long as there is the possibility of saving our planet.”

“We expect the same courage from you.”

For the full declaration, see uniteforclimate.org □



Tariqul Islam, centre, answers questions at the 15th UN Climate Change Conference.

HELPING GIRLS ACCESS EDUCATION IN THE SPIRIT OF MEENA



Ten-year-old Asmany dreams of one day becoming a doctor, a profession she became interested in from her favourite cartoon character, Meena. "I learned how diseases spread, and how important it is to wash my hands after using the bathroom from Meena. I want to become a doctor so I can help poor

people have good health," she explains with a smile as bright as her TV hero.

Launched by UNICEF in 1992, Meena is the spirited character of a nine-year-old girl who appears in TV cartoons, books and on the radio. She spreads awareness about issues including health and early marriage, and one of her key messages is the importance of girls' education.

Asmany is part of a new generation of Bangladeshi girls, a generation raised with Meena who have greater access to education than ever before. The proportion of girls attending primary school has risen dramatically in the past two decades, since the Government of Bangladesh made primary education free and compulsory in 1990. UNICEF works with the Government to achieve quality education for all children through the Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP-II). Meena has helped ensure the success of this programme by opening the minds of people across Bangladesh, where there is now near universal awareness of the TV series.

In a 2004 survey designed to measure the impact of Meena, 66% of children and adolescents believed that their parents had sent and kept them in school because they had been influenced by Meena.



Girls are now ahead of boys in terms of attendance, enrolment, retention and completion of primary school. However dropout rates are high for all students – many students leave primary school before they finish. On average it takes students 8.6 years to finish the five-year primary schooling cycle. Children like Asmany, who complete their primary school education on time, have a much higher chance of making it into secondary school.

Asmany's teacher Mrs Rahima has told her that if she wants to become a doctor she needs to study maths, science and english. Asmany has almost completed grade five at Dhantala Government Primary School in Islampur, northern Bangladesh, and is eager to

Progress in education

	In 1991...	In 2009...
Percentage of girls enrolled in primary school ¹	51%	94% (2007)
Proportion of girls starting grade one who reach grade five ¹	41%	81% ²
Ratio of girls to boys in primary education (gender parity index) ¹	0.83	1.03 ²
Percent of girls in secondary education	33.9% (1990) ³	53.7%(2008) ⁴
Percentage of female primary school assistant teachers	21% (1990) ³	52.8% (2008) ⁵

Source: 1. Directorate of Primary Education, cited in MDG Bangladesh Progress Report 2008
 2. MICS 2009
 3. BANBEIS 2009
 4. UNICEF State of the World's Children 2009
 5. PEDPII 2008 Annual Sector Performance Report (published in 2009)



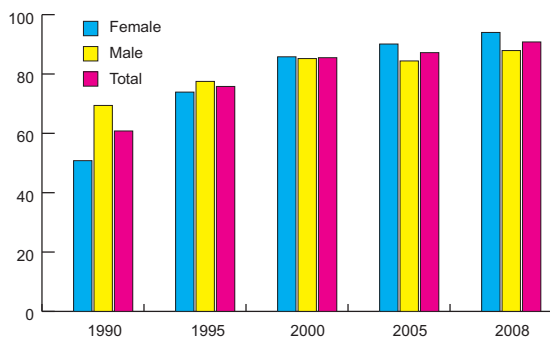
move on. But like many girls, she faces several challenges, particularly from her family and community. Her maternal aunts observe strict *pardah*¹ and they believe that she should go to an all-female Islamic school instead of a secular high school where she will have male peers.

The knowledge, awareness, and participation of key decision makers in families and communities strongly influence whether girls continue their education. UNICEF supports initiatives to raise awareness about the importance of education through activities such as popular theatre groups. Asmany has a vivid memory of seeing a play last year about a girl whose father prohibited her from attending school. “The skit showed how the village people and teacher together with the girl convinced her father to let her go to school. The community told the father of the benefits to her whole family, and eventually, he was convinced!”

The increase in enrolment rates in Bangladesh is one of the country’s key achievements of the past two decades. Increased girls’ education not only contributes to women having greater bargaining power in their households, and improved economic prospects, but it is also linked with a higher age at marriage and better prospects for maternal health.

With more girls also attending secondary school and higher education, girls like Asmany have a greater chance than ever before of achieving their goals. Asmany is sure that she can convince her parents to let her stay in school. “I want to be like Meena, good and strong, overcoming difficulties and helping my friends and family”. □

Progress in primary school enrolment rates



Source: BANBEIS 2009

This project is funded by AusAid

¹ *Purdah* is a religious custom in which women avoid being seen by men who are not related to them.



Reaching those who are hardest to reach

An estimated 1.5 million children in Bangladesh have never been enrolled in school. Dola, 13, is one of them. To support her family, she pounds bricks into small chips for use in construction. Like 40 per cent of Bangladeshi people, Dola’s family lives below the poverty threshold and desperately needs the small contribution that Dola makes.

Luckily for Dola, change is on the horizon. She recently joined a UNICEF-supported Government learning centre that provides Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Working Children (BEHTRUWC) in her city of Barisal, southern Bangladesh. She had never attended a class before and can already see the progress she has made. “In the beginning I did not feel comfortable to go to the shop because I did not know how to count the money. Now, thanks to what I’ve learned, I feel confident that I can shop alone”.

She will soon also learn how to sew. “I have always dreamt of becoming a tailor and now my dream is about to become a reality! I will be able to increase the income of my family...brick chipping is too tiring, unhealthy, and the salary is too low”.

The BEHTRUWC project aims to impart life-skills based non-formal education to 166,500 urban working children between the age of 10 and 14, 60 per cent of whom are girls. To ensure that children can continue to support their families, the school day is shortened to 2.5 hours to fit around their work schedules. Dola is one of 10,000 children who will receive specific vocational training. □

RESPONDING TO EMERGENCIES

CYCLONES

1 In May 2009, Cyclone Aila hit 11 coastal districts, affecting 3.9 million people. In its aftermath, villagers have come to collect safe drinking water from a UNICEF delivery truck. Tidal surges caused by Aila posed a public health threat since they destroyed latrines and contaminated water sources with waste and salt water. UNICEF also distributed water purification tablets, and repaired or replaced inoperable tubewells. The relief efforts made clean drinking water available to hundreds of thousands of people.



© UNICEF/2009/Tanvir Murad Topu

2 Water, water everywhere but not a drop to drink. After Cyclone Aila, 14-year-old Honufa leads her younger cousins through flooded rice fields on their daily walk from their village in Barguna, southern Bangladesh, to the UNICEF-operated water treatment plant. It is the only source of clean water in the area.



© UNICEF/2009/Tanvir Murad Topu

3 A woman carries a UNICEF family kit to what remains of her home near Gorjon Bunia village, southern Bangladesh after Cyclone Sidr in 2007. This box of essentials was distributed to 10,000 families in the most severely affected areas, supplying them with cooking materials, clothes, and plastic sheets to create temporary housing.



© UNICEF/2007/Shehzad Noorani

4 After Cyclone Sidr, UNICEF worked with Save the Children to quickly establish 220 safe places like this one in Gorjon Bunia village. These centres provide children with sustenance, clothing and medical support, and access to psycho-social support and recreation. Longer term care has included cash transfers and social support to 2000 orphaned and vulnerable children and their foster families.



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INFLUENZA OUTBREAKS

5 In 2008 and 2009, UNICEF collaborated with the Government and other partners to raise awareness about Avian Flu and Influenza A (H1N1). Here, a drama troupe spreads the word about the dangers of influenza. UNICEF organized hundreds of such performances in high-risk areas.

6 Sofura Khatun tends to her 400 chickens in Dhour village, central Bangladesh. With the threat of bird flu, poultry farms are potentially dangerous and families may lose their main income. Periodic outbreaks of bird flu in poultry have occurred since 2007 and the Government has culled millions of birds. UNICEF educates local communities about the risks and encourages safe behaviours to reduce transmission. Sofura protects herself by wearing a mask.

FLOODS

7 The floods of 2007 caused 1100 deaths, 90% of which were children. This boy's family helps him through his flooded village near Bogra, north-west Bangladesh. They carry the belongings they could salvage, on their way to one of the safe spaces UNICEF set up to provide care and psychosocial support to 40,000 children.

8 Bangladesh is susceptible to regular localized flash floods like this one in Sirajgong, central Bangladesh, in 2004.

9 Women and children are the most vulnerable during emergencies. During the 1998 floods, UNICEF supported safe spaces like this one in Dhaka, where women could have their babies immunized by a community health worker. □

© UNICEF/2008/Amin



5



6

© UNICEF/2007/Akash



7



8

© UNICEF/2004/Kiron



9

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Children's right to participate

"The child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child." – Article 12 (1), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

One of the rights enshrined in the CRC is the right of children to express their views on matters affecting them. To celebrate 20 years of the Convention, UNICEF Bangladesh organised several special activities and projects that focussed on this spirit of participation.

CHILDREN RAISE THEIR VOICES ON CHILD RIGHTS

Ten-year-old Hassan knows enough about child rights to realise that he is entitled to more than his poor-paying job as a porter, but he feels powerless to change his situation.

"At this age I know I'm not supposed to work, because it involves too much risk. I'm supposed to be at school, but this is my fate. My family depends on me. I'm compelled to work."

Hassan is one of about 30 boys voicing their opinions on child rights, specifically the right not to work, at a drop-in centre in Dhaka's old town, just behind the bustling docks of the Buriganga River.

They are taking part in one of 37 focus groups organised by UNICEF to hear what children think about the implementation of child rights in Bangladesh.

The group facilitators, Golam Ahad and Kehkasha Sabah, have spoken to more than 800 children across the country, in locations including Dhaka, Barisal, Sylhet and Chittagong. Vulnerable children, such as those living in orphanages, refugee camps and juvenile justice centres attended the focus groups.

The words of Hassan and his peers are being carefully recorded by the facilitators. After each discussion group, Kehkasha guides the children to create an

artwork, or write a poem or letter, explaining their situation or what they would like to change.

A total of 650 drawings, plus 200 additional poems, stories and letters, were created by the children as part of this project. The top 35 artworks were displayed in an exhibition at the launch of UNICEF's flagship publication, *State of the World's Children* in December 2009. Their words and pictures were also compiled into a coffee table book, entitled *Children's Voices: It's time to listen*, which was distributed to government officials and civil servants, NGOs and UN staff in Bangladesh and around the world.

Today, the facilitators are sitting cross-legged on the tiled floor of the drop-in centre as many children explain that they have to work due to family breakdown.

"My father got remarried and abandoned us, and my sister is being asked to pay a huge dowry to her new husband. I have to work because my mother and sisters rely on me for survival," says Hassan who has been receiving shelter and a basic education in this drop-in centre for the past six months.

Sajed Hossain, 17, works every night as a volunteer peer leader at the drop-in centre, which is run by UNICEF's partner NGO Aparajeyo Bangladesh. During the day he works as a rickshaw puller, earning between 100 and 300 taka a day.

"I'm deprived of education. I'm deprived of my family's love and care. I'm supposed to be with my family, but I'm on the street. It makes me feel sad," says Sajed.

Despite his limited education, Sajed is familiar with the CRC and talks to the other children at the centre, including Hassan, about their rights.

Hassan says: "I'm learning about the right to be protected from having to work. I know it, but I can't avoid it."

A selection of these artworks are on the next page. Visit www.unicef.org.bd to see a slideshow of works. □



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Facilitators Kehkasha Sabah and Golam Ahad talk to Hassan, 10, front right, at the focus group discussion at Wiseghat, Dhaka.

This project is funded through UNICEF core funding (regular resources). See box, page 2.

Children's voices: it's time to listen

As part of the 20th anniversary of the CRC, UNICEF published a book of children's drawings and poems expressing their views on the implementation of child rights in Bangladesh. The artworks were the result of 37 focus group discussions with more than 800 children. Here is a selection of their works.

"Some children have good dresses. They live with their parents. They are happy. They get love and care from their parents. A poor girl sees these other children buying dresses. But she has no dress. She is helpless."

– Khushi Akter, 12-year-old girl, Rajshahi



"Child torture in the name of discipline must be stopped in the classroom."

- Swapan Biswas, 15-year-old boy, Jessore



"I want to get an education. I want to learn how to use computers. Every child has the right to learn computers. A child has the right to develop his or her life. The government should support every child for education."

– Md. Faisal Hossain, 12-year-old boy, Khulna

"I work in an iron grill workshop. I feel many health problems in my body caused by working in the grill workshop. I think that my eyesight has also been affected working here. This work is very harmful."

- Md. Bablu, 13-year-old boy, Sylhet



"This picture shows the Bangla New Year fair. Children are participating in that fair and are enjoying themselves. All children should be able to participate in different events for pleasure."

– Anwar Hossain, 14-year-old boy, Jessore



"Girls are the victim of child marriage."

– Laboni Gyene, 14-year-old, girl, Jessore



"Two children are selling nuts. They see a school in front of them where there are many children going to school. They wish they could also go to school."

– Salma, 12-year-old girl, Khulna



"In my drawing, the husband is torturing his wife at home while their children are watching. They are panicked and are learning this pattern. It is very important that parents do not quarrel in front of their children. Rather, they should live cordially. The children will not learn these habits and will not become afraid."

– Ariful Islam, 14-year-old boy, Jessore

BANGLADESHI ADOLESCENTS SHOW US THEIR WORLD THROUGH PHOTOS

Shuktara, 17, is sitting in the cool shade beneath a Banyan tree in Chapainawabganj district in northern Bangladesh, learning how to use photography to share her stories with the world.

As the Mahananda River flows nearby, photography trainer Tanzim explains how to compose a photo and helps adolescents like Shuktara select an issue close to their heart that they can document through photography.

Shuktara is one of 30 adolescents receiving intensive training in basic photography during a week-long workshop, facilitated by Pathshala, the South Asian Institute of Photography. The project aims to introduce the adolescents to a new mode of expression.

The photo project, in collaboration with Pathshala and NGO partners the Centre for Mass Education in Science and BRAC, is part of UNICEF's Empowerment of Adolescents project, which is funded by the European Union. It is one way that UNICEF is helping young people express their views, in line with Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Shuktara decided to focus her photos on the issue of child labour, which is an unfortunate reality that she is confronted with everyday, because many of her child neighbours work in a cement business near her house. "Children are our next generation of leaders. If they are deprived of their rights – including the right not to work – they will not be able to lead us," she said.

As Shuktara photographed them, children as young as eight continued their work layering tar on cement rings and steel casings that would be later used to produce cement pillars for bridges and drainage pipes. The children are paid between 90 and 120 taka (less than USD1.50) per day (the younger the child, the lower his pay).

Shuktara and the other participants were given a digital camera for a week and took about 9000 photos during this time. A selection of these photos were launched in an exhibition in Dhaka as part of the celebrations for the 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The exhibition then toured the districts where the photos were produced, and there was also a mobile exhibition on the back of rickshaws, allowing remote villagers to see the photographs. Finally, the photos have been compiled into a hardcover book, raising awareness of the issues these young people face.

Like many trainees in the project, Shuktara had some difficulty gaining access to her subjects, particularly as a woman entering a male-dominated arena.



The adolescents' photo exhibition is displayed on the back of bullock carts in Chapainawabganj, northern Bangladesh.

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Overcoming this challenge helped build her self confidence and assertiveness. "She struggled with the environment initially because many of the guys started 'eve-teasing' her, but she was so determined. She kept at it," said Tanzim.

In Rajshahi alone the adolescents have chosen topics including child trafficking, early marriage, drug addiction and disabilities.

For Farida, the decision of what to photograph was simple. Farida and her family know all too well the prejudice faced by the disabled – her father and two sisters have dwarfism. Tanzim explained that in Bangladeshi society, disability is not widely accepted. "Many people believe that disabled people are not useful, particularly if they cannot help support their family," he said.

Farida's sister, Taj Mahal, had a normal growth rate during her infancy, but at three years of age, after a bout of chicken pox, her growth was stunted. To help support the family, Taj works hard as a tailor, making about 100 taka a day (less than USD2.00).

"I hope my photos will help to sensitize people in Bangladesh about disability," said Farida.

To see a selection of the photographs taken by the adolescents visit: www.unicef.org.bd 

This project is funded by the European Union

DONOR PROFILE: EUROPEAN UNION

UNICEF collaborates with government ministries, non-government organisations, UN agencies and a wide range of donors. It is funded entirely by voluntary contributions.

The European Union (EU) is one of our top five donors, funding child protection programmes coordinated by UNICEF in Bangladesh.

Ambassador and Head of the EU Delegation in Bangladesh, Dr Stefan Frowein, discusses the EU's commitment to working alongside UNICEF for the protection and empowerment of children in Bangladesh.

[The EU is a major donor of UNICEF's Child Protection \(adolescent empowerment and legislative reform\) programmes in Bangladesh. Why are these issues important to the EU?](#)

The EU and the UN share the same values: respect for and the promotion of human rights. We have established a fruitful partnership with UNICEF in Bangladesh to ensure the realisation of women's and children's rights.

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. It also ensures a certain level of protection against human rights violations such as child marriage, commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking and the worst forms of child labour. In a country like Bangladesh, where social practices and norms discriminate against women and girls, the Empowerment of Adolescents project ensures their effective participation in policy implementation and decision making, and enhances family knowledge of gender and child protection issues.

[What improvements have you seen in the projects the EU supports in Bangladesh recently?](#)

As the largest provider of foreign aid in Bangladesh, the EU plays an important role in almost all sectors of development, most prominently in education, health, food security, trade, human rights and disaster preparedness. As Bangladesh continues to score better in terms of social and economic indicators, we are pleased to see that our support is having measurable and positive results for the people of Bangladesh.

The Empowerment of Adolescents project effectively changes the lives of many adolescent girls and is a model of best practice. The 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 behavioural 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 villagers were so supportive of the project and recognized the positive changes it had brought about. Data presented to me 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 adolescents, and also their families. Adolescents are now moving towards a future where they will not have to depend on others to know about their rights.

[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 commitment in Bangladesh amounts to almost 900 million Euros, with 198 million Euros allocated to projects in 2011-2013. Our future interventions will 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 towards achieving MDG targets. In particular, Bangladesh is on track to achieve gender parity in primary and secondary schools, universal primary school enrolment and reduction of child mortality. However, reduction of school dropout rates remains a challenge. According to 2008 data, although certain progress has been made, the country is still far from reducing poverty to 29 per cent by 2015. □



European Union

1 Children's opinion poll reveals widespread use of corporal punishment

Nine out of ten children reported receiving physical punishment at school in a recent survey conducted by UNICEF and the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs. More than half of the children polled reported that "many to most" of their peers suffer from physical punishment at school, most commonly by caning. Almost one-quarter of children reported that such punishment takes place daily. Corporal punishment also extends into the home, with three-quarters saying they have experienced physical punishment at home. One quarter of working children report physical abuse in the workplace. Focus groups revealed that although there is widespread acceptance of physical punishment, children felt that overall physical punishment does more harm than good.

Corporal punishment can have devastating effects on children's emotional and physical health. The Convention on the Rights of the Child states explicitly that children must be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence.

2 Millions of Bangladeshi children lather up for global handwashing day

About 18 million Bangladeshi children participated in mass handwashing demonstrations during Global Handwashing Day on October 15th. Celebrating an event marked in 80 countries around the globe, 75,000 primary and secondary schools and 8000 madrasas (religious schools) took part. Children's participation was vital, since the event focused on the role of children as transmitters of new knowledge to their homes and communities. One of the largest demonstrations took place in Khulna, southern Bangladesh, where more than 3 million children gathered to learn how to wash their hands effectively. Mustahid Billah, 12, said of the event, "I got some information about handwashing with soap from my family and also from the TV. But I think today I learnt the best". Like many Bangladeshis, Mustahid normally only washed his right hand, the hand that he eats with, but this event demonstrated the importance of washing both hands thoroughly with soap.

Effective handwashing is critical to avoiding diarrhoea and reducing the spread of illnesses. The global handwashing day campaign was initiated under a public private partnership for handwashing with soap between the Government, UNICEF, WHO, Unilever and a range of NGOs.

3 UNICEF study finds that 33 million Bangladeshi children live in poverty

More than half of all Bangladeshi children live in poverty and one-quarter are deprived of four out of seven of their basic needs, according to the UNICEF *Study on Child Poverty and Disparities* in Bangladesh which was released in November.

By examining deprivations of basic needs, which are defined as food, education, health, information, shelter, water and sanitation, the study focuses on the multidimensional aspects of child poverty. More than half Bangladesh's children are deprived of sanitation, information and nutrition, 40% are deprived of shelter and 8% are deprived of an education. The study also shed light on the importance of mothers' education as a key determinant of child poverty: the higher the mother's level of education, the lower the chance for the child to be affected by deprivation. In light of the findings, UNICEF suggests that definitions of poverty that focus on income should be broadened to include measures of social wellbeing. The Bangladesh report is part of a global research project involving 46 countries that seeks to assess the level of child poverty worldwide.

4 Bangladesh puts the spotlight on children during Child Rights Week

Child Rights Week in October had special significance as the world celebrated 20 years of the Convention of the Rights of the Child. With support from UNICEF and other development partners, the Government of Bangladesh organized a packed programme ranging from fun activities for children to policy debates on legislative reform.

At the inauguration of the week, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina emphasized the importance of upholding the rights of marginalized children such as girls, the disabled and the poor.

Key events in the week included the launch of a UNICEF-supported children's opinion poll, a rally and cultural programme for girls, and a seminar and other activities for children with disabilities. A policy dialogue was also facilitated by Prothom Alo newspaper in partnership with UNICEF to discuss the need for an ombudsman for children. One of the most popular events was a pop concert attended by 600 child workers, for whom the right to leisure and play is difficult to come by.

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