

UNICEF Bangladesh

# Newsletter

Issue 15, May 2010

## GOING TO SCHOOL IN AREAS AFFECTED BY CYCLONE AILA

In the hot midday sun, children and teachers use a rickety bamboo bridge to cross the floodwater that has surrounded their primary school since Cyclone Aila hit almost a year ago.

It is the end of the dry season, but the playground remains submerged at South Maharajpur Non-Government Registered Primary School because embankments destroyed by the cyclone are yet to be reconstructed. The cyclone completely destroyed the previous school structure, but it was rebuilt as part of the Education in Emergencies (EiE) project, supported by UNICEF and implemented by Save the Children UK and Action Aid. The school is one of 600 that were repaired or rebuilt after Aila under the project.

While the small school in coastal Koyra sub-district is buzzing with activity on this humid afternoon, education was not possible immediately after the cyclone. "There were lots of problems for schooling. There were no books, education materials or furniture – all were destroyed. And schools themselves were destroyed," says Alhas Shomir Uddin, a retired teacher who now provides voluntary support to local schools.

At nearby Protyashita EDAS school in Maharajpur union, many parents were forced to prioritise livelihood over education after the cyclone. "After Aila, children didn't have clothes and parents didn't have food in their homes. Some children helped their parents catch, process and sell fish. Children also helped their parents collect relief items – they spent a long time standing in queues," said Rokeya Sultana, a grandmother of two boys attending the school.

### Immediate action

The Education in Emergencies project, which is implemented with the Government of Bangladesh and



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Children and teachers leave South Maharajpur school in Koyra sub-district. The school is an island after Cyclone Aila.

partner NGOs, provided learning essentials such as pencils, exercise books and school bags to schools affected by Aila. Comic books about coping in disasters featuring the popular animated character, Meena, were also distributed. Between 2007 and 2009, UNICEF also pre-positioned teaching-learning kits for 270,000 students in emergency-prone areas so that students could resume classes with minimal disruption.

At both Protyashita EDAS and South Maharajpur school, classes resumed only a few weeks after Cyclone Aila destroyed the schools. "We learned in the open air for a little while. It smelled bad – like rotting fish," said nine-year-old Indrani, in class three at Protyashita. "After Aila destroyed our home, we were forced to take shelter in the high school," she added.

Teachers and community members made home visits encouraging parents to send their children to

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### In Focus: Education

This newsletter focuses on the progress Bangladesh has made in the area of education, and UNICEF's work to ensure that all Bangladeshi children have access to quality education.

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## Q&A WITH UNICEF STAFF

**Stala Polina Mandal**, Supply and Procurement Section. **Length of Service:** 21 years.



**Tell us about your family and history before UNICEF.**

I grew up in a village near Kuakata, southern Bangladesh. I was one of 12 children, but 9 have died. In 1961, a huge tidal wave hit and I lost three sisters, my grandma, cousins and

uncles. Later, other brothers and sisters died because there was no doctor in the area. For a while we were so poor we lived in a cattle house. I used to swim across a canal to get to school, holding my books above the water! Later I moved to Dhaka and supported myself through my final years of school and college. I got my bachelors degree in 1998, and a Masters of Arts in 2007. And I'm still studying! Now I'm studying for a diploma in supply chain management, and supporting my husband and two sons.

**Tell me about your work at UNICEF**

I started as secretary assisting the health section chief. I have worked in supply since 1991. I have procured local goods, drugs, offshore goods... I have done it all! Until recently, I mainly assisted with printing. I established long-term agreements with printing companies (along with colleagues), checked specifications, and advised programme sections on their printing. Now, I have been given the responsibility for procuring drugs. I take pride in my work and try to maintain time management and quality.

**What have been some of your major achievements at UNICEF?**

In the 1991 cyclone, I worked into the night procuring things like rice and water purification tablets, and I made sure they were delivered on time. It feels good to be helping families in emergencies, when I know what my family went through.

**What do you like about working here?**

I like that I can work independently in a women-friendly environment. It is my great pleasure that I am procuring things for the benefit of mothers and children in Bangladesh and around the world. That makes me feel proud.



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Schoolgirls at Kusura Government Primary School, Manikganj district, stand next to a mural of Meena, a popular animated character in Bangladesh who spreads awareness about girls' education and other social issues through cartoon books and TV shows.

## THE FACTS: EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH

Bangladesh is on track to achieve the second Millennium Development Goal: to achieve universal primary education by 2015. Primary school net enrolment rates increased from 61 per cent in 1990, to 91 per cent in 2008. Bangladesh has also achieved gender parity in primary school enrolment rates, with girls' net enrolment increasing from 51 per cent in 1991 to 94 per cent in 2007.

Despite the progress, major challenges remain. Only about 41 per cent of girls attend secondary school. The quality of teaching is often weak, and emphasises rote learning rather than independent thought. Almost one-quarter of primary school teachers are untrained and some schools have more than 100 students per teacher.

The schooling system is far from inclusive and an estimated 1.5 million children have never been enrolled<sup>1</sup>. The most common reason for a child not to be enrolled is an inability to bear educational

expenses, and many children have to work rather than going to school. Disadvantaged children including those forced to work, disabled children or those living in slums are less likely to enrol in or complete primary school. For instance, dropout rates in urban slums are six times the national average<sup>2</sup>.

Structured early learning opportunities such as preschools and playgroups are far from universal, but the proportion of children aged 3-5 enrolled in early learning activities increased from 14.6 per cent in 2006 to 22.9 per cent in 2009<sup>2</sup>.

Natural disasters also regularly disrupt educational continuity in Bangladesh by damaging learning materials and destroying infrastructure. An estimated 900 schools are completely damaged every year by cyclones, floods and river erosion. □

<sup>1</sup> School Survey Report of PEDPII

<sup>2</sup> BBS and UNICEF, *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2009* (unpublished)

# BANGLADESH EDUCATION PROGRAMME

UNICEF's education programme emphasises inclusive and quality education for Bangladeshi children. The following UNICEF initiatives are implemented in partnership with the Government of Bangladesh, international donors, and local and international NGOs.

More than 60,000 schools are benefitting from the Second Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP-II). It focuses on improving the quality of primary education, increasing access to primary school for the disadvantaged, and improving school planning. Almost 30,000 schools have developed their own school improvement plans, to strengthen decentralisation of management. The programme also trains teachers in interactive teaching techniques to improve teaching quality.

UNICEF's continues to raise awareness about the importance of early childhood development and education through the Early Learning for Child Development Project. Between 2006 and 2009, about 460,000 children aged three to five years

received age-appropriate early childhood care in 7,858 playgroups and pre-primary schools directly supported by UNICEF. Following UNICEF advocacy, many Government strategies and policies include a separate section on early childhood development.

The Basic Education for Hard-To-Reach Urban Working Children project provides 166,150 working children with basic education in subjects including English, Bangla and life skills. The classes run for 2.5 hours a day, six days a week, so children can continue supporting their families while receiving education.

Emergencies are a regular part of life in Bangladesh. UNICEF supported the reconstruction of almost 1200 schools that were damaged after cyclones in 2007 and 2009. Essential learning supplies were prepositioned for 270,000 students in disaster-prone areas between 2007 and 2009, so students could resume schooling quickly after disasters. UNICEF also helps school develop contingency plans to prepare for potential disasters. □

## PLAYFUL EARLY LEARNING PREPARES CHILDREN FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL AND BEYOND

In a small dark room fenced by matted bamboo slips and discarded plastic wrappings, Piyara Begum prepares her three-year-old daughter Saathi for play group.

In the early-morning semi-darkness of her single-room dwelling, measuring just six by four and a half feet, Piyara hurries to dress Saathi in her school uniform and shoes, comb her hair and put her books in her bag.

About three meters away, down the dirty path alongside a smelly municipal drain, in a similar makeshift room, Saathi's classmate Sumaiya also gets ready for her day.

"My daughter enjoys every minute of her time in the school. She always shares rhymes and stories she learns in class with other children in the neighbourhood," said Piyara, who works as a maid.

"We like our school. It's full of fun and excitement and we play with lots of friends," said Sumaiya.

### Building a foundation for education

Saathi and Sumaiya live in a slum in Bagerhat town, some 175 km southwest of the capital Dhaka. They attend preschool at an early learning centre funded by UNICEF and implemented by the Government of Bangladesh through the school preparedness initiative.

The Early Learning for Child Development (ELD) project is designed to assist children aged three to five from disadvantaged families to develop their learning skills and prepare them for primary school, which they are eligible for once they have their sixth birthday.

Research shows that early learning programmes have many benefits, particularly in motivating and preparing children to attend primary school. They also help prepare parents to support their children through the education system. Preschool attendance has been shown to improve children's retention rates and academic performance in primary school and beyond.

Six days a week, Saathi and Sumaiya, dressed in a bright red and bottle green uniform, walk the short distance to their class at the Bangladesh Shishu (Children's) Academy building. They play with their friends in the large classroom before two hours of informal lessons begin.

"My elder daughter Symthia was a student here three years ago. She stood first in her admission test for one of the best primary schools in the south-west of the country. I must thank the teachers of the centre for her achievement," said mother Trishna Das.

As the clock strikes nine, the bell rings and the children tidy the floor in preparation for class. They form a half circle facing their teacher while curious mothers look on from the door and through windows of the old building.



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Sumaiya (left) and Saathi recite nursery rhymes with other students in their class.

## Learning to respect each other

“Hello everyone,” the class teacher greets the children seated on the carpet. “Shall we brush up on the rhyme we learnt yesterday?” she asks in a loud and confident voice.

Jesmin Akhter has been teaching play group for three and four-year-olds at Shishu Academy since January 2004. “Children never feel bored in class although the first few days of learning in January are difficult. As they learn to play with toys and enjoy stories from books provided by the ELD project they start to feel at home,” she said.

Teachers aim to develop students’ eagerness to learn and their active participation in games. Teachers also learn different techniques to discipline misbehaving students.

Hafiza Zaman Shilpi, class teacher of students aged four to five, said, “We try to address errant children through group play where they learn to respect one another. We use a combination of games, visual displays and verbal learning to encourage students to become participants and not rivals.”

## Joyful learning environment

“I wish the classes were longer so that we could play a little longer,” said three-year old Rounak Abedi, adding, “We play, sing songs, learn rhymes and share toys.”

“The centre is very different from traditional schools.

Children learn through play and there is no pressure of homework,” said Farhana Sultana, Rounak’s mother.

The classroom is beautifully decorated with the children’s watercolour paintings. Some colourful posters with educational messages also decorate the classrooms. “Anyone walking into the room would feel a festive mood,” said Farzana Ferdousi, a guardian, adding, “The toys in the shelves and colourful books are added attractions.”

## Popular programme

Through this project, which began in 2004, every student receives a free tiffin (lunch box) once a week, plus a uniform and shoes, funded by the Government. Between 2006 and 2009, an estimated 460,000 children aged three to five benefitted from 7,858 playgroups and pre-primary schools supported by UNICEF.

UNICEF supports creative learning by funding teacher salaries and training, and funding toys, story books and other learning materials.

“At the beginning parents had to be convinced by teachers to send their child to the new early learning centres. Now we receive requests almost every day to admit new students, even in the middle of the academic year,” said class teacher Shilpi. □

**This project is funded by UNICEF National Committees and AusAid.**

# PRIMARY EDUCATION FOR MYANMAR REFUGEES IN COX'S BAZAR

Abdul Munaf, 20, is many things. A son. A brother. A pre-primary school teacher. A refugee.

Munaf fled Myanmar with his parents and five siblings in 1992 when he was just three years old. They crossed the border to Bangladesh and ended up in a refugee camp. He doesn't remember much about his home country, but he knows he can not go back. He doesn't want to.

"We came here to escape persecution. In Myanmar, our life was darkness. There was no security, we were persecuted because we are Muslim. We had no economic rights, we were arrested and detained for no reason," he explains.

Munaf is one of 28,000 registered Rohingya refugees from Myanmar's northern Rakhine state, living in Cox's Bazar district. For more than 17 years they have lived in Kutapalong and Nayapara camps, without freedom of movement, permission to work and limited access to education. About 16,500 of them are aged under 18.

## Preparing for their futures

While secondary education is not allowed, UNICEF has funded NGO RTMI to provide play, pre-school and primary education in the camps since 2008. About 8900 of the primary school aged children in the camps attend classes six days a week. All classes follow the Government curriculum and also include Burmese language classes.



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Musahut, 7, is one of Munaf's students. He hopes an education will give him the opportunity for a life outside the camp.

Munaf teaches 62 children at the Kutapalong camp: "It is my duty to teach my nation. I am teaching them for their future, so that they have dignity in their life." There are 31 students in both his morning and afternoon classes, but his interest in them doesn't end with his class. "I check on the children if they don't come to school for a few days. If there is a reason they're not at school, I help, sometimes taking them to hospital."

Musahut, 7, is one of Munaf's students. He was born in the camp and has never set foot outside. "I like school. I like getting an education. It will help me build my own life," Musahut said.



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Refugee Abdul Munaf, 20, teaching students at the Kutapalong refugee camp.

Like Musahat, Mojammel Hoq, 11, dreams of a future outside of the camp. In his second year in non-formal education, Mojammel's English is excellent. "I want to be a doctor in London. I like to learn English because I want to live in the UK... I am preparing for my future," Mojammel said.

### Challenges to quality education

There are 143 teachers at the 21 schools in both camps, of which 48 teachers are Bangladeshi and the rest are refugees.

"The problem is that refugee teachers are not well qualified," explains RTMI assistant project coordinator, Ansarul Karim. "They often have received little education whereas the Bangladeshi teachers have finished their Higher Secondary Certificate. We are working with UNICEF to attract more Bangladeshi teachers to work in the camps, but it is hard and the pay is very little," Ansarul said.

All teachers receive refresher training every six months. They also meet once a month with RTMI staff and their supervisors to discuss what they have learnt, problems and possible improvements.

Samunnahat, 30, is one of few Bangladeshi teachers at the camp. She teaches a formal education class for 6–10 year olds. Samunnahat completed her HSC and lives in the staff quarters at the Kutapalong camp with her mechanic husband and their two children.

"Most of the parents are illiterate. This is a barrier. Children are getting an education at school, but not at home. Because their parents don't expect to ever leave the camp, they don't value education. This reflects on their children who often don't take care of their schoolbooks and sometimes come to class without them," she says. □



Mojammel Hoq, 11, has worked hard to learn English in the hope that he is resettled in the UK.

This project is funded by UNICEF regular resources (see box, page 2)

## GOING TO SCHOOL AFTER CYCLONE AILA

*Continued from page 1*

school, and even held private lessons in children's homes. "Teachers and the school management committee came to my home, but I wanted to send my children straight back to school anyway. I want my grandchildren to complete their education as much as possible so they have a better future," said Rokeya, whose home was destroyed by Aila.

As part of the UNICEF-supported project, a meeting was held with the local community to create a plan and estimate costs for reconstructing the Prottyashita school. Local people took ownership of the project by contributing whatever small funds they could afford, and helped manage the construction. The new school was reopened after three months, and was expanded to accommodate 100 primary and pre-primary students (it was previously only a pre-primary school).

### Preparing for future disasters

An estimated average of 900 schools each year are damaged by cyclones, floods and river erosion, and these natural disasters are predicted to become even more frequent due to climate change. Teachers in the areas affected by Aila teach their students how to prepare and cope in the event of future disasters.

"We tell them how to survive, how to help their parents survive, and how to protect their assets. For instance, we advise them to keep an empty drum in their homes so they can throw all their valuables in if there is a disaster, and it will float and keep everything dry," says head teacher DM Abdur Rouf, from South Modinabad Non-Government Registered Primary school in Koyra .

Abdur's school is one of 400 that have conducted 'participatory vulnerability assessments' to identify weaknesses in their ability to cope with future disasters. These schools are then provided with a small grant of 16,000 taka (230 USD) to implement action plans to overcome through minor infrastructure work or repairs, or purchasing supplies for temporary learning spaces. Abdur received training as part of the Education in Emergencies project on how to develop this disaster risk reduction plan.

"We held 2-3 meetings with students, teachers, parents, the school management committee and Rupantar [a local NGO] to determine our needs," he says. "The first priority was building a ring dam around our school to prevent flooding. Other proposals include repairing damaged furniture and constructing raised latrines to make them flood-proof. We have already received the money and work is due to start next week." □

This project is funded by Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and the Government of the Netherlands

# BREAKING THE POVERTY CYCLE THROUGH BASIC EDUCATION

Like almost 8 million Bangladeshi children, Muktar Hossain Raja, 13, has to work to support his family. His widowed mother earns only 3000 taka (45 USD) a month, so since age eight, Raja has been forced to work in a metal workshop to contribute to the family income.

"I never had a chance to go to school. This made me very sad. I gave up hoping that I would ever go to school. I thought that I would only ever have the chance to work. Nothing else!" he says.

When he started at the iron workshop, Raja earned only 500 taka (7.25 USD) a month. His duties included fetching tea and water for more senior staff members, and sweeping the workshop every morning and evening.



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*Muktar Hossain Raja proudly does his homework in his simple tin shed house in Lalbagh, Dhaka.*

## School for urban working children

Raja now attends a learning centre run by the Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Working Children (BEHTRUWC) Project, under the Government of Bangladesh's Bureau of Non-Formal Education, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education. UNICEF provides technical and financial support to the project.

Raja's life changed when Nusrat Madam, a teacher from one of the basic education learning centres, visited his house and encouraged his mother to enrol Raja in the learning centre. Nusrat explained that the classes and learning materials would be free, and more importantly, Raja would not have to leave the job that he and his mother depend on for survival.

The project provides education to more than 166,000 students in 6646 learning centres in six divisional cities in Bangladesh. Children attend classes six days

a week, for 2.5 hours each day, so they can continue to support their families while fulfilling their right to education.

Students learn basic Bangla, English, Social Science and Maths, as well as life skills on topics such as interpersonal relationships, critical thinking, decision making, negotiation, job seeking and self employment.

## Changing lives through education

Jesmin Akter Momena, 12, used to have a job in a safety-pin factory to help support her family of four. "One day my finger got stuck into the machine. To my acute pain it was bleeding. I got frightened and started crying," says Momena. In Bangladesh, there are about 1.3 million children like Momena who work in hazardous jobs.

Since starting at her local learning centre, Momena began to reflect on her risky safety pin job and think about finding something safer. In life skills sessions, she learnt about the physical and mental health threats of hazardous jobs as well as how to contact employers to find a suitable job.

Momena proactively gathered information from locals about different employers and finally got a new job. Without basic education, working children often lack the confidence or knowledge to change jobs, particularly because their families are so dependent on their income. "Now I am engaged in Puthi Pathir Kaj. In this job I decorate clothes with beads. I do not have to work on a machine. This job is safe. I feel secure and safe," says Momena.

Raja has also made progress towards a better job since starting at the learning centre. At the centre Raja has learnt relationship skills that have helped him progress at work. "I cooperate with others. I take lessons from my seniors. As a result now I know how to shape iron rods to make windows, doors etc."

Raja also learnt how to talk to his employer to claim his right to just wages and conditions. The learners do role plays, where one learner acts as an employer and the other as a worker. "After practicing in the role-play I talked with my employer and convinced him to give me a promotion as an assistant to the seniors. I asked him for a raise. Now I am getting 1200 taka (17 USD) per month. I am really happy." □

**This project is funded by the Canadian International Development Agency and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency**

# GOING BANANAS FOR A MORE ENGAGED SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Bananas may not be the first thing that come to mind when thinking about quality education, but an onsite banana grove at a school in Bandarban, south-east Bangladesh, has made a huge difference to the school community.

Bandarban is in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, a historically disadvantaged area of Bangladesh with a large indigenous population who live in mountainous terrain that makes transportation difficult.

Students at the Sualock Para Government Primary School in Bandarban come from a wide geographic area, many from poor families, and most cannot go home at lunch time. Until recently, teachers noticed that many students were unable to concentrate on their studies because they were hungry. The school also had other limitations that were hindering student performance such as a lack of ceiling fans and broken furniture.

## Helping schools help themselves

The Second Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP-II), funded by the Government of Bangladesh and 11 other development partners including UNICEF, is helping schools like Sualock address their needs.

An important part of the project is the decentralisation of school management through the use of School Level Improvement Plans (SLIPs). The process begins when head teachers and others receive training on developing a SLIP. A school-level committee consisting of students, parents and staff then identifies activities that would benefit their school and develops a detailed budget and plan. The committee usually raises funds from the local community to supplement the 20,000 taka (300USD) grant that the Government provides to implement their SLIP.

## Bananas for education

At the Sualock school, the head teacher, Mrs Lalthan Zual, thought students' concentration would improve if they could have a snack at school. However, the SLIP funds would not stretch to buying food for the students every day.

Instead, the school took the innovative decision to purchase 60 banana plants, and plant them behind the school building. Within a year, the plants were producing enough fruit for the students to have bananas several times a week. "We told students if they come to school every day, they will get bananas to eat," says Mrs Zual. Susantakumar Amu, a student in Grade 5 agrees that bananas are an incentive to go to

school. "I like to get fruit when I go to school," he says.

In addition to the banana grove, the SLIP Committee plans to plant mango and papaya trees. They have also made sure that neighbours are aware of the school's plans. "As most people in the community know about our banana orchard, they know that they should not steal from it because they would be taking fruit from the children," says Mrs Zual.

Other improvements carried out under the SLIP included painting the school, repairing furniture and blackboards, installing electric fans in the classrooms and repairing doors and windows. The SLIP was also used to fund an annual sports day, six monthly mothers' meetings and annual guardian meetings.

## Improving community engagement

The SLIP process not only helps schools fix their problems, it also engages the community to develop a sense of ownership in school decision making and management.

The real impact of Sualock Para GPS's SLIP is not only in the repaired furniture, or in the pleasant grove of banana trees, but in the newfound initiative of the wider community.

"Before, the community could not see what they could do, but since some funds were provided, the community is involved, and they have more ideas about what they can do to help the school and our students," says Mrs Zual. □



Students tend to the banana grove at Sualock Para Government Primary School in Bandarban.

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**This project is funded by AusAid through the PEDP-II programme**

## EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

**1** A young girl raises her hand to answer the teacher's question at Dharendra Government Primary School in Savar, north of Dhaka. Bangladesh has made huge progress in girls' education such that girls are now more likely than boys to attend and complete primary school. Girls' net enrolment ratio in primary school increased from 51 per cent in 1991 to 94 per cent in 2007, according to Government figures.



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**2** Mrs Rimi Ray teaches a grade one class at Peshkarpara Government Primary School in Chittagong, eastern Bangladesh. UNICEF and others support the Government (through PEDP-II) to improve teaching quality through training on interactive and child-friendly teaching techniques.



© UNICEF/2008/Naser Siddique

**3** Begum, 13, (wearing an orange scarf) and other students learn English in a learning centre for working children in Kamrangirchar, Dhaka. More than 166,000 children receive basic education and life skills training in learning centres run by the Basic Education for Hard-to-Reach Urban Working Children (BEHTRUWC) project, supported by UNICEF. The classes run for only 2.5 hours each day so children can continue to work to support their families.



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**4** Anwar Hossain (centre) is president of the Centre Management Committee for the local learning centre for working children in Lalbagh, Dhaka. He talks to Shakil, 12, and Rahman Meah, Shakil's employer at Yasin Store. Anwar is querying Shakil's working hours to ensure he is able to attend the learning centre. Committee members regularly remind parents and employers of the benefits of education, to increase attendance rates at the learning centres.



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**5** Resma, 9, salvages damaged textbooks in what used to be her room, after 2007's Cyclone Sidr blew the roof off her family home in Barisal District. UNICEF helps children resume education quickly after emergencies through initiatives such as supporting construction of temporary schools and providing supplies including school bags, exercise books and pens.

**6** Learning is fun for children attending the Kumra Para early learning centre in Rangamati, in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), eastern Bangladesh. UNICEF has supported almost 8000 early learning centres, particularly in disadvantaged areas such as the CHT and urban slums.

**7** Children play outside Prottyashita EDAS school in Khulna. The school was rebuilt with UNICEF support after Cyclone Aila destroyed the previous school structure.

**8** The School-Level Improvement Plan Committee meets at Monohar Government Primary School in Rangpur. These committees of parents, teachers and students create a plan and budget to improve their school. They are an important part of moving school decision-making from the central to the local level.

**9** Momotaj, 10, (right), teaches Bipul, 5, the name of the body parts. The children are taking part in a UNICEF-supported peer education programme called Getting Ready for School: A Child-to-Child approach that aims to help young children develop basic literacy, numeracy and social skills in the year before they enrol in primary school.

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## CHILDHOOD BEHIND LOCKED DOORS

About 25 villagers have gathered around Minhaz, 15, as he and his mother discuss his plan for the future. Men wearing *lungis* (traditional sarongs) and women holding babies on their hips provide their point of view.

Minhaz's lively family life is a world away from Jessore's Child Development Centre (CDC), where he lived until two weeks ago. "The centre was no good. This place is much better. I can't live without my uncles and brothers and the rest of my family. I missed them."

The CDC is one of only three juvenile justice centres in Bangladesh, however it also acts as a child protection centre. In addition to detaining children convicted of a crime, it also holds children without a family, children whose parents deem them 'uncontrollable' and children needing witness protection.

Minhaz was in the Centre because he was accused of assisting with child trafficking, even though he is only a child himself. He had inadequate legal representation and was initially refused bail. While he served out a two year sentence, he lost touch with his family. When his case was finally closed he had nowhere to go and remained in the Centre for another year.

### The diversion principle

UNICEF's Juvenile Justice Diversion pilot project is working to reintegrate children like Minhaz back into the community. The project is based on the belief that many of these children do not belong in the Centre, and that staying there may do more harm than good. This principle of 'diversion' is the cornerstone of international juvenile justice, but is not widely recognised by Bengali legislation and legal practice.

The project prioritises children who have no parents or guardians, children without a lawyer, and children whose cases have been pending for extended periods. The process begins with the creation of an individual case management plan for each child. Often the omission of simple details or documents, such as a police report, can leave a child stuck in the centre for

years. A multi-disciplinary case management team has been established including members of the police, local government and UNICEF's partner NGOs, Save the Children UK and Jagrata Jubo Shangha (JJS).

The project provided Minhaz with a legal-aid lawyer, and helped him reconnect with his family. He was provided with a small lump sum to kick-start his new life, which he spent on the rickshaw van. The project can also provide money for guardians' income-generating activities so they can support their child.

Probation officer Rezaul Haque visits Minhaz and other reintegrated children at least once a month. As the villagers look on, Rezaul warns the teenager to stay on his best behaviour. "You are out of the centre, but you are not free from the law. You have to answer to the law, to your family, and to me. It is up to you to maintain your freedom," he says.

### Broken families

Minhaz's family and neighbours seem excited to have him back, but sadly, in many cases, parents are unwilling or unable to fulfil their parental duties. Abdul Haque, assistant director of the CDC, says that most of the approximately 100 boys in his centre are from poor or broken families. "Sometimes, when their case finishes, the boy is free and we provide the information to their families, but the family doesn't come. The mother may think that the boy is a burden for her, and is living well in the CDC. So where do they go? They are free but they have no home to go to."

For children who do not know where their family are, or for orphans, the project involves detective work to find suitable guardians. Several techniques are used, such as newspaper advertisements, going door-to-door in villages, and conducting in-depth interviews with the child. UNICEF helps train detention centre staff on in-depth interview techniques and pays for the boys' transport home when they are released. These small changes can mean the difference between a child remaining in the centre, or reintegrating with his family.

Since the diversion pilot project began in June 2009, 12 children have been reintegrated with their families, and 23 other cases are being reviewed. There are plans to introduce the project in Bangladesh's other two Child Development Centres in 2010.

As for Minhaz, he and his mother agree that he will pull the rickshaw van in the afternoon, and work in the family farm every morning. "I'm determined to be a good boy, to work hard and help my family," he says. □

*Names have been changed to protect children's identities.*

**This project is funded by UNICEF regular resources (see box, page 2)**

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Minhaz and his mother talk, while a child looks on from Minhaz's new rickshaw van.

# MODIFIED LATRINES CHANGING LIVES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Until very recently, eight-year-old Nayan used to watch other children walk to school everyday, not knowing if he would ever be able to join them.

“I always wanted to go to school and play with others. But since I couldn’t attend school I made a mock classroom at home to please myself,” said Nayan, a soft spoken boy from a poor family in Shalbahan village, Panchagarh district, northwest of Dhaka.

Nayan was born with a clubfoot, a disability where his foot is placed at a sharp angle to his ankle. For the first six years of his life he was unable to walk, which delayed his enrolment to the local Munigoch Government Primary School. Although he can now walk, it is painful and difficult and he is also unable to use a regular squat toilet.

## Barriers to enrolment

His class teacher Mosammet Dulali Begum, said, “When Nayan’s mother, Banesa, came for her son’s admission she appeared very emotional and worried. She was confused since our school did not have any student with physical impairment.” Banesa was also concerned that there was no suitable latrine for him to use at the school.

Nevertheless, Nayan began attending school earlier this year, but every time he needed to use the toilet he had to make the painful walk home. The problem was soon overcome, thanks to the Sanitation, Hygiene, Education and Water Supply in Bangladesh project (SHEWA-B), a joint UNICEF and Government of Bangladesh initiative.

The school reported Nayan’s enrolment to the project, and a specially designed latrine was installed for his use. The latrine has support bars, and a low basin fitted with an electric motor for a constant water supply, so he can wash his hands and face. The pathway from his classroom to the latrine is kept even and smooth so he can walk on the soft tissue of his ankles.

## Small changes, big results

These changes have meant Nayan now feels comfortable attending his grade one classes in the single-storey school in Tetulia sub-district, and his classmates have been very welcoming. When the bell rings, his close friends stay and help him pack his bag, tidy books and sometimes walk home with him.

“All the teachers have affection for Nayan. We have instructions to offer special care for such students with physical or visual impairments,” said Assistant



Banesa combs her son Nayan’s hair in Shalbahan village, Panchagarh district.

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Headmaster of Nayan’s school, Shajahan Ali.

The SHEWA-B project is the largest hygiene, sanitation and water quality project implemented by UNICEF in a developing country. It targets about 20 million people and aims to change hygiene behaviours and improve access to safe water and sanitation. One of its initiatives is to provide support, through local partner NGOs, to differently-abled children so they can safely access water and sanitation facilities.

All primary school teachers in the project area receive a two-day training session on sanitation and hygiene. Every primary school in the project area reports admission of any visually or physically impaired students. The NGOs responsible for each sub-district assess the specific support required by the children.

There are 46 physically impaired school children in Tetulia sub-district who are receiving benefits from the project. □

**This project is funded by UKAid through the UK Department for International Development**

## WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP: CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

UNICEF collaborates with government ministries, non-government organizations, UN agencies and a wide range of donors. UNICEF is funded entirely by voluntary contributions. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) is one of UNICEF Bangladesh's top five donors.

### Why Bangladesh?

In 2009, Bangladesh was selected as one of 20 "countries of focus" for Canada's aid programme. Bangladesh was chosen based on its level of need, its ability to use aid dollars wisely and because Canada could make a real difference. Bangladesh has been one of Canada's largest aid recipients for the past three decades.

CIDA's priorities in Bangladesh strongly align with UNICEF's work. CIDA aims to create opportunities for children, equality between men and women, environmental sustainability, good governance and economic growth. CIDA's programme for Bangladesh is directly aligned with the Government of Bangladesh's National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction for 2009-2011.

### How CIDA is helping improve education in Bangladesh

CIDA focuses on: improving the quality and delivery of education; increasing access and retention rates in primary school; reducing gaps between girls and boys.

#### Selected projects:

- CIDA helps improve the quality of primary education by contributing \$CAD 64.4 million to the Second Primary Education Development Program (PEDP II). This 11-donor project works in formal primary schools to improve organizational capacity, infrastructure, quality and access to school for 6 to 10-year-olds.
- CIDA contributes \$CAD 14 million to UNICEF's Basic Education for Hard-to-Reach Urban Working Children (BEHTRUWC) project, which is delivered under the Government's Ministry of Primary and Mass Education. This project provides urban working children aged 10-14 with basic education, life skills and livelihood training. More than 6,600 learning centres have been established, providing basic education for 166,150 children (60 per cent girls).
- Secondary education is targeted through the Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education project. CIDA's investment of \$CAD 26 million helps fund training and professional development courses for teachers in government and private secondary schools.

Through the education programmes CIDA supports, it is expected that: one million poor children not in formal

schooling will receive a basic education; about 20,000 youths will receive employment training; about 500,000 children will improve their capacity to learn due to better nutrition through school meals initiatives.

### How CIDA is helping improve health in Bangladesh

CIDA focuses on: ensuring that healthcare and medicines are delivered efficiently; improving maternal and child health delivery systems; providing essential drugs and medicines.

#### Selected projects:

- CIDA contributes \$CAD 5.25 million to the Government of Bangladesh's \$4.34 billion multi-donor Health, Nutrition and Population Sector Programme, administered by the World Bank. The pooled fund supports delivery of core health services, including commodities procurement.
- The Adolescent Reproductive Health project has a \$CAD 5 million CIDA investment and is implemented by Plan International. It aims to improve the quality and delivery of reproductive health services for adolescents, and to increase their access to these services.
- CIDA has been funding the Acid Survivors Foundation since 1999. The project contributes to building the capacity of the organization in its work to identify acid attacks, arrange for treatment and legal action for survivors and help survivors reintegrate into society.

Through the health programmes CIDA supports, it is expected that: 2,000 public health employees will be trained annually to manage systems for procuring medical supplies; each year, 2,500 nurses will be trained to provide maternal and child health care; essential drugs, vaccines, micronutrients, and contraceptives will be distributed efficiently, transparently, and equitably to 5,000 public health facilities in 64 districts.

#### Other projects

CIDA has been working with UNICEF to assist in the provision of arsenic-safe water to Bangladeshi people through the deployment and monitoring of arsenic removal technologies at wellheads.

CIDA also funds projects relating to: disaster recovery, Chittagong Hill Tracts, governance, poverty reduction, gender equality and environmental sustainability.



Canadian International  
Development Agency

## Young refugees talk about freedom

There are about 28,000 registered refugees living in camps near Cox's Bazar, south-east Bangladesh, including 16,500 children. The refugees are Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar, and most have been living in Bangladesh since the early 1990s. Most of the children were born in the camps and know no other life. UNICEF asked some young people from Kutupalong refugee camp what they understood of the concept of freedom, and what they would do if they were free.



Samuel Ulla, 18

"I want to learn, get an education. I'd love to do a PhD. Freedom means being able to go outside and move freely. Freedom is independence: being able to travel to any country."

Samuel Ulla, 18



Nuerasha Begum, 12

"To me, freedom means citizenship."

Shahalum, 17



Shahalum, 17

"Freedom means being able to access the better study opportunities, better schools that are available outside. I am in class three, but I want to study more. I want to do class five. I would like to be a teacher one day."

Nuerasha Begum, 12



Nur Alam, 14

"I want to go to a foreign country, but I would face many barriers if I tried to go. I would like to study there. I'd like to learn more about computers. That is what I would do if I was free."

Nur Alam, 14



Hasina, 14

"If I was free I would get a higher education. I'd like to study engineering."

Hasina, 14

"If I want to go outside the camp I need permission of the CIC. I don't know what freedom is. We came here as refugees but we didn't get any freedom."

Yasmine, 14



Yasmine, 14

"It is not peaceful here. First, I'd like to get some peace, then I'd like to study. I would like to become a well-educated person and then I would teach my people."

Ambia, 14



Ambia, 14

## 1 Twenty million children receive measles vaccine

More than 20 million children across Bangladesh were vaccinated against polio and measles during a two-week campaign in February. Children aged nine months to five years received both vaccines, while those under nine months only received the polio vaccine. The campaign targeted children who were born after the last measles catch-up campaign, in 2005-06. Measles is included in Bangladesh's routine immunization programme but this does not reach all children. Even for children who have been vaccinated, it is important to receive a second dose to be fully protected. More than 50,000 health staff and 600,000 volunteer and NGO workers were involved in this year's campaign, which aimed to maintain Bangladesh's polio-free status and minimise measles outbreaks. In the two months before the 2006 measles campaign there were 27 measles outbreaks, compared with none in 2007 and only one in 2008 and 2009.

## 2 Action needed on arsenic contamination

Urgent action is needed to tackle arsenic contamination of food and water in Bangladesh, according to a report released by the Government of Bangladesh and the United Nations. The report, *Towards an Arsenic Safe Environment in Bangladesh*, was launched on World Water Day on March 22. It outlines evidence that arsenic can impair the intellectual function of children and significantly increases mortality from various cancers, heart attacks and cardio-pulmonary diseases. About 12 per cent of households in Bangladesh, some 20 million people, drink water containing more arsenic than the national standard of 50 micrograms per litre.

New data from south-western districts of Bangladesh indicate that rice (the staple food in this country) also contains arsenic due to water irrigation. UNICEF and other agencies continue to support the Government to address the unprecedented challenge of arsenic contamination, through initiatives such as providing access to alternative drinking-water, researching arsenic's health impacts, and analysing its presence in the food chain.

## 3 MICS survey reveals uneven progress towards MDGs

The 2009 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) reveals huge disparities between Bangladesh's 64 districts, despite the overall good progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The preliminary report was launched in Dhaka in late January by Minister of Planning, Air Vice Marshal (Retd) A.K. Khander (BU), MP with UNICEF Representative, Carel de Rooy, as guest of honour.

For under-five child mortality, the lowest performing district, Jamalpur, recorded 98 deaths per 1,000 live births while the best performing one, Pabna, had only 44 per 1,000, compared to a national average of 64 per 1,000. Regarding the net attendance rate in primary school, the difference is 30 percentage points between the best performing district, Meherpur (91 per cent) and the worst performing, Bandarban (60.6 per cent), with the national average being 81.3 per cent.

A major highlight of the MICS survey was the huge increase in birth registration rates for under-fives, from 9.8 per cent in 2006 to 53.6 per cent in 2009. Primary school retention rates also improved.

The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and supported by UNICEF, collected data on 300,000 households in April and May 2009. The full report will be released in May 2010.

## 4 Promoting inclusive education through TV drama

Bangladesh's national TV network, BTV, is currently broadcasting a 26-episode drama serial that promotes quality education and enrolment for all children.

The innovative drama, produced by the Government's Ministry of Primary and Mass Education with the support of UNICEF, aims to inspire families to value the long-term benefits of education over the short-term gains of child labour.

The drama series, *None will be left out*, tells the story of two neighbouring villages that are trying to outdo each other. One village is home to significant archaeological sites, so the other village decides to compete by ensuring that all its children attend primary school so that they will have a better future. It also promotes inclusiveness by encouraging parents to send their physically disabled children to school through the story of a young boy who goes to school against all odds.

BTV reaches more than 90% of Bangladesh's population, so the message of inclusive education will reach people living in remote corners of the country, including those who are illiterate. The drama is written by one of Bangladesh's leading playwrights, Anisul Haque, and directed by Faridur Rahman, Programme Director at BTV.

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