

UNICEF Bangladesh

Newsletter

Issue 16, September 2010

SCHOOL AND SHELTER: PROTECTING WORKING CHILDREN

It's a balmy evening in Barisal City, southern Bangladesh, and while the air outside is still, there is a buzz of activity coming from inside the school building. It's 8.00pm, and the students here are only now taking their seats, ready to begin class after a day spent in shops and on factory floors, begging at the ferry terminal, or collecting garbage on the street. These are the working children of Barisal City; forced to earn a living in order to support themselves and their families.

Suddenly, a low whirring followed by a thud signals the first power outage of the night, and the classroom of ten-year-old Nazmul is plunged into darkness. The children here are all too used to the country's erratic electricity supply, and they wait patiently as a couple of assistants rush to light lamps and position them amongst the desks. The teacher stands, walks to the blackboard, and the class begins.

Nazmul has been attending night school here for 12 months after leaving his family's village in Chandpur District, south-east of the Bangladeshi capital. "I love fruit, and in the summer I would climb the fruit trees and steal the mangos and guavas", he explains, "My mother caught me doing this and she beat me. I was upset, so I decided to run away".

It's not surprising that months spent living on the streets have caused Nazmul to grow up fast. Sporting a confident, street-smart attitude that belies his tender age, he wears his hair slicked back in a rock star-style quiff and carries a comb in his pocket which he's quick to whip out in the presence of any reflective surface.

In order to support himself, Nazmul found employment in a workshop painting and varnishing, but he did not like his employer and he knew that breathing in the fumes was unhealthy.



10-year-old Nazmul attends school at night leaving him free to earn a living during the day.

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That's when Nazmul first came to the attention of PCAR Divisional Coordinator, Zulficar Motin, and Barisal's team of social workers. As part of the Protecting Children at Risk (PCAR) project, UNICEF and the Government's Department of Social Services have provided more than 400 social workers with outreach and case management training to help them better identify and monitor children at risk.

Zulficar and his colleagues work to connect children like Nazmul with a network of support services. In this way, Nazmul was soon enrolled in night school and, a few months later, he began living at a PCAR drop-in centre which provides children with secure shelter along with referrals to legal aid, vocational and life skills training, counselling, and support for family reintegration. The walls of the centre where Nazmul lives are covered in children's artwork and he spends

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In Focus: Child Labour

This newsletter focuses on the progress that Bangladesh has made toward mitigating child labour, and UNICEF's work to ensure that all working children can realise their right to an education.

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Q&A WITH UNICEF STAFF

Hosne Ara Begum (Minu)
Divisional Coordinator, Khulna Division.



Minu (right) with former UNICEF Executive Director, Carol Bellamy.

Length of Service:
 19 years.

What did you do before UNICEF?

I worked with an NGO called Village Education Resource Centre mostly as chief of the training unit. I learnt a lot about participatory training facilitation and material development, and visited many countries in the region.

Did you face any challenges as a woman working in a male-dominated society?

Not from colleagues, but I heard some negative comments from villagers. I learnt that if you tell the truth and wait a while then the community will start to accept and trust you.

Could you describe your work at UNICEF?

I started as a health and nutrition training officer, and later worked in Water and Environmental Sanitation, Child Protection and in the Urban Unit. As a Divisional Coordinator, I'm responsible for the coordination and implementation of all UNICEF's activities in Khulna Division. It's an important job because we represent UNICEF in the field.

What has been your highlight at UNICEF?

When UN Secretary General Kofi Annan visited Dhaka in the late 90s, I was asked to make a speech as vice-chair of the staff association. As soon as I was asked my heartbeat increased 100%! It was a huge occasion in front of ambassadors and other officials, but my experience as a trainer meant I had some courage inside me. Afterwards, Kofi Annan heartily embraced me!

Another highlight was when Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF, came to Bangladesh. I was working in the Urban Unit so I took her to the slums of Mirpur on a rickshaw.

What do you like about working at UNICEF?

When I see projects being implemented and children benefitting, that's when I feel proud. □



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Begum, 13, works cutting the labels from plastic bottles at a recycling factory in Kamrangirchor, Bangladesh. For every kilogram of labels collected she earns 15 taka (USD 20 cents).

THE FACTS: CHILD LABOUR

Prevailing social norms and economic realities mean child labour is very common and widely accepted in Bangladesh. Many families rely on income generated by children for survival, while some employers prefer to hire children as they are generally cheaper and more obedient than adults.

According to UNICEF's 2009 State of the World's Children Report, 13 per cent of children in Bangladesh are engaged in some form of child labour, with boys twice as likely to be affected as girls. Rates of employment increase according to a child's age, however, a 2003 Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics National Child Labour Survey found that even five year-olds (two per cent) and six-year-olds (three per cent) are known to work for a living.

'Child labour' is defined by the International Labour Organisation as work that exceeds a

minimum number of hours (depending on the child's age and the type of work); work that deprives children of a childhood; that affects their health and education, or; that may lead to further exploitation and abuse.

Working children are frequently denied their rights to education, leisure and play. Data suggests that the more a child works, the less they attend school, and that half of all child labourers do not attend any form of schooling.

Under the Government's Labour Act of 2006, employment of children under 14 years of age is prohibited, along with hazardous forms of employment for persons under 18. However, the vast majority of children work in the informal sector which makes monitoring their situation extremely difficult. As a result, laws are rarely enforced. □

UNICEF INTERVENTIONS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOUR

Children's paid and unpaid work can make a positive contribution to child development, so long as it does not interfere with the health or wellbeing of a child and prevent education or leisure activities.

To reduce the rates of hazardous child labour and mitigate the risks to working children, UNICEF works closely with the Government of Bangladesh to:

- provide working children with access to education and other outreach services;
- change the attitude of those who consider child labour to be 'normal';
- strengthen legal protection mechanisms for children; build the capacity of Government and NGO child-protection workers; and
- increase social protection measures, particularly following emergencies, to decrease the need for children to work to support themselves and their families.

To provide working children with basic education and livelihood training, more than 6,600 UNICEF-supported urban learning centres have been established through

a project called Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Working Children (BEHTRUWC). Classes are scheduled in a flexible way, so children can continue to support their families while fulfilling their right to an education. More than 165,000 children (10-14) have so far benefited from this project.

As part of UNICEF's Protection of Children at Risk (PCAR) project, social workers reach out to children living and working on the street and facilitate access to various forms of schooling along with other services including drop-in centres which provide shelter, legal aid, various psychosocial services and support for family reintegration.

A pilot project called Amader Shishu (Our Children), provides assistance to children orphaned or made vulnerable following 2007's Cyclone Sidr. Monthly cash transfers of 1500 taka (22 USD) are made directly to families or care-givers on the proviso that children must attend school on a regular basis and must not be engaged in any of the worst forms of child labour. The first phase of the project is now complete and recent evaluation indicates overwhelming adherence to the cash transfer conditions.

CASH TRANSFERS BRING NEW HOPE TO CHILDREN MADE VULNERABLE BY CYCLONE SIDR

Aduri's father uses rudimentary crutches to support his crumpled body as he poses for photos with his daughter outside their house in Patuakhali District, southern Bangladesh. The family home, and the small block of land which surrounds it, have been bought with savings from modest monthly payments of 1,500 taka (US\$ 22.00) provided to the family by UNICEF and delivered by the Government of Bangladesh Department of Social Services (DSS).

The payments are part of a project called Amader Shishu, or 'Our Children' and the result is that a formerly landless family finally have something to call their own. "It is our home," says Aduri's father, proudly, "and when we are gone, it will belong to our children. It is something permanent they will always be able to fall back on".

In Bengali, Aduri's name means 'adorable girl' and in this case, it seems quite fitting. The pretty eight year-old is clever and sweet, smiling dutifully for the camera, but her shy nature suggests that experiences over the last few years have shaken her confidence.

Aduri's life took an unimaginable turn for the worse almost three years ago when Cyclone Sidr ploughed through her home in Patuakhali on the densely

populated coast of Bangladesh. Packing winds of more than 100 miles an hour, the furious storm ravaged 30 districts in the country's south causing large-scale evacuations. More than 3000 perished as buildings collapsed and tidal surges almost five metres high in some villages - swept across the land. Of the 8.9 million people affected by the disaster, many were children left highly vulnerable as a result of the death or disability of one or both parents.

Aduri's father, formally a rickshaw puller, was seriously wounded in the Cyclone when a large tree fell and crushed him, breaking his back. Not only was the accident an understandably traumatic for Aduri and her four siblings, but their family lost its primary source of income overnight. With her husband now partly paralyzed, Aduri's mother, who occasionally supplemented their meager living working as a domestic servant, was forced to stay at home and care for him and Aduri's ailing grandmother.

In desperation, Aduri and her siblings began begging at intersections in nearby towns; pushing their father in his wheelchair from car to car, hoping that the people inside might have three or five taka (US 4-7 cents) to spare. Eyes downcast, Aduri speaks quietly of those



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Aduri poses with her elderly grandmother inside their home; bought with money provided by the Amader Shishu project.

days. “I didn’t like it. I like school better. Everyone at school is my friend”.

In the aftermath of disasters, weakened familial and societal structures often cause a breakdown in traditional caring arrangements leaving children exposed to abuse, neglect and exploitation. In accordance with UNICEF’s policy that institutional care is rarely the most desirable outcome for an orphaned or vulnerable child, the Amader Shishu project supports children to continue living in familiar family environments, while ensuring that their basic needs are met. DSS social workers with training from UNICEF identify vulnerable children, like Aduri, living under the care of surviving parents or extended family, and provide caregivers with a series of conditional cash payments to provide for the child’s needs.

The cash transfers are made on the proviso that each beneficiary child must attend school, must refrain from child marriage, and must not be involved in any of the worst forms of child labour. Every child’s situation is monitored by the social workers, and regular visits are made to ensure that the conditions of the payments are being met.

So far, the results have been overwhelmingly positive. A recent study focusing on 817 orphan children targeted during the project’s pilot stage found that 100 per cent of the care-giving families had made direct

expenditure on the children, had saved some money toward meeting the children’s’ future needs, and had utilized some of the funds to set up income-generating activities. Aduri’s family is no exception and have used some of the funds to start up a vegetable garden, lessening their dependence on outside food sources.

The Amader Shishu project places a focus on creating referral linkages with other support agencies and, as a result, Aduri’s father is in line to receive an interest-free loan of 20,000 taka (US\$ 290.00) from the local Social Services Office. He wants to use the money to expand his vegetable garden and eventually start a grocery business from the house which would further strengthen the socio-economic security of his family.

The payments to Aduri’s family have certainly changed the course of her life, and she beams with pride as she poses for photos with her school books. “I feel happy when I see her reading”, says her father, “I know that she will grow up to be good at whatever she does, but also that she will be a good human being. We have a dream that our children will live a better life, even though ours was destroyed”. □

This project is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Global Thematic Humanitarian Response Fund, and UNICEF’s regular resources.

KARIMA'S STORY: A NEW LIFE THROUGH LIVELIHOOD TRAINING

In the courtyard of her parents' mud house, Karima, 16, sits at her pedal sewing machine expertly fixing the hem of a pink kameez (Bengali tunic).

Every afternoon Karima can be found here, making items such as blouses, saris and bed covers. She earns 50-60 taka (less than US\$ 1.00) a day, and loves the work. "People trust me to do a good job and finish the work on time. I feel that I have some honour and respect within the community," she says.

In addition to supporting her family, Karima is also committed to completing her education at the local high school. But a few years ago her life was very different.

Difficult times

Everything changed for Karima when her father, Md Tainus Ali, was seriously injured in a bicycle accident. Tainus had supported the family of seven by working as a sweetmaker, but after the accident he could no longer work and the family had no income. Karima's two sisters, who were still teenagers, married and went to live with their new husbands' families, while Karima and her mother began working as domestic helpers to support the two younger children still at home.

Almost every day for eight months, Karima worked long hours cooking and cleaning in her employer's house. School was a distant memory, as was adequate sleep. "Even at midnight I had to work. I was not allowed to sleep until my boss had gone to sleep."

Like more than 50 per cent of child domestic workers in Bangladesh, Karima received no wage for her work.



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Karima, 16, sits sewing as her mother looks on. Karima says she is proud to help her family earn a living.

She was given only food as compensation. She was also exposed to abuse in her job. "One day I was supposed to wash the dishes, but I took too long, so my boss beat me" she says.

Karima left the job, but her bad luck did not stop. She became seriously ill with typhoid, and lost her hair. Her mother now had to support a sick husband, sick daughter, and two other children. She could not cope, and in her despair, she began to beat Karima.

Karima ran away from home to try to find another job. In Rajshahi city, she met a girl who listened to her story and suggested that she visit a local drop-in centre.

A new beginning

When Karima arrived at the Protection of Children at Risk (PCAR) drop-in centre, supported by UNICEF and the Government of Bangladesh Department of Social Services (DSS), she was traumatised by her experiences. The centre provided her with immediate medical care and psychosocial support. Later, she was placed in a six-month tailoring training course.

Slowly, Karima's life began to turn around. Her hair grew back and some of her confidence returned. She found a job in a tailor shop, and began to save money.

Home again

After a few months, Karima decided that she wanted to return to school and live with her parents again. PCAR social workers visited the family several times to ensure that a protective environment could be assured, and a committee was formed to assess the situation.

Once family reintegration was deemed appropriate, Karima returned home. She was provided with a 10,000 taka lump sum to support her transition. Using this money, along with her savings, Karima purchased two cows, two goats, and the sewing machine that now has pride of place in her parents' home.

Karima's parents say that the livelihood training she received has changed all their lives. "She is supporting the family, and has inspired our two younger children to also finish their education," says her father, Tainus.

Karima's mother, Sharmina, looks on proudly as her daughter finishes sewing the pink kameez. "Our old life was terrible. Now we finally have some relief. I'm happy that Karima is home. She's my Karima." □

This project is funded by the Spanish, Norwegian, Swiss and Italian National Committees for UNICEF.

UNICEF supports a national campaign against child labour:

'School is the best place for a child to work'

On the World Day against Child Labour, 12 June 2010, UNICEF together with the Government and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) launched a national communication campaign to combat child labour in Bangladesh.

The aim of the campaign is to promote the message that child labour is unacceptable for children under 14 years of age, and that parents and employers must guarantee the basic rights of working children aged 14 and above.

The campaign also seeks to address attitudes of social acceptance around child labour in Bangladesh, as many adults still consider it 'normal' for a child to work to support their family

A wide variety of communication methods, including television, radio, print media, SMS and interactive popular theatre, have been used to promote these key messages and a unique theme song was recorded especially for the cause.

The campaign will also feature a number of special events designed to increase public awareness and encourage community dialogue. These will include a photography exhibition by working children and special programmes during Meena Day and CRC (Convention on the Rights of the Child) Week.

The International Labour Organisation's 2003 Situation of Child Labour in Bangladesh report stated that 2.3 million child labourers do not attend school. The national campaign places great emphasis on this point with the slogan: 'School is the best place for a child to work.'



This project is funded by the Norwegian National Committee for UNICEF.

SCHOOL AND SHELTER: PROTECTING WORKING CHILDREN

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his spare time there playing games and watching television with the other boys.

Child labour is an issue fraught with complexity. It is a visible part of everyday life in Bangladesh, with young children serving at roadside tea stalls, and weaving between cars selling goods to motorists. Widely accepted as a social norm, many families rely on income generated by their children for survival.

For these reasons, the PCAR programme is focused not only on protecting children from hazardous work, but on mitigating the risks to children already in the workforce and ensuring reasonable working hours. With the help of the social workers in Barisal, Nazmul has been able to negotiate a better job working in a local fabric shop.

"It is good to earn money", he says. "If I need clothes, then I buy some. Otherwise I save so that I can have a good future". The PCAR project offers a formal savings mechanism for working children and the social workers are in regular contact with employers to ensure safe conditions and working hours that encourage school attendance.

Zulficar hopes that Nazmul will soon make the transition back into regular school and cut back his working hours to a level deemed appropriate for a child his age, but he concedes this can be a challenge. "Many children come to enjoy the freedom of life on the streets, without understanding the risks. The experience of earning their own money gives them a sense of independence they don't want to relinquish."

For his part, Nazmul certainly seems to understand the value of an education. "School is important to have a good future", he explains, "If I don't go to school, I won't learn to calculate – which is a skill I need because one day I want to start my own business".

Back in the classroom, the power returns, and the children squint as their eyes re-adjust to the light. Nobody forces Nazmul and his classmates to be here after a long day at work. If they are tired, they don't show it, listening attentively and jumping to answer the teacher's questions. "Our work with children like Nazmul means that these children, at least, will not become a liability of our society", concludes Zulficar. "There is no limit to what they can achieve." □

This project is funded by the Canadian International Development Agency and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency along with the Spanish, Norwegian, Swiss and Italian National Committees for UNICEF.

CHILD LABOUR

1 Fatema, 14, lives with her mother in Chittagong. Both mother and daughter begin their day at 6.00am at the Ananda Bazaar waste disposal where they scavenge for recyclables to sell. They earn approximately 1200 taka (US\$ 17.00) per week, and struggle to eat more than two meals a day. After work, Fatema attends the local UNICEF-funded learning centre where she enjoys drawing and also likes to make handicrafts.

2 Originally from Chabitala in Comilla, Shamsu now lives and works on the streets surrounding the Chittagong railway station. Here, he weighs his collection of scavenged bottles before selling them.

3 12 year-old Foysal Hosain works from 6:00am-1:30pm as a part-time labourer at a fish shop in Dhaka. He also attends a UNICEF-supported school from 2:30pm-5:00pm and, while his mother is at work, he takes care of his four younger siblings – especially his youngest sister, Ayesha (12 months old). Foysal wants to be a doctor. “He can do anything if he studies”, says his mother, “I am illiterate. I don’t want my children to be like me”.

4 Drop-in centres provide a safe space for working children to access a range of support services and enjoy leisure activities. At this UNICEF-supported girls drop-in centre in Barisal City, the children are putting on a dance performance to celebrate the marriage of a former resident. In an effort to improve relations between working children and the wider community, Government officials and local employers have been invited to join in the celebrations.



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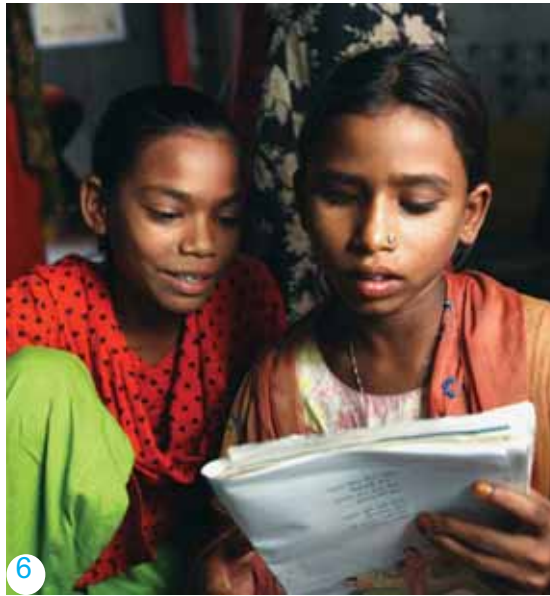
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5 Hanif, 12, and his 10 year-old brother Haroon work on their father's boat in the char region of Gaibandha Sadar. Hanif and Haroon have never attended school.

6 Merina, 13, (right) works to support her family by collecting discarded metal and other reusable items. Merina receives an education at the Shurovi Jamuna Nine learning centre and says she enjoys her time at the school with her teachers and friends.

© UNICEF/2009/Shehzad Noorani



7

7 This open-air school in Barisal City gives local working children the opportunity to keep up their education. Children learn math, Bengali, English, life-skills and health and hygiene. "Most of these children have very little," says Educational Supervisor, Rumana Reshimi (pictured) "so the smallest thing – like telling them a story – makes them very happy".

8 Leisure time is crucial for a child's development. As part of the Protection of Children At Risk (PCAR) project, UNICEF supports open-air schools, like this one in Barisal City which is attended by more than 45 working children. In this safe environment, children are given a chance to learn, play, and socialise with their peers.

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9 Bangladesh's 421,000 child domestic workers (three-quarters are girls) face particular vulnerabilities because they work behind closed doors. Almost all child domestic workers work seven days a week and sleep at their employer's home. 13 year-old Anika Akther is an exception. She works as a part-time domestic worker in Mirpur and attends school in the afternoon.

CHILDREN QUIZ STATE MINISTER ON CHILD LABOUR ISSUES

The studio is filled with children from all over the country: disadvantaged and working children, street children and child journalists. All are here to take part in the thirteenth episode of the hard-hitting talk show, 'Our Voice', produced by the national broadcaster (Bangladesh Television or BTV) as part of a joint project between UNICEF and the Ministry of Information.

Our Voice allows children to quiz the country's top policymakers on matters pertaining to child rights. In the programme's first episode, the children started at the top by interviewing Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Today, they are interviewing the State Minister for Labour and Employment, Begum Monnujan Sufian. There is a hush as the lights go down. Then, the director gives his cue and the recording begins...

Jotsna, school student and part-time domestic helper: **Many children working as domestic help get beaten up by their employers. What can you do to stop such physical abuse?**

Minister: This is not the first time that I have heard this complaint. There are legal provisions to protect children from child labour under the Women and Children Repression Act. The Government has a responsibility to enforce these legal instruments. If we can successfully enforce these laws, I'm confident that the rates of abuse against children will come down.

Md. Shohag Hossain, student and child representative: **Can education and recreation be ensured for all working children of Bangladesh?**

Minister: The Ministry of Labour and Employment has a stipend programme for primary school students to ensure that they do not give up education for work. During the first phase of the programme, my Ministry gave token amount of money to 10,000 children; in the second phase, 30,000 children received primary education and life skills training. We gave small loans to 5,000 poor parents so that they don't have to send their children to work. We are planning to give education and life-skills training to 50,000 more children; this will start shortly.

Opu, student and motor garage worker: **Children are exposed to hazardous work in motor garages and often made to pour acid water into batteries. Employers do not give any compensation to seriously injured children. What is the solution?**

Minister: We can definitely take very harsh measures against such establishment owners provided there is a specific written complaint against them. We can even cancel their trade license.



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Children interview Begum Monnujan Sufian, State Minister for Labour and Employment, on BTV's Our Voice programme.

Kohinoor, student and part-time worker at a tailoring shop: **I get one day weekly holiday. But most working children do not get weekly holidays. How can you ensure holidays for all working children?**

Minister: According to the labour law, a worker is entitled 1.5 days off per week. If anyone has to work on a holiday, it should be as per his/her will and for that extra work he/she should be paid overtime. But this law is being violated by many factory owners, so greater awareness is needed on the part of working people to ensure nobody takes undue advantage of them.

Abony, child journalist: **Many poor children are forced to work as beggars in the cities. How can it be stopped?**

Minister: The Prime Minister is also vehemently against this. We have taken up various plans to help insolvent families so that they don't have to push their children into unethical and risky professions. If we can do this, much of this problem will be solved.

Hamida, disadvantaged child: **How can the government stop the trafficking of children from villages to cities and from cities across the border?**

Minister: First and foremost, everyone in the society must become aware about the evil tactics of fake manpower recruiting agents. People have to know the proper procedures when it comes to going abroad. They have to first find out whether the manpower agent has an authentic license or not. □

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

COMMUNITY MEMBERS STAND UP FOR WORKING CHILDREN

Working children in Bangladesh often miss out on the opportunity to complete their education, and find themselves trapped in low-paid, unskilled occupations through to adulthood.

To address this problem, UNICEF, together with the Government of Bangladesh, runs a project called Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Working Children (BEHTRUWC). The project has established learning centres in slums that feature a flexible timetable. This 'earn and learn' approach ensures children can continue to make enough money to support their families while realizing their right to an education.

BEHTRUWC learning centres are administered by Centre Management Committees (CMCs) made up of well-known, respected members of the local community who are trained by the project to better address the issues faced by working children.

The CMC for the learning centre Rajanigandha-3 in Lalbagh, Dhaka, has been in operation for 17 months, and is chaired by Anwar Hossain. "We hold meetings quarterly," says Anwar, "but sometimes we meet in between if an issue has come up that we need to address. We also meet regularly with parents and employers to persuade them to send their children to the centre".

Ensuring an education for Akash

Akash, 11, was a regular attendee at the Rajanigandha-3 learning centre, until one day he suddenly stopped coming.

When he stopped attending the learning centre, Anwar, together with Akash's teacher, visited Akash's house. They were greeted by his parents who expressed concern about the amount of time that Akash spent at the centre – time that could be spent earning an income to provide for their family.

Over a cup of tea, Anwar and Akash's parents discussed the benefits of education for their son. "I told them that education leads to a better job with more income", Anwar says, "I also told them that it is the right of all children to receive an education".

It is often a challenge to convince parents of the value of schooling for their children, particularly in poor families where the income generated by a child is relied on. Anwar has learned to be both patient and persistent in his efforts.

In this instance, Anwar's hard work paid off and Akash's parents agreed to send him back to the centre where he has been a regular student ever since.

Defending Hridoy's rights at work

Attendance is a common problem for working children wishing to attend school, as they often lack the power to negotiate the necessary time off with their employers.

Such was the case for Hridoy, 13, who works in a cap factory and wanted to attend a class at the learning centre running from 9.00am to 11:30am. Unfortunately, his employer would not give him a break.

After being alerted to the issue in a CMC meeting, Anwar and some other Committee members paid a visit to the factory to speak with Hridoy's employer.

"We explained that if he was allowed breaks, Hridoy would be able to learn a lot of things, and possibly even assist with maintaining accounts," says Anwar. "After a long conversation we were able to make the employer agree to give Hridoy a break for two and a half hours every day. Hridoy is now a very attentive learner and performing well".

Centre Management Committees working for children

There are currently 6,646 CMCs operating in urban centres throughout Bangladesh.

"Committee members check on the progress of learners and ask whether they enjoy their classes or not," explains Anwar, "If we find that a learner is absent for three days in a row, we go to his or her house and try to solve the problem". As a result, regular attendance at Rajanigandha-3 learning centre has risen to 20. In the beginning, only 12 or 13 pupils were attending the centre.

"Parents, guardians and employers highly value the requests or suggestions of CMC members", says Anwar, "that is why our role here is so important".

CMC member, Mazed Begum, agrees, "I want to see a world where every child has access to education. Children should not be bound to work. They should lead a life full of light, hopes and dreams". □

This project is funded by the Canadian International Development Agency and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency along with the Spanish, Norwegian, Swiss and Italian National Committees for UNICEF.

SWIMSAFE LESSONS HELP TO PREVENT DROWNING TRAGEDIES

Five years ago, Shahara Begum's life was turned upside down when her 18 month-old son, Masud, disappeared.

"I was busy fetching some dry leaves around midday not very far from my home and had left Masud alone to play in the courtyard", recalls Shahara, "then suddenly he vanished out of sight. When we couldn't see him anywhere." Neighbours, relatives and others joined in the search, but they found no trace of baby Masud.

Late in the day, Masud's body was discovered floating in the Mirki river, just a stone's throw from his home: a bamboo rooftop earthen house in Gudarghat village, Sherpur district, some 170 km from the capital, Dhaka.

Drowning is an all too common tragedy in Bangladesh. Some 17,000 children die from drowning each year.



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Mizan, 9, and his grandmother display Mizan's prize for being the fastest swimmer in his age group.

Lessons for life

To minimize the risk of drowning, UNICEF has launched a national project called 'SwimSafe' in partnership with a number of local NGOs, including BRAC, CMES and the Centre for Injury Prevention and Research, Bangladesh. The project trains community swimming instructors to teach swimming skills to children aged four to ten.

Children in Sherpur have been enjoying swimming lessons since 2006, before which time, a baseline survey found that approximately 50,000 children in the district had no knowledge of swimming whatsoever. Today, more than 5000 local children have graduated from the SwimSafe programme.

Cultural taboos which prevent girls from bathing out in the open once they reach puberty drastically increase their risk of drowning, so the SwimSafe project places special emphasis on teaching young girls to swim. To make it more acceptable for parents to send their girls to swimming lessons, the project encourages female swimming instructors to volunteer. Of the 140 adolescents so far trained as community swimming instructors, 96 are female. In teaching younger children to swim, the adolescent instructors take on an important responsibility and receive recognition from their local community.

A community approach

To celebrate the graduation of a number of SwimSafe students and raise awareness about injury prevention, a rally and prize-giving ceremony has been organised in Sherpur. More than 1200 people have come to participate in the event, and many hold banners with slogans like, "Keep children under supervision".

"The aim of the gathering is to send parents a message about protecting their children", says Abdul Kader Khan, Additional Deputy Commissioner of Sherpur. "If all the children in this district are able to receive swimming lessons there will be less incidents of drowning".

Nine-year-old Mizan has won first prize for being the fastest swimmer in his age group, and his friends surround him to see what he has received - a school bag, a snack box and a bunch of pencils. "I am so happy to receive the prize", says Mizan, "It is a reward for my hard work".

Mizan was taught to swim in the same river where his neighbour, baby Masud, drowned. "I can just remember Masud's mother crying in front of her son's grave," he says, sadly. While the SwimSafe project is unable to bring Masud back, it will help prevent future drowning tragedies, and spare other mothers the heartbreak of losing a child. □

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

SCHOOL BRIGADES ON THE MARCH TO PROMOTE HEALTH AND HYGIENE

It's a sunny afternoon in Shariatpur District and eight year-old Fickriya Akhtar is leading six of her schoolmates down toward a dilapidated, thatched-roof house next to a dry pond. Today, the students will become teachers, walking from house to house, spreading their important message.

Fickriya organizes a courtyard discussion and the neighborhood gathers around. There is a hush as they wait for the children to speak. "We have come here to find out if you and your family members have knowledge about good hygiene and regularly practice it," says Fickriya, confidently. She calls on 63 year-old Aajibon Nessa, and explains to her why it is necessary to stay clean and healthy. The other children roll out posters illustrating proper hand washing techniques and what a clean living environment should look like.

School Brigades are groups of students who act as agents of change, paying regular visits to local households to promote good hygiene and build awareness about health-related issues. The Brigades are part of a wider UNICEF programme that looks at Sanitation, Hygiene Education and Water Supply in Bangladesh (SHEWA-B).

At Botna public school there are seven Brigades, comprising 60 students. Each Brigade has a name and a senior student who acts as a Brigade Commander. Fickriya commands the Golap (Rose) Brigade.



©UNICEF/2010/Sujjan/Map

Fickriya, 8, talks to community members about good hygiene practices.

Tracking progress

Golap Brigade member, Ayesha, inspects Aajibon's house to check if she and her family have a source of safe drinking water, a clean, sealable water container and a sanitary latrine.

Not surprisingly, Aajibon, a widow with her son the only earner for a family of five, has no sanitary latrine. Nor does she own a tubewell, though she says she does have access to a neighbour's. Their two-room house is made of jute sticks, straw and bamboo built on desiccated clay plinth. A tubewell or sanitary latrine would be considered a luxury for a family like Aajibon's who can barely manage two meals a day.

The students explain to Aajibon that defecating in the open bush is not good for them or their community, and encourage them to save money to buy a latrine.

The School Brigades observe conditions at each household, and keep records so they can track of the progress of families, especially the very poor.

Learning for a healthy life

Every Thursday at school, the Brigade members are exposed to a half hour lesson on hygiene and sanitation. UNICEF provides education materials to prepare students on what to discuss during their courtyard discussions and home visits.

"The Brigades have become very popular", says Faruk Ahmed, the school's headmaster. "The students show tremendous enthusiasm in their work and are well-respected for their contributions in the community".

The Brigades set out from school once a week to conduct home visits in their allocated territory. "It's like a competition among us", laughs Fatema Akhtar, Brigade Commander, "The more homes we visit, the better we feel."

Botna public school is one of 77 in Shariatpur that runs Brigades, and in this Upazilla alone, approximately 32,396 houses have so far been visited and inspected.

Practicing what they preach

The Brigades also work to promote good hygiene within their own schools. Brigade members check the fingers and toes of students for clean nails, enforce proper hand washing after using the latrine, and assign students to clean bathrooms and tubewell platforms.

Shirin Akhter of Bangladesh Organisation for Development Cooperation (BODC), one of UNICEF's partners in the field, says "We don't believe the community would be convinced unless the students themselves practice what they promote". □

This project is funded by by UKaid from the Dept for International Development' (DFID).

SWEDISH INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY (SIDA)

Programmes with UNICEF:

- Education for urban working children
- Cyclone Sidr response (education)
- Cyclone Sidr response (protection)

Funds 2006-2010 (USD):

\$26.7 million

Sweden funds UNICEF to provide child Protection and Education in emergencies and post-crisis transition programmes in Bangladesh.

[Sweden is a major donor toward UNICEF's child Protection and Education programmes. Why are these issues of importance to Sweden, particularly in Bangladesh?](#)

Sweden, like Bangladesh, has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and thus has an obligation to support countries in the protection of children's rights.

Sweden is committed to the Education For All initiative and the fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals. Sweden is also a signatory to the Paris Principles of Aid Effectiveness and the country programme is therefore fully aligned with the Bangladesh Poverty Reduction Strategy.

[What improvements have you seen in Bangladesh as a result of Sida-funded programmes?](#)

The Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Working Children (BEHTRUWC) programme has focused on children, especially girls, doing hazardous work.

The project integrates child protection measures, such as rigorous monitoring and follow-up of the children's situation both inside and outside the Learning Centres.

During the first phase of the project almost 350,000 children (aged 8 – 14) received a two-year basic education course. Few students dropped out and classes closed with more students than originally enrolled. One thousand of those graduates (aged 12-14) were provided with livelihood skills training.

In the second phase of the project (which will continue until 2011), more than 6,600 learning centres are providing life skills-based basic education to more than 166,000 urban working children. (60 per cent of the students are girls.)

One key area of concern is ensuring safe livelihoods for these children. We have also seen some significant progress in the teaching - learning process and parental and community involvement.

Further focus on the employer's role and responsibility is a key aspect. All this has led to improvements in terms of learning, safety at the workplace, security of children attending Learning centres and, not least, happier children.

As a direct result of this project, working children and adolescents have better access to their rights to education, protection, participation and development. Accessing these rights empowers children to make decisions regarding their own futures and opens up wider range of life options.

[Have Sida staff in Bangladesh been able to visit any local project sites and see first-hand the impact that funding is having on Bangladeshi communities?](#)

Programme staff from the Embassy regularly visit the BEHTRUWC Learning Centres and it is always a treat to see how happy the children are in the school environment.

[What are Sida's priorities for the coming years in regards to work being supported in Bangladesh?](#)

Improving the lives of the poor through tangible results, ensuring a rights perspective in programming, human security and gender equality and democratic governance are our main priorities.

The four principles of participation, non-discrimination, transparency and accountability will guide our work in Bangladesh.

[In your opinion, how is Asia \(and Bangladesh in particular\) progressing to meet the Millennium Development Goals?](#)

The mid-term Millennium Development Goal report shows that Bangladesh is doing well to achieve its targets, as it is on track in most cases.

However, maternal health and the completion of primary education require special attention.



Adolescents talk about girls playing sport

Traditionally, very few girls played sport in Bangladesh due to social norms and conservative community attitudes that often restrict girls to their family home. UNICEF recognises that sport is not only beneficial for mental and physical health, but that it can also be used as a tool to promote gender equality. Through a Sports for Development project, UNICEF supports various activities to get adolescents, especially girls, onto the sports field. UNICEF asked adolescents and a mother living in Bogra, north-western Bangladesh, what they think about the idea of girls playing sport.

Photographs by: UNICEF/2010/Sophie McNamara



Lucky Begum

"Playing football is good for girls' mental development. They have the experience of travelling outside their home. It improves my daughter's confidence in herself."

Lucky Begum, mother of Ireen Parveen, 12



Ireen Akhter Sonia, 12

"I want to be a famous football player one day. After I've played a game I feel proud. But when I lose, I feel unhappy. I like winning!"

Ireen Akhter Sonia, 12



Ria Khatoum, 14

"I like playing sport. It also gives me the opportunity to get out and mix with other girls."

Ria Khatoum, 14



Moslema Akhter, 12

"Initially parents were reluctant to allow their daughters to play sport outside. They thought people would make comments behind their backs. But now the parents are happy."

Moslema Akhter, 12



Sadam 17

"Girls have the right to play football. If boys can do it, girls should also have the same right to enjoy their lives."

Sadam 17

"If people can accept us playing football, one day we will be able to raise our heads in the society. People will accept us in other ways too."

Chondona Khatoum, 17



Chondona Khatoum, 17

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

Bayel Shakida, 16



Bayel Shakida, 16

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

1 Urban slum children most disadvantaged

The 2009 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), a national survey on the situation of women and children released on 23 June 2010, has revealed that urban slums have the worst performance regarding women's and children's wellbeing and access to basic services compared to rural and non-slum urban areas.

For the first time, all 481 upazilas (sub-districts) of Bangladesh were ranked according to their performance on 23 key social indicators, and the resulting data clearly indicates which geographical areas are lagging behind in achieving some of the Millennium Development Goals.

For example, the proportion of pupils starting Grade 1 who reach Grade 5 is 48 per cent in slums against 54 per cent in Kushtia – the worst performing district for this indicator – and 79.8 per cent as the national average.

"Evidence exists that mitigating socio-economic inequities is a powerful strategy to accelerate both economic growth and poverty reduction," said Carel de Rooy, UNICEF Representative. "This survey gives us an exact picture of geographic inequities in Bangladesh which the country needs to address."

"Children without access to basic services cannot break the vicious cycle of poverty if specific programmes are not put in place to address their needs."

On a positive note, the MICS survey confirms improvements made by Bangladesh in the areas of child survival and education. The results show that clear progress is being made in relation to timely initiation of breastfeeding, the reduction of child and infant mortality, pre-school attendance and school retention.

The UNICEF-Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics survey collected data from 300,000 households from April to May, 2009. Similar surveys will be conducted in 2012 and 2015 in order to assess progress.

2 Cricketers bowled over by Healthy Hat Trick

Captains of four of the biggest cricket-playing nations in the world – India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh – took time out from the Micromax Asia Cup on 17 June 2010, to commit themselves to playing for a hat trick of another kind – Cricket's Healthy Hat Trick.

At a joint press conference organized by the Asian Cricket Council and UNICEF, Captains spoke out on behalf of children, urging governments and communities to invest in a Healthy Hat Trick – good nutrition, sanitation and girls' education – three critical interventions that can save children's lives.

"Cricketers are not just sportsmen. They are champions, champions for children, champions for change," said Syed Ashraful Huq, CE of the ACC "Like in any world class cricket match a hat trick is that rare and magical formula we all aim for."

"We have seen strong economic growth but this has not yet been translated into improving the lives of women and children", said Philippe Duamelle, Representative of UNICEF Sri Lanka. "Almost half of all children under five in this region are undernourished, and if nothing is done about this their future will effectively be bowled out".

3 Awards for excellence in Emergency Obstetric Care

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina presented awards to 27 health facilities on Safe Motherhood Day, 13 June 2010, in recognition of their excellence in imparting comprehensive emergency obstetric care (EmOC).

In Bangladesh, 32 mothers die each day due to child birth related complications and only one in five deliveries is assisted by a skilled birth attendant. Ensuring access to round-the-clock quality EmOC is therefore key to saving the lives of both women and newborns.

"The observation of Safe Motherhood Day is a commitment by the present government toward achieving Millennium Development Goal 5, relating to maternal health, by 2015," said Prof. Shah Monir Hossain, Director General of Health Services.

"The high number of maternal deaths in Bangladesh is both a social injustice and a violation of women's rights," said Carel de Rooy, UNICEF Representative.

UNICEF has been providing support to the Government of Bangladesh to improve EmOC since 2000. Efforts have included establishing Women Friendly Hospitals, addressing gender disparities, and promoting community awareness of safe motherhood issues.