

UNICEF Bangladesh

# Newsletter

Issue 19, September 2011

## SWIM COACH LAPS UP LONDON

Ducking into the blue waters of the Olympic sized swimming pool, Noor Begum is far from her home in the Rangpur district of Bangladesh. Instead, the 18-year-old is a world away in London, England taking part in the opportunity of a lifetime.

Noor was chosen to represent Bangladesh as part of the UNICEF supported International Inspiration programme, a sports legacy project held in the lead up to the London Olympic Games next year. She and other young people travelled to London to promote various sports – in Noor’s case, swimming.

The International Inspiration programme uses physical education, sport and play to enrich the lives of 12

million children and young people from 17 countries around the world.

Bangladesh is one such country where the programme is promoting swimming. It’s not only instilling a love of sport in the country but also helping save lives and Noor is one of those lifesavers. She has not only taught more than 100 children how to swim but helped save the life of a young girl from her village.

“I was at a neighbour’s house and they had pulled a child out of the water and were treating her with traditional methods by swinging her upside down to get rid of the water,” says Noor. “I told them I had had some training and that I could help her. After hearing me out they allowed me to work on her and I was able to pump the water out of the system and she was okay,” she says.

Noor received the training as part of the UNICEF-supported SwimSafe project, run in partnership with the Government of Bangladesh.

Beginning in 2005, the project identifies vulnerable children aged four to ten and offers them the chance to enroll in a free 15-day swimming course taught by specially trained local adolescents, who also instruct other youths and neighbours in their villages on basic resuscitation techniques.

In Bangladesh, around 18,000 children die each year from drowning, one of the highest number in the world. “Swimming is extremely important,” says Noor. “Bangladesh has a lot of rivers and lakes,



Courtesy: 2011/Begum

Noor Begum, 18, represents Bangladesh as part of the UNICEF supported International Inspiration programme in London.

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### In Focus: Child participation

This newsletter focuses on child participation in Bangladesh and the various projects UNICEF supports in order to ensure children have an avenue for self-expression.

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**Editor:**

Arifa S. Sharmin

**Contributors:**

Jeannette Francis, Konka Karim.

**Design & layout:**

Syed Makhlesur Rahman

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## Q&A WITH UNICEF STAFF

**Shamsuddin Ahmed**  
**Communication for Development Specialist**



**What is your professional background?**

I have a Master in Economics from Dhaka University and I took up journalism in 1972.

**What attracted you to UNICEF?**

It was a time when diarrhoeal diseases used to kill a quarter of a million

Under-5 children in Bangladesh and the infant mortality rate was very high. So, I wanted to work for an organisation that was committed to improving the lives of children.

**How would you describe your job at UNICEF?**

Very interesting. I am involved with diverse activities including partnerships with the Islamic Foundation where I help mobilise Imams and Buddhist Monks to disseminate major development messages in their regular religious sermons. I also work with Interactive Popular Theatre (IPT) groups who perform dramas that educate their communities on disaster preparedness and hygiene.

**What have been some of your highlights and achievements?**

I was actively involved in convincing UNICEF Bangladesh to take up the Meena Communication Initiative (MCI) in 1990. I suggested the name "Meena" for the girl and wrote the draft of the first episode of Meena. I led the launching of Bangla version of the State of the World's Children (SOWC) report in 1991. I organised a national poetry festival to promote the rights of the child in major cities across Bangladesh in 2006, which involved 20 leading poets who recited their poems at huge public gatherings.

**What change have you seen happen during your time at UNICEF?**

The organization has grown bigger and more women are working now compared with the 1980s and early 1990s and there is more professionalism in the system.

**What's next for you?**

As soon as I retire from UNICEF in November 2011, I hope to continue mobilising and encouraging school children to grow up as worthy citizens so that they can be the future leaders of Bangladesh. In addition to that, I will write a couple of books on our liberation war of 1971 in which I was an active participant.



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*Girls take part in a UNICEF-supported national cricket tournament, the first of its kind to bring young girls from disadvantaged communities across the country to play cricket.*

## THE FACTS: CHILD PARTICIPATION IN BANGLADESH

Child participation in Bangladesh can be limited because of the way in which children are viewed. For many poor families, children are seen as earners or homemakers from a young age. Both boys and girls will be sent out to work and many girls will get married and begin bearing children before the age of 18. Child labour and child marriage are two key issues in Bangladesh and thus limit child participation.

While some places such as schools and community centres often encourage children to speak out, the arenas most utilized for wider public debates and social interaction, such as the media, government, think-tanks and community forums, etc., are often viewed as the exclusive domain of adults.

Children have little say in the reporting of child-related news stories by both television and print

media in Bangladesh, which often results in a lack of understanding and a misrepresentation of the key issues that children face.

In line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly article 12, which focuses on the right to freedom of expression, UNICEF is working to promote child participation by using different media where they raise their voices on the issues that affect their lives.

UNICEF seeks to encourage adolescents, particularly girls, to intervene in socio-economic and political structures, take control of decision-making processes within and outside the family and community, enter domains conventionally seen as exclusively male, and, finally, access available natural, financial and intellectual resources.

# UNICEF AND CHILD PARTICIPATION

In line with the Convention of Child Rights, UNICEF and its partners are seeking to ensure more child participation in Bangladeshi society by implementing different programmes to build self-esteem, confidence, knowledge and skills among children with specific focus to disadvantage children so they can better participate in key decision making processes.

The “Our Voice” project gives children the opportunity to take part in a monthly televised ‘question and answer’ session with key leaders, including the Prime Minister herself. Children Express helps develop children’s journalism skills by providing them with the opportunity to produce child-friendly news articles, many of which are often published. The Children’s Parliament draws children from across the country to

participate in a mock parliamentary session in order to better understand social and political processes.

The Adolescent Empowerment project creates a supportive environment for adolescent through the development of community adolescent centers, where young girls are encouraged to participate in sports, school activities, community projects and national events.

UNICEF also supports photography workshops, film making training such as the One Minute Junior Video project, Interactive Popular Theatre programmes, International Children’s Film Festival and the Meena Media Awards, all of which recognise not only the talent children have but the importance of allowing children an avenue for self-expression.

## CHILDREN QUESTION LEADERS ON NATIONAL TV

Beneath a myriad of bright lights, hovering microphones and television cameras, the children take their seats on stage. For a group of youngsters who are about to quiz a key decision maker on national television, they appear fairly relaxed, chattering among themselves until the lights dim and the cameras role.

This unique session is part of the UNICEF-supported Our Voice project, which gives young people the opportunity to question the country’s leaders and decision makers on Bangladesh Television, the country’s national public broadcaster. The project first began in 2009 with a televised interview with the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina with group of children.

Every month since then, numerous government ministers and leaders have been in the hot seat, facing questions by children on different issues happening around them and influencing their lives such as child labour, child marriage, the right to education and child protection etc.

The aim of the project is to increase children’s participation in the media, something which is strongly lacking in Bangladesh. It is the only television programme of its kind in the country and is screened monthly during primetime on Friday evening.

The latest Our Voice episode saw Mohammad Israfil, head of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on



© UNICEF/2011/Jannatul Mawa

Children are attending one and a half-day grooming session facilitated by Kayes Chowdhury before recording of the programme.



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*Tania, 14 asking questions to Md. Israfil Alam, MP and Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee, Ministry of Labour & Manpower, during the 'Our Voice' programme at Bangladesh Television.*

Labour and Employment, answering questions from 20 enthused and media savvy children, all of whom had prepared their questions earlier during a specialised grooming session with trainer Kayes Chowdhury.

"With so many trade unions around, why are so many workers still being denied their rights by self-seeking employers?" asked 17-year-old Asif Zaman. "Due to poverty, children feel compelled to work, what are you doing to provide security and proper safety measures for these children?" asked 14-year-old Nusrat Jahan Tania.

Mr Israfil, like many in the audience was impressed with the children's confidence, fielding their carefully crafted questions one at a time.

Our Voice is part of the Advocacy and Communication for Children and Women Project, implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Information. The programme is designed to provide children with avenues of self-expression.

"Our Voice came about as a means of empowering children to play a part in the country's governance by holding their leaders accountable," says Arifa Sharmin from UNICEF's communication department. "Those asking questions are representing all the children in Bangladesh so it's about empowering young people to stand up for not only themselves but those who don't have a voice."

"The children come up with the questions on their own during the training sessions," says Kayes Chowdhury. "We never tell them what to say, instead they brainstorm

amongst themselves and sometimes come up with something that we as adults would never think to ask; something from their day to day experiences as children," he says.

A three-day training session is held in the lead up to filming and, 20 Children, both from privileged and underprivileged backgrounds are selected from across the country by UNICEF's supported projects to take part in three separate programmes. Since 2009, 22 programmes were broadcast and more than 100 children participating the programme from different socio-economic background.

Each day, the children learn new skills and are taught about how television programmes are put together. As a group, they brainstorm and develop questions, which they later ask to their country's leaders.

"It is wonderful to see how the children interact with one another," says Mr Kayes. "There is no difference between those who come from poorer families and shelter homes and those from more well-off families. When they are here in the training session, they are all children talking about common issues."

As the recording comes to an end, the sound of excited chatter fills the room as the children exchange notes on what it was like to come face to face with the very people who make decisions that shape their lives. □

**The Our Voice project is funded by UNICEF's regular resources**

# A LIFETIME OF STORIES IN ONE MINUTE

The children scurry into the room and take their seats just as the lights dim. Suddenly music blares from the speakers and a projector screen lights up. It's the moment the children have been waiting for; time to screen the 20 short films they've spent the week working on. Not only children, the room is full of audiences, waiting eagerly for screening.

As the films play, one after the other, the children watch intently, laughing as their faces pop up on the screen. They have spent the last five days writing, directing and starring in a series of films as part of the UNICEF-supported One Minute Junior Video project.

The project's premise is simple: to tell a story by children using video in one minute. The final products are then broadcast on various television channels across the country. "We really learnt how to use our time properly," says 13-year-old Silvia Ahkter. "You have to think creatively to tell a story in one minute but in the end we all did it and we all really enjoyed it."

Sylvia was one of 20 children selected to take part in a five day workshop. More than 80 per cent of the children are selected through UNICEF-supported Protection for Children at Risk project come from under-privileged backgrounds. During the workshop they brainstorm ideas, draw up a story board, learn how to use camera, film a sequence and take part in the editing process.

The workshop is designed to give children an avenue of self-expression. In a country like Bangladesh, where child participation can be limited, the project offers children a creative platform to freely and openly express their ideas to the country.

"This is a great project because as the world globalises technology is becoming more and more important," says trainer Rabeya Rima. "We as adults don't see what they see and sometimes they come up with ideas that we don't even think about."

Their videos tackled issues that related not just to children but to wider Bangladeshi society, including HIV/AIDS and child rights violation, child labour, class struggles, poverty, domestic violence and energy conservation. Some were confronting, others humorous.

14-year-old Asrafal Islam Munna's story was about 'eve teasing', a phenomenon whereby young girls are repeatedly verbally and physically harassed by boys and men. "I'm not a girl but I wanted to show what it felt like for young girls," says Munna. "So in my film a young boy dresses up as a girl to see for himself how it feels to be harassed. It is about putting yourself in someone else's place."

The One Minute Junior Video is an international project initiated by the OneMinute Foundation based in Netherlands, began in Bangladesh in 2009 and has since helped produce countless videos and trained 120 Children. Of the short films submitted for nomination to this year's 4th International Children's Film Festival, many of them came from children who had taken part in the project.

As the final film draws to an end, words pop up on the screen for a few seconds before it turns to black and the message sums up what the children have learnt in the last week; "Language doesn't matter; a picture can express the feeling in one's heart". □

**This project is funded by UNICEF's regular resources.**



Mamun (L) making his first attempt at using the camera, while Tushi (R) recording at a shoe store in the city as part of their training programme.

## Study: Children in Bangladesh News media

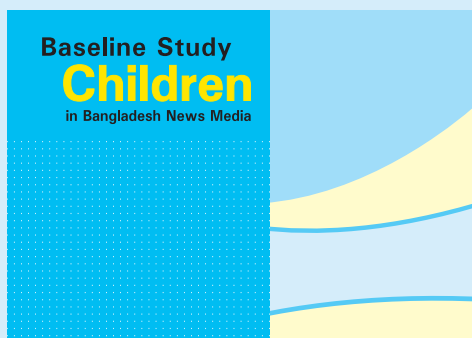
The media is a key arena for raising public awareness, stimulating public debate, and addressing injustices. However, participation and representation in the media can often be limited, particularly for children.

Between June and August, 2009, 12 national daily newspapers and three television channels were monitored in order to assess the frequency and quality of child-related news. A literature review, questionnaires with media personnel and focus group discussions with various stakeholders, including children, were also undertaken as part of the study.

### Highlights:

The study found that the media allotted very little space and time to children and the little coverage that did focus on children was deficient in many ways.

- Only three percent or less of the total news coverage by these outlets was dedicated to child-related issues.
- Only 13 to 14 percent of child-related news stories probed issues in an in depth way.
- While prominent daily events concerning children and children's issues were covered, many were lacking in focused, planned, proactive, and in-depth reporting.
- In newspapers, most child-related stories involved the death of children. On TV, the most-covered topic was education, but the stories overwhelmingly covered seminars, meetings or other such programmes.
- Reports rarely sought the views of children even on issues or events directly concerning them.
- Less than one percent of newspaper editorials addressed issues related to children.
- Many of the child-related television stories focused on various announcements by state personnel and dignitaries.



## SWIM COACH LAPS UP LONDON

*Continued from page 1*

which overflow during floods. Every year thousands of young children die from drowning, this training should be widespread so that these lives can be saved."

Thanks to instructors like Noor, 130,000 children across Bangladesh have been taught vital water survival skills since 2009 and countless lives have been saved.



Courtesy: 2011/Begum

*Noor Begum, 18, stands with other young people from around the world chosen to travel to London as part of the UNICEF supported International Inspiration programme.*

The programme is not only helping to develop young people's swimming skills but also their leadership abilities by giving them an opportunity to participate in key activities within their communities. Noor says becoming a swimming instructor has given her a sense of self and added confidence.

"Before this training a lot of people didn't know me but now people recognize me everywhere I go and show me a lot of respect. They call me Apa (a term of respect) and little kids always say hello to me when they see me."

Noor's trip to London saw her take part in swimming exercises, press conferences and 'meet and greets' with influential athletes, including British Olympic medalist Lord Sebastian Coe. "I felt really good. I never imagined a girl like me would one day to go London. I never thought I would get the opportunity. Everyone asks me about my London experience."

Noor says she wants to continue using the skills she learnt from the SwimSafe project to teach more children how to swim with the aspiration to save as many lives as she can. □

**This project is funded by UK NATCOM**

## CHILDREN TAKING PART

**1** Adolescent girls facilitate a learning session at their local drop-in centre. The centre is part of the Adolescent Empowerment project which was started in 2006 and reached more than 100,000 children. The project provides a space for young boys and girls to mingle and discuss issues that are relevant to their lives, including personal hygiene, the right to education and preventing early marriage.



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**2** Mohammad Mamun, 14, addresses a room full of ministers, dignitaries and press on the difficulties of being a working child. "I worked for 12 hours a day everyday," says Mamun. "The machine I operated was too big for me so I had to stand on a chair to use it. At times I would get very tired but I would be too afraid to fall asleep in case the manager hit me." His address was at the launch of the State of the World's Children 2011 report, which focused on adolescents.



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**3** Members of the UNICEF-supported Adolescent Empowerment project take part in a friendly football game in the Narsingdi district of Bangladesh. In a country where sport is a heavily male-dominated field, the project encourages young girls to take part in football and cricket teams, treating them equal to their male counterparts.

**4** Children perform a play based on the popular Meena cartoons during a ceremony celebrating the release of two new Meena episodes. UNICEF launched the two new episodes of Meena (animation film) after a seven year hiatus. Many children across the subcontinent have come to consider the iconic animated character to be a role model.



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8 © UNICEF/BANA2011-00523/Mojumder



9 © UNICEF/BANA2010-01051/Khan

**5** Chadni, Anchor questions Mr. Mohammed Israfil Alam, Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee, Ministry of Labour & Manpower. The programme was broadcast on Bangladesh Television as part of the UNICEF-supported “Our Voice” programme.

**6** Dulal, 12, takes part in a UNICEF-supported photography training workshop, with 19 other working children from Dhaka and Barisal receive 5 days of specialised training and then encouraged to take photographs of their respective cities. The project gave underprivileged urban children a chance to express themselves by using images.

**7** A group of child journalists perform a play during the 2nd Child Journalists Convention 2011. The convention brought together more than 600 participants of the UNICEF-support Children Express programme, which aims to address the lack of child participation and representation in Bangladesh by encouraging young people to write their own news stories, many of which are later published in newspapers.

**8** Nahid, 16 a child journalist speaks at a seminar on “Child Rights and Child Journalism in Media,” during the 2nd Child Journalists Convention in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

**9** Mohammad Al-Amin Patwari, 10, and his fellow classmates wash their hands with soap during a large scale event in Dhaka marking Global Hand Washing Day. More than fifty thousand students gathered in one area, pledging to wash their hands with soap and promising themselves and their communities to always practice good hygiene.

## CLOWNING AROUND MORE THAN JUST FUN

It's two in the afternoon and the girl's drop-in-centre in Dhaka is abuzz with chatter and laughter. Two groups of girls aged six to 17 have formed at both ends of the spacious room.

The first is a group of 30, made up of youngsters, sitting in circle, all of whom appear to be waiting for something or someone. Suddenly, 14-year-old Shima Begum jumps into the middle of the circle and begins miming, her hands raised before her face as she moves around the space to the delight of her young audience.

Shima is 'clowning', a term the girls use to describe the use of humour and free body movement for entertainment. Shima learnt the techniques from Michel Rousseau, a performer who travelled to Bangladesh in April to hold workshops and performances in Dhaka and southern Bangladesh for children who are part of the UNICEF-supported Protection of Children at Risk (PCAR) project.

The aim of his visit was not only to entertain the children but to teach them a new way to express themselves with fun. Michel also held training workshops for PCAR managers and teachers and months later, his techniques are still alive and well in drop-in-centres, open-air schools and child friendly spaces across the country.

"Sometimes I enjoy doing this so much that I can't help but laugh during a performance," says Shima. "With theatre performances you have to follow a script and try to teach people about social issues but with clowning you can be free to do whatever you want just for fun."

Roxsana Begum, manager of the drop-in-centre says the girls learnt a lot from Michel. "The clowning has a

calming effect on the children and because it's free and fun, they're less likely to fight. They come together and share ideas in a really harmonious way."

But it wasn't only clowning skills that children picked up. Across the other side of the room, the atmosphere is quieter and that's because 12-year-old Silvia Ahkter and three others are concentrating on building elaborate structures from small blocks of wood.

"Don't touch the blocks," says Silvia motioning to a young girl to move away as she carefully places the last wooden block on top of the 1-metre-high wooden bird she has helped build. The young girl moves away but stares at Silvia intently wondering what her next move will be. Once the piece is safely sitting atop of the structure, Silvia's young audience burst into applause.

Silvia's skill was developed during a one-day training course on an exercise known as "Kapla", a block building exercise designed to help children understand geometry, physics and art while helping them develop concentration. Seven boys and seven girls from the PCAR Project were selected to take part in the training, which was run by Kapla expert Marie-Helene Marsaly.

Marie Helene spent time in Bangladesh earlier this year also training social workers and field facilitators on how to use Kapla to educate children under the PCAR project across Dhaka and the southern district of Cox's Bazar.

"It was hard during training because we couldn't figure out what to do," says 12-year-old Silvia Ahkter. "Later when we were sitting around we had time to think about the structure and plan what we wanted it to look like before we built it."

"Children are encouraged to work alone or in groups" says Roxsana. "Their self-esteem develops because they have created something. They have more confidence when they can actually see something that they have produced from nothing," she says.

The structure suddenly comes crashing to the ground and wooden blocks lay scattered around the room. "Not to worry, it happens all the time," says Silvia with a smile as she picks up the pieces and begins to rebuild her wooden bird. □

**This PCAR project is funded by Norwegian NATCOM**



© UNICEF/2011/Khaled Sattar

Michel the Clown, performs at the open air school run by the UNICEF-supported Protection of Children at Risk project in Gulbag, Dhaka.

## BRIGADES ON TOP OF SCHOOL HYGIENE

It is 9am at Shatrashia Government Primary School in the Muktagacha district of Mymensingh and the students of grades three, four and five are already at school - three hours before their classes begin.

More than 100 students have formed small groups – known as school brigades – and taken up the task of cleaning the school premises. One group is busy sweeping the ground in front of the school; another is busy cleaning the classrooms; another, the latrine; another, the drains that carry the water out of the tube well. A half hour later, they are almost done with their work and the school looks ‘spick and span.’

“We come down every morning to clean the school and return two hours later to attend our classes,” says 10-year-old Sabiha Ahkter, as she offloads a pile of dirt and garbage into a hole dug in the back of the school building. Her team mates - Saleha and Sakib - then cover up the hole with earth.

The Shatrashia Government Primary School is one of over 9000 rural and urban primary schools across Bangladesh supported by UNICEF’s Sanitation, Hygiene Education and Water Supply in Bangladesh (SHEWA-B) project. In partnership with the Government Department of Public Health and Engineering, the USD 100 million project aims to promote proper hygiene practices across Bangladesh as well as supply poor communities with safe drinking water and proper sanitation.

As part of the project’s engagement with schools, 143 schools across the Muktagacha district, have been provided with tube wells and latrines; nearly 90 community hygiene promoters – specially trained volunteers - visit the schools twice weekly to train the teachers and students in healthy and hygienic practices; brigade groups, made up of 10 to 12 students each, have been established in each school and teachers have undergone a five-day training course of health and hygiene awareness.

The school brigades are not only tasked with looking after their school premises but also with educating other students and promoting hygiene awareness in their communities. “Each group takes up a different task everyday,” says Shahnaz Begum, principal of Shatrashia School. “While there is no direct competition or evaluation, we try to informally encourage each group to outperform the other,” she says.



*Students wash their hands with soap at the Sobu Sarker Primary School in Muktagasa, Mymensingh. Proper hand washing is one of many hygienic practices promoted by the School Brigades.*

The SHEWA-B project also operates in non-government schools such as the Sabu Sarkar School in the nearby Kumargata Union. The school has 12 brigade groups and a list of team members and tasks are posted on a board in the school’s office room.

The principal Habibur Rahman is teaching Grade Six students about hygiene awareness by reading from a book called Kalim Chachar Parichanna Bahini (Uncle Kalim’s Hygiene Brigade), which – along with other reading materials – was provided under the SHEWAB programme to all schools in the Muktagacha district.

“The good thing is that all these young boys and girls are learning at a very young age not to attach gender roles to different tasks,” says Rahman.

The effect of SHEWA-B’s school brigades is not just visible in schools but across the entire district itself. The children are often directly and indirectly passing on their hygiene lessons to their families, neighbourhoods and communities turning the Muktagacha district into an example of cleanliness.

“My daughter taught me how to always use my right hand while carrying the pot into the latrine, to use my right hand to open the latrine door, as well as the tap,” says Abdul Hakim, whose daughter Amena studies at the Sreepur Maizhati Government Primary School in Muktagacha, describing how Amena had emphasised the importance of proper hygiene to the whole house. □

**The SHEWA-B Project is funded by UK AID**

# BUDDING REPORTERS SWAP STORIES

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*Child journalists light candles as a gesture of 'enlightenment' during the closing of the '2nd Child Journalist Convention 2011' on 25 May in Dhaka, Bangladesh.*

More than six hundred young reporters from across Bangladesh gathered in Dhaka on the 24th and 25th of May for the 2nd Child Journalist Convention organized by Children Express project supported by UNICEF.

Inaugurated by the Minister of Information of the Government of Bangladesh Abul Kalam Azad, along with Carel de Rooy UNICEF Representative and other dignitaries, the convention brought together young journalists from the UNICEF-supported Children Express project. The project aims to address the lack of child participation and representation in media.

Based on the mantra 'Let the Children's Speak', Children Express involves young people in the reporting process. In each district of the 64 districts of Bangladesh, 10 child journalists - five boys and five girls- form a news agency and are trained in feature writing, workplace ethics, the use of technical equipment such as computers and cameras and child rights and responsibilities. They are then encouraged to write stories about issues that matter to children.

"In our society, children are considered to have no voice to raise", says 15-year old Mokarram Rana from Rangpur in north west Bangladesh. "But as child journalists we've been given that opportunity and today

I've been given the chance to speak in front of you all and truly raise my voice." At this many of the other 640 child journalists, listening attentively in the audience, begin to nod their heads in agreement.

For Rana, the convention not only gives budding reporters a chance to mingle and exchange ideas with one another, but also gives them the opportunity to be heard by others. "Today I know that I can make a difference by using my pen, can bring voices of other children who are derived and neglected." The two-day convention was designed in a way that different side events allowed children to participate in discussion with prominent journalist and raise their expectation to the print and

broadcast media. The national convention is being followed by seven divisional level conventions.

Since Children Express began in 2005, it has nurtured 1,800 child journalists country-wide, who have produced more than 3000 individual reports and 1,252 group reports, mainly focusing on issues relating to children and child rights. Many of the reports have been published and have led to change in local communities. □

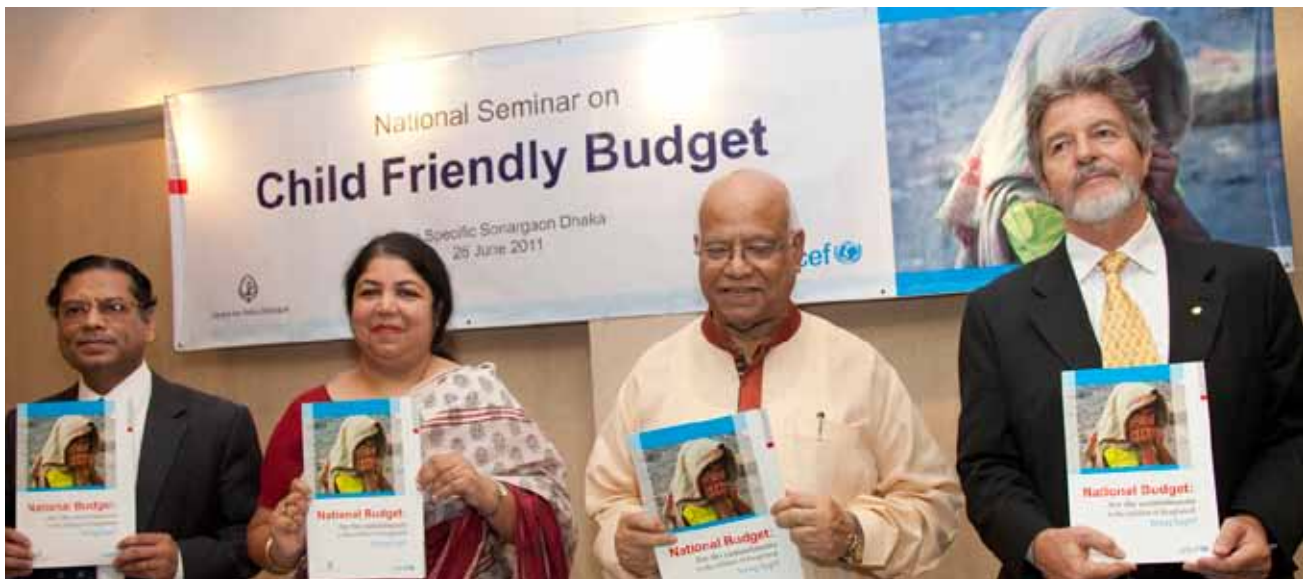
**This project is funded by UNICEF's regular resources**



*A group child journalists merry-making during the UNICEF-supported Children Express project gather at the '2nd Child Journalist Convention 2011' on 24 May in Dhaka, Bangladesh.*

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© UNICEF/2010/Habibul Haque



Right to Left: Carel de Rooy, Representative, UNICEF Bangladesh, Abul Maal Abdul Muhith, Finance Minister, Bangladesh, Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, State Minister for Women and Children Affairs, Bangladesh and Professor Mustafizur Rahman, Executive Director, Centre for Policy Development unveil a UNICEF report on the national budget during a national seminar held at the Pan Pacific Hotel Sonargaon in Dhaka on 26 June 2011.

## UNICEF ADVOCATES FOR A CHILD-FOCUSED BUDGET

One by one, the children made their way to the front of the large seminar room, each taking the microphone and asking a question to a panel of dignitaries.

"I have no parents and I live in a shelter," said thirteen-year-old Mohammad Shajun. "There are many children like me. We want to know what the government is doing to help us." Mukta was next. "I live in a slum, where the conditions are horrible. Will there be any money in the next budget that will go towards improving our living standards?" asked the petite twelve-year-old.

The children were present in a launching event of a new UNICEF report, which not only highlighted the need for more child-related allocations in the national

budget of Bangladesh but called on the country's government to double its direct budget allocation for children.

Co-authored by the Centre for Policy Dialogue, the report analysed the national budgets of the last five years, and found that while the annual budget amount had increased, child-related allocations remained more or less the same. It also found direct child-related allocation was low, amounting to only 4.1 per cent of the total budget for the last financial year.

The report made ten specific recommendations to better deliver services to children, including developing a "pro-child budget" framework; making special public budgetary allocations for children in urban slums; ensuring children's participation in budget consultations; adjusting school stipends according to the opportunity cost of schooling of poor children and enhancing coordinated action between the different ministries responsible for disseminating the budget allocation.

The report was launched by the Finance Minister, Mr. Abul Maal Abdul Muhith, State Minister for Women and Children Affairs, Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, UNICEF Bangladesh Representative, Carel de Rooy, Child Advocate and magician Jewel Aich

In line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF Bangladesh has long been advocating for more resource allocation for children, not only to uphold child rights but to ensure the building of robust human capital which is Bangladesh's most precious asset. □

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Children enjoy a performance by Jewel Aich, renowned magician and UNICEF child rights advocate, during a national seminar on Child Friendly Budget held at the Pan Pacific Hotel Sonargaon in Dhaka on 26 June 2011.

## THE MICRONUTRIENT INITIATIVE (MI)

The Micronutrient Initiative (MI) works exclusively to eliminate vitamin and mineral deficiencies in the world's most vulnerable populations. UNICEF spoke to the organisation's Director in Bangladesh, Zeba Mahmud.

### What are your goals in Bangladesh?

MI seeks to contribute to reducing the child mortality rate at country level to below 50 per 1000 live births by 2013, to improve cognitive and physical development and educational outcomes of children through ensuring adequate iodine intake for all children and pregnant women, to reduce anaemia in children aged 6-59 months children by at least 25 per cent and to improve the health and survival rates of women of child bearing age including significant reduction of anaemia in project areas.

### Micronutrient Initiative is a sponsor of infant health projects and nation-wide vaccinations in Bangladesh. Why have you chosen to contribute to these particular initiatives?

MI Bangladesh intends people in Bangladesh maximize their potential and wellbeing through access to essential vitamins and minerals, while working in partnership with various stakeholders. We aim to apply innovative solutions based on the latest science to ensure beneficiaries sustain progress, thus saving lives and helping improve livelihoods through better nutrition.

### What changes has your organisation impacted or hopes to impact in Bangladesh over the years?

We will continue to strengthen and consolidate vitamin A and salt iodization programs with a special focus on hard to reach areas. We will also continue to support other micronutrient interventions including zinc supplementation; Oral Rehydration Solution for childhood diarrhoea; multiple micronutrient powders for young children; Iron/folic acid supplementation to pregnant and postpartum women as well as adolescent girls; and the distribution of double fortified salt.

### What are your priorities in the coming years with regards to the work that you sponsor in Bangladesh?

We aim to reduce the child mortality rate at a country level to below 50 by 2013 by having a 94 per cent coverage rate of two-dose Vitamin A among children aged 6 to 59 months. Increasing zinc supplements is also a priority. MI wants to improve cognitive and physical development and educational outcomes of children by ensuring the availability of iodine for all children and pregnant women. We also prioritise the reduction of anemia in children aged 6-24 months by at least 25 per cent. This can be achieved by increasing household consumption of adequately iodized salt to 90 per cent and increasing the coverage of micronutrient powders among children aged 6 to 24 months.

Increasing the survival rate and good health of women of child bearing age by significantly reducing anaemia is another priority. In order to do this we will be looking at increasing coverage of iron and folic acid supplementation to of pregnant women. We also seek to foster and sustain strong partnerships with government, UN bodies, development partners and the private sector.

### Bangladesh is on the way to achieving a number of MDG targets particularly those that relate to maternal and child health, what more needs to happen to ensure the country remains on track?

Policy makers should be sensitised to make appropriate decisions regarding which age groups of children should receive what supplement. They should also address childhood anaemia; the revitalisation of iron/folic acid for pregnant women strategy; fortify certain staple foods and make commitments for funds for micronutrient programs including Vitamin A supplementation, especially H2R strategies and zinc supplements in the next Health, Nutrition and Population Sector Program. Food companies and entrepreneurs also needs to be lobbied about fortification of certain products, such as salt, oil, rice and wheat.



### Convention on the Rights of the Child: Child Participation

**Article 12, 1:** States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

**Article 13, 1:** The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

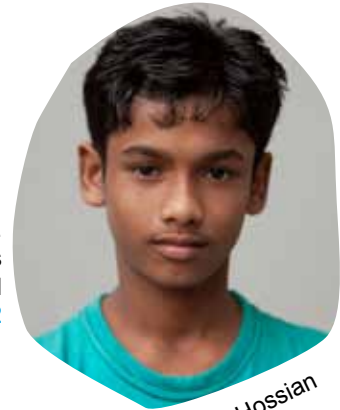
**Article 14, 1:** States parties shall respect the rights of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Children speak out about child participation



Mamum Bokal Masum

I like that children are able to enjoy activities together and receive support from adults. I never thought I would take part in a circus training workshop so I'm really happy to have had the experience.  
**Mamum Bokal Masum, 15**



Rajib Hossian

Child participation is a matter of pride. When children participate, they feel as though they are achieving something and it's also enjoyable.  
**Rajib Hossian, 12**

Being involved in theatre makes children happy. Children feel like taking part in theatre shows to see what they can learn from them.  
**Shimma Ahkter, 14**



Shimma Ahkter



Munni Ahkter

I'm from the streets but I would love the opportunity to practice acting so I can prove that street children can achieve the same things as other children.  
**MD Ashraful Islam Munna, 14**

It's important that children are given the opportunity to participate because it gives them an opportunity to learn more about what is happening around them.  
**Munni Ahkter, 12**



MD Ashraful Islam Munna



MD Kajol

It is important for children to have their voices heard because they are in a unique position to understand their own issues and to tell others.  
**MD Kajol, 15**



Shohagi Ahkter

When older people do things, children want to do them as well, like playing cricket. Young girls should be able to participate in sports.  
**Shohagi Ahkter, 12**



Jannatul Ferdous

I like taking part in different activities like singing, dancing and circus training because it's fun and you learn lots of new things.  
**Jannatul Ferdous, 11**

## 1 Meena makes a comeback

The hugely popular UNICEF flagship production, Meena, has made a comeback after a seven year hiatus, launching two new episodes.

UNICEF launched the episodes – one about sound hand-washing practices and the other about new-born care – in order to reinforce the power of the iconic animated character in influencing social change. Research shows that as a brand, the character Meena is recognised by 97 per cent of urban children and 81 per cent of rural children in Bangladesh.

The Meena Communication Initiative, which began in Bangladesh in 1990, aims to promote a better lifestyle for girls and their families by disseminating messages on children's education, health and hygiene, nutrition, protection and rights of the child.

## 3 Sandra Thier meets Acid victims

German celebrity journalist Sandra Thier has expressed her deep empathy to the children and women of Bangladesh who have suffered from acid attacks.



Supported by German National Committee of UNICEF Ms Sandar visited Bangladesh in August. During her visit she met children and women who have received treatment and physiological support from the UNICEF-supported project implemented by Acid Survival Foundation. She also visited Sirajgonj, one of the hot spots of acid-related crimes and met Amena Khatun Nela, a teenage acid survivor who has challenged social stigma and continued her education.

"I am amazed to see the personality of the girl, despite this tragic incident, she is living her life with dignity" says Sandra.

Although the number of acid attacks in Bangladesh has declined due to government efforts and strict laws, survivors can wait a very long time for justice. UNICEF and its partners are working in schools and communities to raise awareness on how to tackle acid violence.

## 2 Stars align for children

Two of Bangladesh's top celebrities – film actress Moushumi and magician Jewel Aich – have joined forces with UNICEF to become 'UNICEF Advocates for Child Rights'. Being the UNICEF Advocate for promoting Child Rights, Moushumi and Jewel Aich will work with UNICEF Bangladesh with specific focus to create mass awareness on Violence against children and Malnutrition.



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## 4 Photo Clubs: Setting the platform for children

With the aim of building photography skills and providing a platform for children, UNICEF and its partner have begun setting up photo clubs for children in selected four districts in Bangladesh as a pilot phase. The clubs will be run by children and will provide a platform for children, who have received photography training from UNICEF in the last two years, to further develop their skills.

Four clubs will be set up in Dhaka, Barisal, Chapi Nawabgonj and Bandarban where 70 children will receive mentoring on photography by professionals from DRIK. By November 2011, the clubs will be fully functional.

The children will also be connected with the media and prospective organizations where they can contribute by sending their pictures.

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UNICEF Bangladesh  
BSL Office Complex  
1, Minto Road, Dhaka 1000, Bangladesh

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