

Working Children in Bangladesh

# INSPIRING STORIES FROM THE FIELD



**Save the Children**



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# Abbreviations

<b>BSA</b>	Bangladesh Shisu Academy
<b>CMC</b>	Centre Management Committee
<b>CoC</b>	Code of Conduct
<b>CoD</b>	Community Declaration
<b>CPC</b>	Child Protection Committee
<b>EC</b>	Executive Committees
<b>KDA</b>	Khulna Development Authority
<b>LBs</b>	Local Bodies
<b>LRC</b>	Learning and Recreation Centre
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organisation
<b>NSA</b>	Non-State Actors
<b>TfD</b>	Theatre for Development
<b>VGF</b>	Vulnerable Group Feeding



# PREFACE

This book shares some of the inspiring stories we learned from the field during the implementation of the Save the Children project titled “Strengthening Non-State Actors (NSA) and Local Bodies (LBs) to reduce child poverty and promote rights of vulnerable children” supported by the European Commission. This project was implemented from April 2010 to July 2013 and was a part of the Working Children Programme of the Child Protection Sector of Save the Children in Bangladesh.

The purpose of the project is captured in the title. During its implementation we worked closely with organisations and people who are actually the local change makers. The project’s intervention focused on strategic geographic locations where we felt that these working children were particularly vulnerable: Lalbagh of Dhaka city; Kurigram Municipality; Khulna City Corporation and two remote Upazilas of Khulna district. Lalbagh, Dhaka city was chosen as it is known as the hub of small factories where children work in the operation of these industries. In Kurigram, once called the ‘*monga* (famine) district,’ we worked with children who fell victim to yearly river erosions and floods. After devastating cyclones like Aila, Khulna City became the home of newly migrated families and their children. Working alongside Khulna City Corporation we were able to make significant positive contributions to their lives. Finally, we chose the most vulnerable children and their families in two remote Upazilas of Khulna where families struggle everyday for survival.

This project taught us an important lesson. When a local community is actively providing support, change is possible. Local government institutions in each project area offered their helping hand to the families of these children. The philanthropic nature of local people helped working children to receive support with the continuation of their studies or with getting back to school. The referral services to government institutions were extremely beneficial. They ensured access to health care; introduced savings programmes and enabled students to gain access to educational courses offered by government institutes such as Shishu (Children) Academy. Employers' Associations and the relationship between them taught us the importance of this forum, and provided us with examples of good practice for ensuring improved conditions for working children.

We thank the local government leaders (Mayors, Ward Councilors and Union Parishad (UP) Chairmen and Members) and government representatives (Police Stations, Shishu Academy and Post Office officials) who played a special role in engaging these children in their programmes and activities. We thank the local people, civil society organisations, child rights networks and the local media who always stood in favour of the children.

I thank all of our partner organisations and their staff members for their dedicated services. Special thanks also go to the staff of the Learning and Recreation Centres (LRCs) who made their centres lively and happy places for working children. I thank the Working Children Programme Team for the successful implementation of the project and for documenting the best and most inspiring stories for wider sharing. Finally, I would like to thank the European Union for this collaboration.



**Michael McGrath**

Country Director

Savt the Children in Bangladesh



# CHILD WORKERS IN BANGLADESH



Bangladesh is an agriculture based developing country with an estimated population of 150 million. More than 60 million are under the age of 18 years. Over the past two decades, Bangladesh has made significant progress in the education and health sector. More than 90% of girls enrolled in primary school, infant mortality reduced by half, live births and child mortality fell by two-thirds and maternal mortality reduced by three-quarters. Though the economy is growing well, still 41% of its people live on less than one US dollar per day. Due to the high incidence of household poverty and cultural acceptance, about 7.4 million children are economically active – of them, 3.2 million are considered as child labourers, of which 1.3 million are estimated to be engaged in hazardous work.

Rapid urbanization attracts rural people to migrate to the cities. Often, once they have migrated, many are restricted to low cost accommodation in slum areas. Due to the failings in existing Safety Net programmes, migrants and local poor families face several difficulties. Existing Government, NGO and private services are unable to reach the most vulnerable people, particularly children. This may be due to their traditional mind set, limited resources and unavailability of quality services. As a result, most poor families have no option but to send their children to work, mostly in the informal sector, in order to earn additional income.

Working children in Bangladesh are denied access to basic services such as education, health, nutrition and other child development services, which subsequently lead to inter-generational transfer of poverty. Further, prevalence of high levels of violence, abuse and exploitation of children severely affects children's freedom and limits their capacity to access basic services as well as to be grown as active and productive citizen. Socio-cultural norms, values and customs create an environment, where children from poor families (mostly working in the informal sector for their livelihood) live in greater poverty than the majority of poor and marginalized mainstream society. Social acceptance and normalization of child labour, even in extreme conditions with their health, education opportunities and general wellbeing compromised.

# ABOUT THE PROJECT



**Project Title:** ‘Strengthening Non-State Actors and Local Bodies to reduce child poverty and promote rights of vulnerable children’

**Overall Objective:** To build the capacities of Non-State Actors (NSA) and Local Bodies (LBs) to achieve sustainable reduction in child poverty, child labour and child rights violations, thereby achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs: MDG 1- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; MDG 2- Achieve universal primary education; MDG 4- Reduce child mortality).

**Project Period:** Project commenced in April 2010 and ended in July 2013.

**Associate Bodies of the EC-NSA Project are:** Civil society networks for advocacy: Joint Child Labour Working Group (JCLWG), Smart Business Initiatives; Employers associations, Media partners (including The Daily Star, Prothom Alo).

Community level structures and NSAs: Community Based organisations (CBOs), women’s groups, children groups, youth forums, School Management Committees, Child Protection Committees (CPCs).

**Local Bodies:** Union Parishads, Municipalities, City Corporations.

**National Level Policy Advocacy through:** Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperatives (LGRD), Ministry of Labour and Employment, Ministry of Law, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Home Affairs.

**Direct and Indirect Beneficiaries of the Project:**

- 72,500 working girls and boys under the age of 18 from poor households;
- 363,000 women, men, girls and boys from approximately 73,000 extreme poor households, including 200,000 children who are currently not engaged in labour but who are vulnerable to entering the child workforce;
- 8,700 households from ethnic and religious minority groups.

**Four Pillars of the Project:**

1. Building local institutional capacities (particularly of NSAs and local bodies)
2. Improving local governance and accountability
3. Rights based poverty alleviation
4. The effectiveness of the action (pillars one to three)

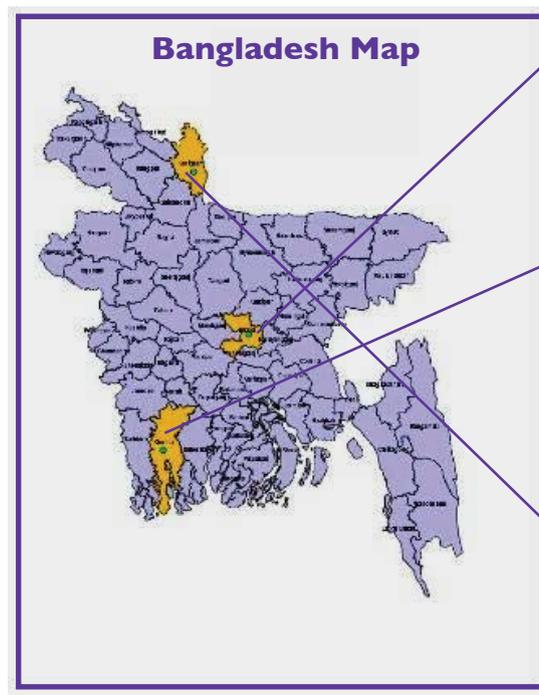
**Implementing Partners:**

1. Prodipon (Dhaka Lalbagh, Khulna – Paikgacha and Koirā)
2. Bangladesh Development Service Centre (BDSC), (Kurigram Pourashava)
3. Manob Seba O Samajik Unnayan Sangstha (MSSUS), (Khulna City Corporation)
4. Rupantar (innovative communication organization with locations across Bangladesh)



# THE SITUATION OF WORKING CHILDREN IN PROJECT LOCATIONS

- Urban Dhaka, Southern Coastal area, Northern “char” (river island) area
- Towns: Dhaka, Khulna, Kurigram. Dhaka reflects the challenges of urban child poverty
- Kurigram represents the extreme level of rural poverty
- Khulna represent poverty and vulnerability to disasters and food insecurity



Dhaka- Lalbag and Chalkbazar Thana- City Corporation 59-67 Ward — 42,477 HHs- 24,496 Children (0-18 yrs old)

Khulna- Sadar and Sonadnaga Thana- City corporation (16, 17, 20, 22, 30, 31 ward- 14,511 HHs- 11,520 Children; Koyra and Paikgacha Thana- 6 UPs-10,071 HHs- 9,700 Children

Kurigram- Sadar Thana and Holokhana UP- 5,979 HHs- 26,784 Children

## LALBAGH



Lalbagh is a densely populated area in the capital city of Dhaka. Every day people migrate here from different parts of the country to find jobs to earn a living. Many have experienced natural disasters which have left them homeless and vulnerable in all respects. Thousands of these migrants find work in small room based factories to live and survive. Employers at this level are keen to hire young children since their labour costs are low and they can work for long hours without access to rights and entitlements.

**Informal base line survey (limited to the project locations) shows that:**

- 60% of the children are engaged in the production of imitation jewellery
- 10% of the children are engaged in recycling plastic materials
- 8% of the children are engaged in aluminium factories
- 5% of the children are engaged in shoe making
- 3% of the children are engaged as helpers or assistants for adult workers
- 2% of the children are engaged as carpenter's helpers
- 2% of the children are engaged in cap making
- 10% of the children are engaged in a variety of work (collecting, sorting and selling garbage)



## KURIGRAM

Kurigram was labelled as a '*famine stricken/famine prone*' district for several decades. Every year people from the northern districts also suffer from natural calamities like river erosion and floods. Victims are often left homeless, unemployed and are forced to migrate to big cities for their livelihood. Many children are sent to urban areas to find work in domestic households or other unskilled and unsafe jobs.

**Informal base line survey (limited to project area) shows that out of 441 children in Kurigram:**

- 388 children (mostly boys) work as day labourers
- 296 children work for bidi (hand rolled cigarettes)
- 189 children work as helpers at bus stands, shops and hotels
- 29 children work in rickshaw garages, tailor shops, jewellery making and carpentry





## KHULNA CITY CORPORATION

Khulna City Corporation is one of the major urban areas of southern Bangladesh. The base line survey on the situation of working children in NSA project locations shows that out of 1,317 working children in Khulna only 97 attend school. Many of the working children in Khulna city as young as five, are engaged in all types of occupations and often exposed to drugs and criminal activities. Boys often work in the fish trade, in saw mills, garages, tea stalls and hotels. Girls mostly work as domestic helpers, water carriers or as embroidery workers. These children spend 6 to 14 hours a day at work and some are engaged in hazardous labour including working with saw mills, electricity, lead and welding machines, in motor workshops or pulling rickshaws.



## PAIKGACHA AND KOIRA UPAZILA



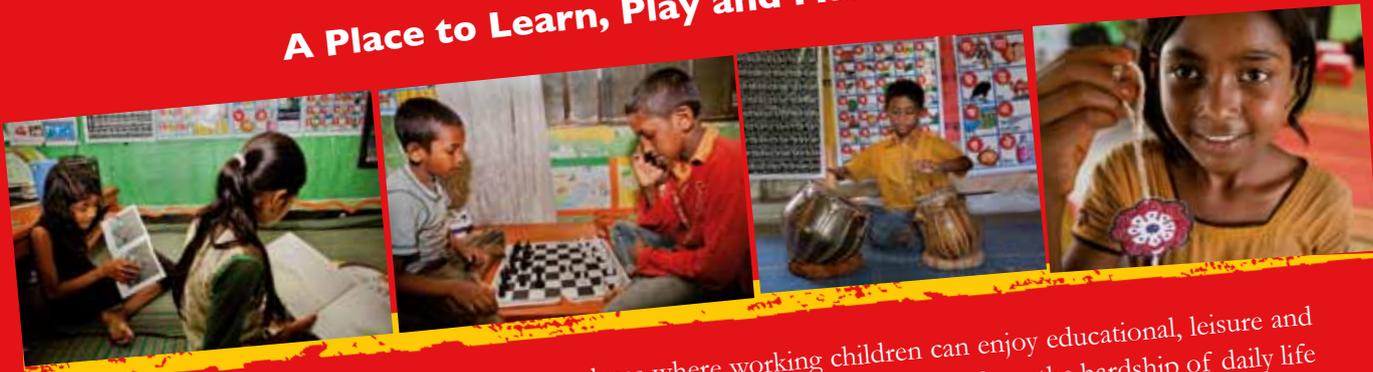
Paikgacha and Koira Upazilas are remote, disaster prone regions of Khulna district. The project location informal survey shows that 1,803 children are working, of whom 1,384 are boys and 419 are girls. Children below 10 years occupy 15% of the total group. In Paikgacha 92% of children surveyed have either never been to school or have had to drop out at an early age. In Koira this figure is 83%.

# CHAPTER- I

## INTERVENTION

### Learning and Recreation Centres

#### A Place to Learn, Play and Make Friends



Learning and Recreation Centres (LRCs) are places where working children can enjoy educational, leisure and recreational facilities that have been missing in their lives. LRCs provide respite from the hardship of daily life and a chance for children to enjoy spending time with other children of their age. Many spend time here during breaks in their long working day or when factories remain idle due to power cuts.

The LRCs are open from 9am – 5pm, six days a week and are child friendly - where children can be themselves. The centres are equipped with toys, puzzles, musical instruments, art and craft materials and have facilities for children to have fun watching cartoons or reading comic books. LRCs also offer working children access to informal education as centre facilitators are given basic teacher training as well as guidance on children's rights and entitlements. Children are now able to deal with daily life issues better as they are developing their reading, writing and counting skills.

The LRCs give working children a chance to enjoy some rest and relaxation. Even by participating just a few hours a week these children have the opportunity to make friends, to discuss their problems, to find solutions and to participate in forums in which they can express themselves. The LRCs help them build confidence and support their hopes for a brighter future. In total 31 LRCs were functioning in five project locations.





# INSPIRATION

**Rabbani Helped to Return to School**

**Sumitra Becomes a Role Model**

**Miraj Wins Awards for Painting**

**Mehdi Helped to Fulfil His Singing Dreams**

**Rina Dreams to be a Nurse**



INSPIRATION

## Rabbani Helped to Return to School

Rabbani left school when he was just eight years old. He started collecting shrimp fry from the nearby river Sibsha as his father's wages as an agricultural worker were not enough. With sharp eyes and bare hands Rabbani would spend around 12 hours a day standing in flowing river water hoping to catch enough tiny shrimps to earn as much money as possible. For children, this work is difficult and monotonous and some time dangerous to particularly in the rainy and windy days. It also meant that Rabbani's body was soaked for hours in cold water which often made him unwell too. There was often no time apart from standing in the water, eating or taking rest. He had no time to play or have fun. Gradually Rabbani became an irritable boy earning himself a bad name in the community. Rabbani recalled his life before joining his local LRC, ***"I felt bad...I was an angry boy and no-one liked me."***

LRC staff visited his parents and spoke about the harmful conditions of shrimp fry collecting. They suggested that Rabbani attend the LRC on days that the weather was unfavourable for the river work and his parents agreed. Project officers spoke about the facilities at the centre and after a while Rabbani started coming to the LRC around June 2010. In the early days he did not feel comfortable with other children but he soon made friends after playing carom and pin board games together.

***"I now love spending time at the LRC with other children. If I had not come I would never have met them"*** said  
Rabbani.

Rabbani's father and brother were helped to access money to set up a fish selling business. They were also assisted to receive free rice each month through the government's Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) card.

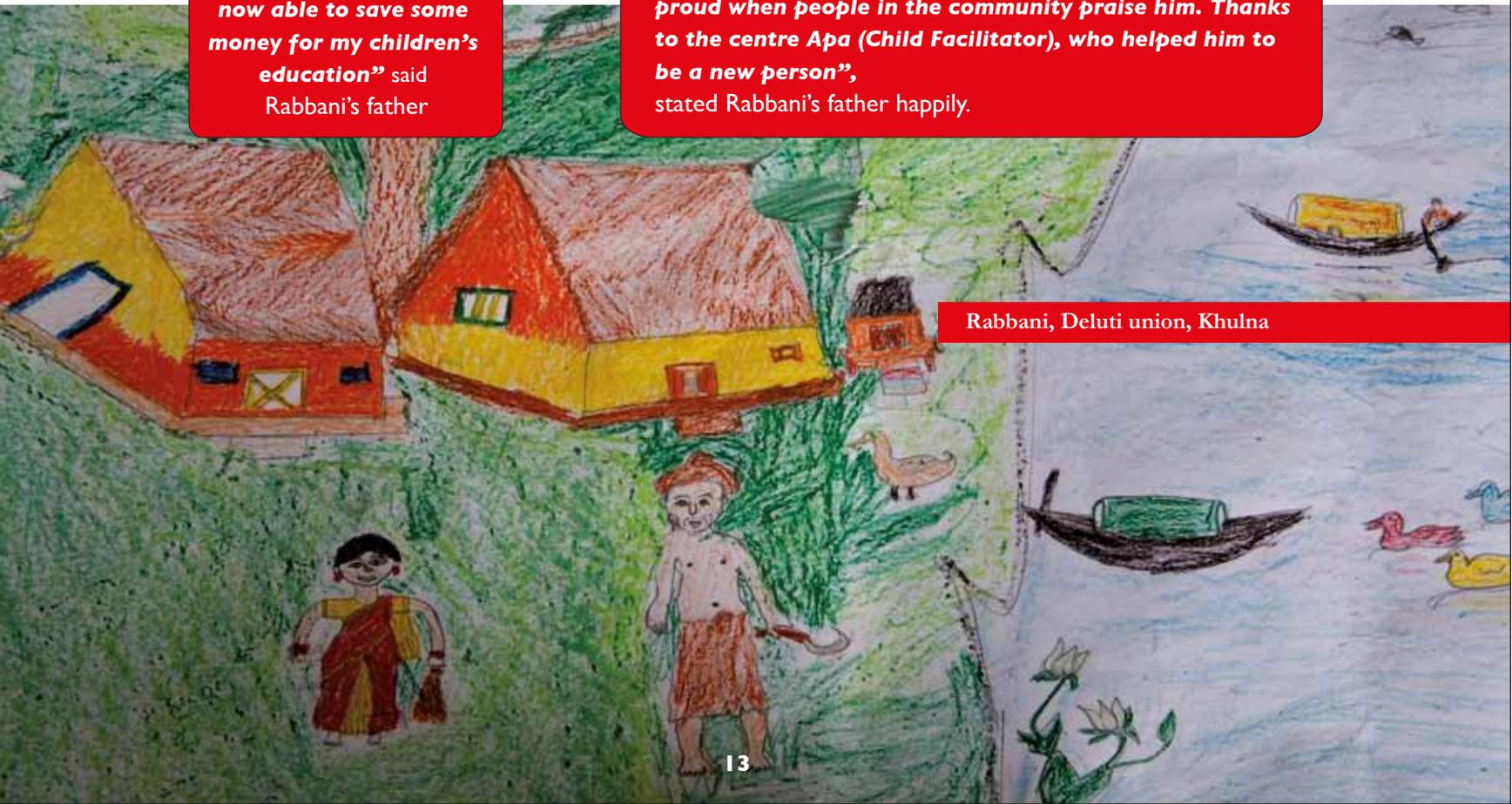
***“My family does not have to think about starving anymore. I am now able to save some money for my children's education”*** said Rabbani's father

As the family were helped to find new sources of income Rabbani was able to spend more time at the LRC learning to read, write and count. Eventually, due to the support of the centre and his own hard work Rabbani was readmitted to Primary School in 2011. He recently received the highest marks in his final examinations scoring more than 90% in most of his Class IV subjects. He was happy to receive Tk. 100 (around \$1) for his good results from one of the centre's management team.

Rabbani also attended the Theatre for Development (TfD) training given by the project's partner NGO Rupantar. Here he learned music and acting skills. He was able to perform in school and community programmes which brought him admiration and recognition. Now Rabbani is better known in the community as a good student and a wonderful performer.

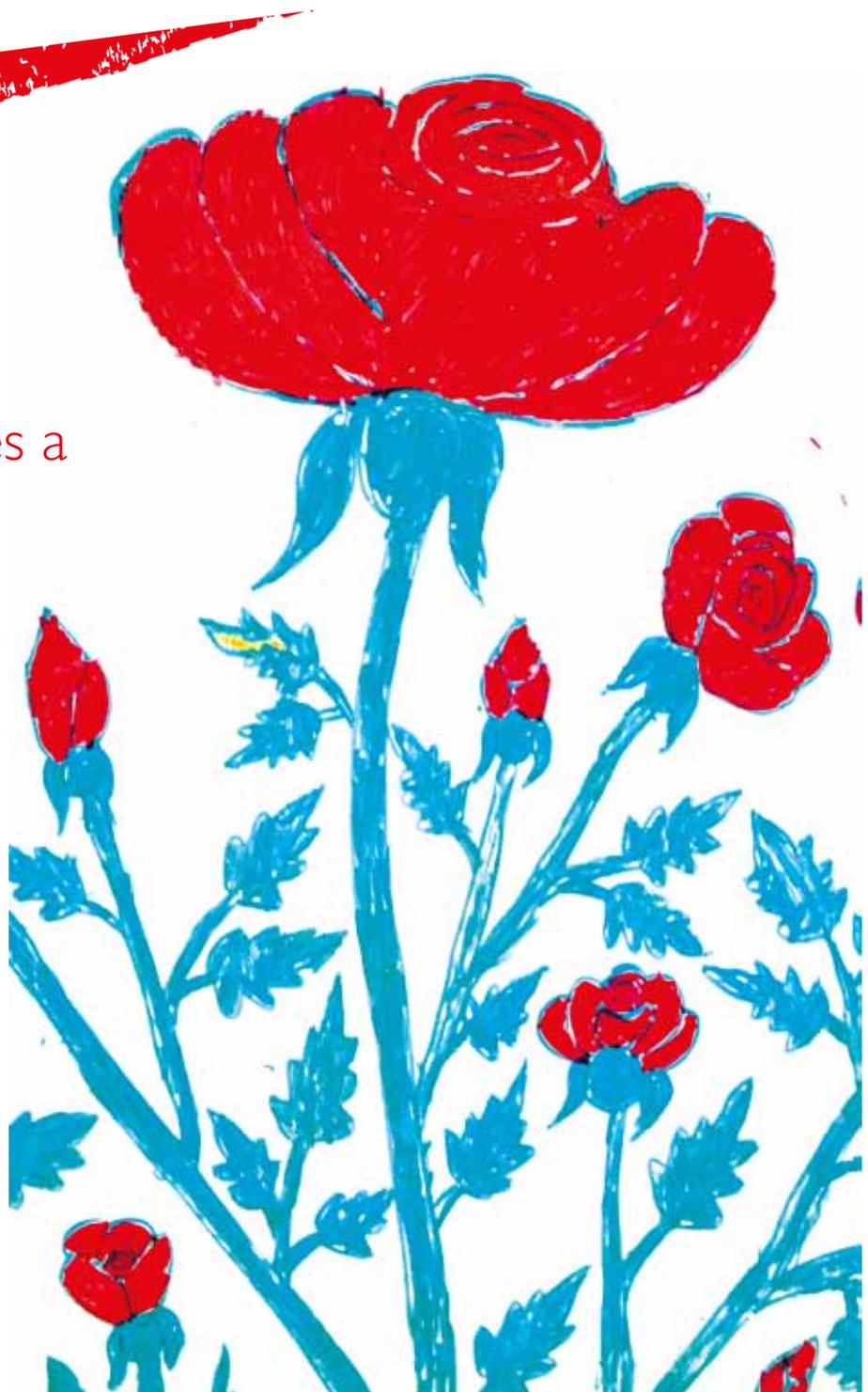
***“Every day I used to receive complaints about Rabbani's bad behaviour before I sent him to the LRC. Now I feel proud when people in the community praise him. Thanks to the centre Apa (Child Facilitator), who helped him to be a new person”***, stated Rabbani's father happily.

Rabbani, Deluti union, Khulna



## Sumitra Becomes a Role Model

Sumitra is a young girl from the Munda community, an ethnic minority group in Boro Bari village. There are about 430 Munda families living in her area. Sumitra's mother passed away two years ago and she now lives with the rest of her family. When project workers met Sumitra in 2010 her father had problems with alcohol. His small and irregular income as an agricultural worker was spent for his own purpose. Without her mother's income Sumitra had to leave school and work in local paddy fields or shrimp farms to support her siblings.





***“My life was really miserable. My father spent a lot of money on alcohol and would scream at me and my family when he was drunk. We did not have enough to eat so I had to spend hours in the water of the shrimp farms to earn Tk. 30–50 (around \$0.5) a day. Some days there was no work so we had to go hungry”***, Sumitra said as she recalled those days.

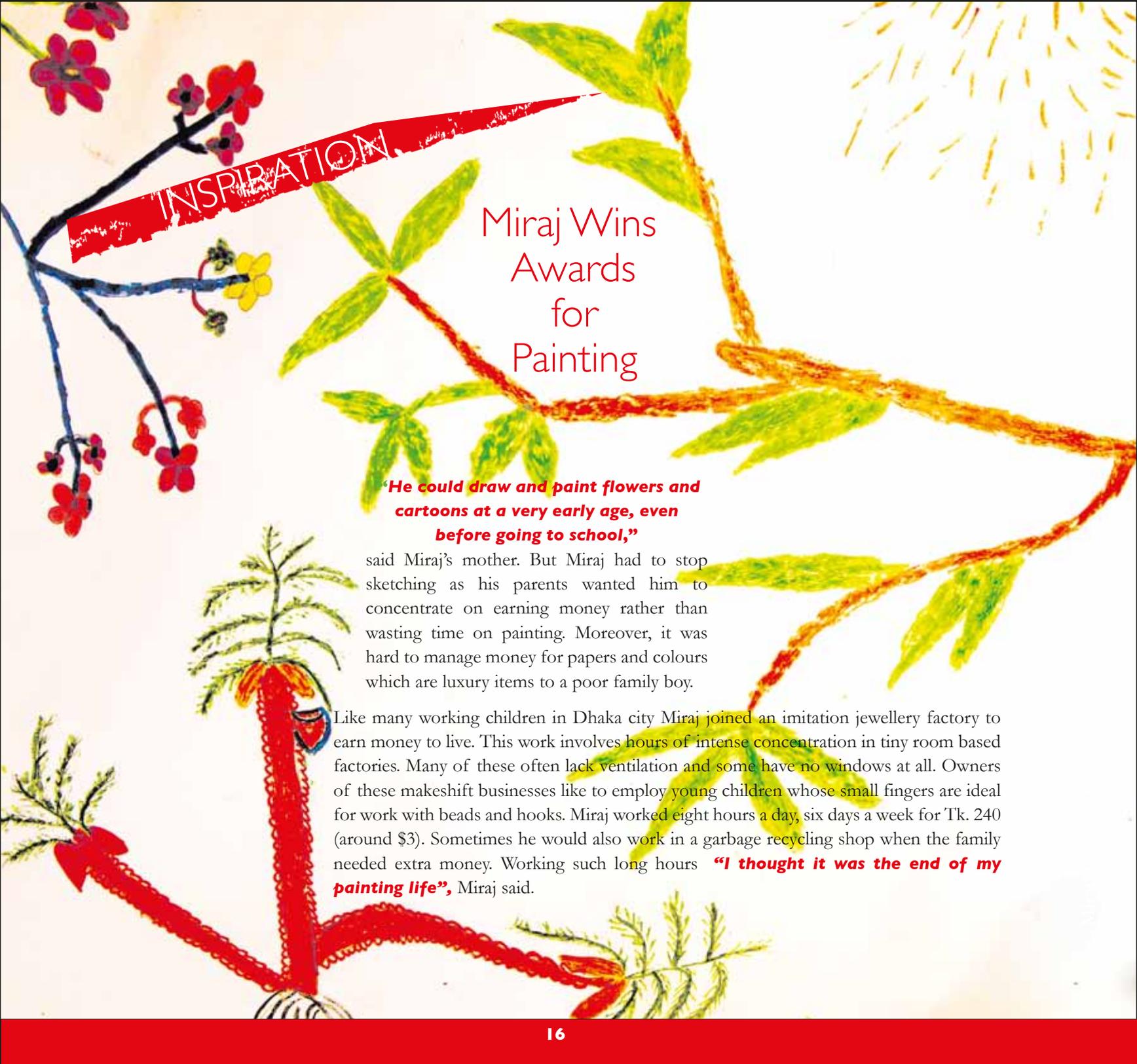
At the age of fourteen she joined the LRC. The project arranged skills development training for girls in the community. There she learned how to make handicrafts like Pati (floor mat made of bamboo or leaves). With her new skills she can earn as much as Tk. 3,000 (\$40) selling these items at local Melas (fairs). She no longer has to spend hours doing labour intensive work. Project staff and the Centre Management Committee (CMC) backed Sumitra’s readmission to school by paying her SSC-examination fees. She is now studying at a local Degree College.

The CMC gave special support to Sumitra as she is from a marginal community. They continue to pay regular visits to her home to speak with her father and ensure that she progresses with her studies. With a lot of support from project staff her father promised to stop drinking alcohol and he is gradually trying to do so.

As a child from an indigenous group Sumitra used to feel nervous mixing with the children from other communities ***“Munda children have always been excluded as people look down at us”*** she said. Since joining the LRC life for Sumitra is much better; ***“I am lucky to receive the support of the project members who helped me to be confident and to continue my education. At the centre there was no discrimination and I now have good friends there”***, Sumitra shared with us.

Because of the positive role of the LRC staff, attitudes towards the Munda community have begun to change. More Munda children are at school and many now take part in social activities. Sumitra has become a happy young girl. She is now a good role model among her community and is appreciated and respected by all.

Sumitra, Koira upazila, Khulna District



INSPIRATION

## Miraj Wins Awards for Painting

***“He could draw and paint flowers and cartoons at a very early age, even before going to school,”***

said Miraj’s mother. But Miraj had to stop sketching as his parents wanted him to concentrate on earning money rather than wasting time on painting. Moreover, it was hard to manage money for papers and colours which are luxury items to a poor family boy.

Like many working children in Dhaka city Miraj joined an imitation jewellery factory to earn money to live. This work involves hours of intense concentration in tiny room based factories. Many of these often lack ventilation and some have no windows at all. Owners of these makeshift businesses like to employ young children whose small fingers are ideal for work with beads and hooks. Miraj worked eight hours a day, six days a week for Tk. 240 (around \$3). Sometimes he would also work in a garbage recycling shop when the family needed extra money. Working such long hours ***“I thought it was the end of my painting life”***, Miraj said.



The NSA project staff visited Miraj's family during the household survey in May 2010.

***“The Centre Apa (Facilitator) explained how parents could send their children to school for the chance of a better life. Therefore, we allowed Miraj to join the LRC and school alongside his work”,*** recounted Miraj's mother.

Miraj became a regular participant at his local LRC. He found the centre an interesting place to meet other children and to refresh his learning to go to school again.

Happily, Miraj also had the chance to enjoy his painting once more. At the centre he discovered new painting techniques and participated in several competitions at the Shishu Academy. He has now won more than ten national awards.

***“Thinking about my previous life is frightening. I could have never reached where I am standing today without the support of LRC”,*** Miraj said.

Now Miraj teaches painting to younger children at the LRC. He feels rewarded when his students at LRC at times paint better than he does. Recently, Miraj found a job at a television and refrigerator repair shop where he works for six hours a day on a respectable wage with a lunch break and snacks. Life is much brighter now for young Miraj.

Miraj, Lalbagh, Dhaka

## Mehdi Helped to Fulfil His Singing Dreams

Mehdi is a musical boy and for the past three years he has entertained his friends with his talents at his local LRC. But, his life has not always been like music. Mehdi started work as a helper in his uncle's rickshaw repair shop when his father died. He used to work from 9am to 7pm almost without breaks to cover the cost of his food and other necessities. He had no time for school.

Once his local LRC was established Mehdi was allowed to spend time there once in a week and during festival holidays. This opportunity arose when project staff successfully negotiated with his uncle. Recognising his talent project officials enrolled him on a music course at the Children's Academy, Kurigram. Mehdi soon became aware of different styles of music such as patriotic, traditional and folk and he was able to play some music instruments.



***“LRC bhai convinced my uncle to send me to the music classes. I was serious about learning music as I wanted to become a singer”,***

Mehdi explained.

Now he performs on many special occasions like Pohela Boishak (Bengal New Year), 21st February (International Mother Language Day), and the Independence Day Programme. People love to hear him sing as his words are sung from the heart. Over the past few years, Mehdi has received awards in district and divisional competitions..

***“I used to think that the son of a poor family should only work. Education and music were only for children of rich families. Mehdi has proved me wrong. I would like to thank the project officers for their continuous support”,*** Mehdi's uncle Masum expressed .



Mehdi was also able to return to school after project workers convinced his uncle of the importance of an education. He is now a student in High School and is able to visit the LRC three times a week. With his free time Mehdi enjoys nothing more than teaching music to younger children at the centre.

***“LRC Apa and Bhai are very caring, they have taught us how to take care of others. We should take care of all our young brothers and sisters”, Mehdi added***

Mehdi, Kurigram Municipality

## Rina Dreams to be a Nurse



Rina is from Harijon Palli (lower caste society). This minority community once earned a living cleaning excreta buckets from households, public toilets and maintaining the drainage system. As they were considered “untouchables” they had no access to shops or other public places. Their lives were miserable. Over the years their situation has improved although nowadays, besides working as town sweepers, they sometimes undertake odd jobs.

Rina’s family borrowed Tk. 20,000 (around \$260) for dowry (a tradition where money is paid to the groom or his family as a condition of the marriage) when her sister got married. The family struggled to repay the loan. Rina began to work as a domestic helper to help the family. For eight hours a day young Rina would clean dishes, wash clothes, wipe floors and help in the kitchen for Tk. 300 (under \$4) per month. She hardly had time for rest or holidays.

**“Life was hard without any hope for change. I was also unhappy due to my father’s violence when he was drunk”,** Rina recalls.



Two of her good friends told her about the newly established LRC. After visiting the centre and speaking to the Facilitators she became interested to join. Here she could read books, play with other children and learn how to play music - all free of charge. The CMC president and Facilitators spoke to Rina's parents and they were convinced to let Rina attend LRC and school after work. One of the local social workers and known freedom fighters took the responsibility to bear Rina's educational expenses. He has been financially supporting her education with a monthly stipend of Tk. 200 (around \$2.5) ever since.

In addition, Rina learned stitching and embroidery work following a referral for training at Bureau Bangladesh, a local NGO. She can now study and earn from home by making dresses and stitching bed sheets at her convenience. She still makes Tk. 100 (less than \$1.5) per month washing clothes for a nearby hostel but makes an extra Tk. 500 (around \$6.5) per month through her stitching work at home.

One of the community members helped Rina's mother get a construction site job. Project workers also helped her father give up alcohol which freed the family from violence. He now pulls vans on a regular basis alongside her brother. With the additional income three quarters of the family loan has already been paid back.

Rina is now studying in High School though she still visits the LRC when she has time; ***“I enjoy doing puzzles and playing games with friends at the centre. I am now studying in a good school and one day I'd like to graduate as a nurse. I think I can do it as my days of uncertainty are fading away”***, said Rina – her eyes shining with pride and hope during her interview.

Rina, Harijon Palli



## INTERVENTION Children's Forum

### A Platform for the Voice of Working Children



The Children's Forum is a platform for LRC children to be heard. In each centre eleven children are selected who possess leadership qualities and feel comfortable speaking about issues working children face. Within this forum the children elect their own executive body whose job is to take the concerns of the centre children to the Centre Management Committee (CMC). Where there are issues relating to child protection.

Children's Forums play an important role in identifying and sharing the experiences of working children including their joys and sorrows. Through these interactions they are kept informed and updated about their rights at work and the wages they receive. They are also given guidance about better work and learning opportunities so they can plan for their future.

The Children's Forum members also help mentoring junior children who need help to develop their new skills. They also assist the LRC staff in organising awareness programmes for the children and their families on issues such as health, social entitlements and financial support.

Forum members are good role models for other working children who need help to develop their new towards others and inspire working children. They encourage good behaviour.

This is recognised and appreciated in the community. They encourage good behaviour towards others and inspire working children to avoid smoking, physical violence and the use of drugs.





INSPIRATION

**Pre-Primary School Built for Working Children**

**Children Learn New Skills at Theatre for Development**

**Child Forum Advocates for Working Children**

## Pre-Primary School Built for Working Children



Jibon, Mongol, Bimol, Shorif, Rana and Komol are members of a Children's Forum in Kurigram Municipality. Due to the lack of educational facilities for young children in their neighbourhood this Forum set out to build a pre-primary school which would benefit the whole community. They shared their ideas with others and created a volunteer group with the support of the Central Management Committee (CMC). Together they found suitable premises for the new school.

In 2013 a new pre-primary school in Kurigram Municipality was opened. The Mayor of Kurigram attended to give his support. **"We thought of doing something worthwhile for the younger children in the community"**, said Jibon, a working child and one of the initiators. The school has the capacity to accommodate fifty children by rotation. Many are from families who have never been to school and these children are provided with extra attention and time to learn. The community has found the school a blessing for their children. Some parents even collect study materials and have come forward to offer their time and labour support.

Many of the friends who helped to establish the school now collect books from senior students who no longer need them. From time to time the Ward Councilor also visits the school to encourage the young learners and organisers or to help raise funds.



***“I was really surprised to hear about this pre-primary school ran by young working children. I believe this new school will encourage parents to send their children to school rather than work”,*** said the Ward Councilor.

In 2012 seventeen children who attended the new school went on to study at the local BRAC primary school to complete their upper classes. Thirty three went on to study at a local government primary school. Gradually, the initial volunteer group learned how to manage student attendance and the school accounts. The Children’s Forum fulfilled their dream of a nicer world with better opportunities for their younger brothers and sisters.

# INSPIRATION

## Children Learn New Skills at Theatre for Development

Sumi, Suman, Parven, Sabina and Polash are members of the Children's Forum in Khulna. In 2010 they attended the *Training of Trainers* course on Theatre for Development (TFD) organised by Rupantar. Here the children had the opportunity to discover different ways of expressing their thoughts and emotions. During the five day training the Forum members learned drama skills and how to compose simple songs using musical instruments. They also had the chance to write dialogues and communicate with audiences the issues they face in daily life. The learners were then given the opportunity to attend regular refresher courses to further strengthen their skills.

Since attending the training these working children have been taking part in formal programmes. Often they perform in their own community too. At Khulna Shisu Academy they have been telling the stories of "*Meena Cartoons*" and their skills won appreciation during World Theatre Day in 2011. The Director of Radio Bangladesh Khulna attended their programme as one of the guests on World Theatre Day in 2012. Finding their talents promising, he invited the children to perform on the popular Khulna Radio programme '*Kollo!*'. The children were delighted to hear the broadcasts in June and August 2012.

The children also performed a story titled "*Our Dreams*", a drama about the lives of working children and their aspirations. This stage show touched the heart of many employers. The team was invited to the Information Fair organised by Transparency International and World Vision in 2012. They also acted in a play about improving the school environment for working children at a local government school in January 2013. These performances are held to make local people aware of the situation of working children in general.



Many schools in Bangladesh are not able to offer subjects like music, art and painting due to a lack of facilities or skilled teachers. Often children have no opportunity to nurture these talents. However, through Tfd the actors need no special facilities and the preparation is almost cost free. The performers can use their skills and immediately enjoy the reaction of the audience. Even the most marginalised children can express themselves and have fun; **“Tfd helped the children build self confidence and the courage to speak”**, the Centre Facilitator shared.



**“No one cared about us earlier. People called us ‘kaajer meye’ or ‘chele’ (working girl or boy). Now as performers we are valued in the community, even by our employers”**, said Parven gleaming, a working child and Children’s Forum member of her local LRC.

## Child Forum Advocates for Working Children



The working children of Lalbagh, Dhaka mainly work in small industries producing household items – such as plastic containers, buckets, imitation ornaments, food and glass wear. These are dangerous working environments for young children who work amidst toxic fumes or in high temperatures without safety measures. The Child Forum of Lalbagh, Dhaka responded to a number of incidents on delayed payment of wages and non-payment of medical bills following workplace injuries. With the support of the Centre Management Committee (CMC) and Child Protection Committee (CPC) this CF has been able to resolve problems with the employers. They also monitor the implementation of better working conditions for children under the Codes of Conduct (CoCs) signed by Employers' Associations.

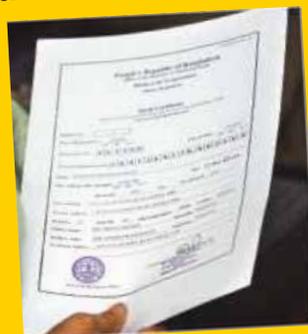
Child worker Jony lost his wrist whilst working in a Lalbagh ball-bearing making factory in December 2012. Following his accident Jony was asked to leave his job and his employer refused to pay his wages and the medical expenses related to that. A member of the Lalbagh CF with the help of the CMC and CPC approached the employer to recover the money owed to Jony. After much persuasion the employer agreed to pay and he promised to take young Jony back at the factory once he has recovered. **“The Child Forum members came to the CMC and CPC committees to ask for support to help Jony. It was their effort against misconduct, we were just with them”**, said Mr. Abu Taleb, the President of the CMC Committee.

Omit, aged 10, had a road accident and broke his leg on the way from his workplace to his local Learning and Recreation Center in Lalbagh. His mother sold her mobile phone to pay for the cost of treatment but the money she received from the employer was not enough. Members of the CF called an emergency meeting with the CPC and CMC and raised Tk. 10,000 (\$129) within 24 hours to provide assistance to Omit. Omit gradually recovered and went back to normal life. **“I can face similar problems, but now I know that I shall be supported by our Child Forum Members. I feel much safer now”**, Sakib another working child of Lalbagh expressed.



This CF has also helped members of the wider community. In December 2012 there was fire in a local Lalbagh slum. Members of the CF helped the victims, particularly children, who were in need of clean drinking water, clothing and basic cooking utensils. Further, this CF organized a human chain to raise awareness about the negative impact of eve teasing/sexual harassment to girls. They also involved community leaders and administration for support. After some action and awareness programs, this type of harassment has now decreased in the area and girls now feel comfortable in the community and at school; ....**“local girls were really upset and now with the help of everyone, we have stopped this nuisance. Girls in the area don’t feel afraid anymore”**, Bithi, a CF member said.

Members of the Forum also took positive steps to educate local people about their rights and entitlements of the working children. They have recently provided information to the community on available services such as Birth Registration and Government Immunization programmes. As a result, in 2013 this CF helped approximately 5,600 children to obtain their Birth Certificates in Lalbagh area.





## INTERVENTION

## Centre Management Committees

### A Platform for Community Participation



The Learning and Recreation Centres (LRCs) are primarily managed by Centre Management Committees (CMCs) made up of local community members. In each LRC up to eleven committee members are chosen from the community. The CMC members are comprised of social workers as well as physicians, lawyers, teachers and child rights activists ensuring a gender balance.

The CMC volunteers give their time and energy for the benefit of working children. The Committee guides the overall functioning of each LRC. They sit regularly with staff as well as the children and their families to inform and update them on LRC activities. They also meet with local employers to speak on behalf of the working children. The CMC also builds strong relationships with the community by discussing new initiatives and encouraging active participation at the centres.

The CMC is also responsible for working alongside other service providers to make education, health care services and social benefits available to disadvantaged children and their families. They also organise community awareness programmes on various issues related to the lives of working children.





INSPIRATION

**CMC Sets Example of Good Management**

**CMC Cooperates with Local Government and NGOs**

**CMC Helps Children Return to School**

**CMC Brings Positive Changes to Local Community**

# INSPIRATION

## CMC Sets Example of Good Management



**“The project not only provided a place for learning and recreation, but also offered working children a place for themselves”,** said Mr. Taleb about the reasons for joining the management committee of his local LRC.

Mr. Abu Taleb a businessman from Lalbagh, Dhaka city had always been involved with volunteering for people in need. He became involved with the LRC in 2010 after he became aware of the important work the project had planned for this community. He initially joined as a member of the CMC; **“...the purpose of the project and staff dedication convinced me to join the CMC”, Mr. Taleb recalls. Later he was elected Secretary of that CMC.**

Children of the LRC in Lalbagh are from poor families who are often deprived of basic rights including access to education, health care, and shelter. These children often work along narrow lanes in informal factories producing ornaments, candy and plastic household items. Under the leadership of Mr. Abu Taleb, this CMC set a good example of LRC management. Volunteer members meet once a month to discuss operational issues as well as other concerns that affect the children of the centre. They also review the progress of earlier activities and make plans for new initiatives; **“Our involvement with the CMC has given us the opportunity to develop a well functioning centre. We now understand the problems of working children and try our best to make their lives easier”,** shared one member.

Mr. Abu Taleb alone arranged a hundred sets of educational materials and donated Tk. 5,000 (\$64) for the LRC activities in 2012. They were also able to provide food during special occasions like Eid, Durga Puja and Independence Day. **“Everyone involved with the CMC is making a contribution and this effort makes a big difference to our children. Their effort is like little drops that will make an ocean soon”,** said the mother of one of the working children of the centre.

## INSPIRATION

### CMC Cooperates with Local Government and NGOs

Mr. Afzal Hossain Khokon, a farmer and well known social worker is the General Secretary of the Management Committee at an LRC in Koira Upzila. He is part of a team of eleven CMC members responsible for the smooth functioning of the centre.

Due to Mr. Afzal's connections this Committee has been able to cooperate with local government departments; NGO's and other service providers. These links have enabled the LRC children and their families to benefit from various social services under the local government programme. Led by Mr. Afzal his committee set up a yearly fund of Tk. 10,000 (around \$129) which was created for the urgent financial needs of the children including school or examination fees as well as buying medicine. Further, the CMC arranged donations to buy two manual sewing machines for the skills development training of the girls at the centre. The twenty young girls who participated gained confidence and have already earned money through tailoring. The Committee also arranged for a wall clock and the installation of a water tap for safe drinking water. **"Due to the great leadership of Mr. Afzal, many good things are happening at this LRC"**, shared one of the project staff.

This CMC also tells parents about the value of education and the need for good parenting. They ensure that parents are informed of their children's progress and attendance levels at the LRC. The project has also been personally rewarding for Mr. Afzal who shared his feelings with us; **"I feel good that I am doing something worthwhile for the community even if it is only a small contribution. The project has helped all its members to make a difference"**.



# INSPIRATION

## CMC Helps Children Return to School



The CMC at Kurigram town is committed to sending its centre children back to school. **“We had to make several visits to parents and employers to send children to the LRC and back to school”**, said Mr. Rawshan Ali Bepari, President of a CMC in Kurigram town.

Mr. Bepari was selected as the President of the Committee due to his positive image and leadership role in the community. Because of his good connections with local government and other organisations he is well known by the people of Kurigram town. He is also the General Secretary for a local trade body and is recognised for his voluntary work. Mr. Bepari and other CMC members were concerned that the centre children belonged to poor families who could not afford to send their children to school. Instead many of these children were working in small businesses like rickshaw repair and welding workshops.

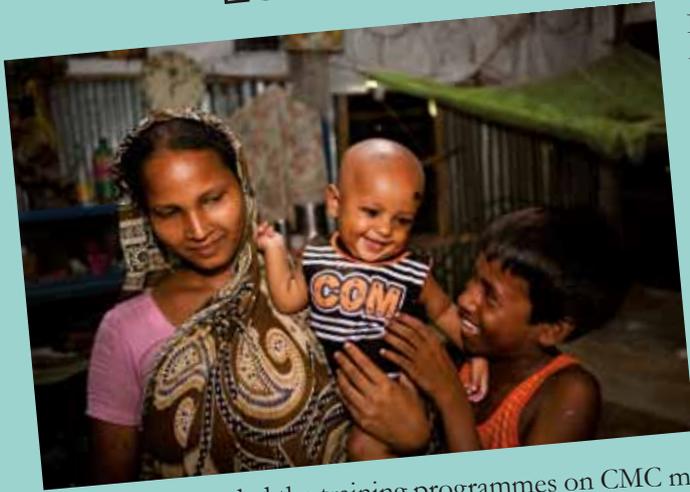


Soon after the establishment of the LRC, Committee members bought essential materials, like floor mats and educational materials so the centre could quickly organise activities for the children. They did not even wait for the project supplies to arrive as this CMC collected used text books, jute mats, water jugs and glasses and other essentials themselves. Usually, schools face difficulties re-enrolling children who have dropped out at an earlier stage. This Committee addressed the problem by convincing parents and employers to send these working children to the LRC and school; **“We made parents keen about their children’s education. Employers also learned that providing children with some leisure time increases their productivity”**, Mr. Rawsan Ali shared.

This CMC also held several meetings with local school authorities to get students enrolled through special consideration. They also negotiated extra learning support for children who were struggling. Eventually, they supported fifty-one children to be readmitted in school in 2011 and 2012. The Committee also helped twelve unemployed parents to find work in local shops. This meant that the centre children now had time to go to school and no longer had the burden of earning an income.

The CMC members attended a two day management training in 2010 and training on child protection in 2011. They now have a better understanding of child labour, child rights and child protection issues. Their effective management is maintained by holding regular meetings where members routinely discuss operational issues, distribute responsibilities and monitor the progress that is being made.

## CMC Brings Positive Changes to Local Community



A large number of people living in Kurigram Municipality are day labourers and children are widely used in the production of bidi rolls (locally produced cigarettes). Ms. Tajneen Ali Bony, nicknamed 'Bony', was born into a family from this Municipality. Popular for her caring personality she has been teaching in a local School for several years. She was contacted by NSA project staff to join the CMC in 2010; **"As I deal with children every day I was interested to join the LRC Management Committee when project staff approached me"**, she recalls.

Ms. Bony attended the training programmes on CMC management and child protection that were organised by the project. Through the CMC, Ms. Bony and her fellow members are now committed to making the community people, especially young girls, aware of child protection issues. She also takes a leading role in connecting social service providers to working children and their parents where they are entitled to social benefits.

In her free time Ms. Bony also visits parents and employers to encourage them to send disadvantaged children to the LRC to enhance their mental and physical development. **"There was a time when we preferred sending children to work rather than school. Our thinking has changed due to the counselling of the Central Management Committee"**, said the mother of an LRC child.

Ms. Bony took the lead in challenging employers who were reluctant to pay children their wages on time. The CMC arranged meetings with those employers and helped at least twenty children to receive the money they were owed. **"I must acknowledge the cooperation of my Committee members, especially the relentless support of Tota Bhai (brother), the CMC President and Ward Councilor"**, she expressed.

Ms. Bony herself is very integrated within her local LRC. Project staff members are comfortable sharing the centre issues with her; **"Apa is a very friendly and caring person. She helps us to run the LRC and advises us how to deal with issues professionally"**, shared a grateful project staff member.

## INTERVENTION

## Child Protection Committees

## Project Members who Protect the Wellbeing of Children



The Child Protection Committee (CPC) is one of the most important bodies of the NSA project. These teams are responsible for dealing with protection issues related to the safety and security of the children in the community. Each CPC is made up of professionals including school teachers, police service personnel, social welfare officials, physicians, social workers and media representatives. Members of the Children's Forums are also attached to these bodies.

The CPC is made up of nine to eleven people and is headed by the local government representative in each location. Their main role is to assess the safety and security of the children in their respective communities. They are also responsible for creating environments for children that are safe and free from violence. This Committee also works towards preventing violence, abuse and the exploitation of children through trafficking or unlawful and hazardous work.

The CPC coordinates action for victims of child abuse or exploitation and function as important platforms for local advocacy initiatives and campaigns. The Committee also works closely with other grass roots institutions like the Child Rights Network and School Management Committees. In addition, the Protection Committees contributes in strengthening community based initiatives for child rights promotion and protection.



INSPIRATION



**UP Chairman Safeguards Child Protection**

**CPC Ensures Better Working Conditions**

**Ward Councilor puts Child Protection First**

INSPIRATION

## UP Chairman Safeguards Child Protection

Mr. Samor Kanti Halder is the UP Chairman of Deluti Union of Paikgacha Upazila in Khulna District. He was made President of the Child Protection Committee (CPC) since the inception of the project in this location. His position in local government meant that he was an ideal candidate for the presidency as he is officially responsible for ensuring the wellbeing of the people in his locality. Children's issues became his priority issue after joining the Committee.



Under Mr. Halder's guidance, the CPC found a suitable site to set up a local Learning and Recreation Centre. This was not an easy task as much of the land is low lying and used for shrimp cultivation. After completing a survey they set up an LRC in the most deprived neighbourhood of Deluti Union.

Early marriage is a severe problem in this remote area where literacy is poor and few girls are able to go to school. Parents tend to marry off their daughters when they are still young to limit the economic burden on them as well as minimising the dowry amount (a traditional practice where a lump sum payment is given to the bridegroom or his family upon marriage). This CPC launched an awareness campaign about the problems associated with early marriage such as the increased risk of health problems for young mothers and their babies. In addition they also regularly discuss other social issues linked to the lives of the children such as the prevention and protection of girls from violence and abuse.

Due to their dedication and hard work this Committee helped to prevent more than thirty child marriages in the community over the past two years. ***“Mr. Halder talked with the local police station about the issue of early marriage. His initiative substantially reduced the number of incidences in the area”***, said a local villager.

Like other areas of Bangladesh, harassment towards girls is common in Paikgacha Upazila. Girls are often afraid to go out due to the pestering and inappropriate behaviour of many local boys and men. In 2011 Mr. Halder motivated the community to stand up against eve teasing, harassment and other forms of violence towards women and children. Under his guidance this Committee motivated parents to deter their sons from this type of conduct.

As Union Chairman, Mr. Halder warned them that legal action could be taken. ***“The community as a whole is now aware and active in preventing abuse against children, particularly girls. Eve teasing is sexual harassment to girls and needs to be stopped. With the help of this Committee this behaviour is gradually disappearing”***, said a teacher of the local girls' school.



## INSPIRATION

### CPC Ensures Better Working Conditions



Many children living in the Notun Bazar area of Khulna City work in shops and fish depots that belong to the KDA market. Before the intervention of the project these working children were not always paid the wages they had earned. Often families suffered who were dependent on this small wage as critical income. At the time, many of these working children were also not allowed to take breaks during long working hours and were punished for tiny mistakes.

Mr. Khurshid Alam Kagochi was aware of this bad practice among some employers and decided to challenge the exploitation of working children through the CPC forum. From an influential family in Khulna City he is well known for his social work and philanthropic contributions. Mr. Alam agreed to be associated with the CPC soon after its formation. Immediately the Committee, under his leadership, sought dialogue with local employers and their Associations to address the welfare issues of working children. The CPC successfully obtained the wages due to seven children in 2011. Since their involvement they have also ensured that no LRC child in the area has been beaten by their employers. Amazingly this CPC was also able to help increase the weekly salary of young workers from Tk. 100 (just over \$1) to Tk. 200 (\$2.5) in 2011.



Child Protection Committee meetings are held every alternate month with extra meetings called in urgent cases where there are reports of violence or non-payment of wages. Mr. Alam feels that the CPC is a good platform for collective action in favour of the working children in the community; **“In the past we were only able to help people on an individual basis. Now the Child Protection Committee has been established we have a forum to help children collectively”**, said Mr. Alam about his involvement in the project. By dealing amicably with both employers and employees in the Notun Bazar area this CPC has been able to gradually change the attitudes of many local employers. They now have the motivation to treat their young workers better.

Mr. Alam, along with other CPC members, regularly keep in contact with working children and their families. His presence gives strength and confidence to those in the community as he is now an advocate and positive role model for working children.

## Ward Councilor puts Child Protection First

Ward Councilor Mr. Haji Altaf Hossain is a member of the local government who has been consecutively elected for three terms in past seventeen years. He is a popular and influential person in the Lalbagh area of Dhaka city and his family has a long history of philanthropic activities. Mr. Hossain is involved in more than twenty businesses and social organisations such as the committees of schools, vocational training centres, religious institutions as well as sports and community clubs. Because of his respected position in the community, it was no surprise that he would lead the CPC of his local LRC in Lalbagh soon after the inception of the project.

Despite his busy schedule Mr. Hossain tries to attend regular meetings, workshops and training in relation to child protection issues. **“My involvement with the CPC has enhanced my understanding and knowledge about working children and child protection”**, said Mr. Hossain during his interview. Over time he has become an experienced advocate for disadvantaged and working children. He frequently speaks with Employers’ Associations to lobby for the right and timely payment of children’s wages and other entitlements. Mr. Hossain has also motivated employers to provide weekly holidays and leisure time of an hour during each working day. In some cases employers have been willing to provide assistance with the payment of medical treatment. So far this CPC has helped more than fifty children receive their full salaries and money for medical fees. Led by Mr. Hossain this Committee also takes the time to sit with parents, employers, teachers, religious leaders and others to discuss the importance of child protection from hazardous forms of labour and violence. Together they have collectively mitigated the suffering of many working children in the community.



In addition to the regular CPC work Mr. Hossain has also made a visible change in the mindset of the local residents. There are approximately one thousand Hrishi Para (lower cast groups) people in this area of Lalbagh. Traditionally cobblers by trade this minority group is often neglected by the wider community. Hrishi Para children are also socially excluded and in the past only a few had access to local schools and other public places. Most of these children work in small leather footwear factories as soon as they are old enough to work. Drug abuse is rampant and the CPC recognised this as a serious child protection issue. Considering their vulnerability, Mr. Hossain along with the CPC members, visited the Hrishi Para area. They had discussions with the local people about how to integrate the children with the mainstream. In 2012, a Community Declaration was developed with the aim of sending Hrishi Para children back to school. By promoting education and school attendance, these children are now more protected from drugs and other forms of abuse. **“Hossain Bhai is great. He has turned the area into a child-friendly community”**, said a local businessman involved with this LRC.





## INTERVENTION

### Code of Conduct for Employers' Associations

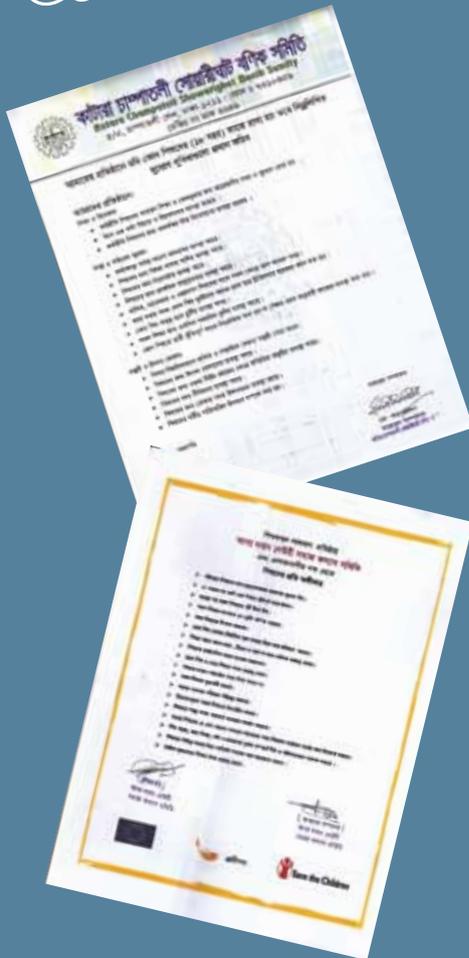
#### How Employers are Working Together to Improve Child Working Conditions

One of the core interventions of the project is to initiate dialogues and motivate Employers' Associations (EAs) to act in favour of the children they employ. Employers are encouraged to set a standard of good practice in their work environments providing basic rights and entitlements for their working children including::

- **minimum wages**
- **health care support**
- **holidays and leisure time**
- **improved overall working conditions (including access to first aid facilities, ventilated working environments and safe drinking water).**

To facilitate the process some standard guidelines have been created by the NSA project in the form of a Code of Conduct (CoC). This CoC is intended for employers who engage children under the age of eighteen in work. The guidelines are particularly important for employers in the informal sector where responsibilities and obligations are not imposed by legal frameworks.

By agreeing to and signing the CoC employers promise to provide fairer working conditions for the children who work for them.



সকলের শিশু অঙ্গাঙ্গী শিশুর অভিনয়, গানের সুবন্ধ ও পরিচালনা করা অসম্ভব, আমাদের এবং সবকয়ের দায়িত্ব  
কুড়িয়াম চাউল বাজার ব্যবসায়ী মালিক সমিতি, কুড়িয়াম।  
বাংলাদেশ গয়েঞ্জিং মালিক সমিতি, কুড়িয়াম।  
বাংলাদেশ মোটর সাইকেল মেকানিক ও ওয়ার্কশপ মালিক সমিতি কুড়িয়াম।

### আমাদের প্রতিষ্ঠানে :

#### শিক্ষা ও বিনোদন :



- শিশুদের সাধারণ শিক্ষা ও কারিগরি শিক্ষার জন্য প্রয়োজনীয় সময় ও সুযোগ দেয়া হয়।
- শিশুদের জন্য গ্রাহিসিম এক ঘণ্টা বিশ্রাম ও বিনোদনের জন্য সুযোগ দেয়া হয়।

#### স্বাস্থ্য ও পরিবেশ সুরক্ষা :



- প্রতিটি কারখানায় প্রাথমিক চিকিৎসার জন্য প্রয়োজনীয় সরঞ্জাম হিসেবে স্যান্ডল, গুট, ব্যাগেজ ও কুলা হাথা আছে।
- কর্মক্ষেত্রে পড়ার আসো লাভসের ব্যবস্থা আছে।
- শিশুদের জন্য নিত্যকাল হাবার পানির ব্যবস্থা আছে।
- শিশুদের জন্য পাঠবানার ব্যবস্থা আছে।
- মাসিক ও কারিগরগণ শিশু কর্মীদের সাথে সকল ক্ষেত্রে ভাল আচরণ করেন।
- শিশুদের ০৮ ঘণ্টার বেশী কাজ করানো হয় না।
- শিশুদের জন্য প্রাথমিক চিকিৎসার ব্যবস্থা আছে।
- কাজ করার সময় কোন শিশু দুর্ঘটনার আহত হলে তার সকল চিকিৎসার ব্যয়ভার বহন করা হয়।
- কোন শিশু অসুস্থ হলে ছুটি ও চিকিৎসার ব্যবস্থা করা হয়।
- আমাদের প্রতিষ্ঠানে শিশু কর্মীদের সকল কর্মী তখনকারে সার্বাহিক ছুটি ভোগ্য করে।
- অন্যান্য ছুটি সমিতির শিশুদের অনুসারে ভোগ্য করে থাকে।
- যদি বহরের কম বয়সের কোন শিশুকে বৃষ্টিপূর্ণ কাজে নিয়োজিত করা হয় না।
- শিশুদের ঘারা ভারী ওজনসের বস্তা বহন করা হয় না।
- শিশুদের ঘারা কাজাইয়ের কাজ করানো হয় না।
- শিশুদের ঘারা অতিরিক্ত ভারী বস্তু বহন করা হয় না।
- শিশুদের ঘারা ভারী কাজ বহন করা হয় না।
- যেদের অস্বীকার হয়েছে সকলে মেনে চলি।

#### মজুরী ও জরাজ ব্যবস্থাপনা :

- নিয়মিত ভাবে মাসিক বেতন/মজুরি প্রদান করা হয়।
- বাস্তবিক উৎসব বোনাসের ব্যবস্থা আছে।
- সকল শিশুর জন্য টিফিনের ব্যবস্থা আছে।

শ্রীমতী সত্য  
শ্রীমতী সত্য  
শ্রীমতী সত্য





INSPIRATION



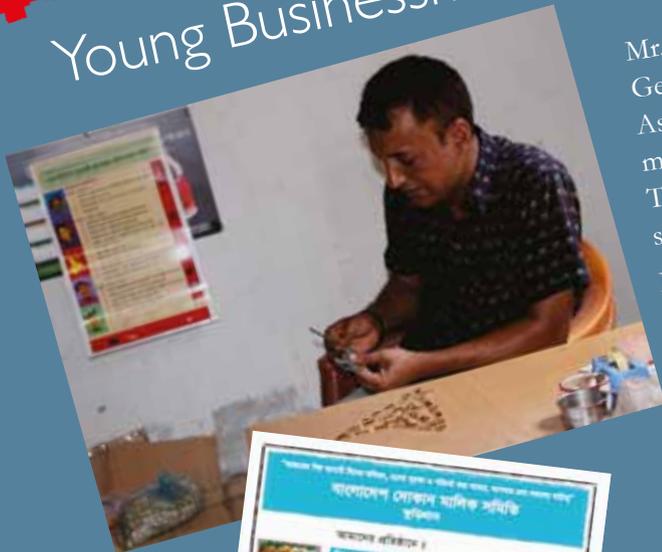
**Young Businessman Takes Up Code of Conduct**

**Employer's Association Receives Recognition**

**Plastic Association Protects Wellbeing of Children**

# INSPIRATION

## Young Businessman Takes Up Code of Conduct



Mr. Nurul Alam Dipu, a young businessman became the General Secretary of KDA Market Shop Owner's Association in 2006. He owns several shops in the KDA market situated in the Notun Bazar area of Khulna city. The Association is comprised of five hundred and fifty shop owners.

In Notun Bazar, children of poor families are often employed in the fish trade. A June 2010 survey found that in the KDA market alone, three hundred and fifty children were working in fish depots and shops. Some forms of work bring high risks for young children who can start their working life from the age of just five or six.

When the project commenced in Khulna, Mr. Dipu was invited to local orientation meetings. He realised that in his position he could play a significant role in improving the working conditions of young children. At that time employers at the KDA Market paid each child worker Tk. 100 (just over \$1) a week. Through persistent negotiation with the Employers Association Mr. Dipu and NSA project workers managed to set a minimum wage of Tk. 200 (around \$2.5) per week for every child worker. This was a major leap forward for the young market workers.





The verbal and physical abuse of child workers at the market place was also common. Mr. Dipu, the CPC and CMC mediated between employer and child employee in over twenty reported cases. He issued warnings to employers not to punish or harm children. The CMC and CPC continue to hold monthly meetings to discuss problems, solutions and actions in response to incidents of children's rights violations by employers.

Mr. Dipu and his Association have also introduced a weekly holiday for working children and one hour of rest per day. A Code of Conduct was formulated through discussion with employers, children, parents, CMC and CPC members. The CPC later issued a Directive to display a copy of the CoC in every shop belonging to the Association. Now all employers adhere to the guidelines strictly. **“Mr. Nurul Alam Dipu has been supporting the working children at their work place. He meets employers and children regularly and promotes the Code of Conduct. If children make any complaint against their employer, Mr. Dipu calls for a meeting and solves the problem in favour of the child”,** a Centre Facilitator said.

## INSPIRATION

### Employers' Association Receives Recognition



Approximately two hundred children work in tailoring shops that are open for business in Kurigram town. Children employed here are engaged in heavy work carrying cloth bundles for long, undefined hours. Many work without rest breaks and are sometimes expected to work without pay as part of their training. **“Most of the employers were not concerned about these children or their development. They only thought of making them work as much and as long as they could”**, recalls Mr. Haque about the conduct of employers before the introduction of the NSA project.

Mr. Sheikh Md. Fazlul Haque has been a tailor by profession for more than thirty years. He was elected as the General Secretary of Kurigram Tailoring Shop Owners Association in 2010. Mr. Haque became interested in the importance of rights and entitlements for working children and State policy. He started talking to fellow shop owners and members of the Employers' Association to persuade them to introduce a Code of Conduct. It was hoped that this would be beneficial for employers as well as the children they employ. After several discussions a suitable CoC was developed for the tailoring sector children. It took one year to reach consensus on all guidelines.



## INSPIRATION

# Plastic Association Protects Wellbeing of Children



**“Children working in factories is a regular sight. In the past we were not bothered about the conditions under which they worked. Seeing working children perform in cultural shows impressed me and I then became interested in their lives”,** shared Mr. Haji Selim about the reasons he decided to become a voice for working children.

Mr. Selim is well-known in the business community of Lalbagh, a densely populated part of Old Dhaka where thousands of room-based industries produce low-cost household items. He is the Organising Secretary of the Bangladesh Plastic Business Association with over two hundred members engaged in the plastics business. Children are traditionally an integral part of this sector as they are the main source of low-cost labour. Man and machine run until midnight in these industries.

Mr. Selim decided to make changes to improve the practical working conditions of children in his sector. The working environment and basic facilities such as drinking water, toilets and ventilation were often not in place before the project started. There were no first-aid boxes available to deal with any accidents, injuries or illnesses during the working hours. This was concern as in some sections of the plastic industry children are exposed to naked flames and other hazards, including burns and injuries.



After the formation of the CPC, Mr. Selim held meetings with local people and working children; **“Now I talk with children and their employers. I ask about the health and wellbeing of the children and how they are getting on at the workplace. I can see the changes...”**, Mr. Selim shared. A Code of Conduct for Employers of the Plastic Association was developed and now regular visits are made to factories to see the improvement in the workplace facilities. The CMC and CPC also hold meetings with the employers to remind them of their roles and responsibilities towards working children.

Recently, in this locality, employers also introduced festival bonuses and payment for extra working hours. Further, an annual picnic has become a must for the Association members and the children who work for them. **“We have become more sensitive towards working children. We are trying our best to make their lives better”**, said a Committee member.



# CHAPTER-6

## INTERVENTION

### Local Bodies and Service Linkages

#### **Helping Working Children and Poor Families Access Government Benefits and Social Support**



Bangladesh is divided into seven administrative divisions: Barisal, Chittagong, Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi, Rangpur and Sylhet. Divisions are subdivided into districts (*zilas*) and districts are sub-divided into sub-districts (*upazilas*). Sub-districts are further divided into “unions” in rural areas and “wards” in metropolitan areas. At the divisional and district level, government officials are in charge of administration, whilst elected officials run sub-district and “union” level governance.

One of the major roles of the NSA project was to establish linkages between local government services and the poor and disadvantaged. Some well known benefits include the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) programme (monthly food rations for poor households) and birth registration entitlements. This project ensures that representatives of local bodies work with the NSA project to assist working children and their families to access benefits they are entitled to. Government support often relieves the financial burden on working children who need to work to earn a living.





INSPIRATION



**Children Protected from Hazardous Work**

**Ward Councilor Becomes Guardian of Working Children**

**Community Leader is a Voice for Working Children**

INSPIRATION

## Children Protected from Hazardous Work

Members of poor families pull rickshaws to earn a daily wage in the deprived region of Kurigram Municipality. In fact the majority of rickshaw pullers here are children in a town where employment opportunities are few. Due to high levels of poverty many boys often start the job before their legs can reach the rickshaw foot pedals. This work is physically draining for young children who routinely work in hot and humid conditions. Road accidents frequently occur and these young workers face hospitalization and the possibility of permanent injuries or scars.

The Mayor of Kurigram Municipality, Mr. Nurul Islam Nuru, became involved with the NSA project after attending seminars and cultural programmes organised by the Centre Management Committees. Working alongside the Bar Association, Press Club and civil society a policy was introduced to prevent children under the age of eighteen from pulling rickshaws or owning a trade licence. The aim was to prevent young boys from doing this hazardous form of work. It was not easy to convince local people of the benefits of the rule change as many were financially less well off. Eventually, through good will, young boys were motivated to give up this dangerous work. Instead these children are being assisted to attend school or if necessary to find safer forms of work in the community.





Local bodies, on request of the Mayor, have also strengthened the birth registration system and made it free of cost for working children. Once registered, these children then have access to government health and education benefits for the first time.

In addition, the Mayor has given working children open access to his office so that they can drop in to share and discuss their issues. He is willing to provide a suitable place on the Kurigram Municipality campus for working children; ***“A permanent room will be allocated for the working children in the building to be constructed soon within the premise of the town office”***, Mr. Nuru promised.

## INSPIRATION

### Ward Councilor Becomes Guardian of Working Children



Mr. Md. Humayun is an influential politician and Councilor in Lalbagh, Dhaka. His active involvement with the NSA project began when suitable premises for the local LRC had to be found. As a Ward Councilor, Mr. Humayun was successful in convincing local leaders to allocate a room of the Commissioners' building and the neighborhood community centre free of charge. Under the tenancy rules each tenant is required to produce a local guarantor. Mr. Md. Humayun himself came forward as a personal guarantor for the children of LRC, an act which demonstrates his dedication and commitment to the working children of Lalbagh.

The LRC frequently holds events and programmes which require the use of larger spaces which can be costly. The Community Centre near the Nababgonj Park is owned and rented out by the City Corporation. They usually charge Tk. 6,000 (approximately \$77) per day for organised programmes. On numerous occasions Mr. Md. Humayun has arranged for the venues to be provided entirely free of cost for the children. Bigger community programmes like awareness campaigns and rallies were organised at the Nobabgonj Park under the City Corporation.



In addition to the provision of rent free premises Mr. Md. Humayun has made personal financial contributions of Tk. 10,000 (around \$130) during Child Rights Week in September 2012. His donations were used to distribute seasonal fruits to the working children who cannot afford to buy and enjoy the taste of the seasonal fruits and deprived of the basic level of nutrition. **“Humayun Bhai is really supportive. Without his cooperation it would have been hard to achieve what we have reached today. We consider and respect him as the guardian of the children of this ward”**, the Project Co-ordinator expressed.

INSPIRATION

## Community Leader is a Voice for Working Children



Mr. G.M. Mofizul Islam, a young community leader of Betkashi Union in Khulna became a voice for poor children in need when he became an active CPC member in 2010. An elected member of local government, Mr. Islam was impressed with the sincerity of the project objectives and decided to dedicate his time for the sake of working children.

Betskashi is a remote area in terms of communication and employment opportunities. Here, parents have very little knowledge about the purpose of birth registration or the benefits linked to it. Mr. Islam took the lead in activating the Birth Registration system in the locality. The CPC, CMC and local government worked together to arrange announcements informing and motivating the community about the importance of birth registration. Further, the local authority introduced budgetary allocations for child development. This fund supports talented students to continue their studies and can pay towards expenses such as examination fees. Mr. Islam himself supported thirty parents of working children to get employment under the Food for Work programme of the local government. He also assisted twenty families to get access to the VGF programme support giving families free food rations. All these measures are provided under the government social safety net programmes.

After the devastating cyclone Aila in 2009, incidents of child trafficking increased in the Khulna district. Lured by promises of a good job or marriage, in good faith, many parents handed over their children. These children were often abducted and taken to the Indian Barashat district or on to other locations in India or the Middle East. Mr. Islam and the CPC successfully rescued a child in August 2012 with support of the local administration. Mr. Islam also attended training on Disaster Risk Reduction conducted by the NSA project in 2011. During the Mahasen tornado threat in May 2013 the project Management Committee worked with the community to turn the local school into a cyclone shelter. With the help of local leaders and the nearby mosque, people were alerted and were assisted to prepare for the potential disaster and its effects.





## CHAPTER-7

### INTERVENTION

# NSAs were Responsible for Promoting Rights and Entitlements in Favour of Working Children and their Families

The term Non-State Actor (NSA) is widely used in the development sector as it refers to a range of non-governmental organisations. In local context NSAs are formed of many types of groups including community-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, trade unions/employers' associations, youth clubs, local media etc.

All the NSAs involved in this project deal with children's issues, particularly those related to working children and their overall protection at national, local and community level. The NSAs we work with include forums, local institutions and clubs. This project aimed to build up the capacity of these forums and bodies so that they can make a greater difference to the community they serve.

Associated NSAs were also responsible for promoting the rights and entitlements of poor families and their children. They provided assistance to local bodies to prepare child development plans and empower communities so that the disadvantaged can receive their services. The NSA involvement also helped to ensure the accountability of local bodies to the communities they serve. One of the prime objectives of the project was to have the commitment of the NSA through a Community Declaration.







INSPIRATION

**NSA Introduces Positive Changes for Working Children**

**Poor Families are the Focus of Paikgacha NSA**

INSPIRATION

## NSA Introduces Positive Changes for Working Children



Mr. Masudur Rahman was a Ward Councilor in Kurigram Pourashova (municipality) for eight years and remains a key member of Kusakri, a local cultural youth organisation. Due to his community connections his help was invaluable in introducing the project and its objectives to the people of Kurigram. In addition to talking to children about their working conditions he was able to engage local families in different forums and motivate parents in relation to education, sanitation and health issues. Mr. Rahman and the youth organisation were also able to discuss the benefits of sending children to the LRC to learn basic reading, writing and numeracy and encouraged parents to join the CMC and be part of their activities.

This NSA was also able to persuade local government to include some of the most vulnerable families in their social safety net programmes. As a result over seventy families obtained Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) cards. Under this programme some of the families of the project's LRC children now receive 20kg of free rice three times a year.

Kurigram Pourashova is one of the northern towns of Bangladesh where winters are severe, especially for the disadvantaged who are unable to buy warm winter clothes. Between 2010 and 2012 Mr. Rahman and the youth organisation successfully lobbied at the Mayor's office for the allocation of warm clothes and blankets for over forty working children and their families.

In 2011, there were a number of serious road accidents outside a primary school in the area. To ensure the safety of children coming to the LRC Mr. Rahman spoke to the local police station to ask them to deploy additional personnel in the locality. This means that children are now safer than ever.

In the past Mr. Rahman thought that the scarcity of resources was the main challenge for development. Nowadays he believes that positive changes are possible even with limited resources. ***“This project has been an eye opener for me. I have learned how we can better use existing resources to help people in need”***, he said.



## INSPIRATION

# Poor Families are the Focus of Paikgacha NSA



Mr. Nripen Mojumdar lives in Deluti Union, Paikgacha Upazila and is a tailor by profession. He became involved with the project in June 2010 hoping to support working children and their families in the community.

Mr. Mojumdar, along with the CMC and CPC advocated for Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) cards for poor children and their families. Under this initiative VGF card-holders receive basic food items such as milk, sugar and flour free of cost during the Muslim Eid festivals and the Hindu Durga Puja. This team were able to manage VGF cards for the families of all one hundred and eighteen working children at the LRC in Deluti union. This became one of the project's biggest achievements to date.

Mr. Mojumdar also takes the initiative to discuss relevant social problems with community members. So far they have held programmes to tackle the local issues of dowry, eve teasing, child abuse, child marriage and adolescent drug problems. He plays a very active role in motivating and spreading awareness about various issues affecting children and their lives. He is particularly passionate about education. These periodic campaigns were useful as poor families in this remote area have no other place to learn about these issues without access to modern facilities like television and radio. Mr. Mojumdar often provides financial support and encourages other NSAs to make contributions when organising these events.

With his initiative eighteen families were helped to access support under the SHIREE project of Save the Children. These families received vehicles, boats and money to set up small businesses. Some were helped to set up local grocery shops as alternative means of generating income. Mr. Mojumdar also played a vital role in establishing links with the Community Health Clinics to provide treatment to working children and their families. Now the LRC children and their families in Paikgacha Upazila receive primary healthcare services free of cost.

## INTERVENTION



### Working together with Government Institutions to Protect, Include and Provide Opportunities for Working Children

One of the project objectives was to work with government agencies and institutions to make positive changes in the lives of working children and their families. In particular the project worked with Post Offices, Bangladesh Shishu Academy (BSA) offices and also with Police Stations in all project locations.

To meet this outcome effective links were initially made with the government Post Offices. For the first time working children have been given access to local savings programmes which helped them invest for the future.

Bangladesh Shishu Academy is a government institution that provides all facilities to nurture and develop the talents of children. Over the last three years the LRC children have been able to benefit from enrolment on various Bangladesh Shishu Academy training courses in painting, music as well as other performing arts. These children have been able to develop their skills and participate in competitions and programmes at local and national level. Some have even won awards, prizes and certificates. For the majority of these working children they have never had access to these facilities before.

Lalbagh Police Station along with others also became positively engaged with working children issues. In the past Police Stations did not pay much attention on the issues of street and working children - were always seen as problematic by law enforcement bodies. With the support of local officials of this project, Lalbagh Police Station made some qualitative changes in favour of working children. These steps go a long way towards acknowledging the rights and entitlements of children.

Collectively these governmental institutions have made positive contributions to the lives of working and disadvantaged children in project locations across Bangladesh.





INSPIRATION



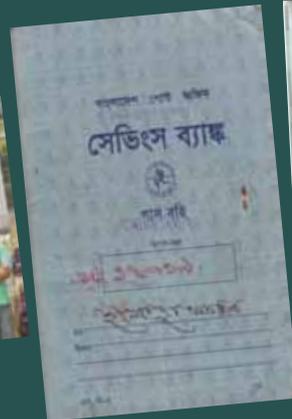
**Kurigram Post Office Gives Rights to Working Children**

**Lalbagh Police Station Protects Vulnerable Children**

**Bangladesh Shishu Academy Welcomes Working Children**

# INSPIRATION

## Kurigram Post Office Gives Rights to Working Children



The Post Office is one of the most trusted and respected institutions of the governmental system in Bangladesh. One of the popular services of the post office is the Savings Account offered to adults and parents who can open and run accounts on behalf of their children. Until recently there was no provision to allow unaccompanied children to access this facility. Project staff visited the officials of the local Post Office to discuss the possibility of extending the Savings Scheme to all working children.

In May 2011 the Savings Scheme rules were made flexible. Now any child with a Birth Registration Certificate and four photographs can open an account with an initial deposit of Tk. 100 (around \$1). For the first time all LRC children now have the opportunity to open an account in their name and earn interest on their hard earned money. In the past two years seventy six LRC children have opened accounts at the Head Post office in Kurigram Municipality. This is an unbelievable success as often working children have no excess income after their daily expenses are met. Where children have earned a little extra they are now able to save a portion of this money for emergencies or to make plans for their future.



To open an account the LRC children can go to the Post Office along with the centre staff, an elder brother or sister or a Child Forum member. This support gives them the confidence to deal with the application process. In time they are able to independently operate their own account. Further, since working children do not have much free time during the day this Post Office provides these children with a speedy service: **“We do not have to wait more than 10 minutes to deposit or withdraw money”**, a young account holder proudly told us.

Nowadays the Post Office with the help of the project Committees and the Child Forum organises community awareness programmes about saving money. In the past the Post Offices of remote districts like Kurigram did not know about ‘World Savings Day’ on October 31st. It is now a special day for both LRC children and the Kurigram Post Office; **“These awareness activities have dramatically increased the number of savings accounts in our post office”**, said a long term postal worker at Kurigram Central post office.



INSPIRATION

Lalbagh  
Police Station  
Protects  
Vulnerable  
Children

The NSA project has been working at Lalbagh Police Station (Thana) since April 2010 to establish child rights in the community. In the past Police Stations were rarely concerned about children's issues and often little attention was paid to cases where children had been exploited, were victims or had their rights violated.

The Police Station of Lalbagh Thana is located in the heart of hundreds of informal factories which employ thousands of working children. In this area children's rights and entitlements are regularly violated not only by the employers but by community members and sometimes by their own parents. The project aimed to provide awareness on child rights and legal processes amongst the caregivers and local authorities such as the police.



Child Protection Committee members talked to Thana officials at Lalbagh Police Station to make them aware of their responsibilities as far as child protection issues are concerned. After a period of negotiation the Thana Officer (OC) along with fellow staff were motivated to sign a Code of Conduct in favour of the children. This was particularly important in cases involving child protection issues. The Code promises child friendly behaviour by the police personnel who are now committed to safeguarding children from abuse and exploitation in the area.

After signing the declaration police officials are now motivated to help young offenders by abiding the rules and legal procedures. Here, police officers are committed to referring these children to local rehabilitation centres with the support of the Probation Officer of the Department of Social Services. In these centres, Child Case Management procedures are followed and the children receive required legal support.

Lalbagh Police Station officials now diligently observe the rules and regulations and are keen to mitigate the suffering of children where there is a conflict with the law. They no longer arrest children using hand-cuffs or detain children with adults in the same prison cell. The Officer in Charge of Lalbagh Police Station expressed his gratitude to the project personnel for taking up this initiative with them.

INSPIRATION

## Bangladesh Shishu Academy Welcomes Working Children



Bangladesh Shishu Academy (BSA) was established in 1976 to give children support with their physical, mental and cultural development. It is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs of the Government of Bangladesh. The mission of the Academy is to help children to nurture their talents and skills in the areas of music, dancing, drawing, recitation etc.

The BSA is a popular and busy place which is enjoyed by many children and there is competition for enrolment. However, the tuition fees were high and many less well off children missed out on the opportunity to attend. In 2010 NSA project officials made several visits to the senior officials and Director of BSA to learn more about the existing programs and also to discuss about the opportunities of enrolling the children of the less privileged families. They focused on finding avenues to accommodate working and disadvantaged children in their regular programmes.

Initially BSA officers had reservations about mixing wealthy and underprivileged children together in the same group/class which could cause tension amongst parents. Finally a bold decision was taken in favour of working children thereby ensuring equal opportunities for all. The BSA was committed to providing special support so that disadvantaged children felt included and proud of their membership at the Academy. In the past two years, seventy working children were admitted to the Head Quarter branch of the BSA for music, dance, painting and recitation classes. The Academy also reduced the admission fee from Tk. 500 (around \$6.5) to Tk. 100 (just over \$1) per child and it was made free for working children.



Many children have enjoyed great success at BSA, taking part in Child Rights Week, Independence Day and Victory Day celebrations. **“The working children of the NSA project are doing really well. They have won awards in painting, dance and music. We recognise their talents and believe they will do well in the future”**, the BSA Programme Officer Ms. Arjuman Banu praised.

Recently the Academy decided to send their trainers directly to the Learning Recreation Centres so that children could save time and money. **“We thought it would be better to offer courses to children in their own environment. We are sending our teachers to the LRC so that children are able to spend more time learning and can save on transport costs”**, the Director said. Even more working children can now enjoy learning new artistic skills and different forms of expression.



## CHAPTER-9

# INTERVENTION

## Media and Working Children

### Creating Awareness About the Issues Relating to Working Children and Their Lives. How the Media Ensures Positive Changes for Children and Their Families

The media plays a significant role in people's lives. By reporting on current issues through news items, investigative stories or special reports the media can be a unique in reaching mass communities. If used effectively the media is a useful tool to bring about social change for all including vulnerable or neglected groups of people in the community.

Advocacy through media was one of the core elements of the NSA project. From the outset local and national media supported the NSA programme to create awareness about issues related to working children and their lives. With their support the project has been able to make the necessary connections to bring about positive changes for disadvantaged children and their families.







INSPIRATION

**Media Lobbies for Working Children**

**Press Club Highlights the Issues of Working Children**

**A Child Sensitive Journalist**

# INSPIRATION

সুন্দরবন বার্তা

## Media Lobbies for Working Children



Mr. Mostafa Kamal Jahangir is the Editor of *Weekly Sundarban Barta* (a popular newspaper circulated in the south of Bangladesh) and President of the Paikgacha Press Club. He is an experienced journalist and has written more than a hundred articles on children's issues. In May 2010 Mr. Kamal became President of the Network Forum, an organisation made up of local professionals who are committed to creating a platform for local children in Paikgacha.

To encourage journalists he introduced an award for the best news article reporting on children's issues; **“Mostafa Bhai encourages members of the Press Club to highlight the problems and success stories of local children particularly working children”**, said Mr. Md. Abdul Aziz, a journalist and Vice-President of the Paikgacha Press Club. Mr. Kamal attended the National Seminar on Child Labour and joined a study tour in Kurigram in 2012. **“The tour helped me to get a better understanding of the problems of children in the north of Bangladesh. I also learned about the initiatives taken for working children in Kurigram”**, he said.





Mr. Kamal learned about the ban on child rickshaw pullers in Kurigram. He discussed this with members of the Network Forum and Press Club in Paikgacha and sought to set up similar initiatives. With the backing of the local Upazilla Mayor, children are now prohibited from the harmful work of pulling vans in Paikgacha.

Through the media Mr. Kamal and his Network Forum were also successful in obtaining budget allocation for child development in Paikgacha town. They also lobbied for land and funds to create a park for local children. ***“We have learned from Kurigram that a legitimate demand is reachable. We hope to have a park for the children in Paikgacha very soon”***, he said. Already significant budget allocation has been made by the local government to construct the park.

## INSPIRATION

# Press Club Highlights the Issues of Working Children

**“Although I always used to write about working children my involvement with the Save the Children project has enhanced my understanding of the issue”,** Mr. Ahsan Habib Nilu commented. Mr. Nilu is the District Correspondent for Bangladesh Television (BTV) and is involved with Jugantor, a national newspaper and a lead person of Kurigram Press Club. The Press Club is comprised of national and local print, television and online media representatives.

Through the NSA project Mr. Nilu and the Press Club opened its doors to the working children of Kurigram. These children now have an opportunity to discuss their issues and concerns with journalists. In turn members of the club try to help working children by addressing their concerns in the media. This awareness has now brought about change in people’s attitudes particularly towards the marginalised children of Harijon Palli.





Mr. Nilu and other journalists often meet with parents and community people to educate them about child development issues and the benefits of giving children access to education. Occasionally they are also able to meet with local administrative and other government officials to increase awareness on children's issues and to provide beneficial services.

The press club also provides professional training to the young journalists of Kurigram to develop their skills. Members guide working children in writing evidence-based articles and features related to their lives. Ten such young reporters are now working for the online news agency BDNews.com. Further, all twenty members of the Press Club are committed to raising awareness about abuse, torture and violence against children and women. Last year, Mr. Nilu and members of the press club conducted interviews with working children that were published in several national newspapers. Soon after, nineteen of the children received financial support from different institutions which helped them to continue their education.

Mr. Nilu believes that the NSA project has tremendously improved the lives of working children in the area. Through Bangladesh Television the Press Club telecasted a series of programmes about Kurigram's working children in April 2013. The people of Bangladesh were able to learn more about the daily lives of poor working children. In addition, the Press Club developed a Community Declaration which is displayed on their premises. This demonstrates their commitment to the children.

# INSPIRATION

## A Child Sensitive Journalist



**"I am always ready to come and report on any issue that affects the Lalbagh children, just give me a call",** said Mr. Abu Saleh Rony, a reporter at Daily Samakal, a popular national daily. From his childhood Mr. Rony wanted to do something for underprivileged children and he is now a regular contributor on child-related issues. Throughout his career he has learned about the laws and policies related to child rights which have helped him to write quality reports with substance.

He became familiar with the NSA project after attending two media workshops organised by the project's partner organisation Prodiapon. These workshops gave media professionals an opportunity to talk more about the situation of working children and better understand the nature of their work in Lalbagh. Mr. Saleh Rony found that thousands of poor children are engaged in low-cost production work. He wanted to do something to create awareness about the extent of child labour in this area and to give a voice to the local working children.



Mr. Rony started investigating the stories of working children and his reports were telecasted through ATN news (a lead TV channel in Bangladesh). His programmes and reports made him a well known person in the Lalbagh area. He became a voice for children and is now a trusted person among employers due to his positive and friendly behaviour with them. Now Mr. Rony has better access to both employers and working children. He regularly visits the workplaces of child workers and can ask questions about their wellbeing. He stated: **“This project has opened the door to a soft but sensitive issue that needs to be told in an appropriate manner. I am happy to be involved with working children. I am trying to do my part and hope that my contribution will bring some positive changes in the lives of those children and their families.”**



Working Children in Bangladesh  
**INSPIRING STORIES FROM THE FIELD**



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