

Feature

Education

Sponsorship Programme Touches Lives of Thousands of Children

by Nikesh Chandra Das

This feature story is about the sponsorship program of World Vision Bangladesh. The story focuses on the impact of the program taking case studies from Maniknagar slum which lies in the north eastern part of Dhaka.



Ali Islam is a student of Class VIII of Maniknagar slum.



Runa Akter of Maniknagar slum is a student of Class VI.

job on to making paper bags for grocery shops. From this job she now earns about Tk 1,000 (US\$12.5) a month.

Ali Islam (14), a student of class VIII lives at Maniknagar with his widowed mother Alekjan Begum (35). When Ali was only one year old his father died. His father's death pushed the family to migrate to Dhaka city from Faridpur which is some 105 km south-west from Dhaka. From then on, Alekjan Begum works as a house-maid. With her meagre income of about Tk. 1,000 (US\$25) they live in a 7x6 sq feet shack. For the

shack, where there is no electricity and running water, they pay Tk. 425 (US\$10.62) a month as rent. As they had no latrine or bathroom facility in this shack they try to avail these facilities wherever possible — sometimes in the place she works or in open space outside her shack.

These are only two typical examples of the slum family and children of Dhaka city. In both the cases the mothers do not have any academic education. As a result they have even no chance to try to have a job to help themselves in their survival race. Learning from

their own life and experiences these mothers are eager to provide education for their children. Sufia Akter the mother of Runa says, "If I had known the value of education earlier, my present days might have been different. I like to get my daughter educated, which is the only positive means for a dignified survival." But most of the women like Sufia cannot do that due to poverty.

This story of Runa and Ali Islam are similar to those of thousands of Bangladeshi children who live under continuous threat of poverty, ill health

and malnutrition. Keeping this grim situation in mind World Vision of Bangladesh, an international development organization, introduced child sponsorship program in rural areas and urban slums. The sponsorship program of World Vision provides full educational costs of the poverty-stricken children.

Runa Akter has been receiving the sponsorship assistance from class I and Ali Islam from class III. There was every possibility of their education being stopped if they did not get this assistance. But they were lucky enough to avail of the sponsorship assistance of World Vision which not only provides educational assistance but also ensures medical and income generating assistance which are important components of its integrated approach to family development. World Vision is currently assisting over 1,50,000 children of whom 65,000 are directly sponsored to get education in the country.

Sufia Akter, the mother of Runa, says, "It is because of World Vision's care and concern I nourish the hope to impart education to my daughter." In fact sponsorship assistance means a lot to most of the poor sponsored families including Runa and Ali Islam because every moment they are struggling hard only to survive, let alone the education.

Maniknagar Family Development Project has been providing educational assistance to 600 needy, poor slum children including Runa and Ali Islam. Throughout the country World Vision has over 228 projects which have been undertaking development efforts emphasizing health, income generation and family planning with main focus on education.

goes on at this pace. England took 30 years to make education compulsory.

Although, the leaders of the country sound high about making education for all by 2000 a success, they are also in a doubt about it. Former President H M Ershad announced compulsory primary education from 1990 as a step towards education for all. But he had told the meeting of the National Education Advisory Council in 1990 that it would need to work five times to make education for all a success within the next ten years.

On the other hand, the present Prime Minister Begum

Khaleda Zia claims four per cent increase of literacy rate during her three years of rule. But at the same time, she has sent a letter to her ministers saying that it is difficult to implement the primary education programme. One cannot expect a proper implementation of the programme alone by the Mass Education and Primary Education departments. There can not be any alternatives to a social movement to make it a success. According to statistics, the number of eligible school-going children would stand at two crores.

To meet their demand, it would need to increase social investment on primary education by 15 per cent. At present, the spending in this sector is Taka 1360.42 crores. This stands for half of the total amount for education. Other than this, 2,800 new schools will have to be built each year and 14,250 new teachers will have to be recruited. All these figures today appear to be too Herculean to be met so quickly, especially when there is only seven years left.

The free primary education started in Bangladesh in 1812. But still there are 7.40 crores people uneducated in the country. Every day 5,000 new entries are made to this uneducated class. In the last 30 years, the literacy rate increased by only 7.8 per cent. In the last 10 years, the pace was at 5 per cent.

To steer education out of this alarming situation, the first thing to be done is to keep education policy clear of politicisation. So that the education programmes do not trip every time there is a change in government.

Emphasis has to be laid on poverty elimination and health related programmes. The rich section of the society has to be convinced about the need for child education. Because, a large section of disadvantaged children work in the rich people's houses or offices. If given chance, these children can become educated.

At the same time, efforts have to be given in making people feel the need for educating the girls.

— Development Feature

A creative educational programme has been initiated by Gono Shahajia Sangstha (GSS), a national developmental NGO. To break the boredom of attending school, the school has undertaken activities which generate immense interest among the students. The school has given different names to three tables. For example: Creative table, Bangla table and Math table. At the creative table the students draw pictures from their imagination, then they write a story based on the pictures. In GSS schools, to determine meritorious students the scores are given on evaluation instead of exams. Thus the students are freed from fear of exams. — Photo: Rafiqur Rahman/Development Features

The currently undertaken primary education programme has addressed these problems and the policy has also been reformed accordingly. Different sub-committees have also been formed to combat the obstacles to education. The government has set some

key persons and organisations which can play significant role in expediting social mobilisation has also been identified. They include people's representatives, social welfare, women and health department, NGOs, Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs etc. Village leaders.

should receive education. They say, "we have enrolled them in school through hard struggle so that they may enjoy a happier life and may not have to earn their living through manual labour like us". This interest shown by Sujon and Sukhi's parents proves that even destitutes are aware of the importance of education.

Following the example of Sujon and Sukhi, other children of the neighbourhood — have all got enrolled in school.

Despite endless problems, guardians are becoming aware about the need of educating their children and children are also feeling enthusiastic about going to school.

— Development Feature

UJON and Sukhi are brother and sister. Sukhi, a six year old and Sujon, five year old are both studying in a school. Last January the two were enrolled in Charkoloni Government Primary School in Barguna, in the deep south coastal region of the country.

Their parents are both working. The father works in the field and the mother works as an attendant in different households. With their hard-earned, meagre income life has been an exhausting struggle all through. For them to enrol their two children in school was a dream that might never come true. Both of them no doubt keenly felt that their children

A School With a Difference

by Raffat Binte Rashid

WHEN a mother goes to work, her prime concern is who will look after her children? This is a major problem, faced by almost all the working women of Bangladesh, irrespective of whether she is an employee in a bank, an institution or whether she is a house maid.

To solve their problems day care centres are a good enough way out and many mothers are relieved to know that their children are safe and well taken care of until they return. But of course such facility excludes the working women living in the slums.

It has happened in many areas that a slum mother comes back home, after work only to find her eight-year-old daughter raped or two-year-old son dead, after he fell into the sewerage hole.

These incidents are quite frequent in any slum; sad, unfortunate but these do happen. As an initiative approach Shishu Rakha Samity Day Care Centre was established 42 years ago in 1952 by Raisa Haroon, then a social worker.

This centre simultaneously is a school called Raisa Memorial School. It is situated in Narinda Monir Hossain Lane. "Our area is literally *tokal free*," explains Professor Salma Chowdhury, the present president of the school and also a teacher of Bangla in

among them five are graduates, three passed their intermediate level and eight passed their SSC level."

Funding of this special school, which is only for the 'tokals', are mostly done by the city's philanthropist and also by World Food Programme (WFP). "We never had to ask for money, there was also someone or the other to give us some and Dr Shafiq a Gynecologist is one of our regular donors, Chowdhury says with a grateful smile. "WFP gives us very pure oil, wheat and pulse and with all these we are some how managing to meet ends," she says.

"But it's not that we have no problems at all. One of our major threat is the building itself. We have a few unwanted tenants, who won't even give up the area and totally forget that we just gave them shelter not the entire house."

Talks are going on in the higher quarters to help us. But it takes a long time for anything good to happen. Lately, however we heard that government's Zilla Parishad is making bills to give, such places, which houses such schools and organization, the ownership of the place."

"This is definitely a delightful news and something workers like us are looking forward to. Especially for us this pro-



The students and the teachers.

Eden Girls College.

"All the street children more or less attend our school and at present we have approximately 100 plus students," she says. Besides regular school work they also give the students lesson on health, environment, sanitation and sometimes on moral ethics too.

On the other hand, the present Prime Minister Begum

declares quite satisfied with the schools progress.

"It is the teachers' duty as well the mothers' to make the children understand what is good and what is bad for them.

"Our teachers are all volunteers and work for free but only recently some sort of honorarium is given to them. We have a total of 16 teachers;

Educational TV comes to India

by Jagan Nath

THE growing popularity of television as a vehicle for educating people has reached India.

And hopes are high that there will be much use for this medium in a country where the literacy rate is very low. Statistics from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) show that as of 1990, India, the world's second most populous country, had an adult literacy rate of only 48 per cent. As defined by the UN agency, adults are people aged 15 and above.

For the same year, 1990, UNESCO estimated that India had 280,109,000 adult illiterates.

Cable Television (CATV), which is growing at an unusually fast pace, is spear-heading the campaign to use TV in education. It is being used to telecast informative, educational and developmental programmes throughout the country.

The whole concept of using CATV is very simple. The studio is makeshift and does not have the fancy, ultra-modern gadgetry of major TV stations. With a couple of neon tubes, an ordinary TV camera used for home movies, a video cassette recorder (VCR) and cable network, the station is in service.

India's experiment in the use of TV for education began in a small town — Modasa in Sabarkantha district of Gujarat state.

A video cassette library owner and cable network op-

makeshift studios on an audio channel via a normal public telephone system.

In Modasa, six select groups of students sitting at different receiving ends were provided with telephone talkback facilities.

The 'teacher at your doorstep' system was received enthusiastically not only by students but also housewives who regularly watched the programmes on nutrition.

The housewives are also taught child care, first aid, and how to maintain family peace and social harmony.

The programme is expected to benefit educational institutions as well. From kindergarten to the post-graduate level, graded instruction and lectures may be arranged, according to the requirements of the learners. These may be recorded for easy reproduction and repetition.

With the encouraging results of the experiments so far, ISRO chief U R Rao has called for making education an integral part of television programmes. The programmes can also help promote family planning, art, culture and general hygiene of the people. The experience of China, Australia, New Zealand and Indonesia in similar activities can be useful, he said. Social workers and experts should be integrated in such experiments.

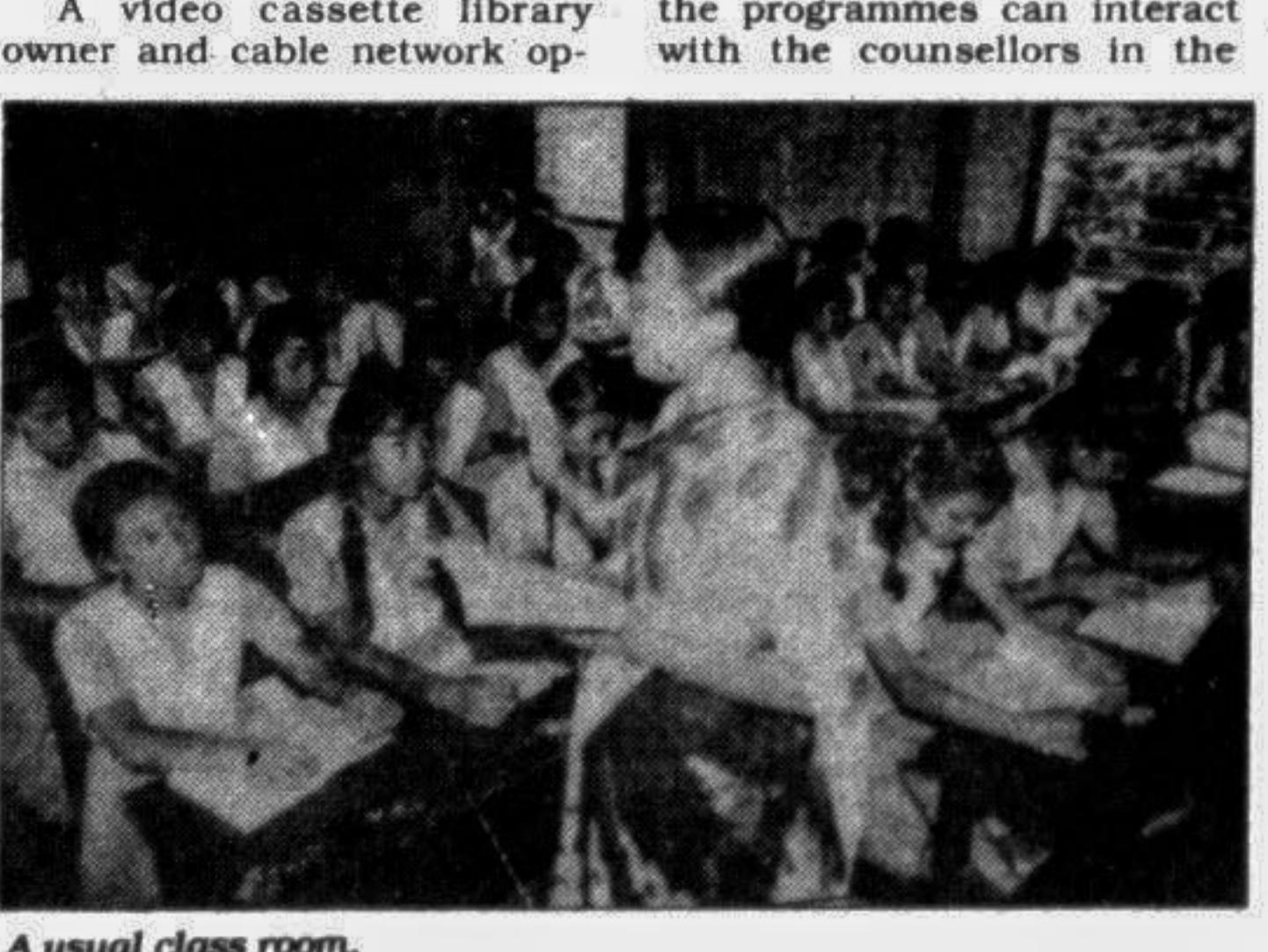
Mr Rao recently inaugurated a ten-day 'distant education through television' experiment at the IGNOU campus here.

He said: 'education has to be provided to every citizen to make strides in the fields of science, industrial development, farming, fisheries, environment, agriculture, hygiene and space technology.'

The university's vice-chancellor, V C Kulandai Swamy, emphasised the increasing need to adopt modern technology like satellite communication for education purposes. He said, 'While the use of technology might be an added facility for conventional education, it is an indispensable need in the case of distance education.'

Even Indian space scientists are monitoring closely the country's use of TV for education.

— Depthnews Asia



A usual class room.