

SOHAY

CHILDREN CONGREGATION THE NEXT STEP

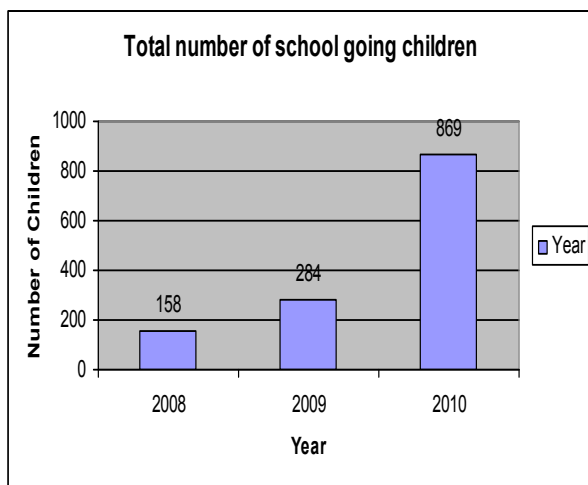
10th April 2010 was a special and big day for **869** slum dwelling children studying in the four Government Primary Schools in Uttar and Dhakkhin Khan unions. Many of them were just too excited to sleep! A mother says “My son was restless and too excited last night I have not seen him so happy even on festival day”. These children have waited a whole year for this day. It is a day of pride, respect, glory, and encouragement, as they are part of the programme, a chair is reserved, astonishing with honour. On the congregation day all slum children gathered in one place. The gathering builds confidence to these disadvantaged groups to move forward. They see light at the end of the tunnel and it is not far from them. They are part of society, and have exactly the same rights as others in this society.



Mr. Mizanur Rahman, ADC (education) Dhaka District is distributing uniforms to children studying in Government Primary Schools

SOHAY has been organizing the annual children congregations since 2005. It tries to make it inclusive, invites Government and local people, representatives and civil society members, it believes working together is crucial. This year Mr. Mizanur Rahman, ADC (Education) Dhaka District was the chief guest, Mr. Khalil Molla, Chairman Dhakkhin Khan Union Parishad, Ms. Alom Taj, Thana Education Officer were the special guests.

The acceptance and expansion of SOHAY’s education support programme in the slum communities is impressive and geometric. The statistics reverberate, 158 children in 2008 to 869 children in 2010. All children are studying in the Government Primary Schools. The eagerness and overwhelming response from parents and children living in the slums confirm SOHAY’s programme planning, delivery, methodology and strategy is effective, appropriate and conducive to bring slum children to the education arena, not to enrol them in the system but to provide the required support to ensure they continue schooling. Millennium Development 2 “Universal Primary Education for all” is attainable if we repeat and replicate SOHAY’s programme delivery strategy in other areas in the country and outside. It is vital to design the



programme in a way that provides adequate confidence to the community that the gaps will be fulfilled and system will heed the hiccups.

SOHAY choreographed the children's congregation in two stages; first stage was for the children to listen from the dignitaries and social leaders, the second stage was to watch the colourful cultural programme performed by their fellow friends.



This year the chief guest passed the message to the children that "The Government is working hard to launch several programmes to bring all school aged children to school". He highly praised SOHAY for organizing such beautiful children's congregation, he was greatly impressed. He encouraged other organizations to arrange such a programme to build children's confidence living in difficult environments.

Hazi Md. Khalil Molla, chairman of Dhakkhin Khan Union Parishad, said SOHAY is playing a vital role in education in his union and his office will provide all sorts of support. He would like to see 100 percent literacy rate in his union. The Thana Education Officer gave commitment to assist SOHAY's programme in its journey to achieve the MDG-2. The Thana Education Officer requested the present school headmasters and teachers to provide all sorts of assistance to SOHAY.

The SOHAY programme has caught the eyes of local elites. They have requested SOHAY to expand its programme to other slums in their areas to bring the disadvantaged children to mainstream primary education. SOHAY has received similar requests throughout the year from neighbouring school teachers and elites to start a similar education programme in their areas. They have seen SOHAY's education programme strategy bring real benefit to the disadvantaged children.



The uniform has enormous social impact. It brings equality among the children and eliminates the economic differences; it places them on the same podium where they are judged on effort and achievement, not on appearance or social background. The children feel they look very smart and can interact and form friendships with others. Some of them have already demonstrated it in school. After holding the uniforms in their hands they were so happy they could not express the feeling in words.

The Parents were also joyful, seeing their children so happy.

The uniform distribution programme opens other opportunities. SOHAY is such an organization that it does not let a single opportunity to be overlooked. Any opportunity to assist slum dwelling children to build their capacity, enhance confidence, self reliance and leadership is embraced. This year SOHAY used its supported class VI children as volunteers in the programme. For the first time these children managed such a large gathering, they were well behaved and well mannered throughout the ceremony. The senior staff of SOHAY provided the initial training to these children and explained their role in the programme day, what they could encounter and how to handle it, and also how to cope with the large crowds. The programme brought great opportunity in their life with regards to gaining practical experience. It helped them to demonstrate their capability. The guests were stunned seeing such a large number of small children with such discipline and order, it was the volunteers who deserved the credit.



After the happy ending of the programme they were so confident that they told SOHAY management that next year they will be able to manage a congregation of more children. SOHAY is predicting that next year the number of supported school going children will be in the region of 1,400, depending on donor support.

The second stage of the programme was the cultural programme where all performers were from the SOHAY working slums. SOHAY does not fix and focus on just one area. It tries to search for talent living in slums. Therefore the second stage of the programme was choreographed with these stars. It built the children's confidence to perform on stage in front of thousands of spectators. They recited poems, sang songs and danced. The spectators were speechless. It was such a beautiful cultural performance. Very few of us in Bangladesh actually realize the talents we live amongst.



It is about time we recognize them. They will blossom if they receive the appropriate opportunity to practice, and receive guidance and training. We pray Bangladesh does not mislay such talents in buds. The cultural community in Bangladesh is growing and they demand these talents, it would be hard for us to afford ignoring these talents.

CHALLENGES:

Providing the same uniforms to all children is the fundamental challenge, this year

SOHAY is providing 869 uniforms to the children. It is using funds from four different kinds of contributors, two institutional donors, personal contributions and SOHAY's own money. Though it has managed to provide similar uniforms to the children, it failed to provide same quality shoes to all of them. Due to the better funding from a donor it is providing quality shoes to a quarter of children. The rest received other quality shoes. This is really painful for the organization. The management staff therefore has decided that they will start writing to the donors so that it can ensure funding for all children similar quality uniforms for all before the next congregation.

The demand of SOHAY's education support programme is huge. It is continuously receiving requests from local elites and conscious citizens, to expand its programme to other areas to provide similar support to the slum children. Bangladesh is a highly populated country with a shocking literacy rate, SOHAY is fully aware it must expand its programme. SOHAY has the required capacity to repeat and replicate it to other areas. Unfortunately, it is the budget that is holding us back. However, SOHAY is fully aware soon the need, demand and capacity of delivery will control the expansion of its programme more than any other issues.

Gratitude:

SOHAY is extremely grateful to the Government of Bangladesh, donors, local communities and children parents. It would have been impossible to organize such a programme without the support it received.

SOHAY is really grateful to the Manusher Jonno Foundation – for its support to the SOHAY education programme activities. It would have been impossible for SOHAY to stand by the side of such a number of slum students without them.

SOHAY is really grateful to the international Non-Government Organization based in London have kindly agreed to contribute to the children uniforms and quality shoes.

SOHAY is grateful to Peter and Vidya Evans, Daniel Shimmin, Sarah White, Sarah Sanyahumbi and Zamila Sultana. It would have been difficult to arrange shoes for three quarter of the total children without their generous support.

SOHAY strongly believes it has completed the whole programme to the satisfaction of and with the blessing of Almighty ALLAH.

Allah bless SOHAY!!!

Zamila Sultana
Executive Director
SOHAY