



# Beyond the Streets

Improving the Lives of  
Street Children in Dhaka



## **Beyond the Streets**

Improving the Lives of Street Children in Dhaka

A Plan International Bangladesh Publication

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**BEYOND  
THE STREETS**  
JULY 2010 – JUNE 2013







## Acknowledgement

As we come to the end of the projects- “Street Children Development project” and “Helping Children Living and Working in the Streets of Dhaka”- I take this opportunity to recall a few things related to the project. As the only urban Programme Unit of Plan International Bangladesh we have always concentrated upon the most excluded and disadvantaged group of children in the urban set up, that is the street children.

In this publication, readers will come to know about many details of the projects, the challenges we faced and the achievements we made. In carrying out the project, we adopted a number of strategies to mainstream the street children. From community level to the policy makers, we tried to engage all the relevant stakeholders and tried to make them realise their responsibilities as duty-bearers towards this most excluded and vulnerable children.

I thank our implementing partner Population Services and Training Centre (PSTC) for their wonderful work. PSTC with the support of Dhaka Programme Unit managed to establish linkages, built capacities of different stakeholders, mobilized the community, re-integrated the children socially.

My sincere gratitude to Mingming Remata Evora, Country Director of Plan International Bangladesh. She has always extended her helping hands and guided us through the journey of the project. I also express my gratitude to Debashish Saha, Director, Field Operations, Plan International Bangladesh for his support as well as Soalihin Fatema, Deputy Programme Unit Manager, Dhaka PU, who being the Programme Coordinator of Protection of Vulnerable Children (POVC) Programme, was the focal point of the project.

Finally, I want to thank the children, who were the inspiration of everything we did. We want to build a future where children are safe and secured and where they can realise their full potential.

Thank you!

**Abdul Mannan**  
Programme Unit Manager  
Dhaka Programme Unit  
Plan International Bangladesh



## Foreword

As the Street Children Development projects draw to an end, let us take a moment to reflect upon all that we have been able to accomplish. This report recounts our activities, challenges, achievements and the lessons we have learnt during the implementation of this project. Through our partnership with PSTC, over 5,000 children have been enrolled in drop in centres throughout Dhaka city, thus providing them with a safe environment to play, learn and access basic services. Over 3,000 children were provided with literacy sessions and educational materials to facilitate learning and 584 children were enrolled in primary schools, thus giving them an opportunity to receive a formal education. Participating children also benefitted from access to vocational training opportunities and materials to enable self employment, thereby improving their future employment and income generation prospects. The project also helped children access health and legal services through linkages with government and non-governmental partner organisations.

We have helped develop the capacity of local staff, stakeholders and institutions as well as establishing valuable networks and linkages that have facilitated the entire sector. Furthermore, we have successfully mobilized local community resources towards helping street children overcome some of the major challenges in their lives. We have also worked closely with local communities to eliminate the stigma associated with street children and to create a collective sense of accountability and guardianship. These are just a few of the enduring legacies of this project.

These achievements would not have been possible without the support of our various stakeholders such as donors, local communities, partner organisations as well as the dedication of our staff members. We are particularly grateful to the children we serve for being a constant source of motivation and inspiration in our lives. Let us continue to work towards helping ensure that their rights are protected irrespective of political, economic or social context. Thank you for your role in helping us work towards this mission.

Mingming Remata - Evora  
Country Director  
Plan International Bangladesh





# Table of Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Introduction  | 07  |
| <b>Chapter 1</b>  | 17  |
| Enabling Access to Basic Services                                   | 19  |
| Activities  |     |
| Lives in Contrast: Bablu's Story: A Budding Entrepreneur            | 31  |
| <b>Chapter 2</b>  | 47  |
| Developing Local Stakeholder Capacity                               | 48  |
| Activities  | 50  |
| Lives In Contrast: Amina's Story: Aspiring For a Creative Future    | 65  |
| <b>Chapter 3</b>  | 77  |
| Enabling Access to Private and Public Services                      | 79  |
| Activities  | 79  |
| Lives In Contrast: Shirin's Story: Ability Triumphs Over Disability | 83  |
| <b>Chapter 4</b>  | 95  |
| Facilitating Reintegration with Family and Community                | 96  |
| Activities  | 96  |
| Lives in Contrast: Sunny's Story: Transcending Abuse                | 97  |
| <b>Chapter 5</b>  | 104 |
| Challenges & Achievements   | 106 |
| <b>Chapter 6</b>  | 111 |
| Lessons Learnt  | 113 |
| Looking Back and Looking Forward                                    | 122 |





## Introduction

Metropolitan cities in Bangladesh are growing at a rapid rate. Dire levels of poverty in many regions of Bangladesh as well as rampant unemployment, homelessness, frequent natural disasters, family conflicts, and a deteriorating law and order situation have led to extensive rural to urban migration as people try desperately to create better lives for themselves and their families. Upon starting their new life in the city, they encounter difficult challenges in this competitive and unfamiliar urban landscape.

Within the harsh realities of city life, the wellbeing of children is often sacrificed and leaves them vulnerable to abandonment and abuse. The Department of Social Services defines the term “street children” as “children below the age of 18 years who are living, working, sleeping and playing on the streets and are deprived of basic rights”. Street children are particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Even those who live with their families spend long periods of time unsupervised and are vulnerable to exploitative forces. Many of them are economically exploited and exposed to high levels of occupational risk, often working under hazardous conditions for low wages and bearing the burden of contributing to the family income from a very young age. They sacrifice their childhoods to provide for their families and due to high rates of unemployment and low income levels, many families depend on their children to ensure their survival.

# Introduction



Girls are particularly at risk of exploitation, becoming victims of sexual and emotional abuse or human trafficking for the sex trade. There is substantial profit for criminal networks in engaging children in commercial sex work, smuggling, stealing, and the distribution of drugs and weapons. There is almost no oversight and rampant corruption and poor law enforcement means that such criminals are never held accountable for their actions.

As a result of the hardship and abuse they encounter on the streets, many children suffer from trauma and psychosocial disorders. They become distrustful of society and social service providers, thus making it difficult to improve their circumstances.

Plan International is a child centred development organisation committed to the well being of children. Plan aims to create a safe environment for children where they are respected, protected, empowered and active participants in their own protection. Its mission is to improve the lives of deprived children in developing countries by enabling children, their families and communities to meet their basic needs and to increase their ability to participate in and benefit from society. It also seeks to build relationships to increase understanding and unity amongst people of different cultures and to promote the rights and interests of children worldwide.







Thus, The Street Children Development Project was implemented by Plan Bangladesh as part of its Protection of Vulnerable Children (POVC) Programme in partnership with the local NGO Population Services and Training Centre (PSTC) in order to aid this particularly underserved and at-risk demographic.

PSTC has been operating in Bangladesh since 1978, with a vision to improve health status, livelihood, and physical living conditions of the poor and socially disadvantaged by undertaking programmes and projects on health, population, environment, water and sanitation, women's empowerment, street children development, literacy, gender, human rights, combating child labour, water resources management etc. PSTC has been working with Plan Bangladesh since 2004 under the Street Children Development Project.

The project operates in the Dhaka Programme Unit, which is Plan's only urban Programme Unit in Bangladesh. It was established in 1995 in order to facilitate the most marginalised and disadvantaged children living on the street and slums of Dhaka city. The working area includes all 10 zones of Dhaka North and Dhaka South City Corporation.



**Objectives:**

The overall objective of the project is to create a protective environment for the children living on the streets of Dhaka City.

**Specific Objectives include:**

- To create access to basic services and facilities for the children, both boys and girls living/working on the streets providing Day Care and Night Shelter facilities.
- To develop capacity of street children, community members, local organisations (NGOs/GOs) and decision makers to carry out appropriate actions and programmes to respect and protect the rights of street children.
- To improve street children wellbeing through ensuring their access to private and public services including legal services
- To facilitate reintegration process through child protection mechanism, legal services and advocacy initiative that reduces the incidences of abuses.

The project specifically targets children between 8 and 18 years of age who are homeless, abandoned by their parents or physically, mentally and sexually exploited or victims of trafficking who live, sleep, play or work on the streets.





Street children are divided and prioritized into 4 different categories:

Category A: Children up to 18 years of age who work/live on the street day and night without their family.

Category B: Children up to 18 years of age who work/live on the street day and night with their family.

Category C: Children up to 18 years of age who work on the street and return to other family.

Category D: Children up to 18 years of age who work on the street and return to their family.

The project utilises Plan's Child Centred Community Development (CCCD) approach wherein children are utilised as powerful catalysts of change within the community who are empowered and aware of their rights and become responsible adults and advocates for the rights of others. Bangladesh is one of the pioneering countries to utilize this approach which is associated with promoting and advocating for participatory and rights based development. The project provides services on a self help basis through participatory planning, monitoring and implementation so that children feel a sense of ownership towards the success of the project and are empowered by it. The project activities have been designed to increase access of street children to various basic services like awareness raising, life-oriented education, health-care facilities, life skills training, legal counselling, growing savings habits, games and sports, recreation etc. Through organisational linkages and advocacy initiatives, the project seeks to mobilize local community resources towards helping street children realize their full potential.





# Chapter 1





## Enabling Access to Basic Services

### Activities

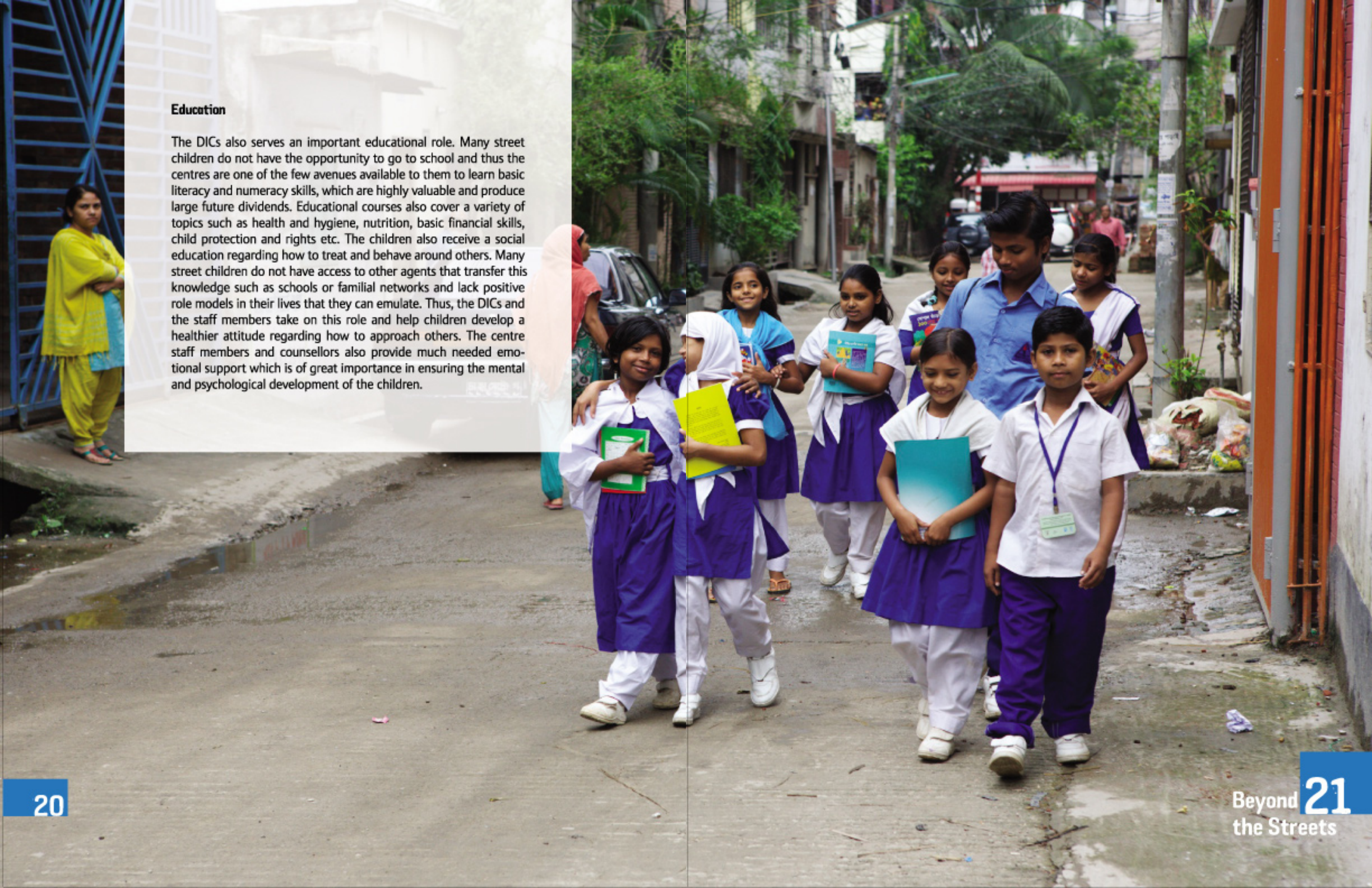
The project operates 13 drop in centres (DICs) around Dhaka city that provide children with access to basic services such as washing and bathing facilities, clean and safe accommodations, counselling services, cooking, storage and recreational facilities, saving mechanisms as well as night shelter services.

While access to basic services such as clean and safe accommodations and washing and bathing facilities is something that most of us take for granted, for many street children, it is the difference between being embraced by the community and being ostracized and left on the outskirts of society. Street children often suffer from low self esteem because of concerns regarding how they present themselves to others. Thus, being able to access these facilities helps the children participate in society as confident individuals. Furthermore, having access to better hygiene and sanitation reduces the occurrence of diarrheal and skin diseases which are a frequent affliction in street children.

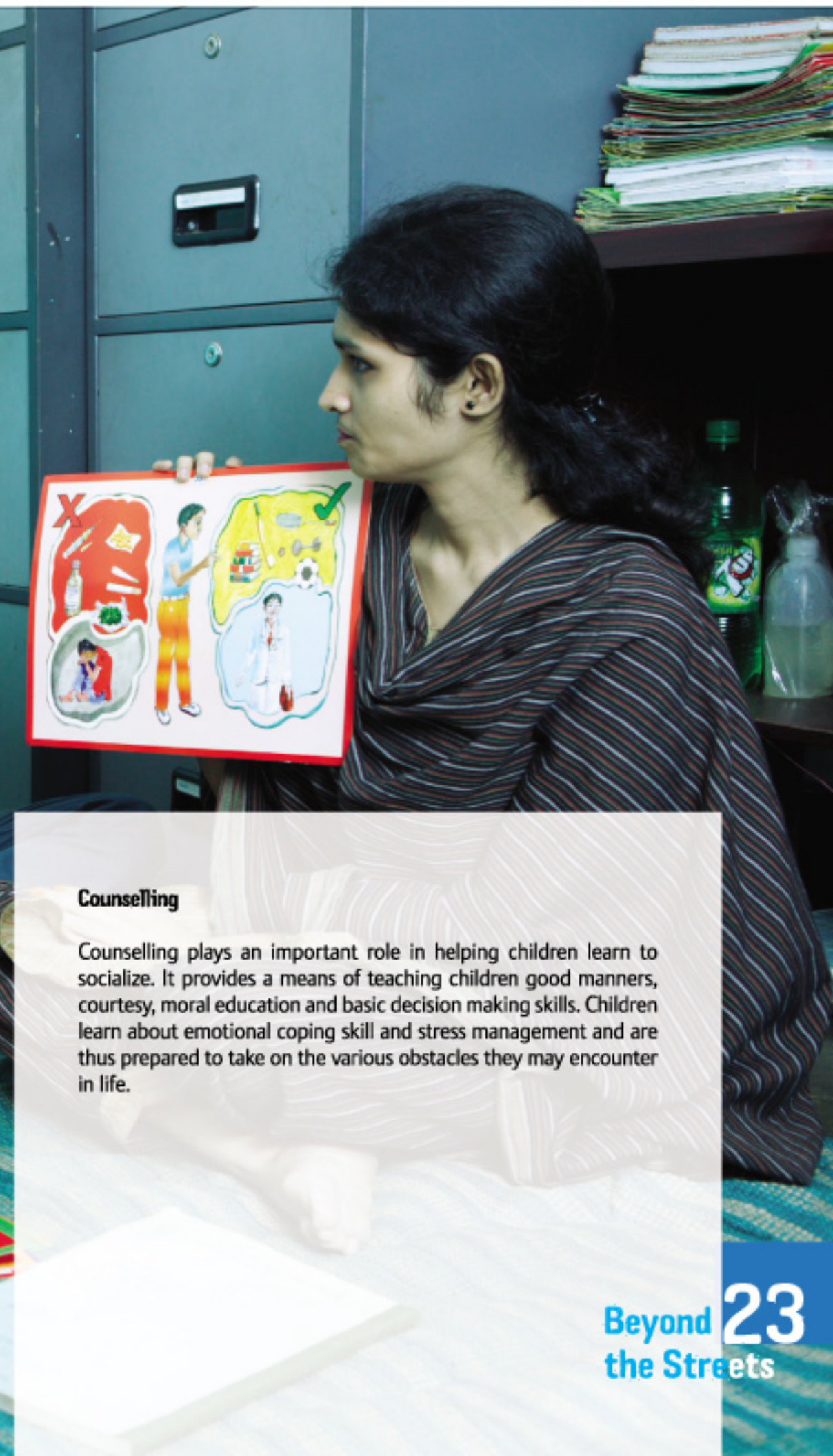


## Education

The DICs also serves an important educational role. Many street children do not have the opportunity to go to school and thus the centres are one of the few avenues available to them to learn basic literacy and numeracy skills, which are highly valuable and produce large future dividends. Educational courses also cover a variety of topics such as health and hygiene, nutrition, basic financial skills, child protection and rights etc. The children also receive a social education regarding how to treat and behave around others. Many street children do not have access to other agents that transfer this knowledge such as schools or familial networks and lack positive role models in their lives that they can emulate. Thus, the DICs and the staff members take on this role and help children develop a healthier attitude regarding how to approach others. The centre staff members and counsellors also provide much needed emotional support which is of great importance in ensuring the mental and psychological development of the children.







### Counselling

Counselling plays an important role in helping children learn to socialize. It provides a means of teaching children good manners, courtesy, moral education and basic decision making skills. Children learn about emotional coping skill and stress management and are thus prepared to take on the various obstacles they may encounter in life.





### Nutritional Support

Most vulnerable children who are utilizing night shelters are provided with a minimum of one meal a day to provide them with nutritional support as it is challenging for children to access nutritious, hygienically prepared food considering their financial constraints and lack of nutrition knowledge.. Access to nutritious meals is essential to maintaining good health and ensuring proper growth and development as child malnutrition is a pervasive problem throughout Bangladesh. Furthermore, malnutrition has severe effects on school performance and impedes physical and mental development. Children are also able to access clean and hygienic cooking facilities and learnt to seek out safe sources of food so as to prevent health problems such as intestinal parasites and diarrheal diseases.





### Birth Registration and Child Profile

Birth registration is a basic administrative requirement and having a birth certificate is necessary to access a variety of public services such as schooling and healthcare and to secure employment. It provides official documentation to verify the child's age and origins and is the right of all children and is necessary as a means of child protection as it is a source of identification as well as a means of preventing under aged marriage. Birth certificates also act as acknowledgements from the government that the children are citizens of the country and are entitled to the same rights as any other citizen. Furthermore, DICs maintain profiles of all registered children so as to create a useful data bank for use in the event of an emergency and as a means of documenting and monitoring the progress of the children and to study the effects of the project over time and determine where improvements need to be made.





সুবিধাবঞ্চিত শিশুদের অংশগ্রহণে ক্রিকেট ও  
ব্যাডমিন্টন প্রতিযোগিতা- ২০১৩

তারিখ: ২৬ জানুয়ারী, ২০১৩

স্থান: বাসাবো বালুর মাঠ

আয়োজনে: হেলপিং চিলড্রেন ওয়ার্কিং এন্ড লিভিং অন দি স্ট্রিট প্রজেক্ট

বাস্তবায়নে:



সহযোগিতায়:



### Providing Access to Recreational Activities

Through the DICs, children gain access to a wide range of recreational facilities. The DICs provide an environment for the children to relax and be children and let go of the anxiety and stress of their day to day lives. They also help children develop mentally and physically thus having a positive effect on their overall health and wellbeing.

Children participate in competitive sports events such as cricket and badminton tournaments, which give them the opportunity to develop leadership and management skills and build their self confidence. They also learn about the importance of teamwork and how to be a good team player. Such skills help them throughout their lives and also free them from their overall sense of isolation. Once they develop a desire to win, this translates into other aspects of their lives and helps develop an achievement oriented mindset.





## Lives in Contrast





## Bablu's Story:

### A Budding Entrepreneur

Fifteen year old Bablu has had a challenging and difficult life. His family is originally from Nimashatpur in Kishorganj but moved to Dhaka after multiple natural disasters destroyed their home and means of livelihood. Faced with the prospect of starvation and dire poverty, Bablu's father decided to move the family to Dhaka, in search of better job opportunities and a better quality of life.

The family lived happily and relatively comfortably till Bablu's father became very ill and bedridden and his mother became the sole income earner for the entire family. As the family struggled to pay for his father's medical treatment, Bablu took on the responsibility of becoming an income earner for his family at a very young age.



# Bablu's Story





To help the family financially, Bablu started growing and selling spinach. He was steadfast and disciplined, venturing out during heavy rains and under the scorching sun to the point of becoming ill from overexertion. However, he was not afforded the luxury of taking rest or receiving medical treatment as his family was dependent on his meagre income. He would often suffer from stomach problems having little knowledge of the importance of proper hygiene and cleanliness. He was also unable to read or write, having never had the opportunity to attend school in his life.

Bablu recollects struggling with his emotional state back then, "I used to start fights and become violent with local children for no reason. I don't even know why". He had no healthy outlets to deal with the frustrations and emotions of emerging adolescence as well as the stress and fears associated with his family's predicament.





In June of 2007, Bablu became enrolled at the Kochukhet DIC. During his time there, he learned important life skills such as how to take care of his health and the perils of child exploitation and drug addiction. He was also taught basic math skills and how to read and write in English and Bengali. More importantly, he received encouragement to learn and do more with his life. Furthermore, he was given the opportunity to play and interact with other children, which is an aspect of childhood he had previously been denied.





At the centre, he also learned about the importance of saving money, and became quite diligent about saving small amounts of cash whenever he could. Eventually, his savings added up and he used the money to start selling groceries at Mirpur # 14 bus stand and started making a substantial profit from the very first day.





By January 2011, his total savings had amounted to Tk. 4,000. With that and a little extra which he borrowed, he was able to purchase a small van to transport vegetables to and from his suppliers, thus saving money in transporting his goods as well as enabling an additional stream of income by renting out the van to others.

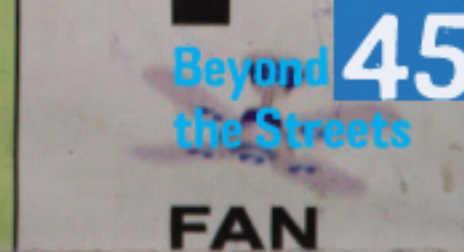
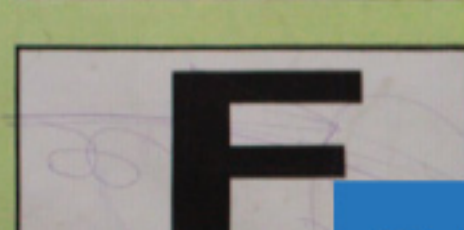
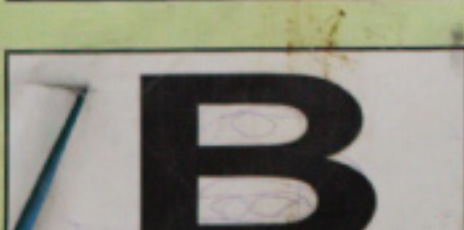
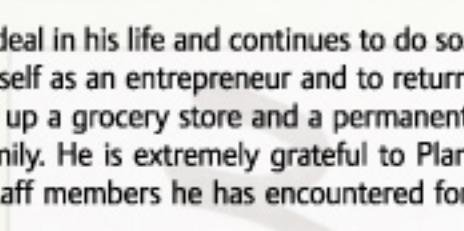
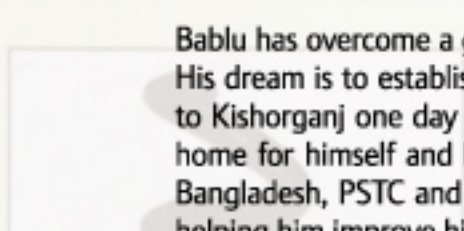
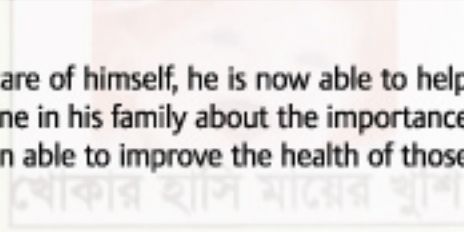
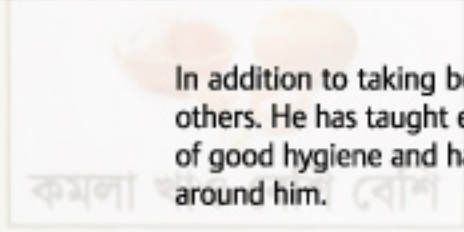




His business is doing very well and he is now able to provide for most of his family's needs. His mother has also started helping him and no longer has to work as a house maid anymore. His father's health has also improved as they were able to afford the medical treatment that he needed. With the profit from his business, he has been able to purchase furniture for the family home and has saved Tk. 300,000 in capital to run his business.



# এসো ছন্দে ছন্দে পাড়ি.....





ফটো গ্যালারী



## Chapter 2





#### Developing Local Stakeholder Capacity

One of the objectives of the project is to develop the capacity of street children, community members, local government and non-government organisations and decision makers to help protect child rights. This is accomplished by a variety of measures such as providing training, developing institutional structures and networks and facilitating children in accessing more lucrative employment opportunities.





## Activities

### Child Training


Children receive training on issues such as protective behaviour, child protection, and basic life skills. Peer educators are utilized to teach other children as they have a better understanding of the vulnerabilities and risks street children face in their daily lives. They are also better able to grasp how best to help children understand these often complex concepts. They also help to recruit and motivate vulnerable children to participate in DIC activities. Putting children in positions of responsibility also helps to build leadership skills and teamwork qualities which will help them in the future.



### Peer Educators and Monitors

The DICs also involve street children who show significant promise and leadership potential in the role of peer mentors and peer educators, who work towards informing street children in the community about child protection and the services and benefits offered by the centre. Peer educators have a better understanding of the children's lives and are thus better able to empathise with their situation and help them learn. They act as positive role models to the children and help create a protective environment by encouraging children to take responsibility for the safety and well being of other children in the community.





### Promoting Personal Savings for Street Children

Developing a healthy habit of saving money is key to financial success. Thus, the project utilizes a savings mechanism which allows street children to deposit cash at DIC for safe keeping and withdraw when required in an easy and convenient manner such as in case of an emergency or to invest in income generating activities. The conventional banking system does not serve the needs of street children. Thus, the saving mechanism represents a valuable innovation that is helping street children access a service that would otherwise not be available to them.



### Creative Activities

Through the project, children get the opportunity to take part in creative pursuits such as art, drama and music. Avenues for creative expression are few and far between for many of these children. For those who are struggling to survive on a day to day basis, such things are luxuries that they are unable to afford. However, street children often exhibit great artistic ability, being free of many of the restrictions imposed upon other children their age and being able to draw inspiration from their daily struggles. Thus, the centre provides an environment to help nurture these talents.

For many of these children, the only employment opportunities available to them are as low wage, unskilled labour, often having to work under unsafe and hazardous conditions. Thus, one of the aims of the street children development project is to promote the idea that creative talents may be utilized as a source of livelihood and a means of improving ones financial standing. This is a novel idea in a culture where such occupations are considered unconventional and often frowned upon.



শিক্ষা চিত্রকলার  
মুক্তার স্বপ্ন  
আদর্শ শিক্ষক হওয়া

Art exhibits and plays are also a powerful means of advocacy, facilitating in spreading the projects message and sensitizing society to the plight of street children and raising awareness of child rights issues. Such events are often organised to mark special occasions such as Child Rights Week and International Street Children Day which provides a platform to raise awareness of child rights issues and brings together a variety of stakeholders such as the media, policy makers and civil society.

This emphasis on creativity also yields a variety of other mental and emotional benefits. It also makes a child's potential more visible to the greater community and effectively illustrates what they are capable of. These events provide an opportunity to celebrate the talents these children possess as they rarely get the chance to demonstrate their abilities.





#### DIC Management Committee (DMC)

The DIC Management Committee is composed of PSTC project staff members and participating children as well as prominent members of the community. The committee arranges quarterly meetings to organise major celebrations and activities and to create a platform for participating children, staff members and members of the community to discuss their thoughts and concerns about the project. The committee act as the DIC's major representative and advocate within the community and are responsible for encouraging donations through their network of personal contacts. The committee is also a means of ensuring the participation of the local community in the project. It creates a sense of ownership thus enabling the projects long term sustainability.



# H C W L S P



## আমাদের ঘর

### মায়াকানন



#### Networking with Stakeholders

The project has strong ties with other NGO's operating in the child development sector such as Aparajeyo-Bangladesh, Marie Stopes, Muslim Aid, Girl Child Advocacy Forum, RADDa, Nari Maitree etc. Periodic NGO coordination meetings are arranged to allow guardians, employers and the local communities a common forum to discuss their roles and responsibilities in facilitating the development of street children. Meetings are also regularly arranged with representative of NGOs, local government officials, hospitals, university students, journalist and the Department of Social Services to help strengthen coordination between the various stakeholders.

#### Capacity Building of Local Staff

Staff members participated in various training workshops on issues such as Communication & Mobilization, Monitoring Tools and MIS maintenance, Management & Supervision, Project Proposal development and Implementation guidelines, Children Management Training, Counselling etc.











## Amina's Story:

Aspiring For a Creative Future

Fifteen year old Amina's family moved to Aziz Moholla in Dhaka from Narayanganj as a child. Her father made a living selling fish and her mother worked as a maid. Her father abandoned the family when Amina's mother was pregnant with her and has not had a relationship with the family since. Her mother was employed at the home of a milk man who helped them out greatly by providing milk for Amina every day when she was a baby. Her mother would go to work, leaving Amina and her brother in the veranda of their home for the entire day. "My mother did the best she could but life was always hard", she recalls.

# Amina's Story



**Amina's Story:**  
Aspiring For a Creative Future

On many days, they would go without eating or would have to ask their neighbours for food out of desperation. Sometimes, they would also pick up discarded onions and potatoes from the local market and bring them home for their mother to cook. Other times, she would come home late at night with food and they would eat happily. When she was around 10 years old, she spent most of her time in the Krishi Market (Farmers Market) area where she would scavenge discarded vegetables. The people at the market would also occasionally hire her to do work, sometimes luring her with the promise of more rice and touching her inappropriately.








One day, while they were at the market, she was approached by a woman who worked for PSTC, Plan Bangladesh's partner organisation, who told her about the centre and the services they offered. She started going to the centre regularly and attending the educational sessions where she learned about hygiene, child protection, health etc. She particularly enjoys learning about music, art and drama. The staff members noticed her enthusiasm for learning and helped her get admitted to a local school after consulting with her mother.



A woman in a blue patterned sari is operating a vintage black and gold sewing machine. A young girl wearing a floral hijab is sitting next to her, looking at the machine. In the background, several pieces of fabric with various patterns, including red and white floral, yellow and black stripes, and red and black floral, are hanging on a wall. The scene is set in a room with orange walls.

Due to the potential that she displayed, she was made a peer educator and now teaches children about a variety of social issues such as child protection, general life skills, child marriage etc. She also received training on Batik printing and tailoring and along with a sewing machine which allows her to work from home to help pay for her education.





In September of 2011, Amina went to Nepal as a representative of Plan Bangladesh to participate at the SAIEVAC Children's Consultation on Care Standards and Child Friendly Services and it marked a significant milestone in her life, "I never in my life imagined that I would be able to travel abroad. I was able to meet children from different countries around the world and was surprised at how much we had in common".

Amina has developed into a talented artist. In June 2012, she participated in an art exhibit at the National Museum where two of her paintings were sold for BDT 12,000 us \$ 150 which she is saving in order to finance her education. She also has a job as a tutor to two younger children and is thus able to utilize the skills she developed as a peer educator to help others with their education and assist her family financially at the same time. She is currently a student of class 9 and because of the passion for the arts, she now dreams of studying music in the future and eventually hopes to become an actress. She is deeply grateful to PSTC and Plan Bangladesh for allowing her to dream of a brighter future.





# Chapter 3





### **Enabling Access to Private and Public Services**

One of the objectives of the Street Children Development Project is to inform children about the variety of services and organisations that are available to assist them and enable access to such services in a convenient and efficient manner.

### **Activities**

#### **Medical Services**

To provide health and medical assistance to street children, the project works in collaboration with a number of organisations. Children are able to access health services through satellite clinics located at various PSTC DICs around Dhaka which are facilitated by organisations such as Marie Stopes, RADDa, Outfall Clinic Services (PSTC) as well as PSTC's Urban Community Health Care Project (UCHCP) and Urban Primary Health Care project (UPHCP). UCHCP and Marie Stopes also provide DICs with free deworming tablets to distribute to the children as intestinal parasites are a major health concern as infections often have a significant negative impact on a child's cognitive ability and general health. Linkages have also been developed with renowned local hospitals and medical health institutions such as Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital, International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR'B), Sir Salimullah Medical College and Dhaka Medical Hospital thus allowing participating children access to quality health care at minimum cost.





### Financial Assistance for Disabled Children

Disabled children are at a particular disadvantage because their communities and families are often unable to provide them with the resources they need to reach their potential. Thus the project has helped disabled children to receive special government stipends of Tk. 300 per month from the Department of Social Service (DSS) as part of the government's Social Cash Transfer Programme which is designed to help disabled children from poor households bear the costs of schooling and education.

### Legal Services

Children are often in need of legal representation and advice such as in the case of those who have been subject to abuse and torture. Bangladesh National Women's Lawyers Association provides free representation and consultation to street children to enable them to get justice and support from the legal system.

### Schooling

The DIC staff and management committee establish relationships with primary and secondary schools in the neighbourhood to help children who are interested in furthering their education. Often, the schools grant fee waivers to participating children, thus keeping the costs of education low for economically disadvantaged families. Schooling is an important way of helping children reintegrate into the community as it gives them an opportunity to form relationships with other children. It also allows them to access better employment opportunities in the future as educational qualifications are highly sought after in the job market.



Lives in Contrast





## Shirin's Story:

### Ability Triumphs Over Disability

Fourteen year old Shirin and her family moved to Dhaka in 2009 after her family lost all their property due to river flooding and erosion. Completely impoverished and without adequate food, work or shelter, the family decided to move to Dhaka to look for a better life.

Shirin recollects her arrival in Dhaka as a traumatic experience. The family spent their first night in Dhaka at Sadarghat Launch Terminal where emotional and physical exhaustion, the unfamiliarity of the big city and the constant pangs of hunger and unrelenting mosquitoes brought her entire family to tears. The following day, with the help of an acquaintance from their village, the family moved to Jatrabari, where Shirin's father took a job as a rickshaw puller and her mother started working as a maid.

Back at her old village, Shirin used to go to school. However, after arriving in Dhaka, she had to do her part to help support the family financially by scavenging and selling discarded vegetables at the nearby market.

# Shirin's Story





In 2010, Shirin met a local peer educator from PSTC's Jatrabari DIC who told her about the services they offered. She eventually started going to the centre every day to attend learning sessions, to play with the other children and to use the bathing facilities. She also expressed to many of the staff members her desire to go back to school. After talking to Shirin's parents, they eventually enrolled her in Jatrabari Government Primary School as a student of class 3. "It was my mother's dream that I would have the opportunity to pursue my education", Shirin recalls "I am glad I was able to make her happy".





She eventually became a peer educator and diligently attends to her duties there every day after returning from school. After 4 years with the project, her life has changed significantly. She learned how to draw and sing and has developed a talent for helping children understand complex issues.



Shirin's life is further complicated by a birth deformity of the left hand which restricts her ability to carry out even simple activities. For tasks that would normally require the use of both hands, Shirin must learn to make do with only one. This often involves additional time and practice to learn to carry out relatively simple tasks the rest of us take for granted. While this poses a challenge, Shirin approaches her circumstances with a very positive attitude and is confident in her ability to learn and adapt to whatever comes her way. "It takes me a bit of time to be able to do things, but I quickly learn how to manage", she says "You have to learn how to manage."

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ইসকুলে যাই...

দায়িত্ব বাহকের কাজ দেখে ভাল







Through the project Shirin also received vocational training on how to sew. Initially, it was difficult and time consuming for her to complete the necessary tasks due to her disability. However, over time she has been able to master this skill. She now receives orders to sew banners and earns a lot more than she did previously scavenging for vegetables. She is saving the money she earns through PSTC's savings mechanism to help safeguard her future. Shirin is currently a student of class 7 at Dholaikhal High School. Her disability has never been a barrier to her progress in life and with the help of Plan Bangladesh and PSTC she has been able to reach new heights.





# Chapter 4



### Facilitating Reintegration with Family and Community

Street children are marginalised by society and many of them have been abandoned by their families or have been forced to leave due to abuse. Thus, reintegrating children with their families and facilitating the reintegration of children into the community is a major objective of the Street Children Development Project.

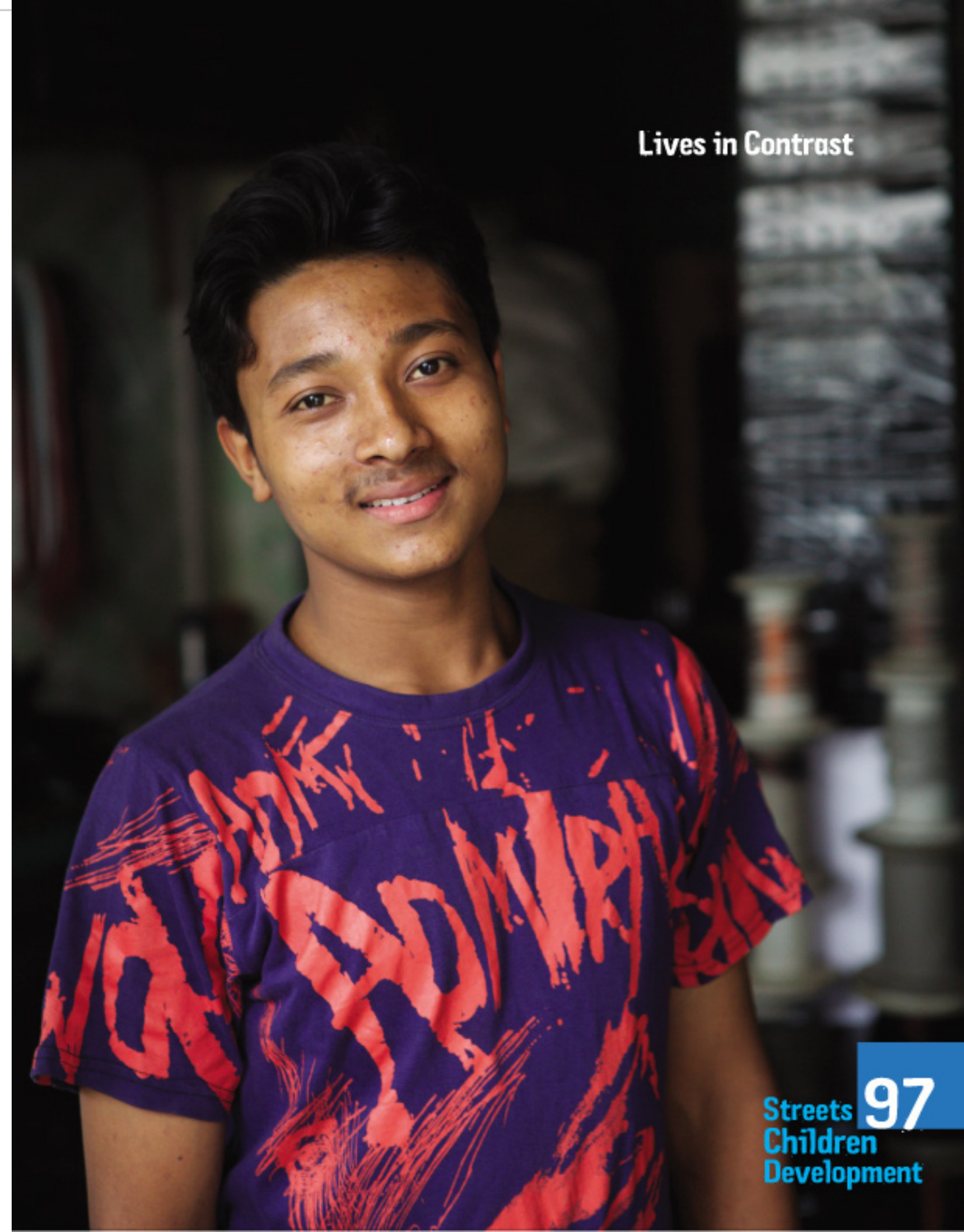
### Activities

#### Reintegration with Family

Children who are separated from their families are more vulnerable to neglect, exploitation and abuse. Furthermore, maintaining a loving relationship with family members is necessary for proper mental and emotional development. Thus, reintegration with family members is highly desirable when it is possible to ensure the safety and overall wellbeing of the children concerned. Children are reintegrated into their family with a better understanding of how to protect themselves and their family members from abuse as well as knowledge of the services and organisations that are available to help them if they require it in the future. Even if children are unable to be placed back with the parents, establishing relationships with family members gives children an opportunity to stay connected with their roots.

#### Reintegration with Community

Street children are stigmatized by society and are often considered a burden and a nuisance. They are misunderstood and deprived of basic opportunities for growth and development that other children take for granted. Thus, the process of reintegrating children with the greater society is important and involves sensitizing others to their plight and building a sense of accountability and responsibility towards children within the community.





## Sunny's Story: Transcending Abuse

Fifteen year old Sunny has had a very traumatic childhood, having to endure physical, verbal and emotional abuse at the hands of his stepfather and stepbrothers. His father refused to let him go to school and would physically abuse him for expressing the desire to do so. Instead, he made Sunny get a job at a workshop against his will.

Thus, one day Sunny decided to run away from home and spent the day roaming around in a children's park and slept outside. The next day, he returned home and was severely beaten by his step- father. The abuse continued till one day Sunny decide to once again to run away from home and stole BDT 1000 to pay for his journey.

He then went to Sadarghat, where he was approached by a man who offered him food and took him to a secluded location with many other young children. One of the children said that the man was planning to murder them all so the children started screaming which attracted the attention of local residents who captured the man and later found out that he was a child trafficker, having found large amounts of money and sleeping pills in his possession.

Afterwards, Sunny starts living in Sadarghat where he earned Tk. 20 a day collecting scrap material. He faced regular abuse at the hands of the local Police as well as attempted sexual assault by other local children. One day, he met a child who was using the facilities at the Potuatuli DIC who offered to take him there. He eventually started using the facilities regularly including the night shelter.





Sunny recalls being very angry and belligerent before becoming involved with the project. His behaviour has changed drastically since then as he has learned how to treat those around him. Upon seeing how well Sunny adjusted to life at the DIC, the staff members asked him to become a peer educator. He excelled in the role and was later promoted to a peer monitor. With the aid of his new job, Sunny was able to start saving money. He also started thinking about his mother, who he left behind and decided to re-establish contact with her. Their reunion was an emotional experience. Upon seeing her son after so many years, Sunny's mother broke down in tears. She was very happy to see the progress Sunny had made in life. Upon visiting the centre with Sunny, she thanked the staff members for taking care of her son as he was very happy there.







In March 2011, Sunny started attending a machinist vocational training course and workshop and later started working at an electronics shop. He is currently earning Tk. 4,500 a month and dreams of becoming a successful entrepreneur one day.

Sunny's life has changed significantly since he became involved with the project. He has learned a new skill, has become economically independent and has re-established contact with his family. His future is bright thanks to his own resilient spirit and the help he received from Plan Bangladesh.







# Chapter 5



### Challenges

There were many challenges encountered during the course of the project. One major issue was the lack of data regarding the total number of street children currently residing in Dhaka. This information gap makes it difficult to allocate resources towards ensuring their safety and wellbeing and to create a system of ensuring accountability.

Long term monitoring of the participating children over distance and time also proved to be quite difficult. Street children relocate constantly in search of better income generating opportunities and may spend long periods of time without any contact with the DIC. Thus, many children end up dropping out of the project and are no longer able to access the basic facilities they require. Furthermore, once a child reaches 18 years of age and graduates from the programme, there is no mechanism for monitoring their long term progress.

Guardians are often reluctant to let children take part in the project as they would prefer that the child work full time in order to earn a higher income for the family. This emphasis on short term economic benefit also prevents many children from being able to attend school, which limits their future employment prospects significantly.





Resource limitations were also a major challenge. However, community contributions helped a great deal in bridging the gap between resources available and resources required to help participating children. Furthermore, gaining the trust of the local community was a long and tedious process which required years upon years of demonstrated commitment to secure. It is often difficult to find buildings to house DICs as landlords are often reluctant to rent out their property due to the stigma associated with street children.

A significant psychological challenge encountered was helping street children overcome their personal insecurities and lack of self confidence in order to encourage them to have bigger dreams for themselves. The encouragement they received from the community and DIC staff members helped motivate children towards pursuing a better future.

#### Achievements

Through the Street Children Development Project, 5,781 children were enrolled in DICs throughout Dhaka city and 1,519 children were able to utilize night shelter facilities, thus allowing them access to a safe and secure environment during hours of the day when they would otherwise be vulnerable to danger and exploitation.

The project also served an important educational function. 3,069 children received access to literacy sessions and 3,138 children were provided with educational materials. 584 children were also enrolled in primary school, thus giving them access to better educational opportunities.





148 children were provided with vocational training to improve their future employment prospects and 77 children received equipment and financial support to enable self employment. 1,740 children also started utilizing the project's savings mechanism thus learning an important financial skill that will help them throughout their lives.

3,429 children were also provided with access to health services through Plan Bangladesh and PSTC's partner organisations and linkages. 5 children also benefitted from legal services provided through Bangladesh National Women's Lawyers Association. 3,169 children were also provided with birth certificates during the course of the project, thus reinforcing their sense of citizenship and protecting them from social evils such as under aged employment and child marriage. Furthermore, 68 children were reintegrated with their families with a better understanding of how to protect themselves and others from abuse as well as knowledge regarding the services and organisations that are available to help them if they require it in the future.

The project was also able to develop the capacity of local stakeholders and institutions to defend the rights of street children, thus enabling the long term sustainability of the initiative.

## Chapter 6





### Lessons Learnt

The project yielded many significant lessons and insights which may be utilized towards improving similar projects implemented in the future. Major lessons include:



### Encouraging Positive Behavioural Change

The best ways observed to encourage children to reconsider their attitude and behaviour is to lead by example and demonstrate the desired behaviour in the specific environment, particularly with the aid of peer educators and monitors who the children look up to as role models.

### Creating Employment Opportunities

Participating children gained access to vocational training opportunities through organisations such as Jubo Unnayan Kendra, Islamic Aid, Underprivileged Children's Education Programmes (UCEP) and Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) where they learned skills such as block and batik printing, sewing, computer skills, electronics and mechanics. They were then placed with local businesses such as boutiques and beauty parlours as employees, interns and apprentices, thus helping them develop their practical knowledge and establishing a network of contacts that they can leverage into more lucrative employment opportunities in the future.

Children were also provided with assistance to become small scale merchants selling products such as news papers, flowers, candy etc. and received the basic materials they needed to start earning. These opportunities enable them to become financially self-sufficient and to access employment opportunities that would otherwise be out of their reach.

The financial skills that they were taught and access to the project's savings mechanism allowed children the opportunity to build up capital to start small businesses of their own and establish themselves as entrepreneurs, with the ability to generate employment opportunities for others, thus enabling a virtuous cycle of economic growth that benefits the entire community.







### Community Involvement and Contribution

Community involvement was essential to the success of the project. Assigning responsibility to members of the local community fostered greater accountability and ownership of child protection and development efforts. Furthermore, it made the street children who are otherwise marginalised from society feel like they are cared for and valued within their communities and thus helps develop their self confidence and sense of belonging.

The project has been particularly successful in mobilizing local community resources towards helping street children by sensitizing others of their collective responsibilities and creating a sense of guardianship, thus making them active participants in helping ensure that child rights are always protected and insured.

### The Importance of Local Linkages

While the project has linkages with large well known organisations to provide medical services, there is also a great deal of emphasis on building long lasting relationships at the local level. For example, staff members at the drop in centres have established connections with small neighbourhood pharmacies so that children can receive medication and medical supplies such as bandages free of cost or at reduced rates. This emphasis on locally available services is significant because the issue of convenience is particularly important for street children as having to travel even relatively short distances while in immediate medical distress may be the difference between promptly receiving treatment and not receiving treatment at all and thus could have major life and death implications





## Facilitating Access to Schooling

Plan Bangladesh recognizes that sending children to school and enabling access to educational services is integral to the mainstreaming process and ensuring their long term well being and economic prospects. Thus, every effort was made to identify children who are interested and committed to going to schools and providing them with the resources to do so. Strong relationships are maintained between teachers, school administrators, parents and members of the DIC Management Committee to help facilitate the child's integration into a formal school environment and to help participating children get the most out of their education.

## Child Protection Group (CPG)

The child protection group is composed of prominent members of the community in positions of power and influence such as police officers, local government administrators, lawyers, journalists and religious leaders who are charged with the responsibility of preventing abuse and exploitation of street children within their community. The CPG incorporates local stakeholders including the Union Parishad Standing Committee, service providers, government organisations and NGOs as well as children to establish linkages that facilitate child protection at all levels. Technical support is provided by Plan Bangladesh and its various partner organisations.

The major objectives of the CPG are to develop a child protection mechanism for reducing the vulnerability of children to violence, establish a monitoring system for child protection incidences and to build the capacity of relevant stakeholders to help protect children.

The CPG determines possible avenues whereby street children are vulnerable to abuse and creates a supportive environment to safeguard them against such activities by intervening wherever required to ensure their safety. They provide guidance and promote rules to encourage children to engage in protective behaviour to look after themselves and other children in their communities.





The CPG intervenes in a variety of situations such as helping girls that face harassment from local boys on their way to school to protecting street children from discrimination and violence at the hands of other neighbourhood children.

The CPG also facilitates the economic empowerment of street children as ensuring a child's financial stability goes a long way towards mitigating many other threats that put them in danger. Participating children take part in a number of economic activities such as working at boutiques, beauty parlours, automobile garages, and mobile shops etc as technicians, assistants and apprentices. The CPGs responsibilities include communicating and establishing a rapport with local businesses that hire children to ensure that they are working in a safe occupational environment with access to protective equipment, for reasonable hours and are not being financially exploited for their labour. This is done through periodic meeting with employers to ensure a child friendly working environment. Furthermore, business proprietors are also taught the appropriate course of action for tackling behavioural issues with the children if they do arise, thus preventing potential situations of abuse and promoting interventions that encourage and motivate the desired positive behaviour.





### The Power of Art

Illustrating the plight of street children through art by depicting their lives through drawings, music and drama was an extremely effective way of mobilizing community support for street children oriented programmes and helped sensitize the public towards developing empathy and understanding for their unique situation.





### Looking Back and Looking Forward

The networks and linkages developed throughout the project are assets that will enable the long term sustainability of the project. Capacity building efforts through the training and development of local staff as well as local partner organisations have helped develop expertise and human resources in the field that shall continue to benefit the sector for years to come. Institutional capacity has been expanded through the development of the child protection committee and the DIC management committee to oversee the proper management of community and organisational resources. Furthermore, by incorporating multiple stakeholders into the project, ownership and accountability has been established and a mechanism created for the mobilization of local community resources, thus making the project more financially sustainable.

As Plan Bangladesh's partnership with PSTC enters its ninth year, the resources developed through their collaboration will continue to bear fruit over time. The children facilitated by the project will go on to become more productive members of society, more capable of contributing as leaders in helping develop their families and their communities. They shall grow up to be advocates of child rights within their communities and help create a culture of child protection that transcends conventional boundaries thus establishing the Street Children Development Project's ultimate legacy.



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