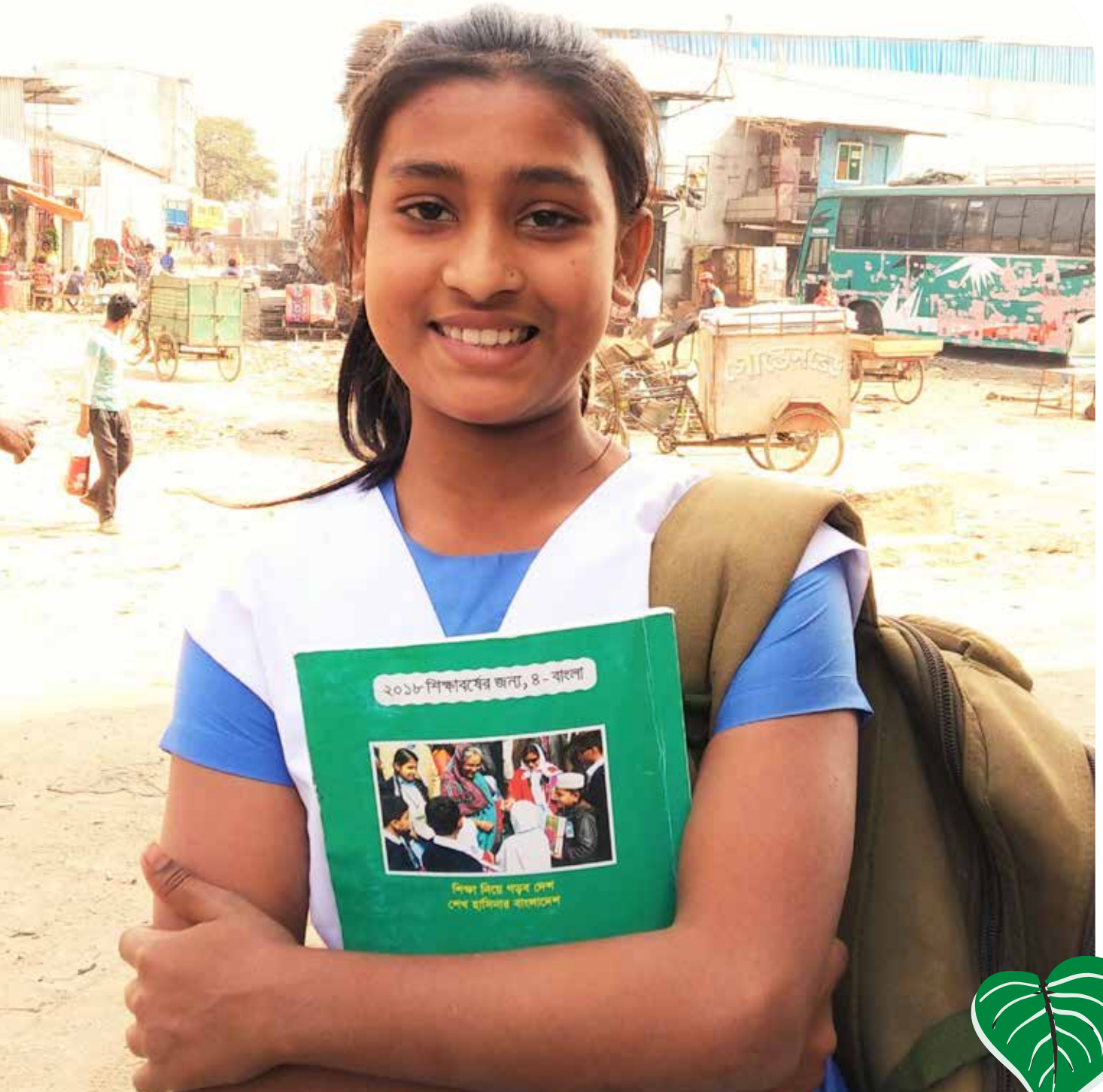
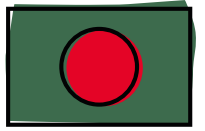


JATRA... Our Journey

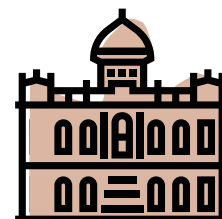
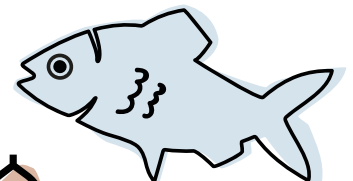
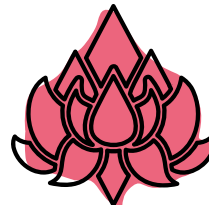
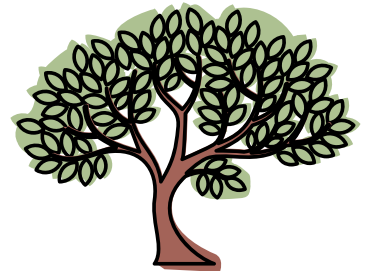
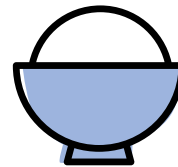
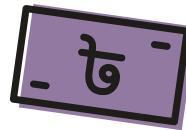
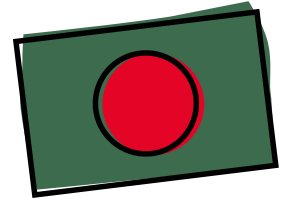
Stories of lives transformed by
Grambangla Unnayan Committee



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Acknowledgements

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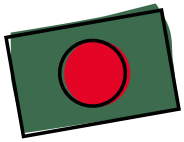
The document captures Maksud's deep care and experience in the written narrative sections, around which the children's stories are told; it shares his wisdom and gives huge insight into what is now a decade of work. Other members of the team have also shared their experiences of working at Grambangla Unnayan Committee (GUC), some of which feature in this booklet. Consent for all the stories and photographs used in this book has been taken as per GUC's Child Safeguarding Policy.

Great thanks goes to everyone at GUC for their involvement in gathering, translating, documenting, reviewing and shortlisting the stories, particularly, Sayma Sayed for leading the process along with ABK Reza, Hafsa, Azim and Shahin. We thank Mahmud Rahman Bhai for his photographs.

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None of these life changing impacts would have been possible without the technical and financial support of The National Lottery Community Fund (formerly known as Big Lottery Fund UK), Government of Bangladesh, Nari Maitree, ChildHope UK and all the supporters. However, most of all we are indebted to the children of Grambangla Unnayan Committee; without their courage and bravery there would be no story to tell.





Introduction

(by Founder and Executive Director,
AKM Maksud, GUC)



Ten years ago, when we started working with the waste pickers of Matuail dump site in Dhaka, we found hundreds of migrant women and children collecting waste materials from the dump site. Waste Pickers are informal group of people mostly are women and children engaged in searching, collecting, sorting, processing and selling of wastes to earn their livelihood. In the process of earning their livelihoods, they are highly exposed to unhygienic conditions, toxic fumes and injury from sharp objects and machinery. In last ten years of our experience, we have seen number of women and children losing their limbs because of accidents during collecting wastes in the dump site and their lives because of diseases like Hepatitis and other infections.

Almost all the waste pickers are the migrants from rural areas to cities because of poverty, family crises, climate change effects and natural disasters. Because of lack of skills and contacts,

they come to the city and become involved in the informal jobs like waste picking.

They have a huge contribution to the country's economy and to the environment. 15% of the total generated waste in Dhaka amounting to 475 tonnes/day are recycled daily mainly by the waste pickers. In 2005, Bangladesh used 263,000 of tons recycled raw materials of plastic waste and saved import cost of US\$ 405 million. Despite of all these contributions, they are deprived from all the benefit that a citizen avail. Most of them live in the dirty and shabby rented one room slum houses. The houses are fragile and made of tin or bamboo or plastic sheets with shared kitchen and toilet facilities. In one of our studies it was found that 41.6 percent waste pickers share toilets with more than 10 households. During the Summer times, crisis of water supply becomes a big issue; sometimes, they do not get water supply for 12 to 15 days. Privacy is a serious issue in those settlements. They have to pay their house rents on daily basis.

Most of the waste picker women are single women with two to five children. There is no one to take care of them in the house. That's why, the mothers keep their children with them while working. And gradually the children also become waste pickers and become deprived from education and childhood. 44.2 percent waste pickers reported that they never enrolled in any educational Institution. They have very limited access to health facilities. 69.7 percent waste pickers visit traditional healers for treatment. They have less access to birth certificates and national ID cards and other Social Safety Net Programs. The informal waste pickers don't have legal accreditation to their work. And because of that they do not get any benefit for their contributions and face legal problems. Because of problems, the poorest children and women are suffering.



To address some of these issues, **ChildHope UK** worked with us to design and implement '**Healthy Futures for Children of Waste-Pickers**' project funded by **The National Lottery Community Fund UK**, during 2015 to 2018. The project also received great support from Nari Maitree and the local government (Union Parishad). Some of our achievement were:

241 children of waste-pickers (M-111, F-130 including five male, and six female Person with disability) received **primary school education** at Grambangla school at Matuail.

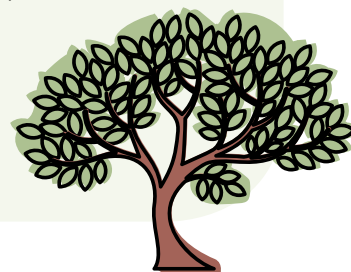
181 (F-169, M-12) adolescent waste-pickers received specialised six-month **vocational livelihoods skill training** at GUC's technical training centre approved by the Government of Bangladesh, in trades such as tailoring, paper bag making, food processing and mobile phone servicing. 90% graduates (162 students, F-150, M-12) were employed in factories, shops or became self-employed.

Seven Self Help Savings groups with 109 waste-picker mothers were established. They received training on functional literacy, general sanitation and hygiene, reproductive health,

child healthcare, food and nutrition. The groups have started saving regularly in bank and lend money to members at interest rates lower than commercial money lenders. Initially, members didn't have any savings and were always under debt but now collectively they have more than £1659 (BDT 165,900) saved in their account, which is a big achievement.

As a result of advocacy initiatives, 574 children of waste-pickers received birth certificates. 2662 waste pickers made aware of their rights, available government entitlements and were supported, in accessing health care services and food supplies through government safety net programme. To sustain these efforts and have a continuous dialogue with government for the welfare of waste-pickers community, **Network of Waste-Pickers in Bangladesh** was also established and is running actively with the support of 46 local members.

It has been an amazing Journey of learning and sharing with children, waste-pickers communities, government officials, etc. Some of which we have tried to share with you in this book.



Grambangla School for The Child Waste Pickers

To fulfill the dream of providing education to waste picker children, in 2008 Grambangla School started its journey under the open sky at Matuail dump site. At that time, there was only 1 teacher for the students.

After that in 2009, with the support of Research Initiatives, Bangladesh (RIB) the Kajoli Model pre-school for the child waste pickers was established in a small room with 46 pre-school children. At that time the day care center was also started with 14 children. Gradually, the number of students increased and the school became bigger; Grambangla School has been shifted from a tin shed to a brick built building.

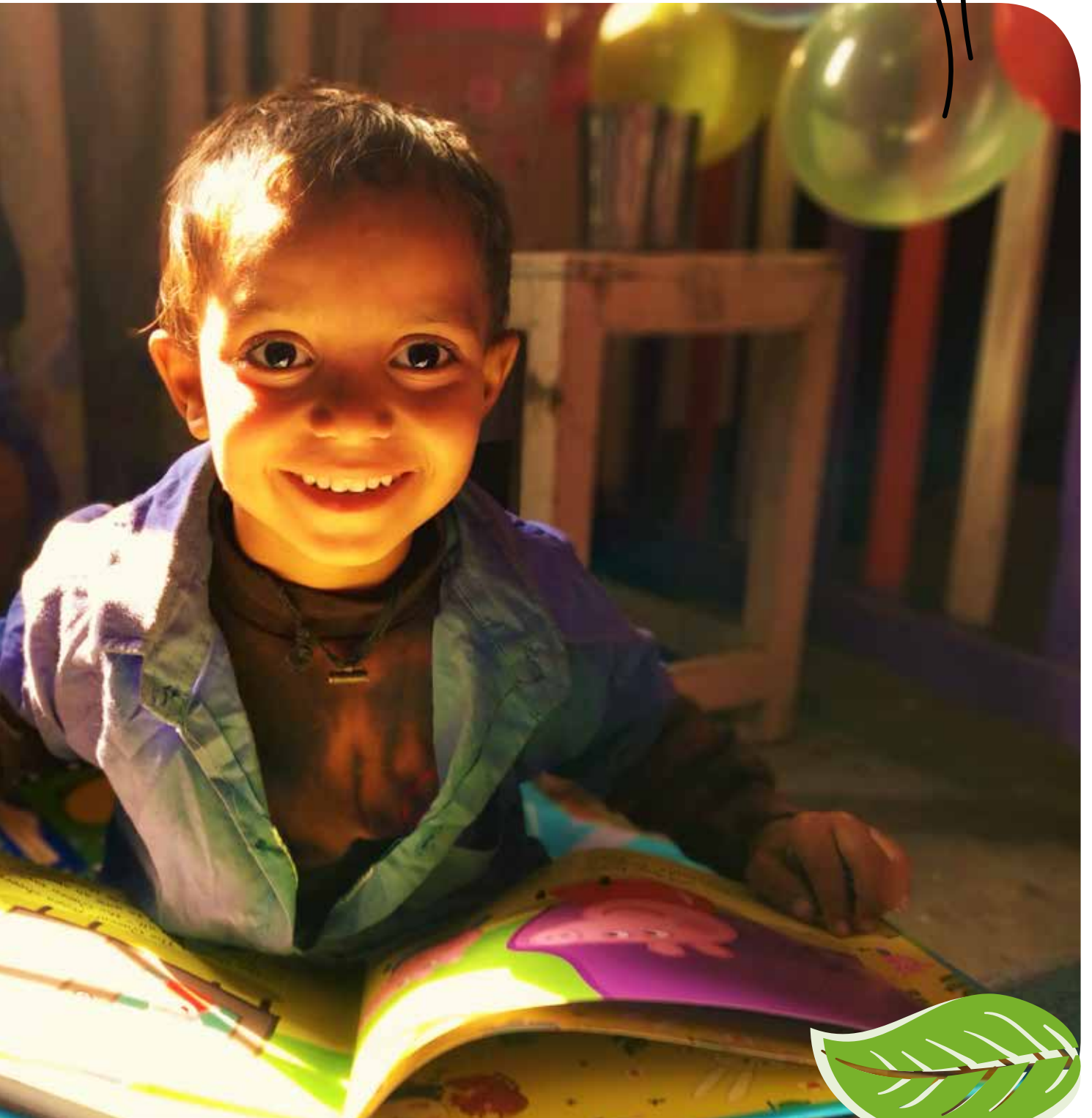
Now, Grambangla School has a well-equipped and spacious day care center, five class rooms for the primary students, one teachers' room, one kitchen and two disability friendly toilets.

Including the children with disabilities, 222 waste picker children are receiving education from Grambangla School. In the school they are provided with books and other educational materials, breakfast, mid-day meal, uniform, health services etc. at free of cost. For the physical and mental development it organizes sports competition, cultural competition, art competition, study tour etc. After the completion of primary education, Grambangla School supports the students to enroll in the high schools and the students who cannot continue study due to poverty are supported to receive technical and vocational training from Grambangla Technical Training Center.

Day by day, Grambangla School has become well accepted in the community. It has been registered under Bangladesh Education Board. Now, the local philanthropists are also expanding their hands help them.

That's how Grambangla School is working for the development of waste picker children.





Grambangla

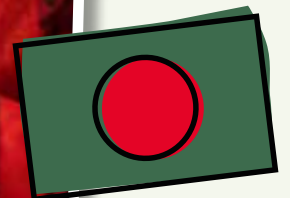
Technical Training Center

To increase the decent employment opportunities for the adolescent waste pickers including adolescents with disabilities living in Matuail, Dhaka. Grambangla Technical Training Center (GTTC) started its journey in December 2015.

GTTC is providing technical and vocational education and training on industrial sewing, jute and paper bag making, food processing and mobile phone servicing. Besides that it helps the trainees to set up the linkage with the employers or to start own business so that they can be shifted from a hazardous work to a decent occupation after the graduation. In 2016 GTTC became registered under Bangladesh Technical Education Board.

In order to run the training program, Grambangla Technical Training Center followed a number of steps. At first, an experienced survey team conducted a household survey at the slum area

near Matuail dump site to find out potential waste picker adolescents who are enthusiastic and have the aptitude to develop their skills. After initial screening, group and one to one sessions with the parents and adolescents were conducted and 250 trainees were selected primarily. After that, waste picker adolescents, parents and the employers participated in FGD sessions to select the potential trades and to develop effective curriculums which also meet the needs of adolescents with disabilities. After the screening of the trainees and development of curriculum, GTTC started providing 360 hours vocational training; simultaneously, the job placement officer, advocacy officer, trainers





and other field staff met the local employers to find opportunities for employment of the future graduates, to identify needs of the employers and to encourage them to provide job placements, apprenticeships and employment to the trainees. For getting job, it is important to show the birth registration certificate to the employers as a proof of eligible age for work. For this reason, a continuous communication is maintained with the local government so that the graduate trainees can get birth certificate easily. At the last step, the trained adolescents are placed with different employers and are supported to start own business.

In last three and half years, more than 200 adolescents were provided trainings in six batches and more than 150 graduates have been placed in different factories and own business with a decent income.

Providing technical and vocational training program is a successful program but initially it had to face some challenges. One of the major challenges was motivating the adolescent waste pickers to give full concentration in training. To mitigate this problem, a number of strategy were taken; e.g. one to one meeting with the trainees and the parents to make them understand the importance of full concentration and attendance; inviting the parents to the training center to visualize the difference between the environments of dump site and a non-hazardous working place; arranging indoor games and television in the training center; sharing the successful case stories with the trainees; interaction with the successful graduated trainees etc. Because of these initiatives, the graduates of Grambangla Technical Training Center are living a decent and successful life.



Inspiration in focus:

Mira



My name is Mira and even though I graduated through Grambangla School and now currently a student in high school, the journey to get here and follow my dream to become a doctor, has been far from smooth.

This is my story.

From my experience of school, there have been teachers around me who have inspired and believed in my potential. Encouraging me to work hard and follow my dreams. It was actually a former teacher who in 2012, went out of her way to help enroll me into class one at Grambangla School.

As I kept going in primary school and was doing quite well in class, my teachers were very happy with me and they always motivated me to continue my studies. Being inspired by them, I started seeing a dream of becoming a doctor and to fulfil that dream, I started by concentrating my efforts on my Primary School Certificate exam.

But my parents had another plan.

Last year, my brother-in-law brought a marriage proposal for me. This made my parents very happy as they had found a guy for me to marry. When I heard this, it made me feel afraid. At school, I had learnt that getting married at an early age can be harmful for a girl's health. Also, I wanted to live a free life as a child. I was not ready to take responsibility of a family. It made me upset and I started crying and arguing with my parents. At first, my parents tried to convince me by telling me about their financial situation. They were worried that maybe in future it will be more difficult to find a suitable match; so they kept on pressuring me.

Fortunately, as soon as one of the community facilitators of Grambangla heard about the marriage proposal she instantly came to our home to find out more about what was going

on. She tried to make them understand the consequences of child marriage. But my parents refused to listen or understand. Threatening to inform the police, my parents reacted by telling me to stay at home and not attend school.

At school my teachers and other staff had heard about the incident from the community facilitator. As I was now absent from school every day the headmistress stepped in. She visited our home and speaking with my parents they talked about the consequence of early marriage, the legal obligations and the importance of the upcoming primary school certificate exams. They assured my parents about all the support the school would offer for continuing in my education. Even though my parents were not fully convinced, they decided to cancel the marriage agreeing to allow me to continue with my studies.

Starting again at school I sat my primary school certificate exam achieving GPA grade 3.25 out of 5.00. I'm now in high school because of their support and all I can say is that Grambangla School is like a blessing to me.





I love my school and I want to be a doctor to serve my community. I don't want to get married in such an early age, but this is what I feared.

Staff Story

Salma

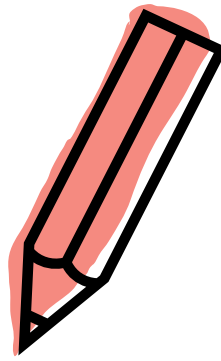


In our Bangladesh society, being a teacher is always highly respected. But for me personally, being a teacher for children who have been neglected and deprived access to education, is deeply rewarding.

By teaching a child who has lived part of their life as a waste picker, I know that even through my work plays just one of the roles in each child, I feel I'm contributing to building our society. I love my job and I want to continue teaching to support waste picker







Inspiration in focus:

Golapi

My name is Golapi and was born into a family who struggles to make enough money for clothes and food.

Having lived a good part of my early childhood either collecting waste from the dump site, cutting collected bottle caps or taking my mum's lunch to work. I'm 11 now and in class five, but it wasn't until **six years ago** that I had even stepped into a classroom.

My father is a day laborer and my mum collects and sorts waste material from the dump site. Because they never went through school, they hadn't imagined of enrolling me into school either. They thought, that as a girl, I would learn how to do domestic chores and find work to help with the family finances.

When I used to take my mums lunch box to work, I used to see our neighbors' children coming from their schools but it never crossed my mind of going there. One day a neighbor began talking to my parents about Grambangla School. How good it was and what it. At first, my parents were not convinced because they thought that they would have to pay tuition fees, which they just couldn't afford.

It wasn't until when some teachers from Grambangla School made some home visits. The teachers described the facilities and support the school offers with free tuition fees, uniform, education materials and mid-day meals. After this meeting, they were able to explain how the school was different which convinced my parents to enroll me.

As soon as I was enrolled in Grambangla Day Care Center my life was turned around.



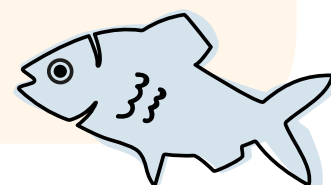


Previously, I had to take care of my family but in school my teachers and a caregiver took care of me. At home, I used to have to do lots of cooking, making the bed and sweeping the floors. At school, I have learnt interesting rhymes, songs, reading and writing. Before coming to school, I was always busy with working around the home but now I can play and spend time with my friends. At home I was always busy helping with the cooking, but at school I get hot lunch. My parents love me so much but now there I have even more people who care about me.

At school I have learnt how to read, write and how to add up numbers. I have also learnt about taking care of myself. I've learnt that it's very important to wash my hands with soap and water

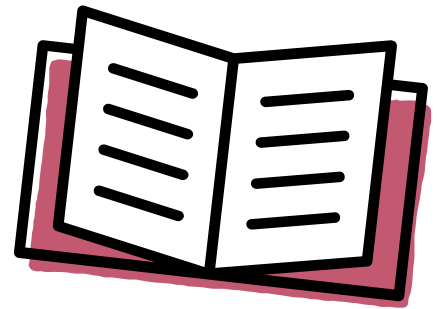
before eating and after using the toilet and the teachers have taught me how to wash my hands properly. They have also taught me about cutting my nails, cleaning me ears and nose, taking daily showers, washing my clothes and wearing sandals while using the toilet. I've now been able to share this knowledge with my parents and family. Since being in school my parents now understand the value of education and want me to continue.

This year I am preparing for the primary school certificate exam and I want to do the best I can. I love my school and Grambangla School has changed my life.

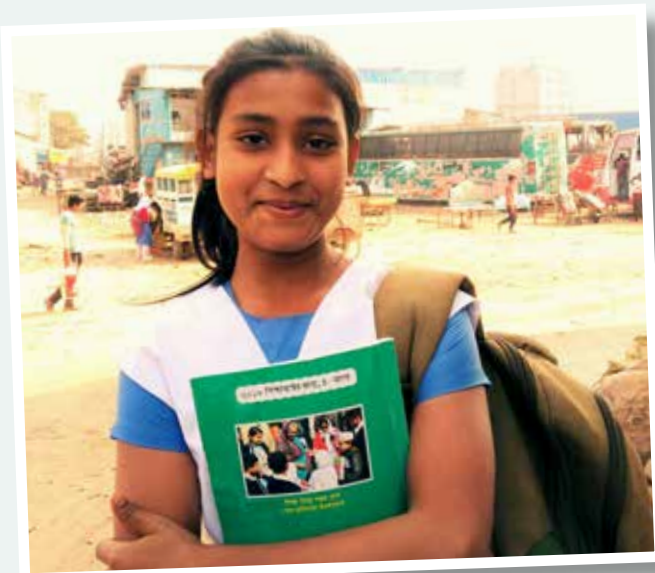


Inspiration in focus:

Nasrin



When I was a kid, my mother used to take me with her to work at the dump site where she was a waste picker as there was no one at home to take care of me.



My mother used to keep me lying under a nearby tree in the dump site while working. At the age of seven, I started waste picking and gave Tk. 100 per day to my mother.

It was a horrible life. Flies, awful smells, cuts, wounds and sickness were the part of my everyday life. Though I was a child, some people used to show some rude gestures which upset me.

When my younger brother was born I had a new additional responsibility to take care of him. My life as a young child consisted of collecting waste from the dump site and taking care of my brother. I had no hope of anything different or better.

In 2015, the teachers of Grambangla School found me and my brother playing in front of our house. They asked me why I wasn't in school. They

completely understood me and the situation and talked with my mother about the importance of attending school, as well as the facilities that Grambangla school provides. After they left, my mother started to find out more about the day care and mid-day meal programme.

After I was enrolled in Grambangla School I finally started living like a child. The caregiver and the teachers started taking care of my brother. I was not in the dump site anymore so I started spending time studying, playing with beautiful toys and my new friends. I can have a hot meal every day and don't have to cook anymore.

Life has improved so much since starting at Grambangla School. Besides reading and writing, I have learnt so much about health and hygiene and I teach my mother about health and hygiene issues too. Now I know that that when we become ill, we'll visit a doctor at a health facility and not a traditional healer. My mother has also become a member of a self-help group facilitated by the Grambangla Unnayan Committee and she is saving money in the group to support my further education.

Grambangla has taught me to see a dream to live a better life. My dream is to see no one in my family earn a living as a waste picker anymore. From all the hard work I've put in this year with my studies I know I'll complete my primary education. My teachers have motivated me to do vocational training at the end of primary education. I've decided to do tailoring so that in future I will have the skills to get a decent job at a garment factory.





Years back, my father got married to another woman and left us. I spent my childhood living on the dumpsite in piles of garbage. When I grew a bit older, I became a caregiver and the bread winner for my family and never thought that I would ever enroll in school



Inspiration in focus:

Samira





Samira's story

Initially I attended a school where my family had to pay a high tuition fees. One day, my father told me that I would have to leave the school and work in a shoe factory.

I was too young to spend a long time working; that's why the Manager was not happy with me and used to scold me a lot. Within a few days I lost the job. There was no one at home to take care of me and my parents did not want to leave me all alone at home.

I used to go to the dump site with my parents who worked as waste pickers where I would play and roam around within a pile of garbage the whole day. For some extra income, my mother used to work in a bone recycling factory and during those times, I had to stay there with her in a smelly environment which was unbearable.

But in 2017, things finally started to change for the better. With the help of a former student of Grambangla School, I had the chance to go back to school again and was enrolled in class two.

In school I eat a daily nutritious mid-day meal and beside the regular classes, one of the things I enjoy about school, is that every week, our "Doctor Sir" who teaches us so many things about health and hygiene which my parents love hearing about when I return home.

Every year I take part in the sports' and cultural competitions. Last year, on our Victory Day, we participated in an art competition - I enjoyed it so much. Sometimes, the visitors from other countries visit our school and I love the chance to confidently talk to them.

Thinking back to two years ago, things have changed so much. Before I had to spend my days in an unhygienic and insecure place - now I spend my days in safe clean spaces.

After I have completed my schooling, I'll be 14 years old and I have a plan to learn tailoring from Grambangla Technical Training Center. I have hope now that previously wasn't there because other people have believed in me.



Because of poverty, I had to leave my school and instead spend my days in a stinky bone recycling factory with my mother at her work place.

Staff Story

Reza

I joined the Grambangla Unnayan Committee as a Programme Manager six years ago. Before joining, I had no idea about the situation of waste pickers.

Our primary objective is to ensure a safe and secure place where mothers can leave their children so they can go to work with the assurance that their children are kept safe and away from harm.

To deliver this objective, we established a day-care center and school near the dump site. When we set the programme up, we talked with parents and tried to make them understand the consequences of keeping children in the dump with the importance of education. Some parents could understand and sent their children, but many of them couldn't make the change.

One of the barriers to education we needed to find a solution for, was that for some parents, they saw greater value in keeping their children back from school as they could make money as waste collectors on the dump site, instead of attending school. When we talked with the authority of the dump site, they soon worked with us to prohibit the entry of any child to the dump and sent them back to Grambangla Day Care Center and school. This coordination greatly built our relationship with the Authority. Restricting the entry of children in the dump resulted in a higher number of students in school and benefiting from the programme.

We've observed many other needs of the waste pickers. We found that they had fewer opportunities to develop their skills and abilities for more secure employment. They make a small living from waste picking but they didn't necessarily have any relationship with the formal banking system. When they needed to take out a loan, they would do so from different informal institutions at a very high interest rate.

I've seen Grambangla grow considerably in my time working here. From a tin shed our school has been upgraded to a brick built facility where more than 200 children are now studying.

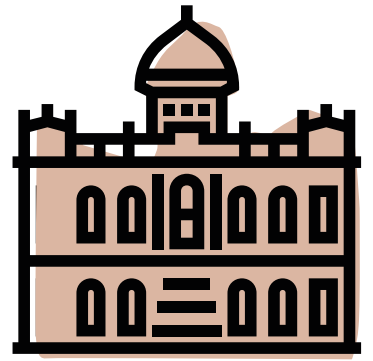
According to their needs we have established a well-equipped technical and vocational training center and because of that, in last three years more than 150 trainees have been placed in different factories. We have facilitated to form seven different self-help groups where waste picker women meet, save money, take out loans from group and learn different things which will help them enhance their skill set to make their life easier. We also do some advocacy work to establish their rights of education, health, decent job, legal accreditation of their work, access to social safety net and entitlement.

Through the years, the Grambangla and the waste picker community relationship has become stronger which has been rooted in trust, respect, love and empathy.

I have a dream, that one day there will be no child waste pickers in this area where instead children will be in school rather than in the dump. They will be skilled labour and will do decent work.

I'll work my whole life to fulfil this dream.





Inspiration in focus:

Ebadul

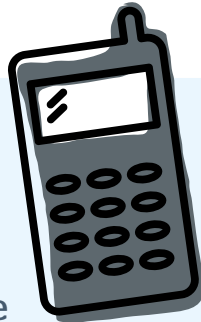
In 2013, at the age of 14, I faced a serious accident where I lost my left leg. It happened on any normal day while collecting waste materials from the dump site. As I was collecting waste, I went just a bit too close to the bulldozer and suddenly, my left foot slipped under the heavy metal crawling tracks.

Instantly, my leg was severely injured and most of the parts of my left foot were damaged. I screamed and screamed and then fainted. My mother rushed over and then with some others rushed me to the closest hospital. After examining me, the doctor advised my mother that I'll need an operation.

It was really difficult for my mother to manage money with the cost of operation. So, the leaders of our community mobilized to raise personal donations from the waste pickers community and traders. My mother had a long-time relationship with Grambangla Unnayan Committee so they also gave some donation for my treatment.

But eventually, I lost half of my leg and became disabled. It took one and a half years to heal the wounds and learn to walk with an artificial leg.

Before the accident, I was a major bread winner for my family. By losing all the belongings in a devastating flood, my impoverished mother came to Dhaka from Gaibandha with me and my two sisters. When we arrived at Matuail dump site my sisters and I started picking waste at a very early age. After accident, I started feeling like a burden to them. From morning to dusk my mother and sisters were collecting wastes in the dump site to



feed me. I felt ashamed and helpless as I knew nothing rather than waste picking.

In 2015, I finally had an opportunity to turn my life around when my mother received an invitation from Grambangla to attend an information meeting on their technical and vocational training on tailoring and mobile phone servicing for young people, with job matching at the end of the course.

Since 1 November 2015, I received training on tailoring from Grambangla Technical Training Center for six months. After completion the training, with the help of the job placement officer, I got a job at a local tailoring shop and still I am working there. At the beginning, I used to earn Tk. 9500 per month but now I have gathered experience and at present, I earn Tk. 15000 to Tk. 17000 per month. From my earnings I saved some of the money to set up my own tailoring shop at my village where I employed two people and have a small tea stall next to the shop. As it is a new business, I currently make Tk. 2000 (£20) profit each month.

I am grateful to Grambangla. When I lost all my hope they encouraged me to go forward. After the accident I became an introvert and I didn't feel comfortable meeting people. But the trainers and other staff helped me a lot and I eventually got involved in social life again. Now I am much more confident in working and talking with people whether that is my employer, my employees or customers.

No one of my family is involved in waste picking anymore.

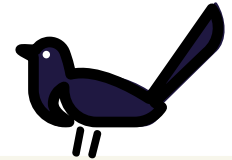


I lost all hope when I lost my left leg in an accident in the dump site while waste picking. My family thought that I would become their burden. But I can say proudly that I am not their burden anymore. I attended the industrial sewing training attentively and now earning Tk. 15000-Tk.17000 per month by working in a tailoring shop.



Staff Story

Shahin

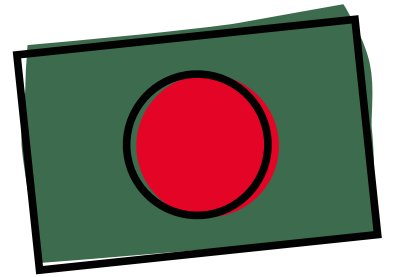


This was my first official job and to begin with, every facet of my work was difficult. There were a number of conflicting aspects to the role which crossed over from the environment, community trust, the problems to solve - everything was difficult.

At first, I had to work very hard to help waste pickers understand the importance and relevance of receiving vocational training.

However, developing interest alone was not enough. The test of encouraging people to attend regular classes was also a challenge. Gradually though, I saw change which made the effort I was putting into the job worthwhile. One of the greatest things I've learnt is that by becoming close to people, to see things from their perspective - this can be a real instigator for change. When I see a former waste picker adolescent girl or boy going to the factory for a decent job, instead of in the dump sites waste picking, I feel really proud. I think to myself; yes, I have helped changed that young person's life. It's one of the best feelings ever.





Inspiration in focus:

Saddam



Five years ago, my parents had to migrate our family of five from Barisal to Dhaka, after losing all our belongings from river erosion around our home. When we first arrived, it was very difficult securing work, as we were new to the city and didn't know anyone, but gradually we all began working as waste pickers.

Within one year of arriving in Dhaka, my mother got a job as a domestic worker, my brother started pulling rickshaw, my sister got married and my father and I continued as waste pickers. My father however became addicted to drugs and would take extended time off from working during the week. He would work for one day and then take seven days off. As a waste picker you need to be self-motivated as you set your own hours. Whatever you collect is what you make for that day. It was really hard work and I felt trapped as I didn't have any other alternative options. I used to work for six days a week and earn just Tk. 2200 a month.

I didn't like anything about waste picking. Frequently I was sick with a fever, jaundice, or healing form cuts and wounds. Working outside all day in the blazing sun and heavy rains was also incredibly difficult as it increased the stinking smell while walking over the dump site collecting waste.

I saw so many boys my age addicted to drugs. Some of them used to start fighting with others for petty reasons which sometimes led to life threatening fights. I hated everything about it. To reduce the queizness of the smell, I stopped eating as it help me stomach the overwhelming smell. This made it partly bearable but then one day, I slipped down through a pile of garbage and broke my leg. It just seemed to be getting worse and I didn't know what to do to change my situation. During my recovering and feeling frustrated by everything, some staff from Grambangla's School visited our home to talk to me about a training course on food preparation. At first, I had to really

convince my family that this was the right thing for me to do as it would mean I would have to leave my job as a waste picker. My parents worried that if I was training then family income would be reduced but, I knew it was the right decision so was totally determined to convince them. The field officers and trainers also talked with my parents about my future and the opportunities that would come out of the training. Inviting them to the training centre, they were shown around the facility and after seeing the difference between the environment of dump site and the training centre and then they finally understood and agreed to allow me to go on the training.

After completing six months of training, with the help of the job placement officer, I was offered a job at a local restaurant as a chef aide. The starting pay was Tk. 6000 a month which was an increase on my waste picking pay and then after seven months, I became experienced and switched to another restaurant, nearer to my house with a higher salary. Today I earn Tk. 16000 per month with tips from the customers on top of this. Since working full time I have opened a bank account and every month I am able to save money. My mother does not work as a domestic worker anymore and I can take care of her. One day I would like to open my own restaurant and I am confident that I'll be able to do that in the future.

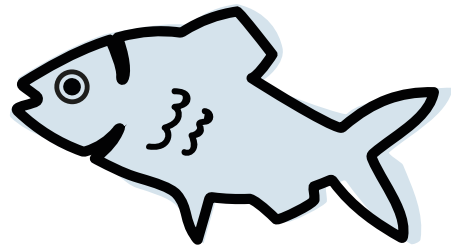
I am so grateful to Grambangla for giving me the opportunity – it saved my life. Now I'm enjoying a decent life and feel so lucky that I had the chance to turn my life around.





Inspiration in focus:

Bilkis



I remember when Grambangla first started ten years ago when the classrooms were under the open sky just near the dump site. My family have seen the school develop and grow and the school has become a big part of our community. In the beginning, there were only a few students and only one teacher.

Maksud Sir used to visit to our waste picker community to see how we were and talk to us. He used to ask us about our work, life, health and challenges. He also used to motivate the parents to send their children to school. Being inspired by him, my mother and I used to tell our neighbours to send their children to Grambangla School. In that time I was 14 years old and already married and the school at this time was just for younger children so I sent my two younger sisters who have completed their primary education from there and are now in high school.

Originally, I am from Baufol, Patuakhali which is situated in the southern part of Bangladesh. When I was seven years old, I lost my father. My father was an agricultural laborer, but he struggled through his life and did not have his own land. After his death, my mother could not stay in the village anymore because she couldn't secure regular work and so we migrated to Dhaka. In Dhaka, my mother started waste picking as she could not find any other job where she could keep her young children with her. At the beginning, I used to help her in day to day work and then gradually I became a waste picker.

I didn't get the opportunity to go to school because at the age of 12, I was married off to a scrap supplies shop owner. When I was 15, I became a mother to a son and to make ends meet, I continued as a waste picker. As my son was growing up, I wanted to change my occupation support him so when Grambangla

started providing vocational training on tailoring and mobile phone servicing in 2015, I was really interested and enrolled.

As I had a long standing relationship with them, they offered me to choose one of the trades. The course started in November 2015, and I completed a six-month tailoring course. After finishing my training, I set up a new business from my home. To set the business up I bought a sewing machine and began sourcing and buying different rejected clothing items from the local garment factories as well as old dresses from the local second hand markets. With the clothes I began giving each item a new lease of life by redesigning and selling them. Initially, I used to earn around Tk. 6500 to Tk. 6800 a month but now I earn between Tk. 10000 to Tk. 12000 every month.

in May 2016, I become a member of the Shurjamukhi self-help group and was able to start saving money each month where I have been able to save Tk. 5800 in personal savings. The group is like a community for me, where we not only save money and give loans, but we also meet socially and discuss relevant issues that are going on in our lives. Our facilitator tells us about personal and children's hygiene issues, how to take care of babies and how to cook nutritious food for children.

In this time, we have learnt how to write our own signature and maintain personal bank accounts. Before becoming the member of this group,

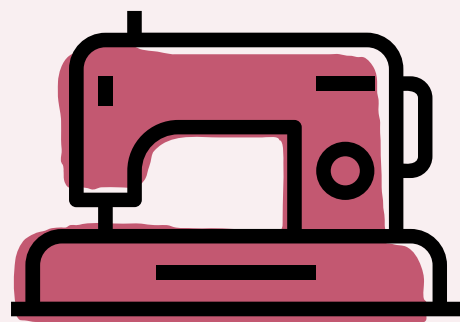




I was the member of other micro credit groups. In these groups the focus was primary on deposits and taking out loans. Except the money and savings was not part of a wider group, it was all individual. Not only this, in these micro credit groups there was no control over our savings. But now in this self-help group, we have more say as we have direct responsibility; as we are the decision makers of the group. We decide how and when money will be loaned and the balancing the books.

I feel so much more empowered these days and I can give more time to my son. He goes to school and know that he will have a much

brighter future. I can only think of a better future of my son and my dream is that my son will be educated and have a good and decent life. He will not be a waste picker.



Staff Story

Sayma Sayed

Every day I see a man who collects waste from my home. He is a slim man and always looks exhausted. I've never seen him with a mask on or wearing any gloves and as he walks around, he does not wear shoes. Most of the time when I see him, he looks sick.

His situation made me think about the bigger picture of what he does each day, that this man provides our community with services at the cost of his own life. Once I started to think about this, I decided that I wanted to find a way to support people just like him.

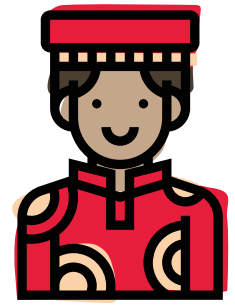
In 2015, I joined Grambangla Unnayan Committee as the Monitoring and Learning Officer, for a project that directly supports the development of the waste picker community in the Matuail Sanitary Land Fill area.

By working directly with them, gradually I've come to understand more clearly their life situation, the challenges they face and their strong resilience to fight against all the odds. From them, I have learnt how to smile even in worst situations that life can throw you. How to fight for your own dignity. How to respect your own job. Once one of the waste picker women told me:

"I don't steel others' things. I don't rob people. I don't kill anybody to snatch his things. I just work hard and earn my living. It's my job and I am not ashamed of it."

That's how they are - the real fighters. Before joining here, I had sympathy for them, but now I have love, respect and empathy. Now I know that they make huge contributions to our economy and environment. In return we also have some responsibilities to them. This conviction inspires me to keep working to fight for their rights of education, health and nutrition and livelihood security.





Inspiration in focus:

Helena



My name is Helena. I am a member of Shurjamukhi Self Help Group. We, the waste picker women of Matuail dump site have formed this group. 12 years ago I came to Dhaka with my children from Patuakhali. Since then I have been working as a waste picker.



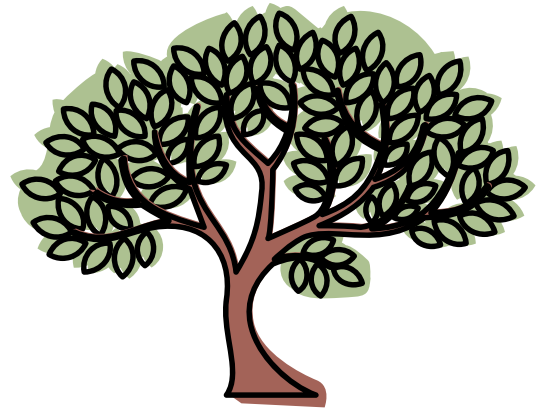
Waste picking is a very hard working job. From morning to dusk I need to work within garbage. Often, I become sick. Recently, I have started suffering from serious back pain. But it is my livelihood. Every day, I and my daughter work for nine to ten hours and earn Tk. 5000 to Tk. 8000 per month. We work so hard and earn money but every month, my husband who has got married again and lives with his second wife in another place; never took any responsibility of my children, used to come and snatch money from me. As if, I am bound to give him money.

To save myself from this situation, and save some money for me and my children's future, I built link

with insurance company and cooperatives from the very beginning. In those institutions, I used to save money and took loan when that was needed. That system was also good.

Two years ago, one of my neighbor told me that with the help of Grambangla, they were going to form a group where they would save money and take loan. To hear that I showed interest to be a member of that group. As Grambangla is a known organization to us for a long time there is no possibility to be cheated. Then she invited me to attend a meeting where the objectives and rules of the group would be discussed. I was amazed to know about the rules of the group. It was a new concept for me that the group will be run by us; we'll take all the decision by ourselves, the bank account will be in our name, all the control will be in our hands and the benefits will be distributed among us. In May 2016, I and other 10 waste picker women formed our Shurjomukhi Self Help Group and started saving Tk. 200 per month. In last 29 months I have saved Tk. 5800. Already, I have taken loans for two times at 12 percent interest rate from the group. At first, I took Tk. 5200 to invest in my recycle business for six months. After paying all the installments, again I took Tk. 30000 to supplement the cost of a land in my village. Besides these, I have received training on health and hygiene, nutrition, healthy cooking etc. from the group. I have learnt to read Bengali alphabets and do signature. Every week, a doctor come to Grambangla's office and for any sickness, we visit him. I don't visit any traditional healer anymore.





I became benefited from this group. Previously, when I used fall in short term financial crisis for investing in my recycle business, I had to borrow money from the Mahajan (Middleman) in the condition that I have to sell the collected wastes to him. Because of that I used to get less price. But now, I can take loan from own group at a reasonable interest rate which has been set by us. Moreover, now, I can do signature I don't give thumb impression anymore.



*I Don't Give Thumb
Impression Anymore*

Inspiration in focus:

Maria



I have been related with Grambangla Unnayan Committee since 2015. I am a single mother with two young children. My husband got married again and live with his second wife. So, I am the only guardian of my children.

I collect and sell waste to earn money to feed my children. At the age of 10 years, my daughter left her school to take care of my younger son. Before being introduced with Grambangla, I did not know about any place where I could keep my children safe while working. I used to feel guilty as my daughter had to leave school to take care of my son. Moreover, she was also too young to take care of another child; that's why I always felt anxious about them. Sometimes, my daughter also used to collect wastes from the dump site with me.

In 2015, while visiting the community, the teachers of Grambangla School talked with me about the facilities of the school. Then I visited the school and enrolled my daughter to class three and my son to day care. Now, my daughter is the student of class five and taking preparation for the PSC (Primary School Certificate) exam. My son is the student of class one. Now, I don't worry about them. In the early morning, I just drop my children at school and become tension free as I know that my children are in safe hands. The teachers and the care giver take care of them a lot. Besides of free tuitions and educational materials, they get free breakfast and lunch at school. My daughter has learnt so many things about nutrition, health and hygiene. When she tells me about those things I become amazed.

With the help of Grambangla, we, the ten women of our waste picker community have formed a Self Help Group. I am the Cashier of that group. I keep the financial record of the group and

deposit the collected money to the group bank account. Before this, I never had any relationship with bank. From the staff of Grambangla, I have learnt how to keep financial records and operate bank account. These are new things to me. Every month, I save Tk. 200 in the group. In last 29 months I have saved Tk. 5800. In future, I'll use this money for my children's education. During the group meetings, we share our personal and family problems with each other and feel better. From the training sessions, we have learnt that "One for all and all for one".

Grambangla has also appointed me as a community facilitator. As the facilitator, I organize different meetings and rallies, motivate people to do birth registration, to send their children to school and vocational training center. I also have attended many programs at Press Club and other places and talked about our problems with the journalists. I feel so good when the wise people like them ask me different questions and I answer them confidently.

Grambangla has a huge contribution to my life. I am grateful to them.





My life is full of unpleasant incidents and sorrow. Since my childhood, I have been fighting with bad luck. After all these years I have become a stone hearted person.



Inspiration in focus:

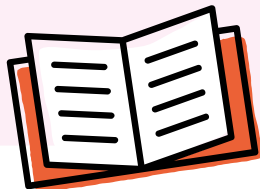
Karima

I have been related with Grambangla for eight years. In 2010, I was enrolled in Grambangla Day Care Center and completed my primary education in 2017 from Grambangla School. In the Primary School Certificate Exam which is a board exam, I got GPA 3.25. Now, I am the student of class six at a local high school. Grambangla helped me find a sponsor to continue my education.

My parents were the inhabitants of Uzirpur Upazila of Barisal district. There, they lived a happy life. My father had two Bighas of land where he used to do farming. My mother was a house wife. But in 1987, my family lost all the belongings due to river erosion and took shelter to my aunt's (father's sister) house. My parents and my elder brother stayed there for one month. After losing everything my father could not find any work in the village. He took some loan from an NGO and migrated to Dhaka with my mother and elder brother. After coming to Dhaka, my family took shelter to Saradghat launch terminal. My parents were puzzled as they did not know what to do; they did not have any work. At last, they became introduced one rickshaw puller at the launch terminal; he helped my parents take a house in rent near the dump site of Matuail. My parents failed to get a decent job and started picking waste at Matuail dump site. During that time, my elder brother was too young. When my parents used to work, he used stay unattended. One day, he was attacked by a dog,



I was born in 2002 and my younger sister was born in 2004. When I was young, I used to take care of my younger sister while my parents were at work. At the age of seven years, my mother took me to a house to work as a house maid. I worked there for six months. The lady of that house was not good. If I made any mistake, she used to torture me a lot; so, I flew away from there. Then I started waste picking. During that time, my parents admitted me at Grambangla Day Care Center. I was continuing my study but when I was in class four, my father arranged a marriage for me. But I was not ready to get





marry; so, I informed my teachers about that. My teachers visited our house and tried to convince my father to not arrange marriage for me as I was too young to get marry. At first father did not want to listen to them but when they said that they would inform police, my father changed his mind.

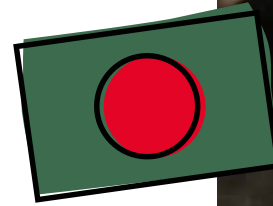
When I completed my primary education with a good grade point, my neighbours praised me a lot they said "Look she is a "tokai" (waste picker) but did a good result." My parents were so proud to hear that. My father said, "My daughter has made me proud."

Grambangla has appointed me as a community volunteer. I love to do this job. In our community there are many teenagers who are addicted to drugs or have relationship with drug addicted. I talk with the teenagers and try to make them understand the bad effects of drug addiction. I played a vital role to stop marriage of three girl children. I motivate the children to attend school regularly. I helped five waste picker children get enrolled in Grambangla School. Now, the people of our community respect me a lot.

I would like thank Grambangla to give me the opportunity to live a respectful life.

Inspiration in focus:

Halima



My name is Halima and I'm 13 years old. We live near the Matuail dump site and when I was three years old I lost my father, my mother works as a waste picker as this is how we survive.

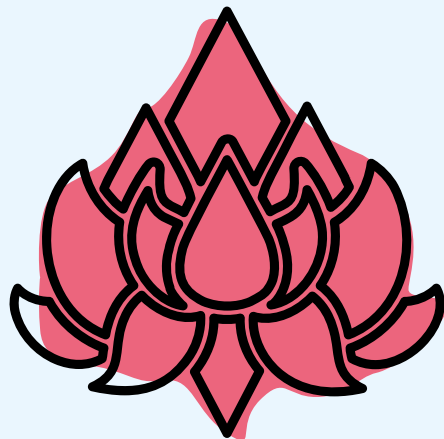
In 2010 I was enrolled at Grambangla pre-school after one of the staff members started talking to my mom about what the school provides and how it would be easier for her. Because my mom was always at work, it was hard for her to look after us as well as making enough money; so she decided to enroll me.

Coming to school has really changed my life. I love my school and have learnt and experienced so many different things here. I've learnt how to read, write and how to do maths. At school I really enjoy drawing pictures, singing songs, reading out poems and writing rhymes. Some of the most memorable experiences of my life have been participating in school's annual sports events and visiting the historical Sonargaon.

In 2016, after all the hard work I put into studying I became more confident in myself and passed the primary school certificate examination.

After my results came in, my mom and teachers were so happy for me. I remember thinking of my dad and missing him so much thinking if he was alive, he would have been so proud and happy for me.

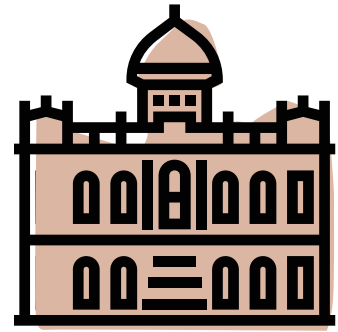
I'm now in class eight at a local high school, which Grambangla supported me with. I really know how hard it is for children living around dump sites, so my dream is, that one day I will be able to serve my community as a teacher, so I can help children get in to school with the help they need.





Inspiration in focus:

Sonia



My name is Sonia. I'm 18 years old and work in a packaging factory. The hours are long, where I can work between eight to ten hours a day over six days a week but when I think of how far I've come in my life, I feel so proud. Where I am today however, is a completely different story to where I was a just a few years ago.

Born in the Mehendiganj Upazila, Barisal district, my sister and I lost our mother when we were really young; I was only three and my sister was seven years old. After some times my father got married again and had two more children, two sons. In our society, sons are more preferred to daughters. So, our father stopped caring about us and became the father of only two sons. My step mother was a very cruel women who would

verbally abuse me and my sister with and not feed us properly. When our step brothers grew up, they used to beat us brutally and our father turned a blind eye to the abuse. The abuse was unbearable, and it got so bad that when I was 12 years old, I decided I couldn't endure it any more so my sister and I took some money from father, and left our village to move to Dhaka.





After we arrived, we rented a house in Mridhabari, near the Matuail sanitary land fill area. Both of us tried to find jobs in the garment factories but couldn't secure jobs. At last, some of our neighbors suggested we try getting jobs waste picking at the dump site.

It was a hard decision to make to start waste picking as the environment of the dump was horrible. The place was full of pile of dirty things, thousands of flies, awful smells, insects, and dogs everywhere. Everything about it was horrible. But we were helpless and we needed the money. During those times, we used to work seven to eight hours a day earning us Tk. 2500 a month which would only cover the rent and food. We soon experienced the stigma and of people who collect waste as a job, people began rudely calling us, "*Tokai*" (waste picker), as if we didn't have a name.

This was our life for more than five years but in June 2016, some staff from Grambangla visited our home. They talked to us about some opportunities at the technical and vocational training center that we would be able to enroll in. For me, this immediately sounded like a way out of waste picking. I was so desperate to change my situation, so I signed up to their trainee selection meeting.

At that meeting I learnt about the three different trades those we could study and the support of regular food within their facility. What really convinced me was that after successfully completing training, Grambangla would help us securing a job.

My challenge was though, in order to start and complete the training I would have leave my job as a waste picker which I found a difficult decision to make. When I got home, I talked to my sister about the course and my worries about not having enough money for rent and food. My

sister assured me to give support and advised to receive training on jute and paper bag making.

That course also appealed to me the most as it seemed easier to produce and less time consuming to learn. There were also plenty of packaging factories in the area where I could find a job after training and if I wanted to run a business from home, it would be possible with just a small start-up investment.

During the six months of training, I learnt how to make different types of boxes, everyday paper bags for groceries, stylish shopping bags and interesting ornament boxes made from jute and other materials. Included in the training were sessions on occupational safety, the importance of birth registration, effects of drug addiction, and general health and hygiene. The training center was such a positive and supportive environment and I used to love coming each day.

Since January 2017, I have been working in a local packaging factory. Like any other job, there are challenges, but would still choose to work here instead of in the dump site.

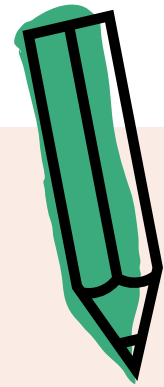
The difference is significant as I now have a dignified life and career ahead of me and the biggest change is that no one calls me a '*Tokai*' anymore.

In the future, I plan to set up a small workshop at my home where I'll take orders from packaging factories and shops. I will always be grateful to them as they gave me a new life.



Inspiration in focus:

Rina



When I was 17, I got married to a farmer from our village where he would get jobs on a limited income. It was a difficult life as my husband's income was irregular so running our family on his small income was very difficult.

Around this time we decided to move in to Dhaka to find better paying jobs. When we arrived, everything seemed to fall into place and was going quite well. My husband was working as a rickshaw puller and I gave birth to a daughter.

But then suddenly, my husband left me for another women. Getting married again and moving in with his new wife he completely stopped supporting our family. By this time, we had three children, so it was difficult for me to secure a permeant full time job as there was no one to take care of my children but I soon started waste picking and now I own a scrap shop.

I've always believed I can do anything if I have a vision and work hard. Growing up in my village, I had a dream of building my own house so when I started earning money, I began saving for this dream.

My daughter is now a student of Grambangla School and I've become a member of Parents Welfare Group. I help Grambangla identify students for school and other activities where I am quite active in supporting other waste picker women.

We set up a self-help group with women of my neighborhood and formed Shurjomukhi self-help group in May 2016. I was elected as the President of the group and at present, the group is functioning successfully. We have opened a group bank account and I am one of the signatories of the account. Every month, I save money in the group. I also took loan from the group to invest in my business.

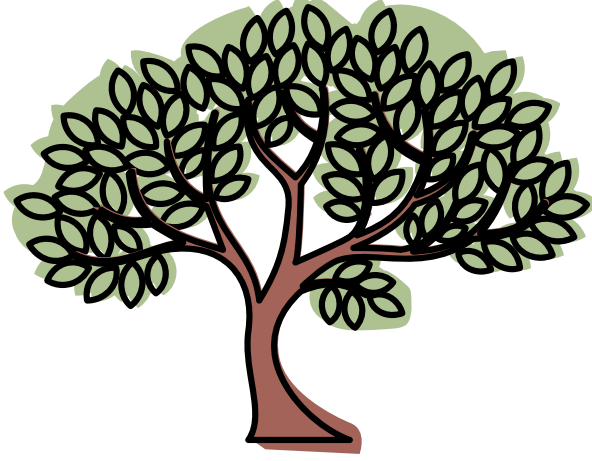
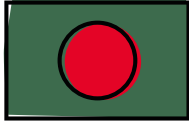
Through Grambanga, I've received training on how to take care of children properly including how to cook to gain maximum nutritional value from meals, recognizing and writing Bangla alphabets and do signature and counting. Now, I can write my name.

As the President of Shurjomukhi self-help group, I have had many opportunities and participated actively in lots of different advocacy campaigns including rallies, press conferences and discussions on policies on the rights of the waste pickers. I have also been heavily involved in birth registrations of waste picker children.

My dream of building a house has now come true and I feel very proud to be the president of the Shurjomukhi self-help group.







*'Shokol Kanta Dhonnyo Kore, Phutbo
Mora Phutbogo. Arun Robir Shonar
Alo du haat diye lootbogo'*

*I'll blossom despite of all obstacles,
I'll hold the golden sunshine in my
little hand'*

- Kazi Nazrul Islam



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