



Rimpa and her family

Rimpa's Dream Castle

Rimpa, a 5 year-old girl, lives in village named Tatia Noagaon surrounded by water. There is government primary school 1.5 kilometer away from Rimpa's house which can only be accessed by crossing a river. Rimpa wished to go to school with her elders but her parents did not allow it as the boat journey is dangerous, especially during the monsoon season. In 2017, the SRG surveyed and made a list of 25 children including Rimpa who do not go to the government primary school from Tatia Noagaon. In 2018, the Project inaugurate a new floating school for 25 children with the



support of community and upazila administration under the IBE project. The facilities included child friendly education materials, game materials, a latrine and ventilation system with one teacher and a boat driver. Rimpa was admitted to the Floating school along with 24 other students. She is delighted to get a new environment where the school comes to the students. For Rimpa, her school is a dream castle where she loves to go, it has space for her to dance and games for her to play with her friends. Her mother remarks, "when Rimpa reads loudly at home in the evening, this makes me happy."

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Floating Boat Schools:

Taking Learning to Hardest-to-Reach Children

Background

Stromme Foundation's (SF) Inclusive Basic Education (IBE) project for the Hardest to Reach Children in Bangladesh was initiated to address the gaps in basic quality education for children in the hard-to-reach areas of Durgapur, Khaliaghuri, Kalmakanda and Mohonganj of Bangladesh. The communities in these areas are deprived of state services and basic infrastructural facilities that communities in the mainland enjoy. The project focuses on creating an enabling environment for the children of ethnic and climate-vulnerable communities by ensuring access to quality basic education. The project is implemented in conjunction with the Socio Economic Empowerment with Dignity and Sustainability (SEEDS) programme. The Floating Boat School initiative is one of the flagship programs of SF Bangladesh.

Goal of the Floating Boat School Programme

The initiative aims to provide a physical learning space for children in water-logged areas during the monsoon season where all available higher grounds are occupied for living and other essential household purposes.

Innovations

Initiated by SF to deliver educational services to remote areas, the idea of a Floating Boat School (Vasoman School in Bangla) is a unique approach that addresses the issue of accessibility in water-logged areas where government schools do not operate in close proximity to the villages.

As the Haors remain under water for nearly 9 months of the year, the children in many of the scattered villages are deprived of education. In this context, the Floating Boat School is the only place where children can receive pre-school education. The initiative focuses on 'fun and learn' education and promoting community ownership.

Implementation Strategy

The boat schools aim to provide inclusive education that is accessible for all: every class maintains a gender representation of 44% Boys and 56% Girls. Girls are encouraged to take ownership of their education. Furthermore, awareness programs carried out are primarily geared towards ultra-poor families that would generally not consider providing any form of formal education for their young. As a result, Floating Boat Schools are now supporting more girls beyond the age of 4 years than any other NGO that specializes in free and accessible education.

Implementing Process

The high-impact and low-cost Floating Boat Schools were inaugurated in January 2015 as a result of a

partnership between Stromme Foundation and People's Oriented Program Implementation (POPI) to ensure access to education for children in the Haor area. The Floating Boat Schools are mainly 12.8 meters in length, 3.2 meters in width and 1.9 meters in height. They are designed to serve as a classroom and Community Resource Center (CRC) as well. They are built on water-launches and equipped with the required facilities and teaching/learning aids. A boat can accommodate 25 students in a classroom at a time. The classroom walls are adorned with paintings and writings by students, handmade flowers, alphabets, word lists and timetables to create an inspirational and effective environment for learning.

This floating boat school initiative is the school-preparedness programme for the children of aged 4 years and above, where they can take a one year course. The programme aims to equip children with physical, intellectual, linguistic,

social and emotional development, along with reading and writing skills, so that they can cope with the growing needs of their education and learning. This floating boat school is adopting different child-friendly strategies to attract children such as learning-by-doing activities, educational games and involving mothers in class activities. By this programme seeks to enhance children's cognitive skills, literacy and social skills, improve retention and have a positive impact on level of educational accomplishment in later years.

Floating Boat Schools are not only a centre for learning but also a place where children socialise, play, observe nature, and engage in community events. Parents/guardians are visiting their children of this community-managed floating boat school and participate in various sessions such as child rearing. They observe the activities of the centres as well as the progress of their children.

Management of the Boat School is largely undertaken by the Center management committee (CMC) for overall boat school management, quality of education, monitoring children progress etc., and then Self-reliant Groups (SRG) is the overall community resource center management as after boat school activities; the project's role is to act as a catalyst by providing technical support in mobilising community and offering guidance.

Current Status

Total 4 floating Boat schools in the project location. Till to date 261 children are enrolled and the project aim is to 100% mainstreamed them to the formal school. Currently, 242 graduated children were mainstreamed to the formal primary school. While a total of four boats have been in operation in Khaliaghuri upazila, the boats have also been utilized as a communal space for 6 Shonglap forums, 3 ward-level PO meetings and 4 CSP sessions. In addition, CMC meetings, parent/guardian meetings have also been conducted on a regular basis.

