

Opportunities Through Education

Since mid 2009 Heidelberg Cement Bangladesh has been supporting a Slum school in the West of Dhaka. How useful is this social engagement and who finally benefits from it? Christa Wüthrich, an independent journalist from Switzerland visited the school.

Abdul is six years old. His story stands symbolically for thousands of kids living in the poor areas of Bangladesh. Since the beginning of this year Abdul goes to school – and therewith he is the exception of his family! With his parents and his three brothers and sisters he lives in a six square meter big room in a Slum in the West oft Dhaka. Together with ten other families they share one water tap and the cooking facilities. His father is a day laborer, earning around 120 Taka daily. The other siblings are working in the garment industry. To send their son to school means for the family to lose a part of the already too small income. Nevertheless, each morning Abdul leaves for four hours his Slum home behind and goes to school. „If he has a good education, he will get a better job to earn a stable salary and to support us”, explains his mother. And she is not the only one thinking this way in her slum neighborhood. A lot of parents are willed to send their kids to school, but finally they are not able to pay the school fees. With a family income of less than 7000 Taka, education becomes an unreachable luxury.



A family in their home in a slum in the West of Dhaka

Classes, trainings, workshops

Abdul would have never had the chance to go to school without the Chetana Bikash Kendra School (CBK) and Heidelberg Cement. The school doesn't charge school fees. HEKS, a Swiss development Organization had supported the school during the last 14 years, but drew back its financial support end of 2009. "A critical situation for the school", remembers Mofizur Rahman, Director of the Community Development Library (CBL), the organization, which founded the school in 1986. "We had to look after a new sponsor, which is interested in a long term partnership and which supports our school policy. In our school, the kids learn not only to read and write. Values, respect and tolerance are part of the lessons. Monthly parents meetings are compulsory. The teaching staff visits each month the families at home to follow up the personal and educational development of the students. Additionally, the school offers tailoring-trainings and sewing-workshops for former students and parents, that they can achieve their own small business. With Heidelberg Cement we found finally a sponsor, which stands behind this special school, its values and visions".



Workshops at CBK for former students and parents

700 students, 10 teachers, one dream

In the beginning, in 1986, the school counted only 16 pupils! Today, 700 kids are taught by 10 teachers up to grade five. Last year, more than 480 children wanted to join the Chetana Bikash Kendra School. Only 220 of them were accepted. „The school building is too small. Actually, we have

to teach in two shifts. 350 students are coming to class in the morning and the other half in the afternoon. In some of the tiny classrooms more than 90 students are squeezed in”, describes Mofizur Rahman the actual situation.



CBK-students during their classes



The students, who finished class five, try to find work in a shop, in the garment industry or in private households. Only the best few students face a further school career, thanks to scholarships, financed by CBL and private donors. “I am grateful for the scholarship and the opportunity to study”, comments a former CBK student, who now goes to University. “Besides my studies I am working as a teacher at the CBK-school. So I can give something back to the community and the kids. Additionally, I am a role model for the small pupils. They realize – if you really study you can reach your goals”.



Work and school: A student of the CBK-school folds paperbags.

Abdul und his six year old classmates do not care yet about the scholarships and university. The first time in their lives they are not stigmatized as dirty rag pickers. Their clean blue school uniforms give them not only a different appearance but also a new self-esteem. However, going to school doesn't mean not to work. After the classes the pupils sell peanuts, fold paper bags or are working in garment-factories or private households. And thereby they dream of a future as engineer, doctor or businessman.

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