



# FRIENDSHIP'S APPROACH TO EDUCATION

## Sharing our approach to needs-based education in remote areas

*To restore the dignity of marginalised communities in Bangladesh, Friendship delivers effective development solutions using a holistic needs-based approach.*

*One of our models has been developed through our experience in education. Below is a summary account of the basic practices and principles underlying Friendship's activities in this area, including a description of the system built over the years. They have grown out of our experience of ten years of service delivery in hard to reach areas for the ultra- poor.*

*Our experience is on-going, thus by definition a work-in-progress. It does not claim to lay down a set of hard-and-fast rules and principles that are valid in all circumstances and for all target groups. However, the programme built up since 2005 demonstrates that it is possible to bring dependable quality education to beneficiaries in remote areas.*

### **Runa KHAN**

Founder & Executive Director, Friendship

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## Objectives of the Friendship Education Program

Friendship has developed a model for basic education which is a needs-based, sustainable and replicable model for the benefit of the poorest living in hard-to-reach areas, with no access to government schools. Our education programs have been implemented so far in the *chars* (nomad islands) of northern Jamuna and Brahmaputra rivers and, more recently, in the coastal belt of the Bay of Bengal. River erosion, annual flooding, very limited income opportunities, frequently shifting populations due to *char* erosion, significant distances from the mainland and poor communications make any infrastructural and educational program development a challenge.

### **Our program focuses on 3 main objectives:**

- Making beneficiaries aware that the right to education is a fundamental human right
- Providing basic educational skills in reading, writing, mathematics and sciences
- Conveying life skills, civic behaviour and the ability to positively interact with the community

### **Setting-up effective Primary schools programs**

Friendship has been running primary schools in the *chars* of Jamuna and Brahmaputra rivers since 2005. The schools provide six years of primary education to children starting age group of 5+ and 6+. The schools follow the government approved curriculum and students complete the primary education by passing the national Primary School Certificate. Subjects taught are Bangla, mathematics, environmental sciences, English and religion. Primary schools accept enrolment of children every year with 30 children per class. Generally it consists of six batches of students and, thanks to a double shift approach, three teachers and three classrooms.

### **5 key conditions for success**

1. Schools are only established in larger communities with sufficient and adequate child flow and where the



majority of children cannot access government or other non-government schools due to distance or natural barriers like separation by river.

2. Teachers, of which 90% are women, are recruited systematically from the communities in which the school are located. Our main challenge is indeed to ensure that teachers in remote areas stay near their classrooms and community. It entails retaining teachers 90% of who have not, themselves, completed secondary school.

3. Given the low level of prior skills and qualification of the teachers, intensive training, including monthly follow up training, continuous support, and supervision are key factors of the success of the program. Training and many of the preschool materials are developed in cooperation with FIVDB (Friends In Village Development, Bangladesh), an organization having a long lasting experience in teachers' training and schooling.

4. A condition for any Friendship school to be introduced in a community is for the latter to make available the land required to have the school set up. For each school a School Management Committee (SMC) is formed with members chosen from the community. SMCs are intensively involved in the school management and assist the project team in respect of learner and teacher attendance, classroom activities, maintenance of centre resources and site, etc. Meetings are held on a monthly basis.

5. Considering the nomadic character of *chars*, all Friendship schools have been constructed with prefabricated steel. When the river devours the *char*, the school can easily be dismantled in a day's time to be transferred elsewhere. Up to date, nearly 40% of the Friendship schools have been shifted at one point or another, due to river erosion.

## Completing with satellite Schools for smaller communities

Satellite schools are set-up in smaller communities where the child flow does not allow a 30-children class to be formed each year. In such communities a new batch of children is not recruited every year.

Just as primary schools, Friendship satellite schools aim at providing primary education to children of school-going age. However, instead of having a class per age group, children of up to three age groups are gathered in one class with all of them moving together from grade 1 to grade 5 (same program taught to all children). In all other respects, satellite schools are organized and managed like primary schools and students are eligible, after grade 5, to sit for the national Primary School Certificate. These schools linked to main schools make it more cost effective per child as transport in the areas are expensive.

### Facts and figures

As of October 2012, Friendship is operating 17 primary and 41 satellite schools in the *chars* of Jamuna/Brahmaputra River and in the coastal belt of Bangladesh. In these schools approximately 3,000 children at a time are being provided basic primary education. 45% of the students are girls. Since Friendship started its first schools in 2005, the 1st batch completed their primary graduation in 2011 after six years of schooling and obtained 100% pass result with 97.5% getting A+ and A. 8 students were awarded government scholarship for further studies.

As of January 2013, 16 new schools will open and a second shift will be introduced in a number of existing satellite schools.





## Extending Functional Literacy Program

In 2007, Friendship initiated a functional literacy program addressing adolescents and adults who have not had a chance to benefit from primary education, thus have to be taught to read and write. The program provides an eight month course, and a class for adult education consists of 20 students and one teacher. After the completion of the course, students are able to read simple books, and to write a simple letter to a public administration, and handle basic calculations. Courses are usually arranged in the morning for adolescent girls, in the afternoon for adult women and in the evening for adult men.

While Friendship provides vocational training (in weaving, dying, sewing, primary health care, boat building, mechanics, para-veterinary, etc.) illiterate adolescents and adults cannot, as a general rule, enroll in those training programs without previously completing the functional literacy course. Similarly, members of Friendship Char Development Committees (FCDCs) which are part of Friendship's sustainable economic development and social microfinance projects, are expected to complete the functional literacy course if they have not been to primary school.

Friendship has decided to introduce education on rights and good governance into its adult and adolescent training courses. It has started to form groups, modeled on the FCDC precedent. Indeed, inadequate information on rights are still among the major causes of poverty, starting with the right to access certain public services, or the rights within the family and the wider community.

### **Facts and figures**

Presently, Friendship has 25 adult education centers running for approximately 430 adult and adolescent students.

## Major features of the Friendship Education Program

Community participation at all levels is no doubt the most important feature of the Friendship education program and its principal factors of success are: requirement of land donation, teacher's recruitment, active role of school management committee, and annual meeting of all stakeholders. This way each Friendship school becomes an asset of and for the community and the beneficiaries highly praise the value of education becoming a reality in the villages.

Intensive training and close monitoring is required for teachers who themselves have enjoyed only basic education and who, in order to perform properly, need to receive very clear teaching instructions and to be very closely monitored.

Adapting to environmental hazards and limitations by using only prefabricated school buildings which can be moved as and when a community is forced to move, is an indispensable requirement in Friendship's working areas.

Getting the local and national authorities more and more involved is a constant preoccupation because Friendship's experience over six years shows that its model for primary education in the *chars* is effective and deserves replication while presently a very significant fraction of the children living in the area remain excluded from access to basic education.



## Good Governance & Human Rights

Friendship from the time it started in 1998, has endeavored to be compliant to 'Rights based approach' to work. We take great pride in saying that we have been able to do so. It is this courage and confidence in our quality of work, which has allowed us now to dedicate a whole department that oversees all matters of Rights and Good Governance.

Since the beginning we have strictly enforced character building, ethical values and followed a strong code of ethics, for those working with Friendship and those benefitting from Friendship's endeavours i.e her beneficiaries. We now celebrate, every month, a character and ethical code. For example, in October we celebrated the concept of 'dignity', this month our code is 'honesty'.

Our approach to Human Rights and Good Governance is built on the premise, that each citizen is equal in the eye of law, and is allowed the same degree of access to information. For this to happen, Friendship recognizes that our beneficiaries need to understand the moral, legal and ethical importance of Law and Government. Our syllabus and awareness program therefore strongly promotes this. We are developing our books and manuals with the ideology that we can aspire to break away from the cycle of poverty and powerlessness through education, empowerment and information.

## ABOUT FRIENDSHIP

To restore the dignity of marginalised communities in Bangladesh, Friendship delivers effective development solutions using a holistic needs-based approach. Founded in 1998 by Runa Khan and Yves Marre, Friendship started its journey with basic healthcare services to communities in the remote sandbars of Bangladesh, through the innovative concept of a floating hospital. From healthcare it has expanded its activities and today runs a five-programme model: Disaster Management & Infrastructure Development; Healthcare, Nutrition & Population; Education & Good Governance; Sustainable Economic Development; and Cultural Preservation. These programmes are interconnected to create a positive synergy among each other.

Friendship constantly shapes its interventions based on the changing needs of the communities. In all our work, effectiveness is achieved through the reflection of a firm and on-going commitment to effective governance as well as high environmental and human values.

Friendship is a growing organization with over 400 members in staff and a strong network of volunteers, partners, donors and friends around the world who, together, serve several million of people.

<http://www.friendship-bd.org>