

BANGLADESH

Education Fund

Thirty-five years after the Bangladeshi constitution mandated free and compulsory primary school education, illiteracy and inadequate vocational skills still trap families in a cycle of poverty. More than 84 percent of Bangladeshis live on less than \$2 a day; 41 percent live on \$1 a day. Nearly a third of Bangladeshis fail to complete primary school and more than half are illiterate.

This Fund pairs Strømme Foundation, a Kristiansand, Norway-based nongovernmental organization (NGO), with grass-roots Bangladeshi educational organizations. Strømme has been working in Bangladesh since 1990, promoting education

alongside local microfinance organizations to help families lift themselves out of poverty. The Fund is designed to ensure:

- More children are enrolled in preschool and primary school and fewer drop out
- Teenage girls and young women learn life skills so they can improve living conditions for themselves and their family members
- Adults become literate and gain job skills so they can increase family income

Fund Profile

Sector priority
Education

Minimum Contribution
\$25,000
£17,000
€18,000

Duration
3 years

Lives to be impacted
48,350 children
and adults



Students greet visitors to their Bagerhat, Bangladesh school. Improvements at the school were funded by Strømme Foundation.

Strategy

While Bangladesh has improved economically in the last decade, 28 percent of the population in minority, ethnic and indigenous communities live in abject poverty. People in these usually remote areas are excluded from opportunities available to others. Projects in this Fund will focus on places where exclusion has worsened educational opportunities, where the government and NGOs have not reached and areas with a concentration of marginalized and excluded minority and tribal communities.

Strømme will partner with nine of the best local implementers to educate and build capacity among:

- Slum dwellers
- Marginalized minority children from remote fishing communities
- People displaced by cyclones or who lost their land due to erosion
- Residents of majority Muslim communities

This Fund gives Bangladeshis a second chance at education by reaching those who dropped out of school or never attended. Programs will help them catch up and succeed in mainstream schools. It also will teach vocational skills to youth and adults and educate women about family and community issues, decision-making, savings, healthy behavior and human rights issues. Human rights advocacy work will reach NGOs, community-based organizations and local government institutions.

Impact

Despite rising enrollment over the last five years, Bangladesh's literacy level is about 43 percent. More than 60 million Bangladeshis cannot read, write or perform basic arithmetic, according to UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Contributing factors include:

- Lack of teachers and classrooms
- Negative cultural attitudes about educating girls
- Students leaving school to work for survival income

Drop-outs face an uncertain future. Boys who leave school are able to find work, but girls often end up staying home and becoming an economic burden on their parents. Unemployed youth and adults are easily drawn into hazardous activities for survival income.

Bangladeshi schools rely on textbook learning, which is not the most stimulating or effective method and does little to persuade children to stay in school. Teacher training for mathematics and English is critical, as is providing arts and sports to encourage enrollment.

This Fund will enable Strømme to improve educational quality and address related issues such as enrollment, drop-out rates, girls' education, life skills and vocational training and adult literacy. Of the 48,350 beneficiaries, 44,212 will be children (including 13,372 adolescent girls) and 4,138 will be adults.

Bangladesh

- About 90% of children enter primary school, but only 76% complete it
- About 34 million tribal children are outside the education system; of those attending school, more than 60% drop out
- The average student-teacher ratio is 72-to-1, Asia's highest rate
- Average student-teacher contact time is 2.5 hours per day, one of the world's lowest rates
- Less than 20% of Bangladeshi teachers have any early childhood training

**U.N. Human Development Index rank
140 of 177 countries**

Sources: CIA, United Nations Strømme Foundation
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Changing lives

In 1998, Strømme proposed building a primary school in a minority Hindu community in Surigati village in coastal Bagerhat district. Although residents agreed they desperately needed a school, they agreed on little else. A disagreement over a religious ceremony 15 years earlier left residents divided and bitter, with lawsuits filed by both sides. Strømme agreed to buy materials for the new school if the community provided labor, encouraging residents to work together. When a Strømme representative later visited the school, he was greeted by a happy crowd. The school management committee chairman greeted the Strømme representative and said, "You not only gave us a school, but you built a bridge between the two communities who were otherwise divided for many years." Today, the school offers classes for 91 children through fifth grade and is expected to accommodate up to 150 students over the next two years. No student has dropped out.



Philadelphia

595 East Lancaster Ave Suite 200
St. Davids, PA 19087
United States

+1 (610) 254-0000 www.GenevaGlobal.com