

PARTNER PLAN

An ecumenical appointment with

The **Methodist Church** 

Pat Jamison - Bangladesh March 2015

Apologies for the late arrival of this letter.

c Flat 5N Quamroon Noor Apartments
9/1 Sir Sayed Ahmed Road
Block A Mohammadpur
Dhaka 1207
Bangladesh

Hello Everyone

This month it's been great being able to cheer for my country both in the rugby Six Nations Championship (which we won) and the Cricket World Cup (which we didn't). I grew up with my three brothers and Dad being avid football supporters. All four supported different English league teams and none swayed by peer pressure to support the more popular teams of the time. When it came to international football however the only one to cheer for in my home and family was and still is Northern Ireland. Even as a girl I have always been included and it's only been in recent years I have enjoyed rugby and cricket. I attended many NI games with my Dad, watched them often on television and trained with the football team my Dad managed when I was young. I was fortunate to have the same opportunities as my brothers and was never treated differently for being a girl (apart from my Dad who was shocked, although delighted his daughter not one of his sons was the first in the family to win a trophy for football).



At the time of writing this update Bangladesh is totally unsettled politically. The main opposition party BNP is led by Khaleda Zia (left) the wife of the founder of the BNP who was killed in 1981. She has been in power as Prime Minister on several occasions. The current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina (right) is the daughter of the founder of the nation who along with all the family except one sister was assassinated in 1975. She is also the leader of Awami League.

As I read about these two powerful and determined women I am reminded of many women in this land and in many other countries who are powerless to speak out, unable to continue with their education, are being married very young (**2% of girls under 11 have arranged marriages in Bangladesh**), rape continues, eve-teasing is on the increase, acid attacks although less still happen and women do not have the same rights as men and are paid much less in many jobs. Many have not and will not have the opportunities I have had or will continue to have.

A report on nutrition in Bangladesh I read recently from Save the Children has some very alarming statistics and the differences show differences in attitudes to girls versus boys. In Bangladesh women still have a much lower social status than men mainly due to deeply embedded cultures and traditions where greater value is placed on men and boys. Many, **although I must emphasise not all**, view girls and women as social and economic burdens and do prefer to have sons. **Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child marriages for girls under 15 in the world.** Most girls who marry young give birth at a young age which in itself increases the risk of poor

PARTNER PLAN

growth of the baby in the mother's womb. The baby is born with a low birth weight which leads to stunting. Early marriage also means many young girls do not finish their education and this can then restrict their social development and leads to an unequal society where many women feel vulnerable.

Child marriage, early pregnancy and stunting at birth are critical points for malnutrition throughout life therefore empowering women and targeting adolescent girls for nutrition-sensitive social protection in Bangladesh is a clear priority. I am very glad to report CBSDP is one of many organisations who are assisting to change attitudes, helping families to discourage child marriages, aid women to become more empowered, stand up for women who are abused, attacked, being neglected and are working together with men, women, adolescents and children in all of these areas and to increase food and livelihood security.

In the Community Health and Nutrition section of our programmes the focus for our beneficiaries is on ante-natal care, breastfeeding practices, preventing ill-health, monitoring under 5s, helping and advocating for available health care which is accessible, appropriate, affordable and accommodating to all, promoting clean safe water and water-sealed latrines and awareness regarding HIV/AIDS. Although CBSDP has several programmes in urban areas most are rural where unemployment is high and adolescents are getting involved in drugs. Climate change in rural areas is also causing many issues with land erosion, saline in the soil and various other land problems. This causes many to migrate to areas such as Dhaka which is already overpopulated.



Unemployment means no or very little money with many families eating a limited diet some once or twice per day with very little nutrition. The woman of the family is usually the cook, the one to serve the food and the last to eat and regularly there is little food left over when it is her turn to eat. Pregnant mothers require a good nutritious diet and to eat more frequently however in most families especially our beneficiaries this is not happening. Food security is therefore an important aspect of the programmes in CBSDP.

Goat/chicken/cow rearing, use of natural compost, fisheries and other agriculture aspects are all included in the CBSDP programmes currently and in plans for the future. In many areas although male and females are included there are also women only programmes. One such programme is in Meherpur where as well as a tailoring programme shorter programmes are being organised such as animal husbandry, kitchen garden assistance, vegetable and flower cultivation and hopefully if



funding is sought for desktop computers then computer courses will begin also for those with a little more education.

This photograph shows a Community Organiser from Meherpur at recent HIV training and one of the trainers who is also one of our CBSDP Project Managers. Both these women play important and pivotal roles now and in the future of CBSDP. One as an inspiring hard working unmarried Muslim woman working with and alongside mainly Muslim families in a slum located in an urban area and the other a dedicated married Christian woman

working with Muslim, Hindu and Christian people in a rural area.

PARTNER PLAN

Both these areas although they appear vastly different have many similarities. Both have very large unemployment rates, many people are at risk of being trafficked to other lands (especially women and young girls) and there are countless others struggling to survive with little regular income to support their families. Many women in the female groups have little education, a large number will have been married young and many of them will arrange marriages for their daughters before they are 18 years old.



A recent study carried out by Bangladesh government on secondary education shows 61% of teenage girls in disadvantaged areas did not enrol in secondary or higher secondary education and of these over 75% of them stated it was due to child marriage and the rest was poverty. The government had proposed to reduce the age of marriage for females from 18 to 16 however they did not. I have been reading recently they are reconsidering it and hope it doesn't happen.

I do pray these little girls are able to finish school and receive a decent education, be able to make decisions about marriage and be part of a society where they can play a role **not against but alongside males** to enable their future

generations to live in a society of equality.

Prayers

The political situation in Bangladesh to be more stable as we have started the 9th week of Sunday-Thursdays and the 13th week of blockades.

Work will continue with women throughout many more organisations.

Young people sitting exams and the start of HSC=A levels this week and facing many disruptions.

...when we acknowledge God's supreme role in our life and set our mind on Him, He enables us to be women of hope - Elizabeth George

Until next month

Pat

