

Acknowledgement

Save the Children in association with Community Development Centre (CODEC), Village Education Resource Center (VERC), RDRS Bangladesh, Jagorani Chakra Foundation (JCF) and Friends in Village Development Bangladesh (FIVDB) has been creating primary education opportunities for more than 300,000 out of school children through SHIKHON Program since 2007. Save the Children has been managing this program with financial support from European Union, Dubai Cares, IKEA Foundation and Chevron.

SHIKHON Program ensured primary education for these vulnerable children through a four years accelerated non-formal education model following national curriculum. Where there is no school close by or schools are over crowded SHIKHON created opportunity for early grade primary from Preschool to Grade II for 5-6 years children and mainstream them in grade III. SHIKHON also worked with the government primary schools for the lower performing students to provide after school remedial support in a playful manner.

SHIKHON has many significant successes in last 10 years. SHIKHON has been selected as one of the Second Chance Education model by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education for national scale up. Collective effort of Government, partner organizations, parents and community made this accomplishment possible. We are grateful to all of them. We also want to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the SHIKHON team at the field, region and central level.

Some of the success stories of SHIKHON are documented in this booklet, which will be encouraging to the readers we hope. Special thanks to those colleagues who have collected these stories from the field and who have made them reader friendly. We wish success of all the characters of these vibrant stories.


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Stories of SHIKHON

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“SHIKHON program has changed almost 300000 children’s lives and their families in Bangladesh. It is an inspiration of Save the Children as a whole.”
(David Skinner, Global Education Director, Save the Children).



“SHIKHON is a perfect example of Quality Education in poor infrastructure. The key drivers are efforts of trained and dedicated teachers and highly skilled supervision mechanism of Save the Children.” (Tahmina Khatun, Deputy Director, Directorate of Primary Education, Sylhet).



A Father's Dream

Abdur Rashid had a great regret. His daughter Kabita and son Raju were growing up fast. But the faster they grew, the heavier seemed his regret. Rashid had a simple dream. The one thing that he wanted most in life was to give his children an education. However, to his dismay, there was not a single school in his vicinity. Seeing the smiling faces of his children, so full of youthful expectation, his silent prick only cut in deeper in his heart. What could he do if there were no school to send his children to?

His prayers were answered though.

European Union and Save the Children, in partnership with VERC, established a SHIKHON school at his village Tarash Badh under Tarash upazila. When the teacher of the school informed Rashid about the school, he could not believe his luck. In fact, he did not even need to pay for books or other materials, everything was to be provided free of cost.

The very first time the teacher from SHIKHON visited Rashid's family, he sent his children to school with her.

Both Kabita and Raju fit right in and were doing well at school. Every evening when they sat down to study at home, Rashid would forgo everything else for the evening and just sit by them. It was a sight that Rashid was afraid he would never have the fortune to see. He would also walk his children to school sometimes. It gave him immense satisfaction when he used to hear from the teacher that his little ones were doing great in school.

The time for the Primary School Completion Examination drew closer. The young learners from SHIKHON sat for the examination with students of government primary school.

Rashid went to the exam center with Kabita and Raju. This day meant a great deal to Rashid.

"If you do well in the exam, I'll get you admitted in high school. Then one day, you will also go to a college," Rashid said to his little ones with fervor.

Rashid waited anxiously under a tree outside the exam center in quivering anticipation. He bought *Jilapi* (sweet) for the kids after the exam. Kabita was ecstatic to see the Jilapi in her father's hands.

"Jilapi! It's been so long!" she said delightfully.

"Would you also buy us some Sandesh baba?" Raju asked with a faint eagerness.

"Why not?" smiled the father.

That was a beautiful day for the three, and the last one that they would have together.

Kabita & Raju



The night before the math exam, Rashid fell very ill and died before he could even see a doctor.

Rashid's house had never seen a sadder day. The man who had wanted nothing but to see his children get an education, could not even see his children go through all the exams. In fact, the neighbors and relatives thought that Kabita and Raju might not even be able to continue their education any longer.

Kabita and Raju had never seen a funeral before. But the kind of funeral that Rashid had, no one else had seen one like it in the village. Kabita and Raju went to take the math exam that day. The funeral was on hold until they came back from the exam center as per request of SHIKHON staff.

Both the children have passed in the Primary Education Completion Examination. They walk the same road everyday to school that their father used to take.

Education Across the River

It was a wintry morning. Jamal, Abul, Bakul and Khogen sat idly for a country boat. They needed to cross the river; they want to go on the other side.

No boats were seen through the heavy clusters of fog. Suddenly a bunch of sunlight burst through and hit the char.

“How sweet is this sunlight” Jamal closed his eyes in the comforting rays of the Sun.

“Why are you gaping your mouth like that?” Khogen asked bewilderingly.

“I am eating the sunlight!” Jamal said without opening his eyes.

Although the boys had started to laugh incredulously, but one by one, they all started to do the same.

All of a sudden, the idea of eating sunlight had started to make perfect sense to the boys.

The vast marshland named Majherchar at Gojghonta union of Gongachora upazila always felt like a forgotten place to these boys. Isolated from the society. Rangpur, the nearest town, was 12 kilometers away; but the Tista River made the distance seem somehow a bit too far.

The boys spotted a group of children running nearby. Scrawny and snot-nosed, clad in dirty, shabby clothes, they looked like almost every other kid on the char. No comb has ever touched their hair.

They were too busy to tie two halves of a coconut shell together to turn it into a football. The boys saw the fun and joined them. Just when they were presenting their own arguments as to who is the best one at trying different things they saw a boat touching the edge of the marshland.

None of the passengers looked like they belonged to the char, so the boys half approached them inquisitively.

The strangers simply said that they were new comers. Upon insisting, they mentioned that they were officials of SHIKHON programme.

The man who looked like their leader, asked: “This is school time; why aren’t you at school?”

The boys had never heard a question like that. So they were not exactly sure what to say. There was no school at the char.

With a stutter, Khogen managed to say just that.

“Would you study if there was a school here?” The man threw his second question at them.

Exchanging a few glances among themselves, the boys nodded yes.

The SHIKHON personnel approached the meager dwellings and started talking to the elders. The boys and the children followed wherever they went.

There were 80 families on the char, and they fell under one of the poorest people in Bangladesh.

Although it required considerable motivation, the villagers warmed up to the idea of a SHIKHON school on the char, which was built the following month.

Jamal, Abul, Bakul and Khogen, among many other boys and girls, attend the school everyday and compete to finish their lessons quicker than everyone else. It’s their new game.



The Strong Do Not Wither

“Raihan, Come on. Tell me the lessons of yesterday.”

Raihan mumbled the lines.

The hujur (teacher) of the madrassah (religious school) swung the cane. Raihan’s back burned a little.

“You ass. That’s not how you say it.”

Raihan burst in tears.

“Keep quiet. If you can’t say it right you would be beaten. Keep quiet.” The hujur felt irritated that Raihan still did not know the rules.

Raihan became quiet. After being beaten for a number of days in a row, Raihan stopped going to the madrassah. In a few days, after he found out that it did not cost any money to go to the SHIKHON School at Balaganj upazila, he started attending classes in the second grade there.

Raihan lost his father when he was eight years old. His mother used to work as a domestic help. Sometimes she also used to beg alms. She however continued Raihan’s schooling, but only till she got married again and left the young boy alone.

Raihan’s uncle took him in. Struggling to meet the needs of the family, the uncle decided to have Raihan look after the cows.

Then one day, Raihan’s plights simply multiplied as his uncle sent him away to Moulvibazar to find a job for himself. He started selling labour to survive. While doing demanding tasks for his age, he used to wonder about going to school.

One day he simply came back to his uncle’s house and pleaded to be put in a school. But the poor uncle could not afford to take his responsibilities.

Raihan however did not give up. He started to work as a domestic help and also go to SHIKHON school.

The School Management Committee noticed Raihan’s miserable conditions and informed the Chairman of the Union Parishad about his ordeal.

When he came to know that such a young boy has been going through so many obstacles to fervently pursue education he took all his responsibilities.

Raihan wants to complete his education and join the police force.



Raihan in SHIKHON School



Shamsunnahar Made It

It did not feel like a usual day. After school, Samsunnahar walked across the school playground towards her favorite spot near the big Jackfruit tree with her two friends.

“What happened? Why do you look so sad?” asked one friend.

“Father said that he was going to marry me off. I don’t know whether they would let me come to school anymore,” replied Shamsunnahar.

“What! You are only a ninth grader. Why would you marry?”

“I cried all of last night. But father said that he does not feel it to be sensible that a family as poor as ours should spend money on my education. He also pushed the point that my cousin Shompa was married off when she was in her seventh grade,” Shamsunnahar elaborated.

Shamsunnahar tried to do what no other girl her age in a similar predicament managed to do in her village, to stop the marriage. But she failed. After her marriage, she yet again attempted a feat that young girls can seldom do from her husband’s house, to continue her education. She failed again. Finally, she started teaching poor children in the village free of cost. She was not going to fail at this, she was adamant. And she was not going to let other children give up on education like she had to.

In 2012, SHIKHON, an education programme run by Save the Children presented an opportunity to Shamsunnahar to become a teacher at their school. She was appointed by members of the community and VERC to teach underprivileged children at SHIKHON School.

SHIKHON opened its doors to school dropouts or who were never enrolled in formal school. The programme offered four years of primary schooling. Shamsunnahar was thankful to get the opportunity to help the children seize a fair shot in succeeding in life.

The children and the parents alike loved her. She brought hope to not only the children but also to their parents.

Shamsunnahar however faced yet another heartbreak when the SHIKHON programme concluded in December 2015. The inspiration that Shamsunnahar had sparked in the community had taken its root and members of the community could not accept that there would no longer be a place for the children to learn and grow.

Members of the community, especially the parents deemed it ill fated that a teacher as sincere, passionate and trained as Shamsunnahar would not be able to teach the children in the village any longer and made up their minds to fight back. A number of parents felt that there was no one better than Shamsunnahar to guide their children and started collecting funds within the community to keep the school open.

Since 2016, the school at Pakuria village in Kamarkhand upazila has been running with the financial support of the villagers.

Shamsunnahar had failed to continue her own education. But she has succeeded to accomplish a far greater feat, that of making parents of an entire village to understand the importance of sending their children to school.



Samsunnahar is taking her students to the exam center

A Special Story of Quality Education

Surendra was looking for an exceptional story. He just joined the local newspaper as a reporter and wanted his first submission to be special.

Surendra got to know about Jakir, a young boy from an underprivileged family. In the last Primary Education Completion Examination, Jakir obtained a Government scholarship. How did a boy, who barely can expect his essential needs to be met get a scholarship? Surendra's curiosity was roused and he decided to follow the story.

After asking around in the village, Surendra got a hold of Jakir. A quiet boy. Surendra approached him. "I heard you got a government scholarship. That's a great! I want to publish your interview on our newspaper. Will you give me an interview?" Surendra asked.

"Yes. Of course I am agreed."

Taking his notebook out, Surendra began the interview: "Where do you study?"

"I went to SHIKHON School. It's over there." He pointed in a direction.

"But there was no school there a few years back, right?"

"Yes. People from European Union and Save the Children built the school. They looked for children like me who were dropped out or never went to school."

"Okay. What did you learn in the school?"

"We read the books that are there in the government schools. But we learnt the lessons quicker than them. It took us eight months to complete the year long classes."

"How many teachers did you have?"

"Only one"

"Wow! Only one teacher! How many students?"

"Thirty. We finish one class and then get promoted to the next grade. The same teacher teaches us."

"Do you know about the qualifications of the teacher?"

"She has completed Secondary School Certificate. She told us that she was given an eight-day long training by Save the Children before starting every grade."

"How does she teach?"

"She teaches us differently than usual teaching. We learn with fun! We learn everything in the classroom. We do not need any tutor at home. Sometimes she also visits our home to make sure that we are studying regularly and talks to our parents."

"Great. I think I have no more questions. Now let's go have some sweets."

Jakir smiles.

After two days a news published in the newspaper "Students under the SHIKHON programme at Pirganj upazila did exceedingly well in the Primary Education Completion Examination of 2015. A total of 2630 (99.02%) students passed successfully out of 2656. A total of 104 students obtained A+, 1159 students got A, 6511 students A-, 383 students B, 367 students C and 106 students got D. And most importantly, 12 students received the government scholarship.

A deep sense of satisfaction came over Surendra. He looked at Jakir, and somehow, saw all the other students through him. All of them have a solid chance of becoming someone in the society.



Joy of Teaching

Tuli and Binoy have always drawn attention in school for the wrong reasons. Always lagging behind in studies and being absent minded in class being the highlight of their misadventures.

However, some things changed. They were absolutely caught up with the lessons in class and also found it way easier to pay attention. Sometimes, they were even ahead of the lecture, as they knew what the teacher was going to talk about next! That too in geometry!

They got a call from the Head Mistress's office. They felt trepidation and some confidence, based on their recent performances, at the same time, as they walked toward the heavy door of her office.

The Head Mistress took a good look at them. Her eyes probing their very souls. "How are you doing better in your studies? Did you get any private tutor?" she asked.

"No madam, we have been studying in the SHIKHON club." Binoy said politely.

"How do they teach?" she asked.

"We pretty much learn by ourselves. The facilitator over there creates a wonderful environment," Binoy added.

"Those books are different. We have to do many activities by ourselves." Tuli joined in.

"What are those books like?" the Head Mistress asked.

Binoy took out the materials from his SHIKHON Club room and put it on the large table.

She turned over the pages and did not speak for a few minutes.

"Hmm. They look good! Who developed these materials?" she asked.

"Save the Children." Tuli replied.

Over the lunch break in the staff room, the Head Mistress talked about SHIKHON Club with other teachers.

In fact, she did not just stop there, but visited SHIKHON Club personally and closely observed the teaching-learning techniques used by the facilitator.

She was pleasantly surprised to see that these methods made the children way more eager to participate and learn. She decided to use some of the materials and techniques at her school.

After observing improved performances of students at her school with the methods of SHIKHON Club, she instructed those methods to be implemented from first grade to the fourth grade. The School Management Committee also backed up her decision after seeing the results.



Joyful learning in SHIKHON Club



Stepping stones of SHIKHON

Moslema woke up to a clear and blue sky. The Sun was bathing the whole village. Gosh it is hot! She saw a crow on the jagged branch of the mango tree. Mother would say that is a sign of good news.

Moslema did not get the good news till the afternoon. When the postman handed a letter in an official envelope of the government, anticipation made her feel funny in her stomach.

As she tore open the envelope carefully and glanced at the content of the letter, Moslema could not believe her own eyes for a moment. It is an appointment letter for the position of an Assistant Teacher at a Government Primary School!

The news spread over the village of Darkhore in Panchagar like wildfire. However, Moslema was feeling a tinge of sadness as well. She would now have to stop teaching at the SHIKHON School. She loves her students so much!

Those little angels, as she called them, would be very sad at the news. However, someone really nice would definitely replace her, she assured herself.

When Moslema's father returned from field in the evening, her heart pounded with joy to give him the news. When his father heard of the job, he felt it was too good to be true. Moslema actually had to show him the letter to make him believe.

Abdul Amin, who is a farmer himself, felt, for a moment, that he could not possibly contain such a joy. Then momentarily hugging Moslema, he burst in tears, his chest swelling with pride. His little girl would be a government school teacher.

Once supper was laid out on the verandah and everyone was excited about planning Moslema's future, she said to her father: "All of this happened because of my experience with SHIKHON school baba."

"How?" Amin inquired.

"All the questions that I answered in the interview, I would not have known them if it were not for the training course at SHIKHON. In fact, I would be applying the methods I learnt at SHIKHON in the new job."

Amin nodded approvingly.



Moslema with her students

Never Too Late

The Union Parisad (UP) member said, “Go away, all of you who don’t know how to sign your own name! No one gets money without signature.”

Majlis Khatun hailed from Chagachar village under Chandanish upazila, already burdened with her old age, she became agitated at the UP member.

“I am a poor old woman, can’t even manage food for two times a day. And you wouldn’t give me the money? Eighty years have passed, never needed to sign; now, why do you need a signature?” Khatun asked vehemently.

The member yelled, “Ah, this is the rule of government now. Come here after you know how to sign. Only then you will get the money.”

Khatun started her walk back home mumbling in disbelief, “Is it the proper age to study?”

Shihab is her grandson, stays around her always. When Grandma tells him what happened, to her surprise, Shihab seemed very calm.

“You would be able to sign. Soon too. Don’t worry.” He said.

Grandma’ laughs. She looks very nice while laughing.

“Will you get me admitted to your SHIKHON School?” she asked.

“I have a good idea. Our teacher can help you.” He said excitedly.

“Wonderful!” could you take me to her?” she looked at him eagerly.

“Okay, I’ll.” he concluded.

They did not have to wait long. It was 8 September 2015, the International Literacy Day. SHIKHON School took an initiative to train groups of illiterate people. Shihab took his grandma by her hand to his teacher at SHIKHON School. Everyone in the class was surprised to see such an elderly woman amidst them. The teacher however was extremely happy to see her.

The instructor helped Majlis Khatun learn to sign her own name. She was a quick learner too, as she nailed the signature rather quickly.

After thanking the teacher, grandma took Shihab’s hand and headed out.

“How are you feeling grandma?” Shihab asked.

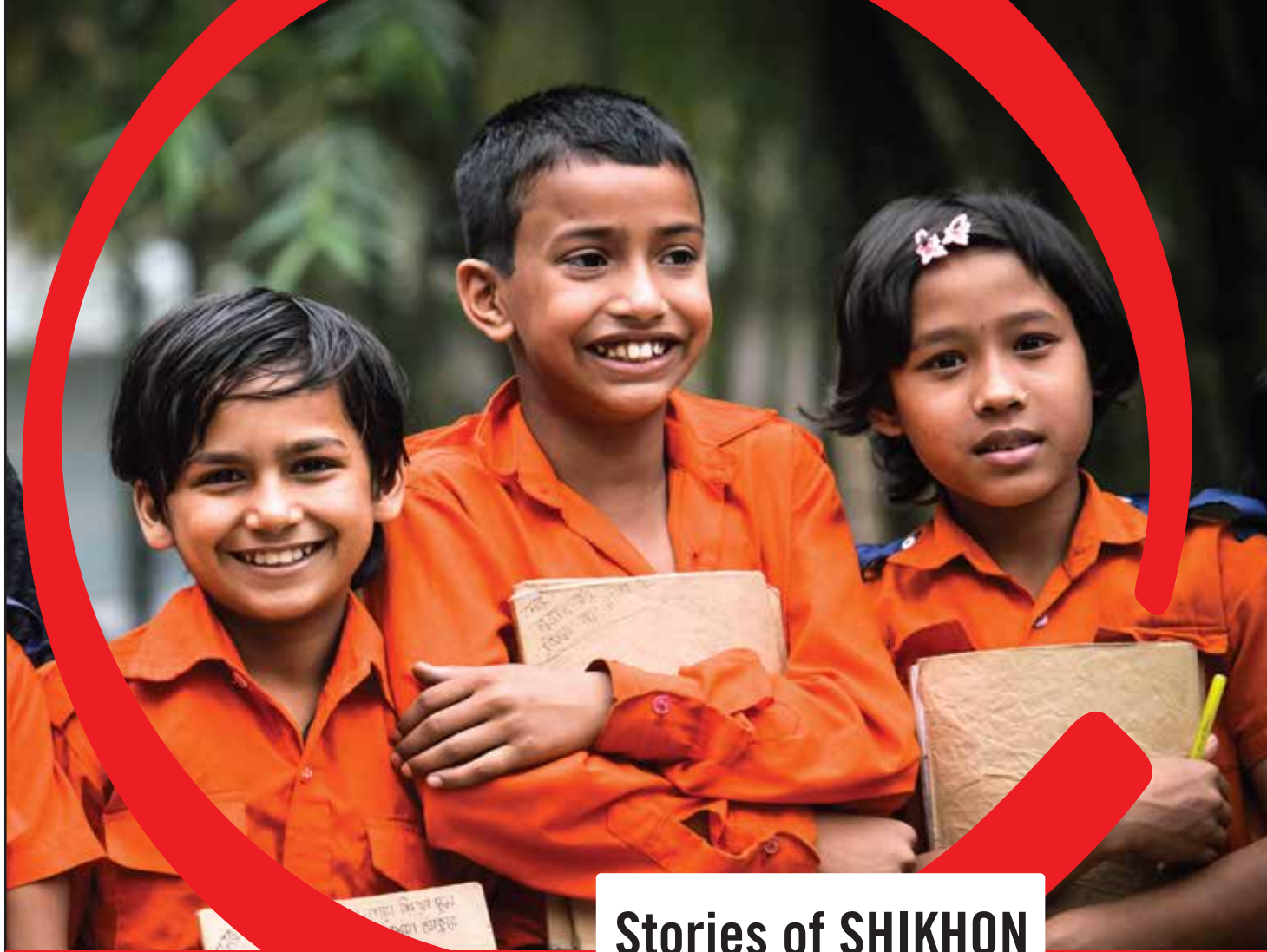
He noticed a teardrop rolling down her cheek. “I have not felt so good in a long time.” She replied.

There was a certain thing about her walk to the Union Parishad office the next day. It was time to get her old-age allowance.

“Why are you here again? You don’t know how to sign.” the member said dismissively.

“Do you have a pen?” she asked, looking directly into the eyes of the member.





Stories of SHIKHON



EUROPEAN UNION



Save the Children

Bursts of Light

Nilufar Yasmin sat down under the mango tree, her feet ached, tired from all the walking.

She had to thank the shade, which offered at least a momentary shield from the searing Sun. She did not want to walk anymore today, the entire village was covered.

“How are you daughter?” Botu Kha, Nilufar’s friendly old neighbor had startled her by breaking the silence.

“I’m fine uncle. Where are you off to?”

“Oh just going to the bazaar,” Botu Kha paused to catch a breath, “You are sure to fail at this. Let it go. These damned rascals can never be given an education. Not possible.”

“Possible. These very children would learn how to read and write, and more!” Nilufar responded with strength.

“There’s always a right age for everything. You are just wasting your time,” Botu Kha jeered.

“I will prove it to you. It’s possible. They most certainly can,” Nilufar stood her ground.

Botu Kha never liked the idea of schooling the children to begin with. And he has his reasons. All of the children are above eight years of age. They are already too late to start! That too from the very beginning, he would have still seen a point had it been for higher level classes. And that was not all. They were to complete studies of each year in just eight months! And Nilufa who wants to teach them, has finished only up to her secondary school herself! His head hurt. He did not want to think about it anymore. But how could he not think about it? His own two grandchildren were going to school! Such a waste! They could have worked instead! Enraged, Botu Kha stepped on his way to Bazaar again.

Botu Kha was not the only one. Many others have been opposing Nilufar in the same way. But she was going to prove everyone wrong, Nilufar pursed her lips in determination.

Save the Children and Uropean Union had helped to set up the SHIKHON School at Godhara village in Natore. Nilufar had stepped up to the challenge and took 33 children under her wings. With her relentless passion and hard work, the children have been passing every grade rather convincingly.

Nilufar even visits her students after school to encourage them to do their homework. And it is not just their studies that she cared about, but also their creativity and sports.

48 months later, the children sat for their Primary Education Completion Exam (PECE). Botu Kha was sitting curiously under a mango tree in front of the exam hall.

“Will you pass the exam?” he asked the children incredulously at the gate.

“Certainly!” they echoed.

Botu Kha lost his temper. He sprang up and walked away, “I will see how certainly you fail,” he derided.

The results came out. The villagers did not know how to react. Every child got GPA 5! But, within moments, the joy hit them all.

Botu Kha arrived at Nilufar’s home with a box of sweets. “What you did dearie, is astounding!” he said while handing the box to Nilufar. She smiled brightly.

Botu Kha looked out through the window to the rickety hut that was being used by the SHIKHON School. That ramshackle little hut was bringing light into the village.



Enlighten Children of SHIKHON School



Save the Children

