

# YOUTH EXCHANGE PROGRAMME 2019

**BANGLADESH**

02-14 November, 2019

Motel Upol, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

*Growing Together*



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# ACROSS CULTURE WE GROW

## Growing Together

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In times of crisis teamwork is of great importance. In cooperation a group of young people from Denmark and Bangladesh, want to create a youth house for the refugees in the Rohingya refugee camp.

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# A cultural meeting

It was Thursday the 2nd of November 2019. A group of 26 Danes from the organization 'Youth Action' left the rainy Danish autumn and arrived to a light odor of salty fish and 40 degree humid heat in Cox's Bazar.

At Motel Upal 27 young Bangladeshi was waiting for them, all involved in different national youth organizations in either Dhaka or Cox's Bazar. All these young people met in Cox's Bazar Bangladesh for an event arranged by the foundation Growing Together. Together these young people, from each side of the world, had to set up a project in order to bring awareness about the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. They had about two weeks of working together ahead of them. Two weeks to create understanding between one another and learn from each other.

The participants had a lecture with the parliament member Nahim Razzaq, visited the local NGO YPSA, visited the Rohingya refugee camp twice and visited the local community to talk with the Bangladeshi people, who are neighbors to the camp. All in order to understand the situation.



All the participants of the program Growing Together on one of the first days

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*“Maybe now I can understand people’s psychology. It is really important to communicate with other people. But first you have to understand the opposite people’s psychology”*

- ASMA UL HUSNA LITU

But learning from each others' different cultures and perspectives was the first challenge the group of young people had to face. Difference in culture will appear in simple things as how much sugar you prefer in your tea, or how spicy you like your food. But the cultural shock will also appear with deeper characteristics like norms the use of language, the perception of freedom and the conditions of upbringing and daily life in your own country. When two different cultures meet new opportunities will appear. It makes us talk, listen and accept the diversity. The Bangladeshi participant Asma Ul Husna Litu, who currently studies in Dhaka, experienced for herself the importance of mutual understanding in cooperation: *"Maybe now I can understand people's psychology. It is really important to communicate with other people. But first you have to understand the opposite people's psychology"*.

# Icebreakers and Cultural Exchange

Day by day the participants' understanding of each others life grew. They showed each other their own understanding of their respective culture through a cultural exchange event. While the Danes showed the Bangladeshi how the youth in Denmark is politically aware, the Bangladeshi took the Danes through a show of traditional dance and drama. They also taught the Danes about child marriage through a mime show and all the ethnic and religious communities of Bangladesh through a ramp show. The danish participant Vega Hultén-Pein soon realized that it can be hard to visit a new culture with different kind of social rules: *"No matter what, when you experience a different culture, you will be met with things which feels totally insane, and that can be in a good way or in a bad way. But we are just people, all of us. And we all have the same process running in ourselves. It might feel more extreme if you are in a new culture, but then you just have to breathe and think, 'It will be okay.' Because it will. Always."* We all have different voices and different opinions, and when you realize that we all just become people. Then it doesn't matter if we come from Denmark or Bangladesh, Dhaka or Cox's Bazar. But not only will a mutual understanding expand the personal horizon, it is also of great importance to even being capable of talking about any kind of issue.

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*“... It might fell more extreme if you are in a new culture, but then you just have to breathe and think, 'It will be okay', because it will. Always.”*

- VEGA HULTEN-PEIN

# We want to make a difference

In itself the cultural meeting between young people from Denmark and young people from Bangladesh had a huge impact for the participants on both sides, but the meeting happened for a reason. At the moment Bangladesh is facing an urgent task of hosting 1.2 million Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. These young people, both from Denmark and Bangladesh, have a great wish to take responsibility for the future and help people in need. The Danes, who were foreigners to the situation, and the Bangladeshi, who faces the problem in their everyday life, had to find a solution together.

To be able to work together in a project like this, a mutual understanding, about the problem consistency, had to be created. Therefore both groups had to start from scratch. A part of the Bangladeshi participants had already visited the Rohingya camp before. But through the Danes they could see the situation with new eyes, as the

Danes could ask new questions. Together all the participants in the project visited the Rohingya refugee camp, first in camp number 13 and 14 in Ukhiya. The second visit took place in Jamtoli, Camp 15. Together they had to develop a sustainable project that involves both the local Bangladeshi and the Rohingya refugees.



*To get to know each other better, the participants played games with each other and had Walk 'n' Talks*



# A visit in the Rohingya refugee camp

It was the first time Dhipen Das, a young Bangladeshi from Cox's Bazar, worked together with people from outside Bangladesh. When the group visited the refugee camp, he felt how it touched the Danish participants: *"We, the young Bangladeshi, could act as translators, both when we visited the Rohingya camp, and when we visited local people in the area. It was nice to see the Danes grow in their understanding of the situation"*. To him the situation is of most important meaning *"At the moment Bangladesh is helping the Rohingya, and we want to help them to get their rights back. Despite that Bangladesh is a poor country itself, it has a big heart."* At the same time he clearly expressed the impact of great consequences it has for Bangladesh to host such a huge quantity of refugees.

And it did touch the Danish group when they visited the refugee camp for the first time: *"I feel, I have got a whole new view on life. It is a completely surrealistic experience to enter the refugee camp. I think, I have become much more humble about everything, but also gained an eagerness to change as much as possible."* said the 18 year old Victor Mortensen after the visit in the Rohingya refugee camp. But not only did the group visit the refugee camp. They also visited local Bangladeshi people in the area. Soon the participants understood the severity of the situation for both the refugees, as they lost their home in Myanmar, but also the local people, who suffer from financial inflation, increasing of natural disasters and much more.

Bangladesh can only provide temporary shelter for the Rohingya. Bangladesh can help the Rohingya people with food and a place to stay, but the situation is unsustainable. Asma UI Husna Litu noted: *“If we start to think about a permanent solution, then we accept what the Myanmar military has done.”* Unfortunately a political

pressure on Myanmar is not something Bangladesh is capable of on doing on their own. Parliament member Nahim Razzaq went with the group, when they visited the refugee camp for the first time, and he cried out for international awareness. Bangladesh needs that UN and the world take responsibility.



*The parliament member Nahim Razzaq went with the group when they visited the Rohingya refugee camp the first time*

Until this happens, they will continue working so that the 400.000 refugee kids have a place to play and the possibility for education. It is also of certain importance to provide something for the youth. As in situations like this, they are extremely vulnerable.

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*“... It was nice to see the  
Danes grow in their  
understanding of the  
situation”*

*- DHIPEN DAS*

# A Glocal Hero and a Youth House

All the participants of the program were moved about the fact that the crisis especially affects sensitive groups like children and the youth. After the first couple of days of research they started a brainstorming process. In the workshop, Tree of change, the young people had to figure out the essence of the problem and come up with suggestions for a solution. As being young people themselves, it was with great importance to create something for the youth in the refugee camp. With inspiration from the Danish Youth House, which is placed in Copenhagen, the participants agreed that the project should contain establishing a Youth House in the refugee camp. The concept is to create a safe place, where young people mentally can put distance to the situation. Various creative and practical activities will take place in the house, based on what the young Rohingya themselves find to need.

Another solution that the participants of Growing Together came up with is the Glocal Hero. The Glocal Hero is illustrated as a fictional character, an influencer for children and the youth, to inspire

people to be good to the environment and each other. The name Glocal is a contraction of global and local, which refers to the importance of engaging at an international level and a regional level. This is also a reference to create an international political pressure towards Myanmar, which, on longer term, is the third goal of the program.

The program ended with a Community event, which was held on 13th of November. Here the young participants played games with the local, explained about the solutions they figured out, and made theatre and played live music.



*The danish participants Diana and Anna together with the Bangladeshi participant Rahima at a visit in the local community*

# Growing Together

The meeting between the Danish and the Bangladeshi participants was not only teamwork across culture, but the young people also formed ties of friendship and grew together. The program the young people were attending was arranged by the foundation Growing Together. It is cooperation across countries: The Earth from Bangladesh, Youth Action and InterCollege from Denmark, and ADEPT from Romania. With their own words the program is to address the needs of refugee integration by promoting acceptances between refugees and local communities. It is all about bringing awareness, encouraging to peaceful coexistence among communities, and to give tools for the youth to work on mutual understanding.

*“If we start to think about a permanent solution, then we accept what the Myanmar military has done”*

*- ASMA UL HUSNA LITU*

Through youth exchange programs young people will be brought together, across countries and cultures. They will learn from each other, conduct campaigns and try to solve problems. It can occasionally be a harsh journey, but it is also a constructive experience for them.

For the participants who just completed the program, it has been a journey. A journey in learning a new culture, a journey in working together despite a different point of view, and in the end, a journey where you have to say goodbye to good friends.

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*‘Sometimes I felt what we did was amazing, sometimes I couldn’t figure out what exactly I was doing here. But in the end of the day, it become something magical.’*

- ASMA UL HUSNA LITU

And when Vega said goodbye to her new friends, she told me: *“I think, I will miss many of these people much more than I understand right now.”* But as much as two weeks can be an eye opener, there is still a lot of work ahead for the young participants, both practical and mentally. All the impressions have to be thought through, and for the Danish group, who just arrived back home, there is a campaign and fundraising process to work on. Concerning the Bangladeshi, who still are still in the middle of the crisis, they have to carry the job of implementing the campaign and making it a reality.



*Vega and Litu brainstorming to figure out a solution. Issues as: ‘what is missing in the refugee camp?’, ‘how can we involve the local community?’ and ‘what about the future?’ is discussed*







Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

