*TALES OF A FOREIGN STUDENT IN BANGLADESH*

*(by Gabriele Zanetti)*

Hello fellas!

Here I am writing you at the beginning of september, after more than one month experience in Bangladesh, hosted by BanchteShekha (BS), Jessore. Well my first letter was after just a week and right now I feel that my honeymoon with the country is finished and my marriage is actually started. And as every marriage, also this one has shown me positive and negative sides. Let’s start with the negatives, leaving the sweetness for the final part. I have witnessed episodes of closed-mindedness in some villages: people who don not really understand the importance of education or are really scared of self-indipendent, proactive women able to take care of themselves. I have spoken with children who dropped out school at 12-13 years old or even already married at the same age. I have tried to discover the reasons of it and also to convince them but they often follow the negative examples of their parents. These parents do not push them to school but only to go working or maybe to get married, they do not care if they throw away their life if they bring some taka home. I have spoken with a 16 years old guy in one village who told me he wanted to get married and find a job and not to go to school. So frustrating watching him playing with marbles, unconscious of wasting his life, his future opportunities and possibilities. I also met a 15 years old girl cooking for her husband in her house, leaving her school and education and growth behind for an arranged marriage. I have tried to give them a different perspective but they weren’t even listening to me. So I realised that BS work sometimes could be really difficult and not always successful, but also indispensable. Luckily the percentage of dropping out students and early marriage is constantly decreasing during the years. Really few students and families still do not understand the opportunity they have.

And now let’s talk about the positive points! First of all commitment: students, teachers and families. Mostly all of them really appreciate the chance BS and all the the sponsors give them yearly. This month another italian girl was here with me and we did official visits with the coordination manager (Shourove Ansari) throughout villages: we were completely speachless in every village. The hospitality was beyond words: flowers, songs and dance exhibitions by children and an indefinite numbers of pictures with all of them! All the children have shared their dreams with us: they want to become teachers, doctors, police men/women, but in particular they really care about helping and support poor local people, their own communities. I was really impressed by a 14 years old girl, standing up and speaking with us, bearing a perfect english conversation and thanking us for the help we give them. Listening to her wishes and dreams, her hope for the future, the way she studies at home just to learn more and her mother’s desire to see her with a good job, really touched us. These children’s potential is definitely impressive, they just need the time and support to develop it.

I also appreciated the motivation of the teachers, who I met in two meetings in BS: they understand the importance of their role and their responsibility, even if a large part of them is still young.

Well this month made me realise that BS work is everything but easy: long-term work, sometimes frustrating. Success and failures are included in all this..but I guess this is the way a good marriage really works!

See you soon for new and different stories!

*A foreign student in Bangladesh*

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