



# Independent Evaluation of Friendship's Education Program

## Terms of Reference

### **Introduction to Friendship**

Friendship, a value-based organization run by compassion, in-depth knowledge, empathy and grassroots experience, has been working for the last 17 years to help address the needs of remote and marginalized communities in Bangladesh, i.e. mostly those people living in the northern river islands and southern coastal belt locations. The organization delivers services in six sectors interacting with each other: Health, Education, Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Management, Inclusive Citizenship, Sustainable Economic Development, and Cultural Preservation. The organization, which started in 2002 with just a floating hospital serving only ten thousand patients is now providing healthcare and other development solutions to more than 3 million people a year. With an integrated development approach, Friendship is nurturing opportunity, dignity and hope by strengthening communities and allowing their members to reach their full potential.

### **Background on Friendship Education Program**

Educational data show that children of the chars and river erosion areas face innumerable challenges in terms of absence of schools (or truly functional schools) in nearby locations, lack of teachers and infrastructure, lack of educational materials, frequent unpredictable displacement due to river erosion, and

poor economic conditions. As part of its endeavor to support a holistic development of the communities in its working areas, Friendship thus saw the need to ensure access to education for those deprived of nationally run education facilities due to geo-socioeconomic challenges.

Friendship started its Primary Education Program in 2006 with 10 schools in 10 chars of Gaibandha and Kurigram Districts of Bangladesh. Over the years, the program expanded so as to, in 2018, host 4,372 primary school students in 18 full-fledged primary schools and 62 single class “satellite schools”. After a reorganization aiming at optimizing the use of limited resources by, on the one hand, establishing some additional full-fledged primary schools and, on the other hand, suppressing a large number of the single-class satellite schools (for which per child education cost are significantly higher than for full-fledged primary schools), the program presently includes 22 full-fledged primary schools and 21 single class satellite schools, altogether hosting 3,428 students, such number to re-increase to approximately 3,900 by 2022<sup>1</sup>.

Based on the success of its primary education program and the obvious need and consistent demand for access to higher education in the chars, Friendship, in 2015, started a video-based learning system in the chars in order to enable the primary school graduates to proceed to secondary education. Currently, eleven secondary schools are operated by Friendship in the chars. In the context of the reorganization undertaken early 2019, four additional secondary schools have been set up and in five of the existing ones, High School classes (grade 9) have been initiated (grade 10 to be added in 2020). Friendship’s Secondary Education program presently hosts 556 students (as against 308 in 2018) and is expected to host 1,000 students by 2027<sup>2</sup>.

Details on Friendship’s Primary and Secondary Education program are provided in Annexes A and B.

After running its Education Program for more than a decade now, Friendship intends to commission an external evaluation of its Primary and Secondary Education program.<sup>3</sup>

### **Purpose of the envisaged Evaluation**

The mission statement of Education program, as per Friendship Strategic Plan, is “*To enable the children of the chars and coastal areas of Bangladesh to develop their potential through quality education, teaching them character building and awareness of their rights and obligations, and also to provide functional literacy for adolescents and adults*”.

Apart from (and in view of) an overall assessment of Friendship’s Education program in the light of its mission statement, the specific subjects to be addressed by the envisaged evaluation, each of which is expected to be addressed separately by the evaluator, are as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> As a result of the fact that the 4 newly created full-fledged primary schools will enroll additional students each year over 6 years. Of course, in case additional full-fledged primary schools are established as additional resources become available for that purpose, the number of students would increase further.

<sup>2</sup> Without prejudice, again to the opening of additional Secondary schools in the meanwhile, in which case the number of students would increase accordingly.

<sup>3</sup> Friendship’s Adult and Adolescent Literacy program is not part of this particular evaluation.

1. **Assess the (absolute and comparative) effectiveness (including organizational efficiency and cost-effectiveness) of the Friendship Education program in delivering quality education to the students admitted to Friendship schools - both in terms of formal/official curriculum contents and in terms of ‘enhancing better citizens’<sup>4</sup>.**
2. **Assess the impact of the Friendship Education program in terms of access to higher education, improved living conditions, and/or better livelihoods, and in encouraging future outlook (hope and ambition) of the students educated in Friendship schools<sup>5</sup>.**
3. **Assess whether and to what extent Friendship Education program is successful in increasing the overall level of education in the chars<sup>6</sup>.**
4. **Assess to which extent the Friendship Education program is/has been instrumental in, beyond allowing access to education, creating community engagement, respectively strengthening communities<sup>7</sup>.**

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<sup>4</sup> At this level of the assessment, the focus is on the Friendship schools and on the students studying (or having studied) in Friendship schools. Whereas other schools and other students may have to be considered as well, this will be for comparison/benchmarking purposes only.

Indicative suggestions: Assess whether and to what extent Friendship Education Program performed better (including in terms of effective learning outcomes; in particular language, i.e. both Bangla and English, and mathematical abilities) when compared to Education programs in existence from other agencies in terms of performance in public examinations.

Consider qualitative aspects of learning, including humanity, values, decision making capacity, environmental awareness, hygiene status, and health seeking behavior among Friendship school graduates. Evaluate whether and to what extent extracurricular activities, such as Code of Ethics, Listen to Learn (L2L), Clean School Clean Home, etc. impacted the learning and values of the students both in the short term and in the long term.

Analyze whether the dropout rate, percentage of students failing in the semester-ending and year-ending internal exams and failing to get promoted to the next Grade, and absenteeism in Friendship schools are within accepted range and whether absenteeism monitoring system is functioning properly. Analyze the effectiveness of internal control and follow-up mechanism of Education program, including the extensive list of KPIs, should be a part of the envisaged assessment.

<sup>5</sup> At this level of the assessment, the focus is still on the children who have done their studies at Friendship schools. But it is about assessing whether and to which extent education received in Friendship schools impacts the subsequent life of the students.

Indicative suggestion: Beyond assessing such impact in terms of access to higher education and/or better livelihoods the evaluator might consider impact in terms of ensuring fundamental child rights, i.e. reduction of child labor, reduction of early marriage, reduction of violence towards children, etc.

<sup>6</sup> At this level of the assessment, the focus is no more specifically on a sample formed by students from Friendship schools but by all the children in school going age in the community/char.

Indicative suggestion of matters to be investigated: Which % of school going age students is Friendship able to host in its schools; for those who cannot be hosted in Friendship schools are they in a position to go to other schools and to which extent has Friendship been instrumental in allowing them to integrate such other schools, respectively to make such schools more functional

<sup>7</sup> At this level of the assessment, the focus is no more specifically on the children in school going age but on the wider char community and it’s about measuring the impact/benefit of the Friendship Education program in terms of community engagement and strengthening (due to factors such as the presence of a teacher in the community, existence of a School Management Committee, PTS (Parents, Teachers, and Students) group, etc.).

5. **Assess the impact of Friendship’s education program and practices on public education and/or on other education actors in the Chars; assess effectiveness of interaction with public duty bearers.<sup>8</sup>**
6. **Explore the potential (as well as limitations and constraints) for the government at local, and possibly national, level to increase support to Friendship’s Education program and/or to adopt elements thereof for the purpose of strengthening public education in the Chars<sup>9</sup>.**

Candidates are expressly encouraged to, when submitting a proposal for this assignment, suggest reformulations of and amendments to the definition of the specific subjects of the envisaged evaluation if they feel that these are not adequately formulated and/or that, as formulated, they cannot be assessed in a relevant manner at a reasonable cost.

Candidates are requested to, in their offer, provide an insight into the methodology according to which they intend to address each of the subjects of the intended evaluation.

The evaluation team will necessarily include a confirmed educationist with significant experience in assessing learning outcomes (in the context of Bangladesh’s education system). The evaluation team will also have to show expertise in respect of the public education sector in Bangladesh – including the legal/regulatory framework and practical aspects.

The evaluation, which will have to include both quantitative and qualitative elements, will be carried out on the basis of a review of Friendship’s process documentation, data and observations gathered in the course of field visits and interviews with Char dwellers (both direct and indirect beneficiaries of Friendship’s Education program and inhabitants/students who have not had access to the program), Friendship staff and relevant personnel from Government and other agencies. The data may be gathered through different methods including, but not limited to, Focused Group Discussions, In Depth Interviews and Questionnaires.

The independent evaluator – where adequate with the support of Friendship’s Education Sector - will develop a detailed action plan and, in particular, determine the appropriate key indicators to address the study subjects.

### **Details of application process**

The interested candidates will have to submit a narrative proposal of no more than five pages and a financial proposal, within **August 08, 2019**. The candidates will also annex the bios/ CVs of the main team members who will lead and be actively involved in the project, if awarded.

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<sup>8</sup> At this level of the assessment the focus is on ‘non-Friendship schools’

<sup>9</sup> *This goes beyond an assessment of the Friendship Education program properly speaking and is rather in the kind of a study in view of further program development* This may be covered from various aspects, including, but not limited to, construction of the schools, training of teachers, monitoring of teachers, class composition, interaction between local community members and the schools, etc.

There will be no pre-bid meeting. But the Candidates may send their queries in regard to this ToR within ten days after the publication of the ToR. Friendship will circulate the responses to the queries among all the interested applicants at least ten days prior to submission deadline.

Upon receipt of the proposals, Friendship may invite shortlisted applicant(s) for further negotiation. Friendship may also request revision in the approach or methodology, in order to align the study design with the purpose of this study.

### **Geographic Location and Overall Sampling**

The evaluation will be conducted in the northern chars of Kurigram and Gaibandha districts.

The beneficiary survey will be conducted in at least one sub-district each under Kurigram and Gaibandha districts. From each of the districts, a minimum of 6 chars/communities should be taken for the survey purpose, which must have Friendship primary schools actively being operated at that moment (with at least 50% of them having Friendship secondary schools). As such, the total primary and secondary schools to be evaluated within this study are 12 and 6 respectively at a minimum.

### **Deliverables:**

1. Comprehensive methodology and project design (including any revision that has been done upon request from Friendship, before/after the project is awarded), key performance indicators and final report outline (soft copy): Within 30 days of appointment.
2. Draft Finding Section of the report (including comparative analysis) in soft copy: Within 105 days of appointment.
3. Draft evaluation report (soft copy) with conclusions and recommendations for discussion. Within 120 days of appointment.
4. Final report (one CD containing the soft copy of the report, all supporting data). Within 150 days of appointment.

### **Confidentiality Agreement – Copyright**

The Consultant shall maintain strict confidentiality of all Friendship information which the Consultant will become aware of in the context of his assignment.

Friendship shall solely possess the copyright of all the works produced by the Consultant within this consultancy task and the consultant must not share any information, data, or analysis related to or borne from this task with anyone other than Friendship, without Friendship's prior written consent.

### **Annexes**

- A. Friendship Primary Education overview
- B. Friendship Secondary Education overview
- C. [Friendship Strategy 2018-2020](#)

## Friendship Primary Education Program

Creating Better Citizens for the Future



### THE FACT!!!

More than 98% of the char children in Bangladesh never completed primary education because of lack proper primary schools in the area.

### Introducing Friendship

Friendship, a value-based organization run by compassion, in-depth knowledge, empathy and grassroots experience, has been working for the last 17 years to help address the needs of remote and marginalized communities in Bangladesh, i.e. mostly those people living in the northern river islands and southern coastal belt locations. The organization delivers services in six sectors interacting with each other: Health, Education, Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Management, Inclusive Citizenship, Sustainable Economic Development, and Cultural Preservation. The organization, which started in 2002 with just a floating hospital serving only ten thousand patients is now providing healthcare and other development solutions to more than 3 million people a year. With an integrated development approach, Friendship is nurturing opportunity, dignity and hope by strengthening communities and allowing their members to reach their full potential.

## Friendship's Education Program

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The Mission Statement in the strategic planning of Friendship for its Education Program is *“To enable the children of the chars and coastal areas of Bangladesh to develop their potential through quality education, teaching them character building and awareness of their rights and obligations, and also to provide functional literacy for adolescents and adults”*.

The program is currently implemented through 42 primary schools and 49 adult literacy centres in *Gaibandha* and *Kurigram* Districts in the North of Bangladesh.

Friendship is the only NGO that deliberately recruits teachers with below SSC (Secondary School Certificate exam in Bangladesh) qualification for its schools. Friendship recruits these teachers from the very communities in which the schools are located, as they already have rapport with the community and is likely to relocate with the same community in case of migration to a new area.

This recruitment mode has proved to be the only one by which student attendance can actually be ensured, as even qualified teachers recruited from outside the community cannot remedy the overwhelming absentee rates. Commendably, teachers recruited this way from within the communities have shown extraordinary performance upon receiving continuous training Friendship.

Considering the risk of the land being washed away, the schools are built with prefabricated materials so that they can be moved when the land begins to break away from the islands. In an environment where a child's very home and everything he knows is washed away before his eyes, this ensures a feeling of security and reliance on her/his school. It also makes the program cost effective in the long run.

Friendship endeavors to offer the best possible cost-effective education to the children and seeks to ensure maximum possible uniformity across the schools.

## Friendship's Intervention in Education at a glance

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- Over the last 5 years of students taking the National Primary Education Completion examination, Friendship's students have had a record of 100% pass-rate and approximately 90% of these students have passed with at least A- grade.
- Friendship's Education Program is conducted in 42 underprivileged remote communities, host to a population of approximately 120,000 people.
- 3,419 children attend 42 Friendship primary schools.
- 20 adolescents and adults attend functional literacy classes in each adult literacy center.
- A total of 124 teachers, trained by Friendship, are employed in primary schools and adult literacy centers.
- 42 functional School Management Committees (SMCs) are in place.

## Characteristics of the Primary Education Program

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### Selection of students

The major selection criteria for Friendship schools are:

- Friendship admits only those students who otherwise do not have access to any education alternative.
- Female students are given higher priority since females find it difficult to travel to other *chars* or mainland for attending schools. Moreover, Friendship recognizes that educated female members of the communities can work toward creating educated families as well as educated communities.
- Friendship wants to ensure that at least one child in every family goes to school. Since the class size is limited, for families where there is more than one child eligible to go to school, sometimes, only one child receives the opportunity. This is done in order to touch the lives of maximum number of households through the education program and to give them an opportunity to change their fate as a family.

Children with ‘special needs’ are normally always given the opportunity to get admitted. As such, most of Friendship’s primary schools have one or more child with some form of disability.

### National Curriculum Exam

The National Primary Education Completion examination is the target which is set for the Friendship schools. Thus, all primary students need to take this National examination at the end of their 6<sup>th</sup> year of schooling, i.e. after grade 5.

Friendship students showed extraordinary performance in Primary Education Completion Examination 2018, the national examination conducted for students across the country.

In 2018, most of the 1457 examinees showed extraordinary performance in the exam, with 99.79% receiving A+, A, and A- grades. The percentage of students receiving A+ (around 40.5%) is way higher than the national average. A+ is the highest possible grade attainable for the students appearing in this national exam.

This itself is a big achievement and when this is coupled with the fact that the students are from some of the most underprivileged regions of the country, where passing rate in PEC exam is below 60%. The effectiveness of the program becomes quite apparent from these numbers. In addition, around 9.8% of the appearing students have achieved government scholarship based on their merit, which is higher than the national average of around 2%.

### Code of ethics

In the Friendship primary education program, building the sense of ethics and citizen rights and responsibilities among students is given highest importance.

Code of ethics plays an important role in the education curriculum of Friendship as Friendship believes that its practice in any field of work and personal life plays a vital role in making people, especially children, better human beings and better citizens. Under the code of ethics:



- One topic on ethics is selected every month and a visual is made by Friendship team to be shared among the teachers of the 42 schools. So far, the topics have included dignity, honesty, commitment, humility, etc.
- The teachers, after having the proper understanding of the topic, share it with their students during morning assemblies. Then both the teachers and students discuss about the topic, their feelings, learning, and experience.
- Code of ethics has already had profound impact on the ethical level of the Friendship students who can be easily detected from a group of children because of their high moral standard and integrity.
- After successful introduction of code of ethics in Friendship schools, the organization was approached by District Primary Education office for implementing the same in government schools in *Kurigram*. So far, the code of ethics has been implemented in 25 government schools, where students are staying back in classes for half an hour after school hour on every Thursday.

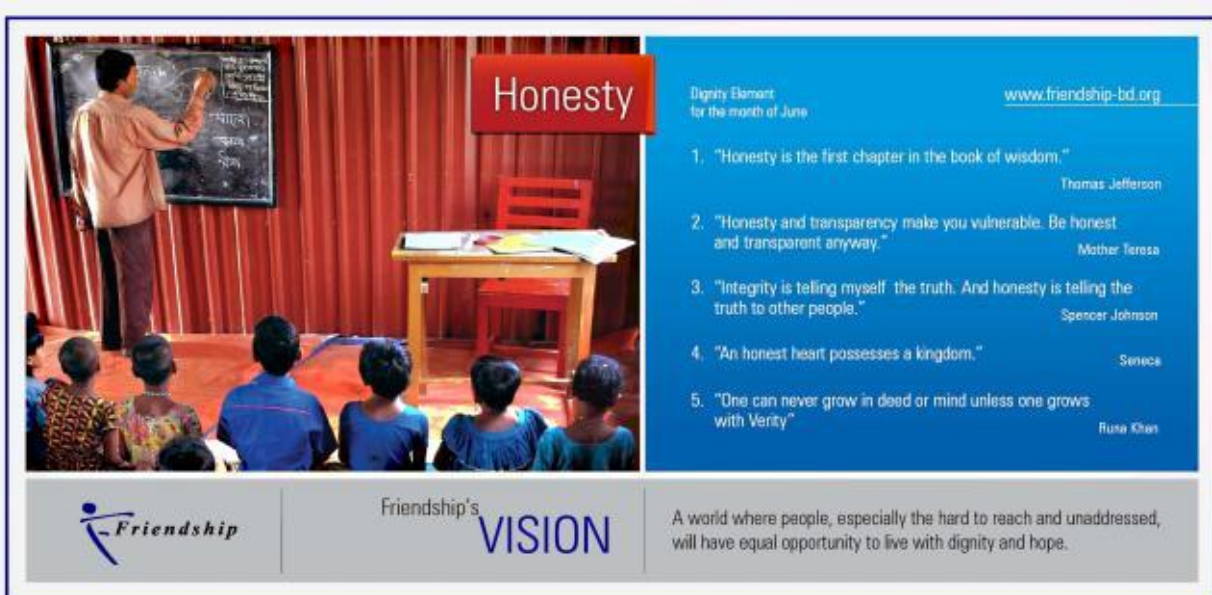


Figure: Sample code of ethics visual

### Listen to Learn

Listen to Learn is an innovative method for strengthening students' capability of listening and speaking better English.

- Under "Listen to Learn", the English from class 1 to 5 is audio recorded by European speakers and students get to listen to a better English accent, thus helping them be better equipped to learn proper English.
- In the process, teachers practice in English pronunciation mentioned in the audio system and become more confident to conduct classes in English.

In a country where knowing English itself ensures significantly higher pay in jobs, knowing proper English is a huge boost for the students for getting employed in the future.

### **Child Rights**

Friendship puts utmost importance on enabling the students to become good citizens. In the way of doing so, the teachers teach them their basic rights, responsibilities, etc.

### **Healthcare for the students**

Through the presence of Friendship field level health workers in the *chars*, the students always receive nutrition related information, behavioural change communication, dental and eye check-ups, basic medication, etc. If advanced or secondary care is needed, they are referred to the floating hospitals of Friendship where they can undergo surgeries, if required.

### **A mobile education system**

When the *chars* face the threat of disappearing completely due to land erosion, the communities relocate to another char. The school structure can be disbanded in 2-3 hours only and then moved to the *char* where the community has moved. At the same time, the teachers also move with the community. Thus, the education system as a whole can move to a different char and start all over again.

### **Types of schools**

Depending on the need of the communities and number of available children eligible for admission, Friendship either establishes a full-fledged primary school with 6 classes from pre-primary to Grade V, or a single-class satellite school.

In each of the satellite schools, there is just one classroom with 30 students- who start from pre-primary and move to the next class every year until Grade V. No new enrolment is done for five years in these satellite schools, until the existing batch graduates. This school is particularly for those small riverine islands where there are not enough students for sustaining a full-fledged primary school. Based on the subsequent need and increase in population, these satellite schools can be converted into full-fledged primary schools later.

On the other hand, there are six classrooms in each of the full-fledged primary schools.

## **Theory of Change**

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When Friendship first started the education program, there were *chars* where not even one person who could read or write. Many of those people were cheated while selling their produced goods or making a contract. They also did not know where to go for seeking help or for availing different facilities/ citizen rights.

As of now, because of Friendship's intervention, in most of the *chars*, the basic literacy rate has crossed more than 60%. In every household, there is at least one person who can read and write. Therefore, s/he can help keep basic accounts, do basic calculation, and get in touch with the authorities with different complaints. This is something which was unthinkable even a few years back.

Friendship is well-aware that many of these children will not be able to continue education beyond primary schools. But they are taught in such a manner that they can grow with a disciplined mind with strong moral values. Friendship ensures that the graduating students will have a fair chance of getting a modest employment when they grow up.

One of the examples of this change was observed during Global Dignity Day 2015. Two representatives of Friendship's students got to give speeches in front of an audience of more than 500 people in Dhaka, which included Dhaka city Mayor and ministers. They spoke about dignity- something not even a single person in their communities was aware of before. The confidence they showed was quite unprecedented and amazed the audience.

The success of education program lies in the fact that it has grown an immense self-confidence and dignity among the char population. Even if for some reason the program ceases after many years, the people (and the next generation) will still be able to lead a dignified life on their own.

## **Environmental Conservation**

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Through its approaches in Education program, Friendship attempts to provide environmental awareness to the students. At the same time, other steps are also taken to ensure that the environment is harmed as little as possible by community members. The following initiatives within Education program contributes to environment:

### **Clean home, clean school**

In order to build a clean community, Friendship attempts to teach students ways to keep environment clean. Some of the key practices that are highlighted within the initiative are:

1. A special effort 'clean school clean home' is part of routine school activities.
2. Keep a bin inside the classroom and demonstrate children the use of it.
3. Keep the sanitary latrines and the tube-well area clean regularly.
4. Teach children to use sufficient amount of water after using the latrine every time.
5. Encourage the children to keep their courtyard and the surrounding areas of their house clean.

Through "Clean home, clean school", a clean community is created through the awareness being created among children first and then transferring the awareness to the guardians and the neighbors.

### **Environmental conservation during construction**

Since we use only prefabricated materials for school construction, the environment is not harmed due to brick structure. In addition, most of the materials used, including bamboos, are quite eco-friendly in nature and thus promotes our commitment toward mother nature.

### **Gardening at schools and homes**

Almost all of the schools have one flower garden within the school premises. Students, supervised by teachers, are encouraged to work in those gardens. Students are also given knowledge and are encouraged to start gardens in their households.

## **Monitoring and Evaluation**

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All project objectives and results are measured against pre-determined SMART indicators.

Supervisors along with other field staff regularly monitor school activities using a predefined checklist to ensure quality of education and student participation. Frequent field visits are conducted and summary reports are prepared by the supervisors on a weekly basis. The school teachers also prepare monthly reports

summarizing student's attendance and performance. Both types of reports are submitted to the project manager, who review and compile all field-based reports and submit to Friendship Head Office. Special reports such as course completed student information and monthly exam reports are also prepared and submitted by project staff on a need basis. The Education Sector Team at head office monitor and supervise the project implementation and take corrective actions where necessary. Regular communication between the head office and the field-based project staff is maintained over phone and through frequent field visits.

### **Looking ahead: key milestones for next three years**

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- Keep the 42 schools and 49 adult literacy centers operational.
- Convert selected one-class satellite schools gradually into full-fledged 6-class primary schools.
- Coordinate and cooperate with local level government in order to ensure that Code of Ethics is practiced across all government schools in Gaibandha and Kurigram Districts.
- Introduce some Friendship curriculum – Code of Ethics, Child Rights, Environmental Studies and Cultural Studies in the Government schools through discussion
- Persuade the Government to adopt the concept of teachers below high school for hard to reach areas with Friendship model of teachers training and monitoring.
- Get a third-party independent evaluation on Friendship's entire Primary Education project.

## Photos

### School Premises



### Students



## Friendship Secondary Education Program

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Friendship, a value-based organization run by compassion, in-depth knowledge, empathy and grassroots experience, has been working for the last 17 years to help address the needs of remote and marginalized communities in Bangladesh, i.e. mostly those people living in the northern river islands and southern coastal belt locations. The organization delivers services in six sectors interacting with each other: Health, Education, Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Management, Inclusive Citizenship, Sustainable Economic Development, and Cultural Preservation. The organization, which started in 2002 with just a floating hospital serving only ten thousand patients, is now providing healthcare and other development solutions to more than 3 million people a year. With an integrated development approach, Friendship is nurturing opportunity, dignity and hope by strengthening communities and allowing their members to reach their full potential.

### Friendship Education Sector

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The project is implemented in some of the most remote and inaccessible river islands and riverbank areas of northern Bangladesh, which are home to severely vulnerable population. Disasters such as flood, char erosion and riverbank erosion are regular events in their lives, which often displace entire communities overnight and make construction of physical infrastructures futile - as they can get washed away within a very short period of time. Thus, the majority of development interventions undertaken by the government, including actions targeted to improve access to education, yield uninspiring results in these remote regions. Additionally, because of remoteness, teachers are hardly available in those islands and parents cannot afford to send their children to mainland. At times, Friendship's field teams came across island populations as large as 1500 people where almost no one could read or write.

In order to address the education need, Friendship started Primary Education in those islands in 2006 and is currently operating 42 primary and satellite schools comprising 3,419 students. The schools are built with prefabricated materials for enabling to move them whenever needed and island dwellers are trained to be teachers in order to ensure retention. Over the years, the students have showed remarkable results in Government's primary education completion exams.

However, despite the introduction and growth of primary education program, there was still requirement of secondary education- since children, after graduating from Grade V, still did not have a place to go upon completion of primary education. They neither had access to secondary schooling from their islands, nor could they apply their primary education beyond a basic level of functionality. Thus, Friendship decided to incorporate secondary level education in its program, giving underprivileged students a change to continue their education beyond the 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

However, the unique socio-economic condition and remoteness of the targeted communities, lack of infrastructure, and total lack of well-educated personnel, posed great challenges during project implementation. In response, Friendship had to adapt its strategy keeping those challenges in mind.

## Need Analysis for Secondary Education in Remote Communities

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Though Friendship initially started with only primary education, it eventually expanded to secondary education. The unique set of benefits which are gained from secondary education and those which cannot be gained from solely primary education was a compelling reason for this expansion. These envisaged benefits include:

- **Enhanced ability to earn a living:** Secondary schooling provides the learners of these remote areas with enhanced capacities, which in turn prepare them to gain vocational training from Friendship or other NGOs. In addition, comparatively higher-level education offers children access to knowledge and resources to look for other livelihood options in the future.
- **Reduction in early marriage:** In the *char* areas, girls would normally get married at the age of 13 or 14 as they did not have the scope to do anything other than household chores once they left primary school. However, following the introduction of secondary schools, the girls now have better access to higher education and their parents have a reason not to marry their daughters off as soon as primary school ends.
- **Better living standard:** Access to secondary schools drastically increases the living standard in *char* communities, as students receiving education from these schools are better aware of their responsibilities and rights and are more likely to work towards creating a better society. Secondary education will also create opportunities for them and thus limit migration to urban slum areas.
- **Increased connectivity:** Most *char* dwellers are detached from the mainland and do not have access to any form of technology. As part of the secondary education implementation plan, each secondary school classroom was equipped with one laptop and multiple monitors on which video lessons are played during class. As such, students now have a chance to experience ICT in meaningful ways and have better access to knowledge and information. Although Friendship's current secondary education program only provides education till 9<sup>th</sup> grade and will start 10<sup>th</sup> grade for the first time in 2020, the experience of connecting with the broader world is expected to give students motivation and enthusiasm to explore higher grades of education (beyond grade X) by traveling to the mainland.

Thus, Friendship's Secondary Education program gives hope to the remotest communities of the country and gives the people there an opportunity towards a more meaningful and fairer life.

## Friendship's Previous Experience in Similar Program Development

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Prior to designing the secondary education program for the *chars*, a thorough evaluation of Friendship's existing resources and in-house expertise produced the following highlights:

1. **Friendship's experience of running primary school project for more than a decade:** Prior to starting the secondary education program, Friendship had already established and ran successfully primary schools in the remotest parts of the northern and southern region of the country. The primary school buildings are modular structures that can be deconstructed, moved, and reconstructed at a new location in less than a day. Using similar infrastructure adjacent to these primary schools, a total of 11 secondary schools are running (4 of them from provisional structures so far, but will move to permanent facilities soon).

2. **Primary school teachers with prior training:** Though these teachers can't teach secondary level students directly, they have the capacity to work as facilitators. They facilitate the learning process from video lessons in secondary classrooms and note students' questions down. They then discuss concepts and forward these questions over phone/ video calls to qualified teachers located in Dhaka. From the answers discussed during these sessions, the facilitators resolve students' queries in class. Thus, these trained facilitators help students understand the taught concepts better.
3. **Friendship's electrification project:** Even though the targeted area is well beyond the traditional grid system, Friendship has a strong electrification project being run in those locations, providing electrification support to both schools and households.

## Challenges in Program Development

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The main challenges faced while designing the secondary education program are:

1. **Absence of skilled teachers:** The main challenge in implementing secondary education was the absence of skilled teachers, since teachers from outside the *chars* do not have an incentive to stay in these remote places.  
  
For primary education, this problem was circumvented by recruiting teachers with an SSC degree or less, from the very communities where they would be teaching. They were then put through an extensive training program, coupled with routine monitoring and supervision from Friendship. For secondary education, however, training does not suffice as the concepts in the secondary school syllabus are significantly more complex than those in the primary school syllabus.
2. **Remoteness of the communities:** This is perhaps the biggest challenge encountered, as building a school in the mainland is not even an option which these communities can access. Limitations in their ability to travel thus created certain constraints that Friendship had to abide by.
3. **Lack of affordability:** The students' families cannot pay for education and hence arranging expensive solutions in the *chars* is not an option.
4. **Lack of internet connection:** Although the country's internet infrastructure and access is improving significantly, internet-based video teaching is not a fully viable option yet due to slow/ no internet connection in remote areas like *chars*.
5. **Natural Disasters:** The islands are always shifting form, and the targeted communities are the biggest victims of flood, or any other natural calamity. Due to the shifting nature of these islands, the people migrate within a time span of 6-7 years. It is always difficult to maintain a permanent structure on these islands. Natural disasters are always a challenge as floods can wash everything away.



## The Big Idea

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Friendship Secondary Education was initiated in 2015 with Grade VI in five islands. In order to ensure best quality education for the students and recognizing the connectivity issue, Friendship has had made thousands of hours of educational videos on government curriculum taught by the top-quality teachers living in the capital city. Those videos are converted into CDs, sent to the schools, and shown through computers in the classrooms, where the trained primary school teachers work as facilitators.

The demand for enrolment increased over the last few years due to the opportunity of better employability and as an escape from early marriage.

## Program Strategy

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In all of the islands where the secondary schools are implemented, Friendship already had its primary education program operational and selected graduates from only Friendship primary schools were enrolled in the secondary schools. This enrolment restriction was based on the premise that students who did not require primary education access either had access to alternatives or didn't have the academic preparation needed for secondary level. Girls were given priority since at least few of the primary school graduating boys were able to travel to another island or mainland for getting secondary education, but it was virtually impossible for girls to travel and receive further education.

In each of the classes, around 15 students were enrolled on an average. The demand for enrolment increased due to the opportunity of better employability and an escape from early marriage. As such, around 20-22 students are enrolled for each batch at present.

By the end of 2018, the second batches of students completed Grade VIII and appeared for Junior School Certificate Exam, achieving commendable results, far exceeding the national average. Currently, there are four grades being operated (up to Grade IX) and Friendship envisages to initiate Grade X next year.

The total number of classes operational at the moment:

- Grade VI, Grade VII, Grade VIII and IX: 5 schools
- Grade VI, Grade VII and Grade VIII: 7 schools
- Grade VI: 4 schools (to be started in March 2019)

All students in Friendship Secondary Schools are those who have passed from Friendship Primary Schools.

**Infrastructure:** There are one computer (laptop), two to three monitors (depending on the number of students) and lights in each of the classrooms. There is one solar panel installed in every school for supporting these solutions across the classes.

The classrooms are constructed immediately adjacent to existing Friendship Primary Schools.

**Solar grids:** This project requires solar panels that provide power up to 8 hours, for all computers in operational classes. Friendship's own rural electrification program provides the required technical support in this regard.

**Primary school teacher as facilitator:** The trained Friendship primary school teachers work as facilitators/shadow teachers and are offered basic subject knowledge beforehand, related to the topics that are taught

to the students. During the classes, they answer questions that the students may raise after watching the videos.

**Learning method:** Videos are made on government curriculum syllabus and saved in portable hard disk drives that are sent to the schools. Prominent teachers from Dhaka have appeared for those videos and concepts have been explained in an easy manner with layman terms for the students. Lessons are recorded and converted into video files for each subject. Teachers from renowned schools of Dhaka, such as Residential Model School & College, BIAM Model School & College, Rifles Public School and College, and Motijheel Ideal College are among those who taught through these videos. In the videos, the teachers focus on conceptual clarity and proper application of learning materials. Each recorded session is approximately 40-45 minutes long.

The videos are shown to the students during class hours and they have the option to ask questions after the classes. The questions are either resolved by the facilitators immediately, or after they discuss these questions with teachers from Dhaka during weekly phone calls.

**Call Centre:** When students have questions, they are taken down as notes by the facilitator. The facilitators try and understand the solutions to those problems through phone calls with teachers at Dhaka once every week. The teachers also visit the schools from time to time (usually once a year) to understand how they work.

**Checking exam scripts:** In order to ensure that students get a fair and accurate evaluation of their merit, all the monthly and semester exam scripts are sent to Friendship's Dhaka head office and are checked by teachers in Dhaka. The checked exam scripts are then sent back to the students.

**School Library:** Secondary school students are given the opportunity to read different books (novels, fun books, history etc.) from libraries that have been set up in some of these schools.

## **Special Features of Friendship Education Program**

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Like the Primary Education Program, Secondary Education has the following features integrated within the curriculum:

### **1. Code of Ethics**

In the Friendship education program, building a sense of ethics and citizen rights and responsibilities among students is given highest importance.

Code of ethics plays an important role in the curriculum of Friendship, as Friendship believes that its practice in any field of work and personal life plays a vital role in making people, especially children, better human beings and better citizens.

### **2. Child Rights**

Friendship puts utmost importance on enabling students to become good citizens. In the way of doing so, the teachers teach them their basic rights, responsibilities, etc.

### **3. Healthcare for the students**

Through the presence of Friendship field level health workers known as *Friendship Community Medic – Aides* in the *chars*, the students always receive nutrition related information, behavioral change communication, dental and eye check-ups, basic medication, etc. If advanced or secondary care is required, they are referred to the floating hospitals of Friendship where they can undergo surgeries, if needed.

#### 4 Years of Secondary Education

The journey of Friendship Secondary Education Program until 2018 can be summarized in the table below:

Details	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number of Students	65	123	249	302
Number of male students	28	49	98	124
Number of female students	37	74	151	178
Number of schools	5	5	7	7
Number of classes	5	10	17	19
Number of facilitators	5	10	17	19
Cumulative number of video lessons available	456	550	1268	1546
Pass rate of Junior School Certificate (JSC) Examination <sup>10</sup>	-	-	100%	98.43%

A press conference for “Friendship’s ICT-aided Schools in Remote Chars Creates Landmark - 100% pass rate in JSC exam” was held at the Daily Star Centre on the 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2018. The event was a recognition and celebration of the fact that all students from 7 of Friendship’s innovative ICT-aided secondary schools not only had a 100% pass rate, but their results were way above average when compared even to schools in Dhaka and other major cities. The press conference was attended by chief guest Zunaid Ahmed Palak, State Minister of ICT Division, Government of Bangladesh, who praised Friendship and its students for their achievement. The press conference received wide coverage in several media outlets.

<sup>10</sup> The **Junior School Certificate**, also known as **JSC**, is a public examination attended by students in Bangladesh after successful completion of eight years of schooling, i.e. after completion of Grade VIII

## Secondary Education Program Highlights 2018 - 2019

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The secondary education program is being piloted in 11 schools in the remote char areas. 2018 has been a year of achievement for Friendship Secondary Education Program.

64 students (26 boys and 38 girls) from Friendship Secondary Schools appeared for the Junior School Certificate (JSC) exam in 2018, with a pass rate of 98.43% as compared to the national average of 53%.

Based on the most recent updates, an overview of Friendship's Secondary Schools program is as follows:

1. As of January 2019, 285 students are enrolled in Grade VI, 134 in Grade VII, 95 in Grade VIII and 49 in Grade IX in Friendship Secondary Schools. For the first time, Friendship is offering Grade IX education this year, in 5 of its schools in *Gaibandha* and *Chilmari*. The students attending Grade IX are among the 63 students who passed Grade VIII in 2018 from these 5 schools. 531 total, VI – 285, vii – 134, viii – 95 ix – 49

Though Friendship had initially planned to enroll 10-12 students in each of the classrooms, 142 students were enrolled in Grade VI in 7 schools in 2018, which is equivalent to more than 20 students/ classroom.

This represents an increasing demand for secondary education program in the *chars* among both students and their parents, who are better aware of the necessity of further studies. In addition, many of the girls are seeking secondary education as a way out of early marriage.

2. Grade VI, VII, VIII and IX are continuing in 5 schools, whereas there are two schools in which there are only Grade VI, Grade VII and Grade VIII.
3. 4 new secondary schools have been started in Rowmari and Ulipur from provisional structure and are expected to move to permanent facilities upon the completion of construction in late March.
4. In 2018, a total of around 278 new lessons were recorded by subject – wise teachers from renowned schools of Dhaka. As of January 29, 2019, 58 recordings for class 9 have been completed and more are in process.
5. In 2018, school visits were made by the subject specialist teachers to 7 secondary schools of Friendship. The students & facilitators at these schools had the scope to share their feedback and suggestions during these visits.

## Follow Up

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For future employment, Friendship provides training to its graduating students for better opportunities:

- **Vocational Training:** Friendship has some vocational training initiatives for secondary level school students where they can use their learning for income generating activities in future. In 2018, 8 students were given a 3-day training in healthcare and an internship at the Friendship floating hospitals. For 2019, Friendship is taking the initiative to provide training to male students on solar panel installation and maintenance.

- **Government Training:** Friendship is cooperating with the Department of Youth Development under Ministry of Youth and Sports to create access to government facilitated training programs for the students who graduate secondary school.

Out of the 63 students graduating from Grade VIII in 2018, 49 got enrolled in Grade IX in the same school run by Friendship. 6 of the graduates dropped out and 8 of the graduates (4 male and 4 female) went to different schools to pursue education in class IX.

## Future Plan

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The following are future plans for the Secondary Education program

- Introduce Grade IX (in 2020) in the two schools in *Kurigram* which started in 2017 and have currently three grades only.
- Introduce Grade X (in 2020) in the 5 schools in *Gaibandha* and *Chilmari* that started in 2015 and currently offer classes until Grade IX.
- Continue introducing new grades every year until at least Grade X in the 4 schools in *Roumari* that have started with grade VI in 2019.
- Friendship is also looking into the possibility of incorporating Grade IX and X in all its schools in the near future, subject to permission from the Government.
- Friendship will start running an advocacy program with the Government for incorporating video-based lessons into Government supported schools in remote locations where traditional methods of teaching are not feasible because of a shortage in the number of qualified teachers. This has already been highlighted once during the press conference in the beginning of 2018.
- Subject to availability of funds, Friendship intends to operate one hostel for female graduates who intend to continue further studies after completing Grade VIII in *Gaibandha* town, in order to ensure safety for girls and encourage their parents to continue their daughters' education.
- Friendship Secondary Education graduates, after completing further studies, will be connected with job-providers after completion of their studies. Follow-up is already in place to monitor the students who have graduated from Friendship Secondary Education program, in order to understand and support the continuation of their further education.

## Photos

