



# DISPATCHES

I N T E R N A T I O N A L

## FEATURE ARTICLE WRITING GUIDE

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To Whom It May Concern:

This package is a compilation of the interview transcripts, rough draft, and edited draft of an article produced by Mowmita Basak Mow for the first issue of *Dispatches International*. Mowmita is a student at the Asian University for Women in Bangladesh. She is to be commended both for writing such a good article and for sharing her experience with other writers for *Dispatches International*.

The documents in this package have only been edited for formatting. They are not perfect and should not be interpreted as such. Minor improvements could have been made; for example, the responses of interviewees should have been recorded at greater length and the rough draft should have been edited many more times before submission. With that said, the recorded quotes are excellent and the rough draft (as well as the final draft) indicated of the potential for a good article.

If you feel it might be useful, please review this package to help you grasp the general style that defines *Dispatches International*. Particularly worth noting are the techniques used to draw information from interviews and integrate entire quotations into the text of an article. Although the writing in this article is good, it is the abundance and sharpness of interviews that makes it a worthwhile article. This is true of most of the articles published in *Dispatches International* – or any international feature publication, for that matter.

If you have questions or concerns about the techniques and methods exemplified in this package, please contact the editors of *Dispatches International* at [editor@dispatchesinternational.org](mailto:editor@dispatchesinternational.org). Mowmita would also be pleased to answer any questions about her article, and she can be contacted at [mowmita.bm@dispatchesinternational.org](mailto:mowmita.bm@dispatchesinternational.org). It might also be worth consulting *The Handbook for Student Journalists* for other suggestions and information.

Keep up the great work, and happy reading!

Kindest regards,

The Editorial Board

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# INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW #1: At Railway Station Slum, MuradPur, Chittagong  
Interviewing the Mother of Slum Children named Rahima

1.How many Children do you have?

Mother: Two, one is 4 months and another is 2 years old.

2.What do you do ?

Mother: I earn by begging.

3.Why ? where is your children's father?

Mother: He is dead .

4. What ? Dead?

Mother: You can consider him as dead.

5. Sorry I didn't get what did you mean?

Mother: Their father left me and don't run this family.

6. So, Do you only run your family by begging?

Mother: Yes. But you can't say it as running.

7. How many times a day do you take your meal?

Mother: Basically two times a day. But I don't prepare my food. I get rotten food from people and bring it for my babies. I prepare food rarely and when I prepare I only prepare "Khichuri"(type of rice prepared by rice and dal together)

8. What did you bring for your children today ?

Mother: I brought two rotten breads. I will give them during lunch.

9.Do you think it's enough?

Mother: I don't know . It doesn't depend on what I think it depend on what I earn.

10.Where do you beg?

Mother: In the Chittagong University area, Kodomtoli area and so on.

11.How do you go to Chittagong University to beg ? I guess it's so far away.

Mother: I go by free train.

12.Where do you buy your food ?

Mother: From a small Bazar.

13.Who is in your family?

Mother: I and my two children

14.Where did you live before coming to this slum?

Mother: Sohid comandar Colony

15.Do you have any idea about health and wellness?

Mother: I don't know anything about that . What is that ? Ohh .. There is one in "puskonir Par" a place where if you buy a ticket of 20 Taka you will get treatment. They also provide "Oshudh Pani"(Medicine like water) They take 20 Taka for any problem

16. How is doctor there?

Mother: I heard that doctor is educated but how would I know. We only believe what people tell us.

17.Have you ever been to a Good doctor?

Mother: No how could I?. I couldn't even afford essential vaccination for my babies after their birth.

18. How much is your house (little bamboo shade one room) rent?

Mother: 800 taka.

19.You said you do begging. How do you afford 800 taka?

Mother: We eat one time , other meal of the day we don't eat . We save it for rent. What to do ? You know We can't stay outside in the road. Please take my one child with you, please. At least he will get food to survive , At least he will get a name ... I can't afford food for them.....

INTERVIEW #2: At Muradpur , Shohid Commandar Colony  
Interviewing a Slum Dweller

1. How do you feel life here?

Slum Dweller: In this slum 80% of we are in dire situation. If you ask me about life I don't know what to say. We eat one or two times a day sometimes in the morning or in the night . Suppose , we are 4 in one family. Our income is 200 taka. 1 kg of Potato is 32 taka and even 5 kg rice is 100 taka that even don't fit a month ... money is finished then , how do you expect us to survive. Also, think in this slum we have 6 members in one family and income maximum 200-300 taka, by this money you will get only rice. Where is our money to buy other ingredients or other things.

2. Do you have any interest in sending your children in School?

Slum Dweller: I am incapable in my family even if I want to send my children to school I don't have that ability. In this slum you will get people who don't have interest in sending their children to school also there are people who war to send their children but can't do it as they don't have the ability. Also, the nearby school fee is 175 taka per month which is not really possible to pay.

3. Don't you have any school where you don't have to pay?

Slum Dweller: Yes ... BRAC school, is totally free and offer education.

4. I have heard that there are some government schools who offer food with education to the children?

Slum Dweller: Yes. BGS school they do so. But they only take children of garment's worker not our child . One of our child go to that school.

5. What do you eat in your daily life?

Slum Dweller: Rice, Vegetable and dal. I can rarely imagine when I had last eaten fish and meat. Not , even in Eid-UL-Azha( it is an occasion of muslims where they sacrifice animal and eat that meat )...Nope.

6. Is there any body that come and give aid or food in this slum?

Slum Dweller: I am here for 34 years. I have never seen someone came and gave us aid.

7. I really want your true opinion and I want to ask whether here is any drug business in this slum or not?

Slum Dweller: No. 4 years ago there was a business of drugs but no more.

8. It would be really helpful if you could tell me something more about drug business?

Slum Dweller: As I was involved with that , I know what it is . There are several slums like Kodomtoli , Madarbari,Borobari where children from even 6 years old take drugs .

INTERVIEW #3: At the Bangladesh Government School (BGS)  
Interviewing A Teacher Named Rina Das

1. I heard this is a free school by government and government gives many facility to the children.

What types of facilities are those ?

Rina Das: Yes. Government gives them free books and also foods to eat when they are in the school.

2. What types of food are those ?

Rina Das: Like grain, potato and so on.

3. How many level do you have?

Rina Das: Class 1- 5 also we distribute book, pen , notebook. We have some needy disabled child , we have special session for them.

4. How is the background situation of every student? I mean economic condition?

Rina Das: Most of Children are from Slum. So, they don't often understand the value of education. Ultimately, they go to work as a labour and leave their education. If you want you can talk to our student of class 5.

5. Would you please show me some students who are from slum area and often being sick.

6. In the class: Who is here from pilkhana Slum?

Slum Child: I am from Sujan.

7. Do you fall sick very often ?What types of sickness?

Slum Child: Yes. Fever. I can't tolerate cold. As we have lackings of water we don't get water to take bath regularly . That's why , sometimes I feel itchy.

8. Have you consulted with doctor?

Slum Child: Nope . My Abba (father ) said it's not a big problem. It will be ok without medicine.

9. Selim, how often do you get sick?

Slum Child 2: Very often.

10. Why ?what happens?

Slum Child 2: I had Jondis , Diarrhea , heavy fever this year.

11: Did you consult with doctor?

Slum Child 2: Yes.

12: Where ?

Slum Child 2: Bohoddarhat , Badurtola

13. What did the doctor suggest ?

Slum Child 2: Homeopathic medicine.

14: Why your parents didn't take you any hospital?

Slum Child 2: Because it is really expensive and not possible for my parents.

15. Did it help you to recover?

Slum Child 2: Yes. It helped me to recover but after recovery I had high fever and then Diarrhea.

#### INTERVIEW #4: At the Refugee Camp of Pakistani Refugees, Foyes Lake, Chittagong

1. How many years you have been living in this refugees Camp?

Pakistani Women: After Bagladesh get liberation.

2. Do you have Bangladeshi Nationality?

Pakistani Women: Yes and our children also have. But what to do with this nationality most of we don't have any nationality

Girl Child: No, we are not Pakistani, don't hate us. We are Bangladeshi by born

3. Do you have any desire to go to your own country.

Pakistani Women: Of course, I have mother , brother and a lot of relatives in Pakistan. Obviously, we want to meet them but government doesn't give us visa. We can go to our country.

4. Can you afford food for your child?

Pakistani Women: Rarely. Sometimes we cell "Chanachur".. Earn very meager amount and feed my child with this.

5. Could you afford to give them proper education?

Pakistani Women: No.

6. What does your son do?

Pakistani Man: He works in a factory.

7. How old is he?

Pakistani Man: 10 years old.

8. What do you do?

Pakistani Man: I don't do anything.

9. What types of food do you take everyday?

Pakistani Women: We eat rice, dal , and vegetables, can't afford meet. Child often cry loudly in hunger. But what to do?

10. Do you children has any disease or fall sick often?

Pakistani Women: Ohh yea... most of the time in the year my child is sick.

11. Do you consult with doctor?

Pakistani Women: I don't have money to show him to any good doctor but I often take him to the Farmacy.

# ROUGH DRAFT

## The Effects of Food Crisis on Slum Children in Chittagong, Bangladesh

The lives of children are fragile, and there are a lot of complicated factors which go into their ability to survive into adulthood. In the slums of Chittagong, Bangladesh, the children have an uphill battle to fight against malnutrition, disease, and education. Both the causes and the consequences of food crisis are multifarious in slums of Chittagong. The causes of the crisis are rooted in the socio-political situation of the country, and it affects children of slums physically, psychologically and in all other spheres of life.

Lack of affordability is a big question when it comes to the question of food crisis. Dispatches International has found that the main reason behind the food crisis in slums is the dwellers' lack of affordability. "If you ask me about life here, I don't know what to say. In this slum 80% of us are in a very dire situation.... We eat once or hardly twice a day, either in the morning or at night. See, I have four members in my family. Our income is 200 taka per month. 1kg potato is 32 taka, and even 5kg rice is 100 taka, and that's not even enough for one mouth.... After the money is finished, how do you expect us to survive?" says a father of a slum child, a resident of a railway slum in Chittagong. Poverty or food crisis is nothing new in a third world country like Bangladesh, but the impact of how extreme it is often goes beyond the imagination of the people of other parts of the world. Actually the effect of not getting sufficient food is not only physical, it is related to the social and psychological health of slum children as well.

Food crisis can have grave consequence on slum children. "A child's world can be influenced by a plethora of aspects that shape her/his physical, emotional, cognitive, social and emotional development and maturation," says a psychologist Professor Varuni Ganepola in her interview with Dispatches International. "The impacts of poverty on children generally affects their education, health and nutrition, housing, developmental needs, nature of family relationships (for example, economic hardships of parents will have an impact on the quality of relationship parents have with children in terms of time, energy, and availability) and nature of relationships with others (in school, in the community etc)" she added.

Children living in the slums have to live with minimal access to basic needs, and it often creates both physical and psychological strains on children which make them unlikely to take up the responsibility of the nation with their natural ability in the future. So the present food crisis in slums paves the way for a bleak future for the nation. Considering the large number of children living in these extremely impoverished places who could be a great asset to the country if given adequate opportunity, we can assume that the food crisis is a great obstacle to progress of Bangladesh.

The food situation is so dire that even sometimes it is not possible for the slum people to meet the minimum needs of their children in respect of foods. When asked the three-year old Rahim's mother about that day's meal, she replied, "I brought two rotten breads. I will give them for lunch." "But is it enough for a three-year old child?" Dispatches asked. The Mother replied, "I don't know. It doesn't depend on what I think; it depends on what I earn." Her answer might sound very simple, but this is the reality because she begs from door to door, and brings food, fresh or rotten whatever people give her. This is a fairly common picture of the food habit in slums in Bangladesh. Children do not get the kind of attention in respect of foods they should have, since the dwellers cannot afford it. Money determines who eats and who does not, what people eat and what they do not in Bangladesh. There is no governmental supervision in this regard. Hence is the poor nutrition situation in the country, especially for those who live at the bottom of the social ladder, the slum dwellers.

Another slum dwellers said about her family's daily food menu, "Rice, vegetable and lentil. I can barely remember when I last ate fish and meat. Not even in Eid-ul-Azha (a religious occasion of Muslims when they sacrifice animals and eat that meat) we can eat meat." This is a common picture in most houses in slums.

According to the nutritionist and Professor Georgia Guldán, a roti weighing 125 grams, contains 12.9 grams of protein and 95.4 grams of carbohydrates. This is a meager amount of protein and provides very little energy. Cooked rice, the staple food in the slum residents' diet, does not do any better. Malnutrition, the most common result of slum life, impairs the development of children and decreases their overall health and mortality rate.

The healthcare situation is also very poor for the common people in Bangladesh. In Chittagong Medical College (CMC), the government provides free treatment for everyone, but they do not really treat every patient equally. Also, the environment in the medical is not only unclean and unhealthy, but also not conducive to the treatment of diseases. They rarely have visiting doctors or nurses. "Today at six in the morning, I brought my child's diagnostic test reports; now it is three in the afternoon, and not a single nurse or doctor came to see the reports," says one father. The food provided by the medical authority for the patients is carelessly served and not healthy enough.

Among all the wards of CMC, Pediatrics ward provides the worst care for the patients. In the pediatrics ward, there are more than 500 patients. Dispatches was looking for doctors to interview, but there were not a single doctor in the whole ward except two intern ones. There were a lot of slum children with several diseases which often occur due to malnutrition. After interviewing some patients, Dispatches got some slum children with enormous tummies but very skinny figures. Those children's hands, legs and other parts of the body seemed so thin. Their mothers had a wrong belief that because of drinking lot of water they got such disease. "That's edema," says Prof. Guldán. It occurs due to Malnutrition. "There is a disease called Kushioko. If edema develops from this disease, it is called Protein Energy Malnutrition. When the first child comes, it has to be removed from the mother's breast because the second child comes along. So, what happens is that children need protein, and protein comes from breast milk, which mother can't provide to all the children she has. Professor Guldán also stated, "a child needs approximately thirty-three grams of protein daily, otherwise, s/he might suffer from protein nutrition deficiency or malnutrition."

"A one year old child should be eating food containing half calories of energy other than the breast milk," says Guldán. "People often think that a small child does not need to eat that much. Another thing is that a one-year old has a very small stomach. Foods like daal (lentil) do not have a lot of calories or energy. Is their much oil in it? As they can't afford, it means no oil. Foods like rice and daal do not provide that much energy. Children have very little stomach, quickly the energy finishes, and no one feeds them again. So, the body of a child really needs snacks between meals. I do not mean snacks like junk food—maybe rice and daal again, or may be more daal and less rice, so that they can get more nutrient because daal contains more protein than rice does."

Though slum children often get several types of diseases, there is not enough medical equipments or doctors to treat them. However, in a slum in the Muradpur area, Chittagong, people are treated by a doctor who has no education in medical science, or public health. When Dispatches asked about their treatment, the slum dwellers said, "There is a doctor in puskonir par, a place where you buy a ticket with 20 taka and you get treatment. They also provide oshudh pani (medicinal potion), and they take 20 taka for any problem." "I heard the doctor is educated, but how would I know? We only believe what people tell us," a mother says in reply to whether the doctor is educated or not. Ignorance and illiteracy is another major problem in slums which is related to all the troubles they suffer from. Sometimes illiterate people cannot differentiate between right or wrong and true or false. Therefore, people often deceive them. Social prejudice and belief in false treatment which result from illiteracy and lack of education make people prone to deception. This aggravates the health problem of the slum dwellers further.

Basically, the diseases they suffer from are quite common diseases and people do not need very highly educated doctors for that. They can be even treated by people who have a little education in public health according to nutritionist Professor Guldán. Obviously if serious symptoms show up, it needs to be dealt with highly educated doctors and be diagnosed as soon as possible with the recommendation of the men with healthcare education.

According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the country has the highest prevalence of child underweight in South Asia and other regions of developing countries. However, Professor Sara Nuzhat Amin says, "In South Asia there are lots of commonality in slums because of the level of Poverty is very similar from place.... Basically in a country where it is dependent on where the food is processed and comes from makes it different.... Bangladesh and India have fewer sufferers

than Pakistan because they are less dependent on imported food whereas Bangladesh produces food by itself. Generally speaking, in that sense the impact of poverty in Bangladesh and India may be different from Pakistan.” Though on some points Professor Amin is true, but as Bangladesh export food to other countries, the citizens do not get to eat the food produced in their own country. It seems to be a suicidal policy on the part of the Bangladesh government because exporting food should take place only when the needs of the country are satisfactorily met.

As a remedial of this situation, the government has taken some necessary steps and gets a lot of foreign aids. Consequently, government offer ‘Education for Food Program’ in both urban and rural areas, but what percentage of people really gets this facility is a big question. In Pilkhana slum, we asked some people whether they know about such steps taken by the government or not. “We heard BGS (Bangladesh Government School) do so. But only garments employees’ or government employees’ children can only get admitted to it.” Also, there are some non-governmental schools like BRAC that often provide free education but they do not offer any food according to a slum dweller.

When talked to the Head-master Mr. (anonymous) of BGS in Muradpur area, he totally denied the fact held by the slum dwellers. He said, “Without any discrimination we encourage all the children to come to this school and get education. Besides, we have students from different communities and social status, but most of them come from very needy families. Therefore, we treat the entire student body equally so that children who come from really poor backgrounds do not feel themselves “inferior” to others. Another teacher, Rina Das of BGS, says, the government gives them [the children] free books and also provides foods like rice for education.”

“I am incapable as a father. Even if I want to send my children to school, I don’t have the ability. In this slum you will find people who do not have any interest in sending their children to school, and also there are people who want to send their children but cannot afford it because of their inability. Also, the nearby school fee is 175 taka per month which is not really possible for us to pay,” says one slum dweller. However, it is not always true that slum children do not get education because they do not have access to education. Sometimes, the environment or the surroundings do not encourage them to study. “If slum children live with parents who have little or no education, they [parents] may tend to undervalue education. This can have a negative impact on children,” says Professor Varuni. ‘Unhealthy’ conditions can include congestion and poor living conditions as well as lack of nutrition etc. “I still remember when I last came to Bangladesh. I asked one mother what you want your child to be. She didn’t reply anything. She was just looking at me with blank eyes,” says Professor Guldán.

Human beings, wherever they might live, have the right to have access to all the basic needs of life, especially, food. Children are most vulnerable and suffer from the food crisis more than anybody else. It is an imperative responsibility of the government to look after the children who are hard hit by the food crisis. Slum children have the right to have nutritious food and necessary healthcare, so that their parents can dare to dream about their future.

# EDITED DRAFT

## Deprived: Slum Children in Bangladesh

"I bought two rotten breads. I will give them for lunch," Rahima, the mother of a three-year-old child, tells me in a sprawling slum on the outskirts of Chittagong. "Do you think that is enough for a three-year-old?" I ask, noting that her son appears famished, and she looks hungry herself. She tells me that she has another child at home. The bread she is holding is supposed to provide enough nutrition for her, the son standing next to her, and her other child, for the entire day. "I don't know," she says. "It doesn't depend on what I think, it depends on what I earn."

For many families, the food situation is so dire that it is often not possible for the residents of slums to meet the minimum nutritional needs of their children. Money determines who eats and who does not eat. Adults are able to survive without much nutrition, but the lives of children are fragile and many factors end up determining their ability to survive into adulthood. In the slums of Chittagong, the children have a constant uphill battle against malnutrition, disease, and ignorance. Their lives are an ongoing crisis, defined by a lack of opportunity.

Rahima tells me that she begs to support her family. In her desperation to feed her children, she accepts whatever foodstuffs people offer, savoury or sweet, fresh or rotten. "I earn by begging. I get rotten food from people and bring it for my babies," she says. She is their only guardian and she does her best to ensure their development. After having two children, her husband left her to raise them alone, without compensation or any other form of support. "Their father left me. You can consider him as dead," Rahima advises. She might be impoverished and starving, but she isn't homeless – her children live with her in a small bamboo hut, which they rent for 800 taka (about \$12 USD) per month.

"If you ask me about life here, I don't know what to say," says a man from a different slum, who has children of his own. "In this slum, 80% of us are in a very dire situation. We eat once or hardly twice a day, either in the morning or at night." He lives with his family next to a railroad, trying to earn an income working odd jobs. Until four years ago, he was involved in the slum's drug business. His modest income can not support the nutritional needs of his family. "I have four members in my family. Our income is 200 taka per month. A potato is 32 taka, and five kilograms of rice is 100 taka, and that's not even enough for one mouth for a month," he says solemnly. "After the money is finished, how do you expect us to survive?"

Poverty and food crises are typical of developing countries like Bangladesh, but the extremity of the squalor in slums is beyond the imagination of those from other parts of the world. Images of starving children and adults are cliché, but the social and psychological impact of malnutrition on children is less visible. Few realize how stunted children become when they go through life hungry, without the necessities for growth or advancement.

"A child's world can be influenced by a plethora of aspects that shape his or her physical, cognitive, social and emotional development and maturation," says Professor Varuni Ganepola, a psychologist at the Department of Social Sciences at the Asian University for Women in Chittagong. She explains that even the relations of starving children suffer from the lack of nutrition. "Children can suffer a loss of self-esteem and develop a poor self-concept," Ganepola says. "Loss and deprivation can affect the way he or she develops a sense of who they are in the way that they relate to their social world."

Children living in the slums have to live without basic necessities, and this precarious state often creates both physical and psychological strain. Some argue that the present food crisis in slums across Bangladesh paves the way for a bleak future for the entire nation, with thousands of children suffering daily due to malnutrition. Academics and policymakers alike have concluded that the large number of children living in these impoverished places could be a great asset to Bangladesh if given adequate opportunity. However, they become a liability when they have no opportunities and are faced with only bleak futures.

Despite the outspokenness of politicians, there is effectively no government supervision or intervention in the slums of Bangladesh. Many are indifferent to the troubles faced by the country's poorest citizens. Simple solutions are ignored and proposals for broad change are rejected. Thus, there is substantial nutritional deprivation across the country, especially for those who live at the bottom of the social ladder, the slum dwellers.

The father who lives in a slum beside a railway track tells me about the food he acquires for his family. "Rice, vegetables, and lentils," he says. "I can barely remember when I last ate fish and meat." If his family gains access to any special ingredients, like a savoury sauce or spice, they have cause to celebrate. "Not even in Eid-ul-Azha can we eat meat," he explains bitterly about the annual event when wealthier Muslims sacrifice animals and feast on the meat. Such a diet lacking meat is common in most slum households.

Professor Georgia Guldán, an expert in nutrition and health at Tufts University in Boston, tells me about the nutrients lacking from the diets of slum dwellers. "A roti weighing 125 grams contains 12.9 grams of protein and 95.4 grams of carbohydrates. This is a meagre amount of protein and provides very little energy," she says, noting that such a roti would be a special treat for slum dwellers in the first place. "Cooked rice, the staple food in the slum residents' diet, does not do any better." Malnutrition, the most common result of this bland and bare diet, impairs the development of children and decreases their overall health and increases mortality rate.

Families from the slums find it difficult to get adequate care for health problems associated with malnutrition. At the Chittagong Medical College (CMC), the government provides free treatment for everyone, but they do not treat every patient equally. Slum dwellers are scorned and their children are not made to feel comfortable or welcome. When I visited the clinic, I found the environment to be not only unclean, but also not conducive to the curing of disease. The CMC rarely has visiting doctors or nurses and patients often wait for hours before receiving any treatment. "Today at six in the morning, I brought my child's diagnostic test reports; now it is three in the afternoon, and not a single nurse or doctor came to see the reports," says one father waiting at the clinic.

Slum children are afflicted by many diseases – some due to malnutrition, others due to the filthy conditions in which they live. There is insufficient medical equipment and few doctors in clinics. In a slum near Chittagong, for example, people are treated by a doctor who has no education whatsoever in medical science, or public health. When I asked about the quality of treatment at this clinic, the slum dwellers told me, "There is a doctor, so you buy a ticket with 20 taka and you get treatment. They provide a medicinal potion, and they take 20 taka for any problem." There have been cases of medical practitioners misusing resources or providing faulty advice to slum-dwelling patients. "I heard the doctor is educated, but how would I know?" says one outspoken slum dweller waiting for treatment. "We only believe what people tell us."

Among all the wards of the CMC, the paediatrics ward provides the worst care for patients, many of whom are too young to be aware of the seriousness of their conditions. On the day that I visited, more than 500 young patients were waiting for medical attention in the paediatrics ward. After searching throughout the entire clinic for a doctor to interview, it was clear that there was not a single doctor in the whole ward, except for two partly-trained interns. Most of the children waiting for treatment exhibited symptoms of diseases that are caused by malnutrition. I met a few slum children with enormous bellies but very skinny figures. Their hands, legs and other parts of their bodies were frighteningly thin. When I talked to the mothers of these children, they mistakenly believed that the condition was due to drinking too much tainted water. Without a doctor around to correct them, they had no way of knowing how to help their children recover.

"That's edema," says Guldán about the condition causing the children to have swollen bellies but small limbs. She tells me that it almost always occurs due to malnutrition. "There is a disease called kushioko. If edema develops from this disease, it is called protein energy malnutrition." According to medical literature, this condition is common in families where mothers have too many children to breast feed individually, but cannot afford nutritional supplements to aid the development of their offspring. "When the first child comes along, it has to be removed from the mother's breast because the second child comes along," explains Guldán. "The children need protein, and protein comes from breast milk, which the mother can't provide to all the children she has."

"A one-year-old child should be eating food containing half of their energy calories other than the breast milk," says Guldán. "A one-year-old child also has a very small stomach. Foods like daal do

not have a lot of calories or energy. So quickly the energy finishes, and no one feeds the children again. The body of a child really needs snacks between meals.” But without the ability to regularly eat meals, it is very unlikely that slum children would ever be able to acquire snacks. Too often, adds Guldán, families are unable to afford staple foods that add energy to basic foods. “Is there much oil in their daal or rice?” she asks rhetorically. “As they can’t afford it, it means no oil.”

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the country has the highest prevalence of underweight children and malnutrition in Southeast Asia. Pakistan ranks a close second, as it relies on imported food and its populace is poor. However, some have argued that despite the fact that Bangladesh produces an enormous amount of food, Bangladeshi policies requiring that staples be exported, leaving residents of slums and other poor people without access to even the cheapest goods, like rice and lentils.

To remedy this situation, the government of Bangladesh has taken some steps to make food accessible to even the poorest citizens. For example, regional governments offer “Education for Food” programs in both urban and rural areas. Through these programs, a few meals each day are provided to children who regularly attend school. When I asked some slum dwellers if they knew about these steps being taken by the government, they were highly critical. “We heard about the Bangladesh Government School,” they say. “But only the children of garment employees or government employees can get admitted.”

When I talked to the Headmaster of the Bangladesh Government School in a poor area of Chittagong, he totally denied the assertion of the slum dwellers. “Without any discrimination we encourage all the children to come to this school and get education. Besides, we have students from different communities and social status, but most of them come from very needy families,” he says, while requesting that his name be omitted from this article. “We treat the entire student body equally so that children who come from really poor backgrounds do not feel themselves ‘inferior’ to others.”

Whether the slum dwellers are telling the truth about their children being barred from the “Education for Food” programs, or the Headmaster correct about the accessibility of his school, poverty prevents most slum-dwelling children from attaining an education. “Even if I want to send my children to school, I don’t have the ability,” says one slum-dwelling father. “In this slum you will find people who do not have any interest in sending their children to school, and also there are people who want to send their children but cannot afford it because of their inability.” The father is referring not only to the inability of the family to afford tuition, but also more importantly their inability to lose the income brought in by working children. “I am incapable as a father,” he sadly adds, reflecting on his inability to guarantee his children a life better than his own.

Social prejudice can also get in the way of education. “If slum children live with parents who have little or no education, they may tend to undervalue education. This can have a negative impact on children,” says Varuni, the psychologist from the Asian University for Women. Too often, parents are forced to focus on keeping their children alive from day to day. “I still remember when I last came to Bangladesh,” says Guldán, the nutritionist from Tufts University, about her experience working as a nutritionist in the slums of Chittagong. “I asked one mother, ‘What do you want your child to be?’ She didn’t reply with anything. She was just looking at me with blank eyes.”

Without hope for education or nutrition, children in Bangladeshi slums are most vulnerable to a lack of food. They become sick and weak, are unable to attend school and lift themselves out of poverty.

“Please, take my child with you,” says Rahima, the mother of two children from the sprawling slum on the outskirts of Chittagong. Her skinny two-year-old is fidgety and bored with this interview. I can’t imagine what her four-month-old baby at home looks like. Her toddler appears ignorant of the difference between where he lives and where I grew up; unaware of how hard he will have to fight to reach his mother’s age. But he is painfully conscious of his hunger for food, clean water, and other essentials. “At least he will get food to survive.”

[END]