



# THE DHAKA PROJECT

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## **1. General**

This area covers the organizational questions about the Dhaka Project.

### **1.1. What is the Dhaka Project?**

The Dhaka Project is a charity organization in Bangladesh. The Dhaka Project is the product of countless children and adult volunteers who are gifted mentors giving tirelessly their time and expertise.

### **1.2. Are you registered officially?**

Yes, TDP is registered as a non profit organization through the well know Bangladeshi Rural Service Foundation (RSF) – Registration number: n No. C-645 (33/06).

### **1.3. Do you have any contact with the Bangladesh Government and do they know you?**

We do not have any specific contact with them but they know us very well and allow us to do any activities regarding our project.

We do receive incredible support from the Bangladesh Rural Services Foundation, which took us under their umbrella and made our life much easier.

### **1.4. When did you start?**

We started in July 2005.

### **1.5. Who is the founder?**

Maria Conceicao, a Portuguese national, and a flight attendant for Emirates Airline.

### **1.6. How did TDP start?**

The Dhaka Project idea came to Maria, the Founder, during a 24 hour stopover she had in Dhaka in April 2005. She decided to have a look around the city and discovered that Dhaka suburbs mainly consisted of slums. So she decided to do whatever she could to help. She came back on month later, distributing clothes and blankets and couple of months later she opened 2 rooms school in the heart of Gawair – a slum suburb in Dhaka.

### **1.7. What is the main objective of the Dhaka Project?**

The Dhaka Project is a community project that aims to break the cycle of poverty in the slums of Dhaka. Every child deserves the opportunity to build a full and rewarding life. At The Dhaka Project, we maximize human potential. We try to bring hope to the children of Dhaka by providing sustainable skills needed to get along in their future life.

### **1.8. What is the process by which The Dhaka Project meets its objective?**

The project focuses on giving skills to the adults, both men and women, and on a parallel, taking their children from the streets and garment factories into full time education. To help the women get work, there is also a nursery.

### **1.9. How many students does The Dhaka Project serve, and how?**

The project currently has 30 children in nursery, 30 in pre-school and 650 in primary. We provide these children with 2 meals per day, medical and dental care, school uniform including shoes, stationary, electric lamps (so they can study at home even with the frequent power cuts), beds and bed sheets, crockery, mosquito nets, blankets, pillows etc... Health and education of the children are our top priority.



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As part of bringing good health to the area, over 700 children have been vaccinated for Hepatitis B, Typhoid Measles and Polio. The project also provides housing for the families of 25 children, who came from the slums. The project provides this when the children are the income earner for the families, for example if they have sick parents.

## **1.10. What Curriculum do you follow for the students?**

Previously we were teaching the Bangladeshi curriculum but we just switched to the Cambridge Examination Curriculum.

## **1.11. What do you preach?**

We preach universal set of values and social skills. We help developing the personality of the child by encouraging qualities they will need to success in their future lives such as self confidence, self esteem, intellectual curiosity, leadership, creative thinking to analyse and make wise decisions. We teach and increase moral sensitivity and focus on concept of honesty, equality, humility, understanding and respect of humanity.

## **1.12. Are you a missionary school?**

No, we are in a Muslim country and we follow Islam rules. We have prayer rooms in each school and an Islam teacher.

## **1.13. Who is working for The Dhaka Project?**

Maria Conceicao, the Founder, spends most of her spare time in Dhaka working on a volunteer basis. The employees of the Dhaka Project are Bangladeshi citizens mainly living in the Project area. TDP is welcoming volunteers for couple of days, weeks or months bringing their specific skills to add value to the project.

## **1.14. Who is supporting TDP?**

- TDP receives financial support from Emirates Airline Foundation. The project has received also financial donations from various Dubai based entities such as Emaar, Delta Partner Group, Burjuman, Gems School, Dubai British School, JESS School, Al Salam Private School, EK Raki Group, Irish Community More Cafe and from many other individual initiatives and our garage sales in Dubai.
- Some of our global supporters are the Singapore Women Association and BCD Travel in Portugal, Sheraton Hotel in Dhaka.
- Also a number of donators have provided school supplies as Rotary Dubai with school Bags, Dubai Modern high School with student's stationeries, visitors buying rice in Dhaka, Novartis with vaccination and medical supplies twice a year, Sheraton Hotel as a Dropping point with special room for donations, cabin crew and captains bringing suitcases full of children clothes and many more.
- Maria is supported by Emirates Airline with free tickets from Dubai to Dhaka.

## **1.15. Does the project generate any income?**

Yes, very little at the moment but on a growing process. The sewing shop is training Karchopi (local embroideries) ladies and sewing ladies in order to produce clothes, cushions' covers etc... The Clothes shop sells at a very low price (to encourage self responsibility) clothes to the local community.

## **1.16. How do you manage accounts?**

Our accounts are made in Dhaka and audited each year in Dubai. They are now available on the website for transparency.



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## **1.17. How much money is being donated each year?**

It's hard to say precisely, as it varies each year; however, with an average of Dhs 80000 monthly it would be something close to One Million Dirhams annually.

## **1.18. How can one make a donation?**

You can make a financial donation directly to our Bangladeshi account or drop goods as clothes and other items in our storage room in Dubai. For more details please contact us on [childrendhaka@yahoo.com](mailto:childrendhaka@yahoo.com).

## **1.19. What are the plans of expansion for the children?**

In term of education TDP wants to open new schools in the immediate neighbourhood as more than 200 children are on the waiting list. But TDP wants to buy land and build the entire schools not to depend anymore on rents and landlords' fluctuations of price!

## **1.20. What are the main challenges for the children at the project?**

The first one is the fact that they are a source of income for their families, mainly when their parents have working limitations, sometimes due to deteriorated health conditions. That's why we should address the children's problems as family issues, and take care of everyone that is part of the family. Young girls getting married by their parent's choice is another tough challenge, to address this situation we created a hostel for young girls facing this problem, hence avoiding the marriage by providing them with a personal choice.

## **1.21. What are the plans of expansion for the adults?**

- TDP wants to be source of recruitment for Bangladeshi staff.
- As we continue to generate sponsors, TDP is developing - on a humble scale - a guest house service in the heart of the Project in order to provide a training platform for adults for the hospitality industry.
- TDP is negotiating partnership with hotel chains to provide pre trained staff in Dubai.
- The Project is also training Beauty Salon ladies, office assistant, female helpers, and security guards to help them to find a job.
- TDP is also in the process of opening a Tourism Company to provide local services and Tour Guides for cabin crews and people on a stopover. Later, TDP will offer some Tours for couple of days in other parts of the country as Sylhet in the North and Cox Bazaar in the South.

## **1.22. You hope to make it self sufficient in the future, what are the key elements in doing this?**

Apart from the above, our initial goal is to have the project working entirely from a self owned property, thus not depending on rental price variations and tough negotiations with landlords. Once this is done we will build sustainability by producing services and goods inside the project and therefore making it profitable and able to pay for its own costs. We also continue to focus on long term sponsorships, like the 'Emirates Foundation' – they have helped us in realising many of our dreams.



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## 2. Founding Story, Founders Story

This area covers the questions mostly asked by media, by donors, and by partnering organisations – where and when did the Dhaka Project originate, and who is the Founder of this charity. The questions here, for the most part, are real questions asked by the media, and the real responses printed.

### **2.1. Some quick facts about Maria Conceicao:**

Name: Maria Conceicao  
Age: 31  
Born: Vila Franca de Xira in Portugal  
Lives: Dubai  
Position: Dhaka Project Founder  
Profession: First Class Flight Attendant, joined Emirates Airlines on 21st August 2003.

### **2.2. What influenced your decision to start up the Dhaka Project?**

I realised how lucky and privileged I am and now was time to give back to society.

### **2.3. What was the first work started with your commitment in this project?**

We opened a sewing school with six sewing machines and enrolled 39 children in school.

### **2.4. Can you tell us more about your work for Emirates?**

The most rewarding part of my job is being able to travel around the world, last five years I have had the chance to spend time in more than forty countries meeting people from all walks of life. I have come to know some great people and been fortunate to learn many things from them, countless have inspired me with the beauty of their vision, the strength of their commitment and significance of their action and impact in the world.

I have been able to learn important lessons from everyone I met on my flights from executives, from people that doesn't have any place to call home, from mothers and fathers, teachers around the world, human rights workers, have had chats with monks, priests, nurses people from all walks of life .Travel has a way of stretching the mind, is amazing to be able to experience new sights, smells, sounds and also how others do things differently to what we believed to be the right and only way.

### **2.5. Has your experiences as a cabin crew member been an asset to the success of this project?**

Absolutely! My job has been the platform to do it all, the concessions tickets, the help of the crew, pilots, ground staff.

### **2.6. Who has been your biggest support during you career?**

I wish to not just acknowledge the volunteers but also thank and acknowledge the hundred and hundred of friends and family members who are working behind the scenes, providing strength and support to the volunteers who are helping us break the cycle of poverty. We could not do what we do without them.

Emirates Airlines , Emirates Foundation have been tremendously supportive towards The Dhaka Project , they finance us on monthly basics , they also finance my flight tickets to Dhaka whenever needed and also finance doctors and nurses flight tickets .

Dubai media , Dubai British School , Jebel Ali School , Jess school have been loyal contributors.



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## **2.7. What is your ultimate goal in life?**

One must put back into the world at least the equivalent of what he takes out of it. One's inner and outer life depend on the labours of other people and I believe one must exert themselves in order to give in the same measure as they have received and still receiving.

## **2.8. What drives you to do what you do?**

Once someone said "Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have to hold on for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations".

## **2.9. What is most important in your charity work?**

Health and education of the children and try to give them all a bit of individual and care as well to bring all the best in them and develop their individual talents.

## **2.10. What poverty situation is keeping more refreshed in your memory?**

The lack of hygiene, the fact they live next to or on black pools of water, that they drink, cook and wash from the same, they go to the loo on it, the kids swim on it ... I feel like throwing up every time I think of it.

## **2.11. How much of your time is spent in Bangladesh and how much of your free time in Dubai is spent organizing things for the project?**

During most of the past three years I could say that 100% of my time outside Dubai was spent in Dhaka and 100% of my free time in Dubai was also spent working for TDP. This is because for the first two years I was largely working alone, but lately I have received help from some volunteers.

## **2.12. How is your day to day life?**

In Dubai, either working as flight attendant or in spare time running around like a headless chicken, raising money, meeting sponsors, packing, unpacking, update emails, updating sponsors, meeting volunteers, doing interviews, running the garage sales. Earlier was also trying to get registered in Dubai, that is now taken care of.

In Dhaka, have meeting every morning with staff, run around all day doing whatever needs to be done, like vaccinating kids, updating records, go to the government trying to get things done, request authorizations, community teaching and also spend time with kids. Buy the monthly supplies - don't think people will understand the hassle this can be, show project to visitors, organize new initiatives, do emails, accounts and often still working up to 1 am! Visiting slums all in a day's work.

## **2.13. And how does your family react to your life?**

They are very proud of me.

## **2.14. How do you define poverty?**

Poverty is people living on less than one dollar a day. Children having to work to maintain their parents how sad. Poverty for me is people not being able to afford medical care, access to clean water, don't receive education, and can't afford a meal a day and are basically living in hopeless despair.

## **2.15. You have no previous experience of business, but you are now in charge of a small NGO, how is the business run?**

Acting, instead of waiting for things to happen. A lot of time can be wasted talking about what could be done, and that is why I spent the last three years doing things that needed to be done. A motherly instinct has always been my guidance, the feeling of what was more important to my



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children was always more effective than any management skills, it was coming from my heart, and it has served the children very well.

## ***2.16. You have picked up awards, has this helped in creating more interest to the project?***

Absolutely! After winning a pan-European competition for women innovators - that had attracted 35 applicants from 16 countries - I was looked at in a more serious way. After the award we received AED 110,000 (approx USD 30,000) from Emaar and AED 60,000 (approx USD 16,000) from Burjuman. We then started to receive incredible support from the Emirates Foundation and the Emirates Airline. Emirates Foundation is sponsoring us for a period of five years with a monthly contribution of Dhs 45,000 (approx USD 12,000), and Emirates Airline provides me with unlimited free tickets to Dhaka and adds periodically tickets to Doctors and Dentists who are going to Dhaka to help us.

## ***2.17. Have you faced any big obstacles over the past three years?***

Many! Red tape, bureaucracy, politics, child labour, custom of child marriage, lack of funds, natural disasters, etc... But we've never given up fighting - obstacles are part of life and it is our duty to overcome them.

## ***2.18. How do you feel about the Project's success, and what makes it special to you?***

The success is clear by seeing where our children and their parents are today comparing with where they were three years ago. I'm very proud of my children's accomplishments. Recently we had four of them here in Dubai and to see them talking about their dreams with everyone they met was really touching. They carried themselves with dignity and displayed a special strength that I do believe in a brilliant global future for them. Also, now we have adults rescued by the project working here in Dubai, the latest of which is Nurul Islam, the first one to be proudly employed by Emirates, I hope there will be many more.

## ***2.19. How do the children's parents and other people in Bangladesh react to your work? Is it all positive?***

Of course not! Initially they were always very suspicious, I looked like a big trap to them. Fortunately, now with the clear results they have become very supportive - they have good examples to inspire them.

## ***2.20. You once shunned the limelight but now you are more visible, have you found the right balance?***

I don't like to showcase myself or what I do for the children and their families, I'm not an artist. But sometime ago I realized that I'm the brand of the project, that I give it legitimacy, people trust me, therefore I should go ahead and be part of the show, if that can help us to reach our goals I'm very happy to do it.

## ***2.21. Do you ever wish you had more time for yourself?***

I wish I had more time to do more humanitarian work. Not caring about my personal life over the past three years has brought me problems, specifically to my health, which I need to avoid in the future.

## ***2.22. Answers to quick personal questions asked by a media outlet:***

- Growing up, I wanted to be an actress.
- I studied languages.
- My happiest memory was when The Dhaka Project won an award in European Union 2007 awards.



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- If someone wanted to follow my career path in the humanitarian world and have vision energy and passion this individual can go on and do great things starting with a simple gesture of giving will set of a chain of events that will multiply hundred folded.
- Giving is important because you may not make your dreams come true but you will help people to go beyond theirs, you may not retire with gold in your bank account but you will think of the rest of your life as the golden years.
- Being able to help others less privileged makes me feel alive, more human, more fulfilled.
- Everyone can help in a small way by getting out there and give. Everyone regardless age and background has a unique gift and skills to share with the world whether is healing the sick, being a compassionate listener, fixing things that are broken, raising money, being a good friend, finding solutions to problems . Some people are good teachers others have talent in art, others great in sports, running companies, designing clothes, working in computers, organizing events, either in spots, art, cooking, working with children .Like a mosaic made up of countless brilliantly coloured pieces a movement thrives when everyone contributes his or her own skills. If each of us put in a little stone you will get a great mosaic . The good news about volunteering for The Dhaka Project opportunities are only limited by your imagination.
- Every morning I smile when because I know day by day the hope of a brighter future is growing inside the little hearts of my children in Dhaka.
- My motto: There are moments in life when we need to trust blindly in intuition.
- I'm most proud of my children and their families accomplishments.
- My biggest challenge has been finding balance between my full time job and my role at The Dhaka Project.
- Three items I can't live without Books, mobile phone and red colour.
- My favourite celebrity is Richard Branson what an inspirational man.
- I am helping save the environment by recycling Dubai residents unwanted clothing, furniture.
- Before I die I want to go back to university :)
- I stay healthy by having daily long walks and every other day attending Yoga classes.
- I would like to be remembered by someone who helped to make the world a more just and compassionate place.



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## 3. Volunteer FAQ

This section covers queries for volunteers who wish to travel to Dhaka for direct involvement with the Project at the ground level.

We were delighted to hear that you wish to volunteer for The Dhaka Project.

It will be a pleasure to have you spend time at the project in Dhaka. We are sure you will derive a great sense of fulfilment and purpose.

### **3.1. Where can I get full details on volunteering?**

Full details on how volunteers can help out are given in our website [www.thedhakaproject.org](http://www.thedhakaproject.org) under the "volunteers" heading.

In addition, if you go through past issues of our newsletters, you will get a good idea of the range of social programmes and activities of The Dhaka Project. Very informative and shows you how volunteers' skills, experience and talent can be of benefit to the children under our care.

Once you have gone through the website, do let us know in which specific area of volunteering you'd like to participate in. We can then give you our thoughts.

### **3.2. Who are the people in Dhaka I should coordinate with?**

We have three senior management staff members in Dhaka to look after the needs and concerns of volunteers:

Volunteer Manager: Takes care of arriving Volunteers: "Mr. Jewel". He is indeed a jewel in that he takes good care of volunteers when they arrive in Dhaka.

Project Manager, and a team of support staff: For the applying of visit visas to Dhaka, if your passport is one that requires a visa, Mr. Rossie, based in Dhaka, will take care of that formality jointly with you.

Project Director: The on-site Project Director in Dhaka is Mr. Korvi Rakshand.

### **3.3. Who pays for the expenses related to volunteering?**

Please note that visiting volunteers pay for all their expenses when they come: airfare, accommodation, meals, visa fees, airport transfers etc.

### **3.4. How Volunteers can positively affect the lives of the children and the Dhaka Project Community?**

Any skill that you may wish to share with the children, or any help you can afford to the Project's daily work is welcome.

Some examples: Education and activities like drawing, painting, music, dance, children's games, drama workshops, singing, organize treasure hunts, take photographs of children and put together albums for them. If you have computer skills, you can show the children how a computer works. If you are sporty, you can help set up sports programs. Volunteers help the children build confidence, knowledge and a sense of belonging.

### **3.5. What do the children benefit from my volunteering?**

You will make a real difference to the lives of these underprivileged children. The volunteer activities provide the children with:

- Better opportunities for future employment and prospects by learning basic English,
- Vital social skills and friendships through team building activities,



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- Basic hygiene, safety and health care skills in order to improve their daily life,
  - Understanding the world beyond Bangladesh through your knowledge and life,
  - An interest in newly learnt hobbies and skills,
- Friendship and integration back into society of ex-slum dwelling children.

### **3.6. What is required of a Volunteer?**

The emphasis is very much on the activities that the volunteers want to do rather than a daily structured itinerary. Any suggestions for new activities will be warmly welcomed by The Dhaka Project's coordinators.

Some helpful hints are given below:

- A personal drive to make a difference to the lives of others, and a good work attitude and eagerness to work as part of a team for the benefit of others
- Plenty of energy and enthusiasm and passion
- You need to be adaptable and flexible
- Have a sense of humour, willing and able to listen

Be culturally sensitive, freely accepting others and their differences without discrimination.

### **3.7. What is the checklist for me before I come to Dhaka?**

#### **3.7.1. Flights**

The Arrival Airport is DHAKA. Different companies do the rotations. Please check on the internet.

#### **3.7.2. Travel Insurance**

Check with your insurance or Credit Card Company if you have one that you are covered in case of accident.

#### **3.7.3. Passports**

Make sure your passport is valid at least 6 months after to return home after your volunteering.

#### **3.7.4. Visas**

American, British, Europeans, New Zealand, Australian citizens can get a visa on arrival. Just need to carry 50\$ to pay the visa fee at the airport. The visa is issued for 15 days. If you plan to stay longer, send a passport copy + CV by email to process an invitation letter.

With the invitation letter we send you back by email, go to the Bangladesh embassy or consulate in your country and ask for a visa. It should take only 3 days but by experience, start the process one month in advance.

For other nationalities, send us the passport copy + cv by email in order to process the invitation letter. Then please follow the same procedure than above.

#### **3.7.5. Travel Essentials**

- Address Book
- Travel Journal and pens
- Money belt
- Torch
- Spare batteries
- Camera, batteries, charger, spare memory cards
- Lap top
- Universal adapter



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- Sewing kit
- Earplugs
- Snacks or other food stuff you like ;-), biscuits, nuts, dry fruits. Sweets for the children are banned at TDP
- Insects repellent (body cream or spray)
- First Aid Kit - Paracetamol, antibiotics, Imodium.

## 3.7.6. Clothing and Footwear

- Take clothing that you don't mind getting ruined not your Sunday's best! Most of the work on the field will involve getting dirty or wet and you won't enjoy it as much if you are worried about spoiling your clothes.
- The Project involves a lot of walking. Make sure you have a good pair of shoes and a good supply of socks. We recommend Thousand Mile socks (they guarantee no blister!)
- Flip flop and waterproof ponchos are very useful especially during the raining season!
- Please remember Bangladesh is a Muslim country so consider conservative clothing.

## 3.7.7. Money

- Local currency is TAKA. Rate is 1\$ = 68 taka
- Bring USD biggest notes possible as the change rate is better.
- A team member will go the first day to change the money with you.
- Don't change money at the airport. Exchange rate is low.

## 3.7.8. Health and vaccination

- We recommend basic travelling vaccinations as Hepatis B, Typhoid and Tetanus
- Please inform us if you have any specific allergy or any medical condition as epilepsy, diabetes she should be aware about.

## 3.7.9. Hygiene

- Please bring your own Towels, toiletries as soap, shampoo, shower gel, tooth brush, tooth paste etc...
- Sanitary napkins, wet wipes, hand sanitizer.

## ***3.8. What do I need to know about living at The Dhaka Project?***

### **3.8.1. Guest House facilities at the heart of The Dhaka Project**

- 7 rooms with twin beds with sharing bathrooms (4)
  - Kitchen set up for breakfast and simple cooking
  - Dining space
  - Common living room with TV, DVDS, Books, Music system.
- Rate:
- 1000 Taka - 50 AED – 14\$ - 10€ per night including bed sheets and breakfast
  - Special rates after 2 weeks of stay
  - Special arrangements for long term volunteers.

### **3.8.2. Food**

- Local food is safe only when prepared by our cook or recommended by us. Lunch and dinners are available on site with rice, noodles, vegetables, meat, dal, eggs etc = 100 taka per meal per person



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- Pizza, Chinese, Thai, Bangladeshi Take away are available but more expensive: from 300 taka ++ per person per meal.
- Basic supermarket available for primary food stuff as milk, sugar, tuna etc. The team will bring you there the first day of arrival.
- There are a few restaurants we will recommend.

## 3.8.3. Water/ Drinks

- Drink Mineral water **ONLY** and be sure it is sealed. Little to no risk if you get MUM brand.
- We recommend also washing your teeth with mineral water.
- International brands soft drinks are available in cans (in supermarkets).

## 3.8.4. Laundry

- A local laundry service is available. Drop the cloth in the morning giving your name and pick it up next day with the payment due!

## 3.8.5. Transport

- Airport pick up and drop off will be arranged by TDP at 1 000 taka both ways.
- During your stay Rickshaw, TukTuk and taxis are available (average of rates to be given on site).
- Minivan can be booked 24 hours in advance at 2 500 taka per day (depending on availability); only full day bookings.

## 3.8.6. Dress Tailoring

- TDP sewing shop can tailor make local dresses for ladies. Upon arrival request, you can get a 2 pieces in 48 hours (plain). With embroideries it will take 5 days. Please contact us in advance.

## 3.8.7. Goods Donation

- If you come from Dubai please contact us in advance in order to clear our "always" full storage room and bring donations to the project.
- Do not bring sweets for the kids. They are banned from the Project.
- Please contact us in advance to know what our current urgent needs are.

## 3.8.8. Local Behaviour

- Respect the rules of any Muslim country.
- Do not give money to the kids in the Project or out of the Project. It encourages them to beg instead of joining a school.



# THE DHAKA PROJECT

## 4. Contact Us

- Email: [childrendhaka@yahoo.com](mailto:childrendhaka@yahoo.com)
- Website: [www.thedhakaproject.org](http://www.thedhakaproject.org)
- Postal: 524 Gawair, Ashkona, Uttara, Dhaka-1230, Bangladesh.
- Please remember that the Project is closed on Fridays for school and staff day off.

Thank you for your time in understanding and helping The Dhaka Project.  
- The Dhaka Project Team.