

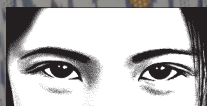
Terre des hommes Magazine

Courage



Bangladesh
**Young people,
sport and
climate change**

N° 86 | September 2024



Terre des hommes

Helping children worldwide.



“I had my own questions and aspirations when I was their age. The resilience and courage I am witnessing in these young people inspire me every day.”

Jiniya Afroze, Tdh Deputy Representative in Bangladesh

Sport as a way of coping with climate change

Under the scorching sun of the Kurigram district, after hours of travelling by car and then by boat, I come across a group of young girls playing handball outdoors. Their energy and enthusiasm are tangible. This scene is familiar to me as I frequently visit displaced families, yet still poignant. When I was younger, this wouldn't have been possible.

As a girl, I was passionate about cricket and would have loved to play, but it was considered a boy's sport. Our dreams were often suffocated by strict cultural norms. For girls, the emphasis was on modesty and appropriate behaviour. It was therefore out of question to participate in physical activities in public.

I am firmly convinced by the impact that the sports and personal development activities set up with Terre des hommes have on young people, giving them a voice and the opportunity to prepare for the major challenges imposed by climate. Bangladesh, one of the world's most densely populated countries, is bearing the full brunt of climate change. Floods, droughts and cyclones are forcing many people to migrate to live in ever more precarious and dangerous regions. The current political crisis and violence deteriorate their situation.

It's very powerful to work alongside these children and young people. I feel privileged to be able to make significant changes in the lives of young girls like Jamiya, whose story you will read in the following pages. She was displaced several times and, because of the difficult situation her family faced, was married off at a very young age. Imagine what life can be like for a child who has had to change homes and environments several times, and then finds herself uprooted from her family because she's married to a much older man. Isn't that terrible?

As a woman, I can feel what girls like Jamiya feel. I had my own questions and aspirations when I was their age. The resilience and courage I am witnessing in these young people inspire me every day. Despite their trials and tribulations, they are courageous and determined to change their lives and those of their families. Fortunately, cultural norms and attitudes are evolving. Thanks to your support, we can continue to use sport as an extraordinary tool to transform their lives. Please help us give hope and strength to these young people.


Jiniya Afroze

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Climate change: surviving thanks to sport

The majority of girls and boys displaced by climate change-related disasters in Bangladesh are from marginalised communities living in poverty. Many have experienced forced marriage, and some are living with disabilities of varying severity. Traumatic, their stories follow one another but are not alike. There is a light at the end of this flooded tunnel: sport.



The sky hangs low and heavy over one of the playgrounds in the village of Chilmari in the Kurigram district, barely disturbed by the laughter of young girls playing barefoot on a dried mud floor. The atmosphere is festive, you can tell. In front of a group of women in colourful traditional shalwar-kameez (traditional dress) and laughing children, they are playing a Bangladeshi game that could be likened to European Blind Man's Bluff or Wolf. Most of the teenage girls are blindfolded with black scarves and holding sticks. Unconcerned about the oppressive, humid heat around them, they tease each other but remain focused, caught up in their game. It's so much fun trying to recognise someone without seeing them, or to break a vase placed on the floor at random.

walls collapse, and the ground can become muddy and unstable”, explains Nashirul Haque, project manager at Terre des hommes.*

“Seeing young people overcome significant challenges through the support of sport underlines the impact of the work we do.”

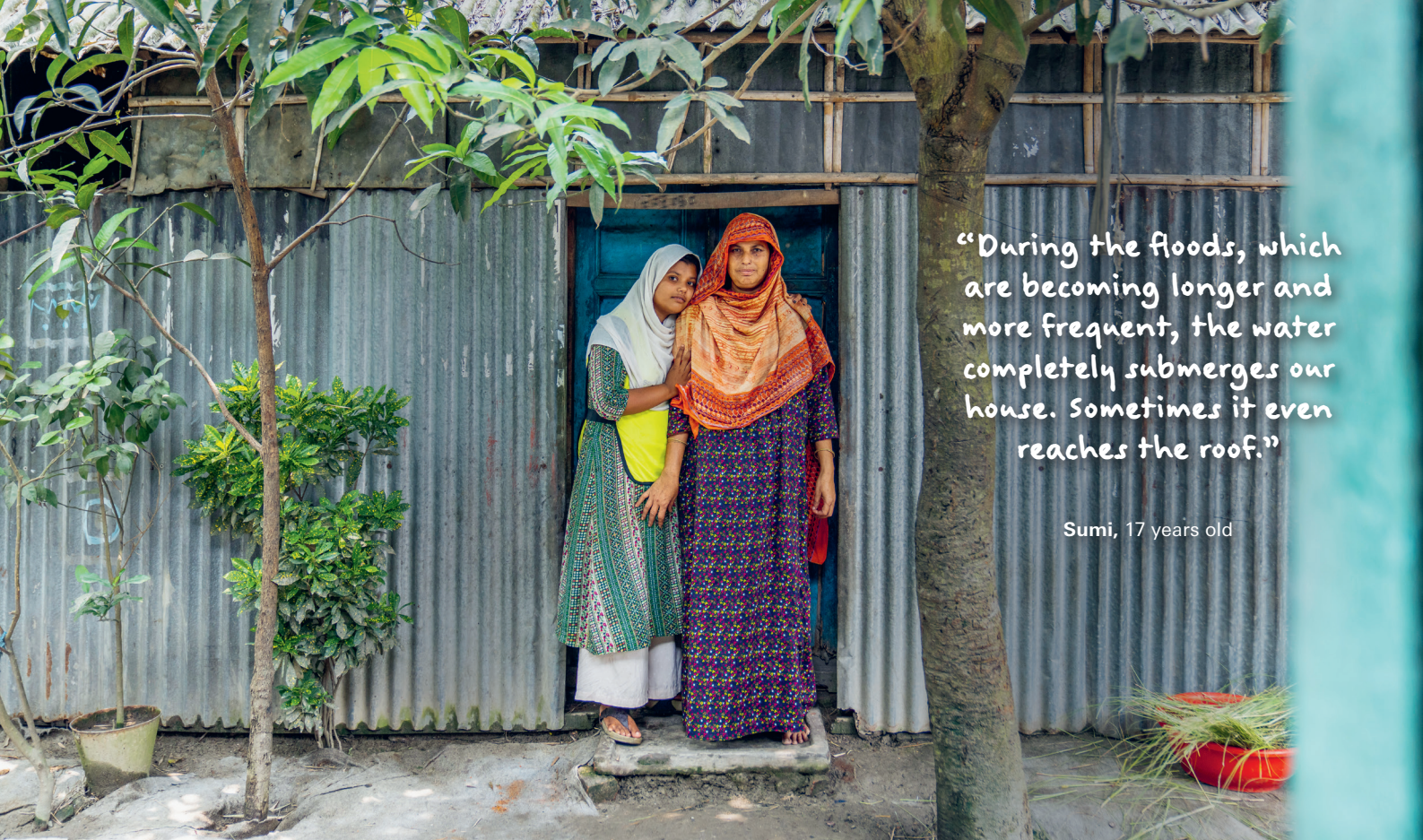
Nashirul Haque, Project Manager
at Terre des hommes

His role? To help children and young people take part in sports activities and personal development sessions in the community where he himself grew up and discovered football. His aim? To improve the physical and mental health of these young people that were displaced but also to give them the keys to acquiring skills. The goal remains to promote their well-being by providing security, creating links, enabling them to assert their identity, reminding them of the fundamentals of justice and their rights, and passing on hope. *“Through sport, which is always accompanied by sessions devoted to personal development, we offer young people the opportunity to express their feelings and share their opinions. We guarantee them inclusion and diversity, which helps making them independent and empower them to deal with new situations. Seeing young people overcome significant challenges through the support of sport underlines the impact of the work we do.”*

Did you know?
13.3 M
people will be displaced
by natural disasters by
2050 in Bangladesh
(1/7 of the population)



Surrounding the happy troupe and their attentive audience, the huts and houses are made of bamboo, sheet metal, pieces of cardboard and bits of wood - materials that offer little protection against the fury of natural elements. *“With the rain and frequent flooding, the homes are often destroyed or badly damaged: roofs leak, some*



“During the floods, which are becoming longer and more frequent, the water completely submerges our house. Sometimes it even reaches the roof.”

Sumi, 17 years old

Highly vulnerable to climate

Everyone here is strongly affected by climate change. *“Kurigram is an area that is extremely vulnerable to climate. River erosion, heavy rainfall, floods, droughts and cold snaps are all part of our daily lives here,”* adds Nashirul. No fewer than sixteen rivers surround the area, which remains both a resource for the inhabitants and a source

of stress, even a vital risk, during the rainy and cyclone seasons. Many families live on ‘chars’, precarious alluvial islands formed from sand and silt deposited by the surrounding rivers. Characteristic of the region, the chars determine the entire lives of the communities that live there. During the dry season, these immense strips of land are an almost peaceful place to fish,

plant and harvest rice, wash clothes and play football with your feet in the water but your head towards the stars. The land is fertile and generous.

But from June onwards, the floods arrive and everything can disappear in a matter of days or even hours: homes, land, farming tools, fishing nets and other personal possessions. *“During the floods, which are becoming longer and more frequent, the water completely submerges our house. Sometimes it even reaches the roof. This forces us to move around by boat. It’s dangerous, especially for children who can’t swim. Not to mention the problem of buying food and basic necessities,”* tells us Sumi, 17-year-old, who is an assiduous participant in the Terre des hommes project to promote team sports practised in safe conditions under protected supervision. In these often dramatic circumstances involving migration and forced displacement, sport is not only a life-saving tool for learning and cohesion, but also one of the only ways of psychologically coping with immediate or future dangers, which are unfortunately rarely foreseeable.



↗ **Chars are river islands formed from sand and silt deposited by rivers during the monsoon season. Frequent flooding can wash away dwellings, forcing communities to relocate.**

Water. Here, there, everywhere. Water, that great ally, the source of life, but also that treacherous creature that can rage out of its bed and swallow everything in its path. Jamiya knows all about these risks. *"My house is close to the mighty Tista. If the river overflows, there's a risk that it will be washed away. I don't know where we'd go if it was destroyed."* Already married and a mother at just 19, Jamiya lives in a precarious situation with her child, her husband and her parents-in-law. Since discovering handball and the support sessions set up by Terre des hommes, this young mother, who is also studying at university, has found her vocation: *"I want to progress as a handball player. I aspire to play at national and international level."*



♡ "I want to give my daughter a better life. I don't want her to suffer like I did."

Jamiya, 19 years old

Beneath the pretty red scarf covering her hair, Jamiya has a bright smile and determined black eyes. *"I want to give my daughter a better life. I don't want her to suffer like I did. That's why I want to work to provide for my family."*

Displaced by climate change

The floods that affected Jamiya have already displaced Imon and his family three times. Now settled on a dyke belonging to the government, Imon and his family have to cope with dramatic living conditions. Fleeing, always

Child marriages, still a common practice

"In our community, there's a lot of pressure to get girls married young. I am determined not to marry off my daughters because they want to continue their studies." The words of Aduri, a young widow and mother of two girls, highlight the reality of early marriage in Bangladesh, where a third of young girls are married before the age of 15. Living in a climate of constant instability and insecurity as a result of natural disasters, many parents do not hesitate to marry off their daughters, even at a very young age, believing that this is the only way to lift them out of poverty, give them social status and reduce family expenses. This harmful custom has very serious repercussions on health, particularly in terms of early pregnancy, psychological development and inalienable rights, and is strongly opposed by Terre des hommes.

fleeing, rebuilding somewhere else a little further away, because of the river that rises dangerously several times a year, swollen by the monsoon and the melting of the glaciers due to climate change, which is getting worse every year.

Imon is 17 years old and visually impaired. *"Because I'm not able to see well, the flood poses huge challenges for me. Getting around becomes incredibly difficult. It's also difficult for my family to find money to buy food and clothes."*

While the boy proves to be an excellent storyteller, full of humour and poetry, his account of his life is poignant and makes his audience's eyes light up. *"As a child, I spent most of my time at home alone, playing, drawing and dancing, as no one in our community would accept me as a friend because of my eye problem and my sensitive nature."* Every day brings its share of threats to overcome. Actions that to us seem natural and obvious – moving around, studying, writing, *"finding out how to kick the ball into the goal"* – are still very trying for the young man, who nevertheless accepts things with a smile.

The positive impact of sport

Imon's life has been transformed since he entered secondary school and started taking part in the football sessions organised by Terre des hommes. When he talks about his liberation through sport and words, he likes to be poetic. *"Before, I was sad and upset. It was like being a bird in a cage,*

longing to get out and connect with nature. Now that I attend discussion groups and play football with other young people, I feel as free as a bird, able to breathe in the open air." As the interview progresses, the boy opens up more. He feels very grateful, because this group project has radically improved his mental health and his social acceptance, giving him the opportunity to *"always learn something new"* and to share everything that weighed on his shoulders *"like an enormous burden."* He adds: *"Now, the people around me know about my talents. I have lots of friends who appreciate me for who I am."*



Teamwork and resilience

In a sky laden with clouds and humidity, the burning sun makes a timid breakthrough, creating shadows on the football pitch right next to the tin huts where we are chatting with Imon. All around us, nature reclaims its rights, with bright green palms rising into the sky, and mango trees spreading their powerful roots through the muddy ground. In this familiar setting, Imon invites us into his brick-built house. He introduces us to his parents and shows us his work: songs, poems and colourful drawings. You can feel his pride, happiness and peace of mind. *"Thanks to the sessions, I've been able to develop my singing, dancing, drawing and acting skills. People with disabilities have invaluable talents that deserve to be recognised and appreciated."* On the way home, Nashirul tells us how much Imon's story means to him: *"His story reminds us that our efforts can have a profound impact on their daily lives, providing not only immediate relief from stress and psychological well-being, but also long-term independence."*

Doing everything boys can do

Playing a team sport when you're a girl is no mean feat. It was not easy for Jamiya to convince her husband, who is much older than her, and her parents-in-law to let her play outside.



Did you know?

10,000

young Bangladeshi people are taking part in the project, **5% of whom have a disability**

Traditions weigh heavily here, such as the early marriage of children (see box), and the elders always have their say. *"At first, it was difficult to get my family's permission,"* she says. Jamiya can't thank the community worker who came to her house to convince her family to let her play enough. *"Now we have the freedom to play in open fields like boys, and we can enjoy play in a well-managed and safe environment."* It's true that Jamiya has her hands full with her 3-year-

old daughter, her studies, the household chores she shares with her mother-in-law, and her involvement in the handball and training sessions initiated by Terre des hommes.



"Now we have the freedom to play in open fields like boys."

Jamiya, 19 years old

Creating a favourable environment

Nor is it easy for a young woman, married at the age of 16, to continue her studies. *"My parents-in-law were apprehensive about letting me pursue higher education because they were afraid it would take me away from my family responsibilities. But I managed to explain to them the importance of education. I insisted that I could contribute to the financial*

"We lost our house and land due to the collapse of the river and now we are living on the government river dam. However, the memories of the village deep in my mind now stir emotions. I often recall the cool atmosphere of my village."

Imon, 17 years old



"Everything changed when I started playing handball"

Sagoree, 17 years old, wants to become a doctor. The shy, solitary pupil has opened up to the world since taking part in the handball sessions. *"I feel safe. The coach who trains us is very friendly and has encouraged me to express myself. I've followed her example in the way she communicates and learnt to overcome my fears."* Sagoree has gained confidence in herself and managed to forge new friendships with her playing partners. *"It's a place where we can meet other young people, build relationships, share our thoughts and feelings and learn to adapt to different environments."* The young girl, who admits she had never interacted with people from her village before, has seen a real change in her life, as well as a significant improvement in her physical condition and mental health. *"Now I can play, move around freely, run and jump wherever I want because I've finally overcome my fear and shyness. It's true, I feel so much better! I share everything with my family and like to get involved with people in my community."* Just as the chrysalis transforms to allow the butterfly to spread its wings, Sagoree has finally found her path. And a form of freedom.



stability of our family." Thanks to the support of her parents and husband, Jamiya has been admitted to university and is able to take part in the handball sessions, which are planned in advance to suit her schedule. On the green grass of the handball court, the players' shalwar-kameez form bright, multicoloured flashes,

constantly in motion. On top of their traditional outfits, they are wearing the team's fluorescent yellow jerseys, dotted with red and grey lines. The equipment, supplied by Terre des hommes, sets them apart and unites them at the same time. Perfectly recognisable, it reflects the spirit of freedom that they come to

exchange and seize on a daily basis. Like a balloon filled with hope.

Catherine Delaby

The SPiRiT project - Sports for Protection, Resilience and Transformation - is supported by the Olympic Refugee Foundation and implemented with our partner organisations Breaking the Silence and SOLIDARITY.

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Word to

Sabu Islam – *Community trainer in Kurigram*

Sabu Islam, 22 years old, is a community trainer in a village on the south bank of the Brahmaputra river in Bangladesh. He was confronted with floods that destroyed his family's home and land. Having taken part in Terre des hommes' sports and support activities, the student talks about the difficulties he has experienced and what he tries to pass on to the young people he coaches on a daily basis.



“When we were forced to move out of our home, it was a mentally devastating experience. Leaving my childhood home and adapting to a new situation was incredibly difficult. Thanks to the support of my family, I persevered with my studies.”

Where did you live before you were displaced?

I lived in a house that my family had lived in for years, even before I was born. As we didn't own the land, which was government property, we had to leave because of reconstruction projects. All the houses on the embankment near the dykes were destroyed and the people who lived there evicted. It was a very disturbing situation.

What difficulties have you encountered?

During the move, my family, my neighbours and I were very depressed. Leaving our home and our village literally broke us. We were stressed at the idea of facing an unknown environment. We needed money to build a new house but we were having great financial difficulties. I was constantly thinking of ways to support my family financially. I became obsessed with these worries and became mentally ill from thinking about them too much. However, upon joining the project, I began to learn the importance of trust and building relationships. I discovered the power of mutual support in achieving our goals and learnt how to manage my emotions and turn them into strengths.

How do the children you support experience their migration journey?

Migration is always a difficult experience, especially for children. Leaving home is particularly painful. Younger children are more vulnerable and find it hard to deal with their emotions. When families are forced to emigrate, children lose their friends from the neighbourhood. This is both terrible and very frightening.



↑ Sabu and his team. The team sport is based on trust and security.

How are you making a difference in the lives of these children?

I'm convinced that families, guardians and myself as a coach have a role to play. We need to offer children and young people solid support during these periods. We need to help them manage their psychological well-being. Encouraging them to continue going to school and making new friends can help them feel less isolated. This helps them to become stronger mentally and physically, which benefits the whole community.

What does being a community coach mean to you?

It's essential to show respect and encourage constructive dialogue. I have to assure the young people I supervise that I am trustworthy and offer them security. I have to be able to sense, even guess, their ups and downs. Once this is the case, I feel connected to them and they to me. In this way, I work to overcome my own difficulties and learn from others. In return, I commit to helping and supporting them.

What have you gained from the project with Terre des hommes?

It made me aware of loneliness and depression. I also discovered techniques for taking care of my mind and learning to manage my emotions. Now I'm thinking about how I can contribute to the well-being of my family and the young people in my community, whether by giving them mental support or practical advice.

What message would you like to pass on to young people?

Have faith in the future and don't let yourself be overwhelmed by gloomy thoughts. Believe in yourself! Patience and self-confidence make everything possible. Try to love yourself too. Everything becomes easier when you start to love yourself.

↙ The team in the middle of a training session.





Every child in the world has the right to a childhood. It's that simple.

We aspire to a world where children's rights, as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, are always respected. A world where children can grow up safe from harm, and become the agents of change they wish to see in their lives.

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