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PHOTO & CAPTION

Reaching Children by Rickshaws



Photo: USAID/Bonnie Carlsson

With USAID support, the local version of the world-renowned educational program Sesame Street began airing on Bangladesh national television in April 2005. It has quickly become one of the most popular children's shows in the country. The program is called Sisimpur and has its own cadre of fun, colorful and friendly Bangla-speaking Muppets made to appeal to Bangladeshi children. There is Halum the vegetarian tiger, Shiku the golden, bespectacled jackal, and Ikri Mikri and Tuktuki, two inquisitive, outgoing girls.

More than 800 children came out to see the first viewing-by-rickshaw of Sisimpur, Bangladesh's Sesame Street, in the small town of Savar. After only a few months on the road, Sisimpur attracts an average of 100 children each showing.

Locally produced, Sisimpur teaches children about letters and numbers like its American counterpart, but it also tackles such local concerns as health and hygiene. And, of course, there is plenty of singing, dancing, and playing too. Learning with Muppets in Bangladesh is no different than learning with Muppets in America or any of the other 120 countries where the program airs — it's good fun.

However, not every child in Bangladesh has a television and not every town has electricity. Understanding this, USAID teamed up with Save the Children to bring Sisimpur to children in remote villages by transforming traditional cycle rickshaws into mobile theaters. These specially designed rickshaws are outfitted with a box containing a TV, DVD player, and a generator. The rickshaw driver pulls into town, opens the doors, turns on the television, and waits for the children to come running out to view their favorite educational show. Surveys show that nearly half of all preschool age children in Bangladesh watch Sisimpur regularly. With the ability to reach rural children, the popularity of Sisimpur will continue to blossom in new places — there's no place where it is more popular than in rural towns with no televisions at all!