

# Kulsuma Akter's Journey of Transformation and Hope

Kulsuma Akter is a 14-year-old student of Mostakpara 'POPI Bridge' School. Her father, Abu Sayid, passed away when she was just 3 years old, leaving her mother and three children behind. To support the family, her mother, Jahanara Begum started working at a dry fish processing zone. When Kulsuma was young, she sometimes accompanied her mother to her work. Over time, she began working there regularly, usually earning BDT 250 to 300 a day and he would hand it over to his mother. That is how their days went. Later, her mother enrolled Kulsuma in an NGO school, but she did not like the environment of the school and became an irregular student. She spent more time dry fish processing zone than studying. The situation worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, which halted Kulsuma's education entirely.

Reflecting on her earlier experience, Kulsuma said, "I used to both study and work in the previous school. But I did not like the school. There was irregular education and there were no facilities for fun or sports. So, I went to school less and spent most of my time working in the dry fish processing zone. Even if I did not go to school, the authorities demanded tuition fees every month, so I had to contribute all my earnings there."

Kulsuma's perspective began to change when she saw her cousin, Riya, attending 'POPI Bridge' School. Curiously, she asked Riya about the school and came to know that they do not have to pay for studying there, moreover, the school provide opportunities of sports, dancing and singing after classes. Kulsuma expressed her desire to study to her mother. Seeing her daughter's desire, her mother went to talk to the teacher at Bridge School, and soon after, Kulsuma was admitted to the fourth grade last year.

She expressed that, "After being admitted to 'POPI Bridge' School, I no longer went to the dry fish processing zone regularly. Moreover, my mother sometimes attends to various school meetings and after the meetings, she comes to know about the harmful activities. Now, I am in class five."

She has made good friends since coming to this school, and she loves to chat and play with them. The teachers here teach with so much joy, which helps her learn easily. Kulsumma is very optimistic about her future.

## **ASPIRATIONS & FUTURE OUTLOOK**

She wants to become an educated teacher and teach poor children for free. She says, "In the future, I want to be a good teacher. Most importantly, I don't want to be a victim of child marriage like my older sister. I want to learn and become a person who is worthy of respect."