



# My Equal Life

**Caritas Finland**

Information and tasks  
for those of 13 years or older

# **My Equal Life – Glimpses into daily life in Bangladesh**

This booklet contains information on My Equal Life-project and the photo exhibition by GMB Akash accompanying it. First, we'll go through how the project is connected to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), guiding principles of Finland's Development cooperation and delve deeper into the issues of inequality. Then we will discuss whether compassionate approach can reduce inequality. Lastly, we will shortly introduce the artist and his native country of Bangladesh.

After this we'll move on to the material for discussion, which deals with inequality-related issues and encourages adopting a compassionate approach to other people. This material can also be used on one's own, as a tool for self-reflection.

Finally, this booklet features a glossary, which helps understand the stories behind GMB Akashi's photographs and the terms used in the material for discussion.

## The objective of the project

Billions of people throughout the world live in unequal conditions. As a result of United Nations' initiative hundreds of countries have committed to reducing inequality. In September 2015 all 193 Member States of United Nations (UN) adopted global plan of action for sustainable development, Agenda 2030, which contains 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

By 2030 they aim to eradicate extreme poverty, protect Earth's carrying capacity and promote equality and justice.

The Member States have made a commitment to prioritize those in the most vulnerable position in order for us to finally achieve a more just world. Reducing inequality is one of the key goals of sustainable development and the goal of Caritas Finland's global education project My Equal Life. Goal #10, Reducing inequality, is closely connected to the other 16 goals, which depict the things we should guarantee people everywhere in order to achieve an equal world.

# **Sustainable Development Goals:**

- Goal 1: **No Poverty**
- Goal 2: **Zero Hunger**
- Goal 3: **Good Health and Well-being**
- Goal 4: **Quality Education**
- Goal 5: **Gender Equality**
- Goal 6: **Clean Water and Sanitation**
- Goal 7: **Affordable and Clean Energy**
- Goal 8: **Decent Work and Economic Growth**
- Goal 9: **Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure**
- Goal 10: **Reduced Inequality**
- Goal 11: **Sustainable Cities and Communities**
- Goal 12: **Responsible Consumption and Production**
- Goal 13: **Climate Action**
- Goal 14: **Life Below Water**
- Goal 15: **Life on Land**
- Goal 16: **Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**
- Goal 17: **Partnerships to achieve the Goal**

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

To end poverty, protect our planet and fight inequality and injustice



All the creativity, knowledge, technology, and financial resources in the society are necessary for achieving of the Sustainable Development Goals. Every one of us can be part of the change making the world a more just and equal place to live in!



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## What does Finland's development cooperation hope to achieve?

The goal of Finland's development policy and development cooperation is to support the developing countries' attempts at reducing inequality and promote sustainable development as outlined by various UN goals.

Development policy seeks to globally reduce poverty, realize fundamental right for all individuals and to promote sustainable development. Development cooperation is one way to implement development policy. It is practical cooperation between developing countries and other partners – such as international and civic organizations – in order to achieve the development goals.

Advocacy in international organizations is an important part of development policy. In addition to this Finland engages in development cooperation in a way that strengthens both public and private sector. Part of development

policy is cooperation with civic organizations both in developing countries and Finland. One way to do this is to support these organizations' projects and global education. My Equal Life is a global education project.

Finland's development policy and development cooperation generate concrete results that have positive impact on development within societies and peoples' lives and help reduce global inequality.



# What is inequality?

Inequality means unjust disparities between people which can be observed in individual's well-being, and which can be avoided. Inequality can be associated with almost all spheres of human life: well-being, health, economy, origins, gender, age or living conditions.

According to PhD Antti Kauppinen inequality between individuals becomes problematic when unequal distribution of resources derives from unjust conditions, or it results in unequal treatment. The opposite of inequality is equality, which is closely connected to the concept of justice.

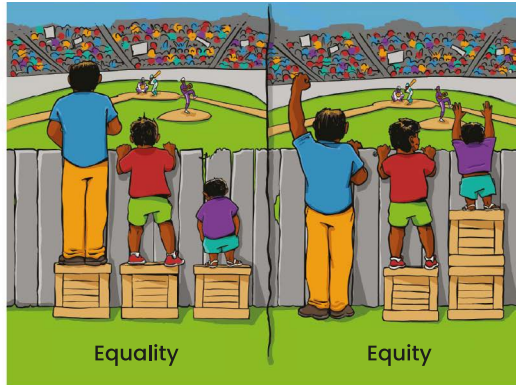
Inequality can be addressed for instance by examining the access different people have to education, healthcare, and clean environment. It is also crucial to provide special assistance to those in vulnerable position and improve individuals' resilience; reinforce their capacity to survive adversity by utilizing the resources and strengths which contribute to their well-being in different situations.

## What is inequality related to?

Inequality can relate to almost every area of the human life:



It is challenging to try and accurately measure reducing inequality because objective points of references are not always readily available. There are some indicators used internationally to measure income inequality. However, there are no internationally standardized ways to measure inequality associated with well-being, because it is largely down to person's experience, which is both personal and culture bound.



Equality and equity mean different things.

Inequality can be reduced by equal treatment, which means either distributing resources equally between everybody or by distributing them according to each individual's needs. This is referred to with concepts of 'equality' and 'equity'.

Finland is widely considered to be one of most just and equal countries in the world. Still 80 percent of the Finnish people consider increase in inequality the most significant sociopolitical threat.

Inequality is a complex and multi-dimensional challenge, which studies have shown also reduces person's ability to feel compassion. Some of the crucial factors in reducing inequality are citizens'

awareness, ability to take responsibility, willingness to take initiative and securing their independence. At the same time effort must be made to strengthen the most vulnerable groups' ability to participate in society. Increasing compassion reduces inequality. We can all contribute towards reducing inequality in our daily lives and learn compassion. What matters is paying attention to how the other person is feeling – not focus on how you would feel in their shoes or what you would in their situation.

Read more about sustainable development goals from websites additional material package [tasks.myequallife.org](https://tasks.myequallife.org).

**The project's also on social media – don't forget to follow us on Instagram and Facebook**



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# Compassion reduces inequality

Compassion helps reduce inequality. We all can feel compassion for others. Sometimes there's a need to change existing structures or learn new things in order for compassion to grow: who gets to help, who gets to be helped and who has the permission to help whom.

## What is compassion?

Compassion combines knowledge, feeling and action.

The action can be a look, a warm smile, holding the door open, seeing the other and acknowledging the agency of the other.

A compassionate person sees the wants and needs of another person.  
Compassion is also defending the weaker.



Compassion combines knowledge, emotion, and action. An act of compassion can comprise of a friendly look, warm smile, opening the door for someone, making the other person feel seen and acknowledge their agency. A compassionate person sees the other person's desires and needs. Compassion is also defending those less fortunate. Compassion is rooted in a view of humanity, where human is good and seeks connection with others.



**GMB AKASH**

## Photographer GMB Akash is also a benefactor

GMB Akash is a Bangladeshi photographer, whose work focuses on marginalized people around the world. Through his photographs he seeks to give them a voice. He has been collecting their stories for more than two decades. Akash has photographed many disenfranchised groups such as prostitutes, casteless (Dalits) and disabled people.

Akash maintains contact with the people he's photographed even after the shoots. Over the years he found agonizing to see how their situations had not improved, so he set out to help them himself. Akash has helped several people set up businesses: street kids sell popcorn, one man trades in clothes he sells out of his rickshaw while another one sells cucumbers.

Akash has founded a school to ensure children of poor families, too, have access to education. He also trains people in photography. He has seen the





In GMB Akash's photo, Md. Rabbi who cleans drains and works as a sweeper.

power of education and how it improves people's standard of living.

Akash has won over hundred international awards and his work has been featured in many prominent publications such as The Guardian, Vogue, Time, Sunday Times ja Newsweek.

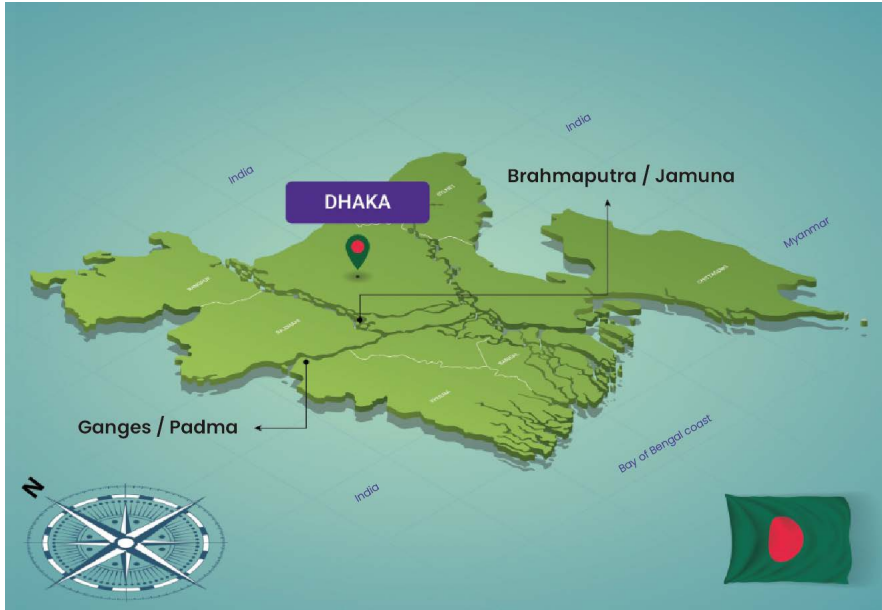
## Bangladesh is a densely populated country

- Bangladesh is located in South Asia.
- The neighbouring countries of People's Republic of Bangladesh are India and Myanmar.
- Capital Dhaka is home to some 7 million people.
- Some of the other capitals of divisions the country is divided into are Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, Barisal and Sylhet.
- Bangladesh occupies an area of 143 998 km<sup>2</sup>.
- The official language is Bengali.
- Currency is taka.
- Bangladesh declared independence from Pakistan in 1971. Between 1955–1971 the country was known as East Pakistan.
- Its population is 162,7 million.



Location of Bangladesh on the map.  
Neighboring countries are India and Myanmar.

Bangladesh is the eighth most populous country in the world, making it one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Ganges delta, formed by the rivers Padma (Ganges) and Jamuna (Brahmaputra), is a very fertile region. Bangladesh is annually hit by several monsoon floods and tropical cyclones. Bangladesh is fairly flat terrain and majority of the land lies less than 10 meters above sea level. Should the sea level



The capital of Bangladesh, Dhaka, and the rivers Ganges / Padma and the Brahmaputra / Jamuna delta on a map.

rise by just one meter, it is estimated that approximately 10% of the land would be flooded. During some of the biggest floods more than half of the country has been underwater. The effects of natural disasters are aggravated by deforestation and erosion.

Economic growth is slow. Challenges it faces consist if political instability, poor infrastructure,

corruption, insufficient availability of energy and the fact that the country's economic system is not being reformed enough.

More than half of Bangladeshis work in agriculture. Clothing industry constitutes 75% of the country's export. Bangladesh has several factories producing clothes to Western market. Majority of the employees of these factories are women. They get paid very little while toiling in poor conditions. Accidents are fairly commonplace.

Most of the Bangladeshi population are Muslims. The country has religious minorities such as Hindus, Buddhists and Christians.

Majority of the people live in the countryside dominated by self-reliant subsistence economy. There is shortage of clean water. In many regions contaminated surface water has come in contact with groundwater, subsequently contaminating it, too. There is inequality within the Bangladeshi society. The country has a Muslim majority and casteless Hindus (Dalits) are a disenfranchised group. Refugees from the Rohingya minority of

Myanmar who have fled to Bangladesh have faced hardships, too. It has proven to be difficult to find areas for them to settle in. Economic disparity contributes heavily to increasing inequality.

Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world. The quality of healthcare and education have steadily improved. According to the World Bank, adult literacy rate was 75% in 2019.

# **TASKS FOR DISCUSSION**

## For you, dear reader,

This material has been created as a guide for all those, who wish to learn more about global issues. Some instructions are specifically geared towards teachers and others working in global education. Material is part of Caritas Finland's My Equal Life -project. In conjunction with that, between 2021-2024 we will be hosting Bangladeshi photographer GMB Akash's photo exhibition both in various locations around the Finland and online. We wish to encourage all viewers to go over the following tasks.

The objective of this material is to inspire people to discuss or individually ponder inequality and what kind tools we have for reducing it. The material seeks to deepen the understanding of inequality and encourage people living in Finland to take on global responsibility and active global citizenship. The material can be utilized both during a visit to the photo exhibition and in classes with children and youth.

You'll also find the photographs and tasks at [www.myequallife.org](http://www.myequallife.org).



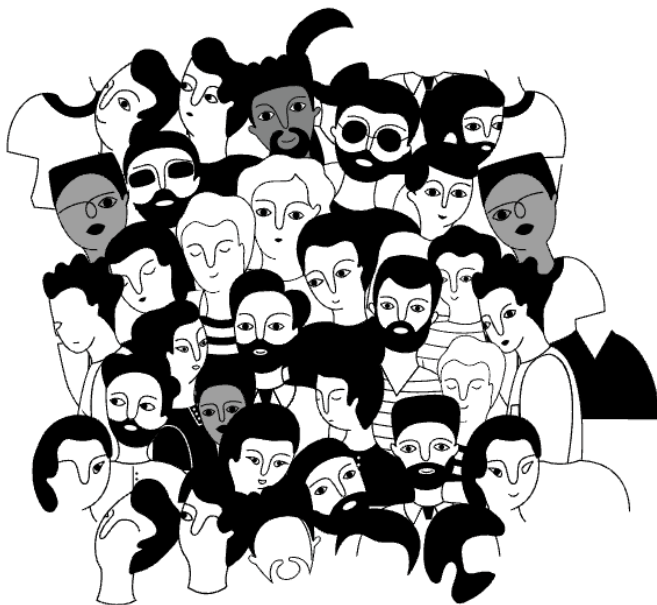
## For educators and teachers:

These tasks are designed for youth of 13 years or older. On the project's website [assignments.myequallife.org](https://assignments.myequallife.org) you'll also find group assignments, which the teacher or educator can implement at any grade.

Some of the photographs on display at GMB Akash exhibition may be upsetting to some viewers and some of the captions or tasks may feature concepts a child is unfamiliar with and the discussion of which may seem challenging. That is why at the end of this material we have compiled a glossary of terms, aiming to help educators to process these topics with children.

Inequality adversely affects the lives of billions of people worldwide. Those of us living in Finland can make a difference through development cooperation and civic participation. Educators are in key position in teaching children to grow into compassionate individuals capable of recognizing inequality, questioning the structures that sustain it and working in their own lives towards equality and reducing inequality.

We hope to inspire you to address the theme of inequality in classes, in hobby groups and discussions taking place at home. Feel free to adjust the material to suit your needs and to find useful ideas for your educational work and daily life. Some of the tasks are related to persons and stories featured in GMB Akash's photographs, but you may also take the opportunity to think of another person you find more beneficial.



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**1. What are basic human needs? Can they all be found in the picture on next page?**

- a. What kind of needs have you've had recently?
- b. Are they basic needs? Do you think a friend of yours would answer similarly to the question and are their basic needs the same as yours? Why? Why not?
- c. Why do you think people in the photographs might answer differently?

## Basic human needs



**2. Global Sustainable Development Goals apply to all basic human needs everywhere in the world. We can all do our part to achieve them.**

- a. Among your own circle of friends and family who would you say are the ones whose basic needs or goals are not met?
- b. What could you do in your daily life to help these goals be achieved?
- c. Many children have chores to do at home – maybe you do, too? What do you think these chores are usually for?

### 3. Akash photographs people on “the margins of society”.

- a. What does it mean to “be marginalized” or “live on the margins of society”?
- b. Who do you think are the people living at the centre of society?
- c. Why are these boundaries created?
- d. How do you think it would feel to be marginalized or live on the other side of the boundary?
- e. A boundary can be discriminatory and unequalizing, but can it also be inclusive and equalizing?
- f. Do you think you create boundaries in your own life to separate yourself from the others? Why is that?
- g. Do you think it would be possible to create boundaries that are positive: ones that help include others instead of those that exclude them?

**4. Pick one of the people you saw in the photos. Try to think, what the world looks like in their eyes.**

- a. What does their world map look like?
- b. What kind of places and things would seem familiar to them? What would feel weird and exotic?
- c. What kind of things do you think are current and important in their world? How about what kind of people?
- d. Which of the Sustainable Development Goals would they prioritize?
- e. Do you think their opinion matters as much as yours? Explain your answer.



5. Please evaluate the following statement: "Money is calming and makes one happy". Consider the assertion from the perspective of people living in different situations and in different parts of the world. What kind of things determine whether those words are correct?

6. Are all people equal?

- a. Can you name something about your own society that puts people in unequal positions?
- b. Does a person's profession and income level affect their human dignity, their worth as a human?
- c. How does one achieve human dignity?
- d. How does a person's outfit or appearance effect other people's perception of them, their respect for them and their preconceptions about them?

7. Prejudice refers to pre-conceived notions we've made before actually getting to know the person or thing. Often, they are negative and reflect on an entire group of people. Prejudice can prevent us from getting to know, respecting, and trusting in each other.

In worst case scenario they lead to discrimination and racism. We all make assumptions if other people, whether they're positive or negative. Once we get to know other people and things, we can overcome our prejudice.

- a. Are you aware of any prejudice you might have?
- b. Have you ever had a mistaken perception of another individual or a group of people that you've later corrected?
- c. How can prejudice be overcome?

8. Stereotype is a simplified view or generalized opinion about particular group of people or an individual who's part of that group. Through stereotypes these groups are classified as either good or bad. This means that an individual belonging to that group is seen through a very one-dimensional lens, and they're not treated as an individual, as a result of which they do not get treated equally.

- a. What kind of stereotypes do people attach to your own nationality?
- b. Are they correct as far as you are concerned? How about with other people you know from the same group?
- c. When you look back to the people you saw in the photo exhibition, do you think they all have something in common? What makes you feel that way?
- d. Do you think stereotypes be used for something good?
- e. What are the sort of situations when they are damaging?

9. Read the definitions given below to various terms related to equality and inequality. Then think of the photos you saw at the exhibition. Which one of the people depicted in the photos does each term remind you of? Why do you think the term made you think of that particular person?

- **Inequality** is a state, where there are unjust and ethically reprehensible differences between people that could be avoided.
- **Equality** is a state, where people are not treated unequally in regard to the goal or action in question without a just reason.
- **Justice** is a state, where people are treated in a way that ethically and juridically right.
- **Non-discrimination** is a state, where people's social rights, opportunities and resources have been distributed equally.
- **Discrimination** is course of prejudicial action, where different categories of people are treated unfairly on the grounds of certain features such as ethnicity, age, sex, or disability in a way that puts them in disadvantaged position without a just reason.





What should be done in your school/ at your workplace to promote equality? What are some of the things you yourself could do?

10. Try to imagine what prompts another person to do something and how they do it. Do we make all our choices based on them being something we want to do? Do you regret or have a bad conscience over a decision you have made? Think back to the photos by GMB Akash that you've seen.

- a. Which of the people have been able to make decisions or choices regarding their life?
- b. Do you think they're happy with the decisions they've made?
- c. Do you think some of them regret the choice they've made or the situation they're in?
- d. Which of the people you saw were happy?

11. Think about hardships or fears you may have in your daily life. Now think back to the photos and captions you saw at the exhibition. Think about what lies outside the stories: hidden fears, emotions on the surface, personal experiences and stories. What are the people in the photos scared of? What makes them happy? Then shift the attention to your nearest and dearest.

- a. What kind of emotions have they experienced and what are the things that make them scared, sad, or happy?
- b. What makes you push through the difficult situations?
- c. Many of the people in GMB Akash's photographs look optimistically to the future, no matter what hardships they've faced. Where do different people draw their strength from?
- d. Do you draw your strength from same things than the people in the photos?

**12. People communicate and experience affection differently. Many of the people in the photos have experienced feelings of rejection, but many have also felt love and affection.**

- a. Do you know how your nearest and dearest are doing?
- b. How have they been doing these past weeks?
- c. How do you think you could express an interest in how they're doing?
- d. How would you want them to show you they care about you?
- e. Is asking "how are you doing" as meaningful than giving space and receiving information?
- f. How can you better pay attention to another person when you're asking how they're doing?

### 13. Think about the people on the photos.

- a. Which of the people in the photos and the stories stands out in your mind as someone who's happy?
- b. What does the happiness of these people consist of? What are things that make you or your nearest and dearest happy?
- c. How do the sources of happiness differ between different people? What are the things people have in common?

How did it feel to discuss inequality-related issues through the photos you saw at the exhibition?



# Glossary of terms

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- **Allah** – Allah is an Arabic word that means God. In other languages this term is used to refer to God in Islam.
- **Anorexia** – Anorexia is an eating disorder triggered and fueled by various reasons as a result of which a person starts to restrict, evade and avoid eating. It's a psychiatric long-term illness characterized by patient's compulsive need to lose weight.
- **Bazaar** – a covered market or a place of business consisting of various stalls, typical for Oriental and specifically Islamic cultural tradition.
- **Caste** – Caste system is social classification system where individual's position, opportunities available to them in life and their culture are defined by their origin, i.e., the class they were born into. Hindu society is divided into different castes, societal classes. According to the rules of the system those higher up in the ranking should avoid coming into contact with those lower in the system. Those who are left outside the four casts are called Dalits and only have access to the most menial jobs.

- **Cyclone** – Cyclone is a large air mass that rotates around a strong center of low atmospheric pressure. In tropical regions it often causes strong rotating storms such as hurricanes, typhoons, or tropical cyclones, which in turn cause rotating winds, torrential rains and thunder.
- **Dalit** – a term in Hindu caste system reserved for those ranking so low in the caste system they are considered to be outside of it, i.e., casteless. In Hinduism people are divided into castes and the status of Dalits, the casteless, has traditionally been the worst. Members of higher-ranking castes often refer to casteless derogatively as “untouchables”. Dalits can be found in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.
- **Disabled** – a person with some form of long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sense-related impairment, which, in conjunction with other obstacles, can exclude an individual from fully and actively participating in society equally with everybody else (UNs disability treaty of 2008, adopted in Finland in 2016). Disability is something that can and should be discussed, provided guidelines of good conduct are respected. “Disabled” is not a derogative term.

- **Drugs** – Drugs are substances which alter person's mental or physical state. Some drugs can initially induce feelings of happiness and pleasure, but their effect is very unpredictable, and they can be very dangerous to those using them.
- **Eid** – id al-Fitr- Eid celebration concludes the month of Ramadan, during which Muslims fast every day from sunrise to sundown.
- **Erosion** – Erosion is process where soil is worn away and or transported to another location by various natural forces such as water, ice, wind, or another soil-eroding factor. Up to one third of agricultural land has been destroyed because of erosion and pollution.
- **Iftar** – evening meal consumed after sunset, which marks the end of daily fast during the month of Ramadan.
- **Immigrant, "mamu"** – A foreign-born person, who's not a Finnish citizen, but lives in Finland and has a permit to stay here. Immigrant is not a derogative term, though its colloquial Finnish abbreviation "mamu" is sometimes used in such a manner. Term is often mistakenly employed based on a person's name, appearance, or mother tongue alone.

- **Monsoon** – is a weather phenomenon that is characterized by seasonal changes in the direction of strong wind and heavy, long-term rains. Monsoons are common in tropical regions around the world, particularly in Southeast Asia. prevailing wind.
- **Prostitution** – Sex and prostitution are topics that should be discussed with a child or youth according to the level of their development. You can open by asking, how the child perceives words such as “making love” and clarify it is affection and pleasure shared between two adults. You may proceed to explain for instance that “prostitution is somebody acting being affectionate towards another person and something some people resort to in order to earn a living.”
- **Ramadan** – Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar a month of fasting for Muslims around the world. During this month people abstain from eating and drinking from the sunrise to sunset and focus on spiritual growth – gratitude, patience, mercifulness, and compassion.

- **Rikshaw** – a passenger cart designated to carry one or two passengers; a cart that is pulled by a person riding a bicycle or a scooter. They are particularly prevalent in Far East, but also in Africa and Latin America, where they go by different names.
- **Sari (saree or shari)** – a garment worn by women in India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. It is essentially a piece of fabric, several meters long, which is draped on a person in a way that covers the body.
- **Sehery (the 'suhoor' or 'sehri')** – morning meal that Muslims consume right before the sunrise after which they start their daily fast.
- **Shrine** – is a holy place devoted to praising and worshipping certain deity, hero, or an idol.
- **Suicide** – Death and suicide are topics that should be discussed with a child or youth according to the stage of their development. You can open by asking, how the child perceives words such as “death” or suicide”. After their answer you may proceed to explain for instance that “when a person dies, they stop breathing and thinking. A suicide means that a person has done something that has stopped their body from working.”

- **Sweeper** – a person who sweeps the streets and cleans the drains, often with bare hands. This job is traditionally thought to belong to Dalits, the casteless.
- **Taka** – the currency of Bangladesh (BDT). One euro is roughly the equivalent of 100 takas.



This material for discussion is part of Caritas Finland's My Equal Life project. It consists of a photo exhibition by GMB Akash, a social media campaign and workshops in vocational schools.

For more information, please visit [www.myequallife.org](http://www.myequallife.org).

The project will be carried out 2021-2024 and it is one of the recipients of Finnish Foreign Ministry's Global Citizenship Education- funding. The texts for the material are written by Mervi Hakoniemi and Laura Koskelainen.

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