

# Experience Report DAAD-Promos fellowship

Identification Code:	BD-2019-1A4D7-w
Subject(s) of Study and Final Degree:	M.Sc. Environmental Sciences
Amount of Semesters:	3
Host Country, City:	Bangladesh
Period and kind of Stay:	Internship, 19-02 till 01-04-2019 (6 weeks)
University or institution abroad:	NETZ Partnership for Development and Justice

## **1. Advice and suggestions concerning the living, working, studying and/or research conditions, which might be useful for future scholarship holders.**

### **- Personal and academic interest in the host country**

In 2012/2013, I stayed in Bangladesh for one year for a volunteer service. That is why I was interested to stay there again for a longer period of time. Furthermore, I study environmental sciences and I was interested to get to know the view of environmental scientists, activists and other actors on environmental challenges in Bangladesh as well as the global level.

### **- Preparation and organization of your stay abroad (application, how did you find your place at the university, your research or internship position? Information on your visa, flights, insurances, accommodation search, living expenses, language, visits to authorities, transportation system, behaviors in the foreign culture, politics etc.)**

I asked my former sending organization from my volunteer service, NETZ e.V., if they could think of possibilities for an internship with them in Bangladesh. NETZ has one office in Wetzlar, Germany and one office in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The colleagues from Germany asked the colleagues in Bangladesh, if they had some tasks for an intern like me. The colleagues in Dhaka came up with the idea of supporting the climate change adaptation project "Rehabilitation and Strengthening of the Economic and Social Resilience in the Flood-Affected Areas of the Districts of Kurigram and Naogaon" (resilience-project for short). My tasks would be the conduction of interviews on climate change with project participants, which NETZ could use for improving their projects and for their public relations.

After I received the approval for my internship I applied for a new passport. However, there were parliamentary elections going on in Bangladesh in December 2018. NETZ advised me to wait with the visa application and booking of the flight till the elections were over and the political situation of the country was foreseeable. The situation after the elections allowed me to do the internship. I applied for my visa (tourist visa) and booked the flight (Turkish airlines, 750 €). The NETZ colleagues in Dhaka were very much helpful with the search of an accommodation. The husband of my colleague Afsana Binte Kamal was a teacher at Dhaka University and organized a seat in the international hall for me. There I paid 800 BDT per day (=255€ per month) for a furnished room with a bathroom and AC. This was more expensive than living in a flat somewhere else in the city but my colleagues advised me to stay there as it was a safe and also quiet place in the very crowded city of Dhaka. I liked it very much to stay in the hostel, as I got to know many other students and could encounter the campus live of Dhaka University. Furthermore, there was a canteen in the ground floor where I

had breakfast (35 BDT = 35 ct) and dinner (70 BDT = 70 ct). From Dhaka University I went everyday with a Rickshaw to my office, which took about half an hour to an hour depending on the traffic (100 BDT per ride= 1 €). Sometimes, I also joined my colleague Afsana, who was living close to the hostel and who went to office by car.

The most widely spoken language in Bangladesh is Bangla, which I learned in a language course during my volunteer service. For me it was amazing to experience, how I could remember more words every day, which I had forgotten during the last six years.

**- Please describe the course of a typical weekday in a few sentences**

On a usual day I got up at 7:30 and left for office at 8:30. Then I stayed in the office from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. There I had different tasks from preparing my interview questions over transcribing my interviews to other tasks related to my internship. At 1:00 pm all colleagues had lunch together. In the evenings I went either to the students hostel or met colleagues/friends (I had a lot of friends from the time of my volunteer service).

During one week of my internship I got the chance to accompany my two colleagues Zakir Hossain and Khairul Islam during their project visit in Naogaon and Kurigram. The aim of the visit was to write a mid-term report on the resilience project. During these days we stayed at different guest houses. In the mornings we visited groups of project participants or staff members of the partner NGOs for evaluation workshops. During these meetings my colleagues used interactive methods to get feedback from the groups on the project. I was listening their meetings and sometimes took interviews with project participants in parallel. For this task I asked colleagues from the partner NGO's to help me during communication problems as I took the interviews in Bangla. During our project visit we usually came back late in the evenings. Even though this week was quite exhausting for me I was very happy that I got the chance to join this project visit.

**-Characterization of the host country, institution or university, the city or the area.**

Bangladesh is a country with 160 million inhabitants and eight ecological zones. Therefore, the realities of life of people and also the natural environment is very diverse. I stayed most of the time in Dhaka, which has 20 million inhabitants. As I spent a lot of time with my colleagues and other students of Dhaka University, I stayed mostly in a more privileged environment. During my volunteer service I was supporting a school for underprivileged students whose parents work e.g. as rickshaw pullers or garment workers. This time I had more encounters with University students, teachers and NGO workers.

During the project visit we stayed in North-West Bangladesh, which is a rural region with comparatively less industry. The region is highly influenced by the three big rivers Jamuna, Padma and Teesta. It was very interesting to get to know four project participants who live in this region better through the interviews.

**2. report with a focus on the realization of your academic goals, consisting of the following three sections:**

**a) General impression of the host institution or the host university**

- Internship or study conditions
- Contact persons and advisory service

From my feeling I was very lucky with my institution. The colleagues in the office were caring for me very much and also the supervisor of my internship, Zakir Hossain, took great care of me. I knew the activities of NETZ from the last six years and am also active in a working group of NETZ in Germany. Therefore, I was also not bored in the office, rather I found six weeks a very short time to finish all the ideas I had in my mind.

### **- Your relationship with fellow students or colleagues**

I had very good relations with my colleagues. There was also another Bangladeshi intern, Somp Rani, who was about my age. She was preparing for her volunteer service in the NETZ office in Germany and we spent a lot of time together. We took the same flight to Germany and also now we are in close contact.

### **- Courses attended, extracurricular activities (congresses, workshops, additional academic events...)**

During my internship I got the chance to attend a climate change conference which lasted two days and took place on the campus of Dhaka University. I had to pay a fee to enter the conference and it was organized by the Faculty of Applied Chemistry. Therefore, the lectures were more chemistry and engineering oriented (not so much biology or ecology). I learned a lot about new adaptation and mitigation technologies related to climate change and also met nice students.

### **b) Content and purpose of your stay abroad**

#### **- Did you feel over-challenged, unchallenged or was it just right?**

It was the first time that I worked more on social sciences than on natural sciences. Therefore, it was very difficult for me to decide on a topic for the interviews, to design the questionnaire, to conduct the interviews and to transcribe them. But I had a lot of colleagues in Germany and Bangladesh who studied Geography and Anthropology who could help me in this regard.

#### **- Did you prepare your stay well, if not, what didn't you take into account?**

As it was not my first stay in Bangladesh, I knew more or less what I would need and I felt well prepared. During the time of my volunteer service I had many preparation seminars, seminars during my stay and also seminars after my return to Germany. If I would have went to Bangladesh without all this support, I would have felt left alone and overwhelmed, I guess.

#### **- What did you experience and learn?**

For me it was very beneficial to cross-check the impressions I gained during my volunteer service. It was interesting to see how I and my perception changed through my studies, but also through just being six years older than before. My internship helped me to better get to know people from another part of the world. Through the time in Bangladesh I experienced that people can think and live very different from the way I used to think and live (intercultural competences).

Also for my academic life I learned a lot about the way how social sciences work. I also learned how time consuming it is to conduct and transcribe interviews. Therefore, I would prepare even better for interviews if I ever have to do interviews again.

#### **- Did you achieve your goals? Were your expectations satisfied? Did you have any fears or worries in the forefront and if so, did they prove to be true?**

I could achieve the goals I had for the internship. I took four interviews. Unfortunately, I could manage to transcribe and translate only one interview. However, my goal was more to get to know the techniques of taking interviews than answering a scientific question. Therefore, I think I achieved my goals.

Furthermore, I was worried that six weeks would be too short to achieve anything at all. In fact the internship was truly quite short and I would have loved to extend my stay. However, I had only six weeks of semester holiday and it was not possible for me to stay longer. For the short time period still I learned and achieved a lot.

#### **- Does it prove beneficial to your further studies, language skills and/or your career entry?**

What was most beneficial for my future career was to accompany my colleagues during their project visit. It was very useful to see by which methods it is possible to evaluate a project. Also to see how to take participatory decisions within a project was very helpful.

### **c) Criticism and recommendations**

**- Personal assessment of the value of your stay abroad at the host institution/host university and in the host country.**

**- What did you learn on personal and on academic level, i.e. which 'take-away-values' did you gain?**

See question "What did you experience and learn?"

**- Would you recommend your stay abroad?**

I would recommend students who never went abroad to go to Bangladesh only if they can stay at least half a year. It is worth to do a language course and to learn the beautiful language of Bengali. Furthermore, it takes some time to accommodate to food, daily life habits and the different climate.

**- What would you do differently or suggest to future outgoing students that they should do differently?**

I would try to stay longer the next time as six weeks is a very short time.