

BANGLADESH

THE PERFECT WAVE

In a country where almost 50 children drown every day, a surfing revolution is saving lives. By Amy Fallon

Sumi, 13, takes off her headscarf as she strolls along a long, white sandy beach after school in Cox's Bazar, a beach town in south-eastern Bangladesh. She's ready to catch some waves.

"Before surfing, I was selling boiled eggs to tourists," says the teen, who spent all her spare time after class working to make money for her destitute family. She did this for three years.

Then Rashed Alam, a lifeguard and surfing instructor, saw her and some friends watching in awe as surfers were riding the waves. The sport had only been introduced in Bangladesh in 1995, after an Australian traveller left a surfboard behind.

Alam began giving the girls surfing lessons. But they landed in

trouble at home. "Their parents wanted them to be out making money," he explains. "And some people say women aren't supposed to surf. But I say, 'Why not?'"

After a crowdfunding project to pay for lessons for the girls more than doubled its target, the teens are now able to go to school and spend time in the ocean with their friends after class.

They have also learnt to swim, a crucial skill in Bangladesh, where about 18,000 people under the age of 17 drown every year.

"It was a scary moment for me the first time I had a ride on a wave," explains Sumi, who can now both swim and surf, and has made friends thanks to her new pastime. "Surfing is helping me change my life a lot."



Crowdfunding helped pay for Sumi (right) and these Bangladesh children (below) to take swimming and surfing lessons.



MC FACT

In Bangladesh, drowning accounts for **43%** of all deaths in children between the ages of one and four.*