



HIGHLIGHTS OF

**INITIATIVES
ADDRESSING
CHILD MARRIAGE
IN BANGLADESH**

Share-Net
Bangladesh

The Knowledge Platform on
Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights



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Content



Preface	4
About Share-Net Bangladesh	5
About Share-Net International Rapid Improvement Model	6
Child Marriage in Bangladesh	7
Masuma Billah, Population Council	8
Dr. Sushmita Ahmed, Population Services and Training Center	10
Farhana Jesmine Hasan, Terre des Hommes: Stops Child Exploitation	12
Dr. Ikhtiar Uddin Khandaker, Plan International	14
Sara Hossain and Taposhi Rabaya, BLAST	16
Khaleda Yasmin, Marie Stopes Bangladesh	18
Nasima Akhter, The Hunger Project	20
Nishath Sultana, BRAC	22
Tazeen Hossain, Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO)	24



Preface



This book is a part of Share-Net Bangladesh's Knowledge Collaborative on addressing Child Marriage issues in Bangladesh. It aims to highlight the practices undertaken by key stakeholders to address the issue of child marriage in Bangladesh, where it is common.

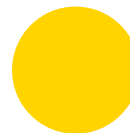
This book brings forward the methods adopted by nine organisations who are working directly and indirectly to spread awareness against child marriage among the masses, the achievements and outcomes of their projects, the challenges they face and their future plans to eradicate child marriage in Bangladesh. The book translated the tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge by interviewing experts who are actively working on addressing child marriage issues in Bangladesh.

This book will enable practitioners to learn from each other and use each other's knowledge in their own implementations.

Share-Net Bangladesh would like to acknowledge all other organisations who are working on child marriage issues in Bangladesh who are not covered in this book.

Share-Net Bangladesh would like to thank the experts who spared some time from their busy schedules to share their contributions and that of their respective organisations on the issue of Child Marriage in Bangladesh.

Share-Net Bangladesh wants to show special gratitude to Arnob Chakrabarty, Managing Director, RedOrange Media and Communications, for providing all the support that was needed for the successful publication of this book.



About Share-Net Bangladesh



Share-Net Bangladesh is the country hub of Share-Net International, a Knowledge Platform focusing on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR).

Share-Net Bangladesh is the first of Share-Net International's country hub, drawing on the years of experiences and interventions by practitioners, researchers, and policymakers in the field of sexual and reproductive health, especially placing SRHR at the centre of human rights.

Share-Net Bangladesh aims to bring together the Communities of Practice (CoP) that consist of social and medical researchers, development practitioners, health workers, government officials and legal experts to engage with one another to find solutions and take critical issues forward. Share-Net Bangladesh has 740 individual members and 60 member organisations.

Share-Net Bangladesh is hosted by RedOrange Media and Communications, with JPG as partner.

Vision: Universal access to and utilisation of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

Mission: Evidence-informed policies and practices enable everyone to have a satisfying and safe sex life, the freedom to decide how many children they want,

when and with whom, and access to good-quality care to ensure their sexual and reproductive wellbeing.

Priorities of Share-Net Bangladesh are to:


- Promote interaction between national, international, sustainable and empowered community of practice and encourage them to share learning.
- Apply knowledge to evidence-informed SRHR programs, policies and practices.
- Enable members and strategic partners to connect, discuss, share, translate and jointly operate this knowledge network on SRHR.
- Ensure accessibility of policymakers, practitioners and researchers to the knowledge platform and enable them to address the relevant knowledge gaps on SRHR scientifically, politically and practically.

To know more about Share-Net Bangladesh, please contact Anika Binte Habib, Coordinator, Share-Net Bangladesh at anika@redorangecom.com

About Share-Net International Rapid Improvement Model

The Share-Net International Rapid Improvement Model contributes to better understanding of which strategies can be used effectively by Share-Net country hubs to successfully move newly acquired knowledge towards policy influencing and improving practice. This model uses the so called Collaborative Approach as a structured learning system to facilitate collaboration between the country nodes and to stimulate sharing experiences and knowledge.

Overall aim:



Using the Collaborative Approach with a focus on experimenting with strategies for moving newly acquired knowledge towards policy influencing and improving practice and spread this experience across the Share-Net Country Hubs.

The Share-Net Rapid Improvement Model aims at:

- Exploring different strategies that effectively influence the complex processes by which evidence informs policy;
- Improving understanding of which strategies contribute to successful knowledge translation and use in the specific context of each Share-Net Country Hub;
- Facilitating learning, collaboration and exchange between Share-Net Country Hubs;
- Developing capacity of participating staff from the Share-Net Country Hubs secretariats with respect to knowledge brokering; and

- Sharing and applying knowledge about the most effective strategies that contribute to successful knowledge translation and use in the specific context.

In this light, Share-Net Bangladesh is working together with the member organisations who are working on the issue of Child Marriage in Bangladesh.

Country Specific Problem statement:

There is a lack of coordination and interaction between different policy makers, researchers and practitioners who are working in Bangladesh resulting in limited knowledge sharing and translation on effective interventions to address child marriage.

Aim of Collaborative Approach in Bangladesh:

Sharing and applying knowledge about the most effective strategies that contribute to successful knowledge gathering, translation and sharing on child marriage issues in Bangladesh.

Child Marriage in Bangladesh



Bangladesh has the highest rate of child marriage in South Asia, and the fourth highest in the world. In 2017, half of the girls in Bangladesh were married before their 18th birthday. The rate of child marriage in the country still remains one of the highest, in spite of the fact that the numbers have reduced when compared to previous data. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and UNICEF Bangladesh have jointly launched the National Plan of Action (NPA), whose goal is to eradicate child marriage completely by the year 2041 and eliminate the marriage of girls below 15 years by 2021.

According to UNICEF, “Child Marriage is defined as “the marriage of a girl or boy before the age of 18 and refers to both formal marriages and informal unions in which children under the age of 18 live with a partner as if married.” According to Stemming Girls’ Chronic Poverty, Chronic Poverty Research Centre, 2010, child marriage is “any marriage carried out below the age of 18 years, before the girl is physically, physiologically and psychologically ready to shoulder the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing.”

Child marriage prevails in Bangladesh because of the following reasons:

1. **Honor:** Many parents marry off their daughters to save her from stalkers and eve teasers. They also claim that if they don’t get her married early, their daughter might engage in a pre-marital affair and stain the family’s honour.
2. **Poverty:** Parents who cannot provide for their daughters believe that if their daughters marry a man who is financially stable, it will help in reducing their burden. This results in the marriage of a young girl to an older man.
3. **Dowry:** In rural areas, parents get their young girls married as soon as possible so that they can pay less dowry to the groom’s family. According to the custom, the younger the bride, the lesser dowry they have to pay.
4. **Social Pressure:** In cases where the parents are sick and feel that they are going to pass away, they emotionally force their children to get married, claiming that it is their desire to see their children marry before their death. This further leads to teenage/early pregnancy, because they also emotionally force them to ‘show the face of their grandchild’ before they die.



“We need to understand that economy, religion, society and a lot more should be considered while thinking about child marriage eradication.”

Masuma Billah

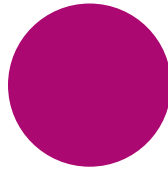
Program Manager and Program Coordinator
Population Council

The project titled 'Accelerating Action to End Child Marriage in Bangladesh' with the objective of reducing school dropout of girls has the approach of letting girls decide who they want to choose to help them against getting married at an early age. They also have aims to search for alternative ways to reduce child marriage.

The Accelerating Action to End Child Marriage project is designed to identify ways to scale up skill-building activities along with alternative community participation strategies to ensure long-term sustainability of the program. The project follows randomised controlled trial study involving more than 13,000 girls aged 10-19 in 72 communities within two districts (Bogra and Jamalpur) of Bangladesh where child marriage prevalence is very high. The aim of the project is to develop and evaluate a skill-building program that is girl-centered, cost-effective, sustainable, and community owned, as well as to identify pathways to scale. The research design is built upon the evidence-based BALIKA skill-building interventions. Communities will be assigned to one of three different intervention arms in order to test the potential value-add of different community engagement approaches, as complementary to the skill-building program.

Female Gender Promoters (GP) will be recruited from the community by Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWCA), the implementing partner of the project, to provide the girls with basic life skills, gender and livelihoods training. GP(s) will be provided with TOT for 12 days, prior to their session conduction with girls. Training sessions will be conducted in 72 unions of 2 districts: Bogura and Jamalpur. The project will create safe-spaces for girls which will be known as "Kishori Resource Center" in designated primary schools where training sessions will be conducted. The centers will be equipped with Information Communication Technology with access to laptops and internet. Training sessions will allow the girls to enhance their life skills and livelihood capabilities. The GP(s) will also engage with communities with a focus on changing gender norms and practices through different community engagement activities.


Monitoring of the project will be carried out through mobile based applications. Mobile apps will be used to monitor attendance of girls and other activities such as scheduling community meetings and monitor community engagement activities.



“Make the brides understand their rights, increase her life skills, empower them.”


Dr. Sushmita Ahmed

Team Leader, Hello, I Am (HIA)
Population Services and Training Center



‘Hello, I am’ project aims to reduce, and gradually stop child marriage by addressing cultural norms revolving around child marriage in Bangladesh. It is currently operating in 6 upazilas. 18 new parents and adolescents are trained in every 6 months.

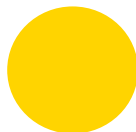
The root cause of child marriage is not only poverty, but other factors like eve-teasing, stalking and societal pressure also play a huge role. ‘Hello, I am’ aims to change the conservative mindset of people residing in rural areas through face-to-face sessions and edutainment via television and social media. They approach communities by screening TV shows to adolescents and their parents. Edutainment serves as a light mode of entertainment that does the job of portraying the root cause of early marriages and knocking their conscious minds. The project encourages the strengthening of relationships between parents and their children so that they can understand each other and talk freely about gender issues at home. The project aims to increase life skills of adolescent girls and make sure that there are fewer school dropouts by motivating them to continue their education. The project also involves members of the community police, health workers and community leaders to maintain sustainability for the future.



This way the project aims to build capacity, socialise and follow up with the trained groups. After follow-ups, change of behaviour was seen among the adolescents. They understood the value of education. Interactive sessions were successful at motivating them.

A few learnings that were discovered through the project are that: kazis are responsible for high numbers of child marriage, ward councilors often don’t register marriages after checking birth certificates, ward councillors and doctors often provide fake birth certificates.

Some challenges that were faced while carrying out the project are: fathers were unable to attend sessions as seminar dates fell on their working days, conservative parents could not deal with sessions on gender learning, parents often dropped out of sessions, most of the times the volunteers were not educated.



“Parental counselling should be done frequently in communities to make them realise the importance of education and the negative impacts of early marriages.”

Farhana Jesmine Hasan

Project Director-IMAGE Plus

Terre des Hommes: Stops Child Exploitation


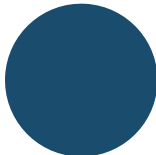


IMAGE Plus (Initiative for Married Adolescent Girls Empowerment), focuses on early married adolescent girls. It is a project on SRHR (Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights). The project aimed to empower Early Married Girls (EMGs) so that they can work towards achieving their rights. One of the key standpoints of the government is to eliminate child marriage by 2041, and they complement the goal. IMAGE Plus is principally and formally part of different networks like Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF), National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (NGCAF), Girls Not Brides (GNB) at the national and global level.


The project aims to create awareness through advocacy, communication and regular capacity building. More than 200 ambassadors work for the prevention of child marriage in their family and community. Girls who were married off at their early age are encouraged to act as ambassadors to work against child marriages in their community. The project believes that the girls who went through the trauma of early marriage can be the best changemakers as no one else can convey the message in a better way. The key intervention of the project is to create awareness through sessions and meetings. The ambassadors conduct sessions with adolescent girls, married girls, family members and the civil society forum.



The development of these changemakers act as an advocacy agent and creates a linkage between early married girls and the respective service providers.

Awareness is created through popular theatre, issue-based campaigns, celebration and observation of days like Children's Day, International Day of the Girl Child and so on. One of the main objectives of the project is to provide services on SRHR and nutrition to early married girls in Gaibandha, Kurigram and Nilphamari.

Through this project many parents were successfully educated about the negative consequences of child marriage and around one hundred child marriages were stopped in the last three and a half years.






“Through our global campaign- Girls Get Equal, we believe in focussing on girls’ rights, but not ignoring the boys.”




Dr. Ikhtiar Uddin Khandaker

Head of Health Programme
Plan International




Plan International is a non-profit child rights humanitarian organisation working throughout the globe, having its presence in 72 countries. Their motto is to inspire 100 million girls throughout the world to learn, lead, decide and thrive with the help of its 5 years' global strategy programme. This organisation started its journey in Bangladesh in 1994 from the Northern parts of the country. With the help of 5 year programmes, they are targeting 6 different areas - health, education, child protection, water sanitation and hygiene, emergency situation and disaster risk reduction, and lastly, youth economic empowerment.

Their Child Protection Programme directly works to reduce child marriage by working directly with the Prime Minister's Office to target all the 67,000 marriage registrar's throughout the country for educating and training them. Their Education Programme strives to retain girls in schools. When a girl drops out from school she becomes more vulnerable. A school can play a huge role to protect children against getting married, so this programme also makes sure that the quality of schools and teachers is always checked. With the help of Youth Economic Empowerment Programme, the girls who are most vulnerable to getting married are linked to vocational training and skills. They have provided sewing machines



to girls who have developed their sewing skills. Their Health Programme has two parts, one looks after maternal and newborn health, and the other looks after adolescent SRHR which plays a huge role in preventing child marriage by providing right information, training and services about SRHR to children and their parents.

A few of their projects that are directly related to child marriage are: Aporajita, which provides training to 67,000 marriage registrars across the country, Building Better Future for Girls, this program develops their life skills so that they can aspire for a better future. They have projects that are working in remote areas like Khagrachori, Kishoreganj, Rangpur and Bargunaha to prevent child marriage in those areas by targeting to adolescent and young people, their parents, community leaders, teachers, health care providers both in schools, health facility and community in providing Sexual and Reproductive Health & Rights (SRHR) and gender equality information, skills and services. Child marriage being their flagship programme, all of their programmes are related to the prevention of child marriage in one way or the other.






Sara Hossain

Executive Director
Bangladesh Legal Aid and
Services Trust - BLAST

“We need to create a safe society for the girls so that their parents are not bound to marry them off in order to keep them safe.”

BLAST contributes to the prevention of child marriage by creating awareness about law and punishments through legal camps, campaigns and training sessions in schools and colleges, and through radio shows to reach the masses. When they get any news of children who are about to get married, they inform the local thana or Mahila Parishad. BLAST does intensive research work on cases like these and advocacy around the law is also done. Community intervention is done by BLAST to prevent child marriages, whenever the community workers are informed that an early marriage is taking place, they try to intervene and stop the marriage by talking to the family members of the to-be bride.

In one such case in Faridpur, a girl was about to get married, when BLAST received the news they sent a team which conducted the advocacy office, spoke to the district's Women Affairs Officer, had a discussion with the local police, went to the house where the wedding was supposed to take place and successfully stopped the wedding. In another incident, a school



“A national database
for birth registry
will put an end to
birth certificate
tampering.”

Taposhi Rabaya

Assistant Director (Mediation & Awareness)
Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust - BLAST

management committee came to BLAST office to report that the parents of a girl from class 9 wanted to have her married. BLAST took action on the spot by contacting the local government of the girl's area who went to her home with a team to stop the marriage. Later follow ups confirmed that she continued to go to school on a regular basis.

A lot of things should be considered while working with child marriage eradication. We should not look at child marriage as one separate thing, child marriages occur when the marriage is forced upon the child against their wills and freedom of choice.

The law is not the only solution. To decrease child marriages the employment rates need to rise up, business opportunities need to increase and economic opportunities need to be sufficient.

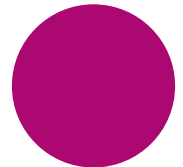





“Child marriage prevention should be done spontaneously. Implementing laws and justice will work, however projects need to be advocated in the community level and one to one counselling should be provided to adolescents and their parents.”

Khaleda Yasmin

Team Leader, Nirapod-2
Marie Stopes Bangladesh





‘Nirapod-2: Empowering Women on SRHR and Choice of Safe MR and FP’ project started in December 2015 with support from the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (EKN). The project directly communicates and helps almost 1.6 million (1,647,000) people in the local level. It is currently being implemented in selected 40 upazilas of six coastal districts in Barguna, Patuakhali, Noakhali, Lakshimpur, Khulna and Narail. The main objective of the project is: ‘Empower women, men, and adolescent girls in rural Bangladesh and in garment factories to exercise their sexual and reproductive health rights and ultimately improving maternal health outcomes’.

The project formed different groups to communicate with local leaders, local Govt. GoB officials, NGOs and community people. The volunteers were sensitised on gender and SRHR issues and were trained to lead whenever needed. After training, the volunteers tried to orient and disseminate messages to people in their communities. Life-skill training allowed volunteers to empower adolescent girls, boys, women, men and educate their parents about the negative impacts of child marriage. In the project areas, 40 adolescent groups are working with 800 members in 40 upazilas. Under the project, BAPSA Noakhali and Chasir Union Parishad jointly worked

in vigorous campaigns to prevent child marriages in those areas. Soniamuri Upazila Administration of Noakhali district declared ‘Chasir Hat Union Parishad’ as early child marriage free.

In one incident, a male community support group member of Nirapod-2 successfully prevented the marriage of a 14 year old girl to a 25 year old man by tactfully pretending to call the police on the wedding day. Afraid, the father of the groom went back. This stopped the marriage, and the girl’s parents vowed that they will not let her marry before her legal age.

As Bangladesh is a patriarchal society, whenever a major decision is taken, male involvement is inevitable. 800 Male Community Support Group (MCSG) members are given sessions on how to practice safe MR/MRM and enlighten them on different issues like the effects of child marriages and VAW (Violence Against Women). The project understands that supportive role from masculine counterpart is crucial for the success of the project activities.

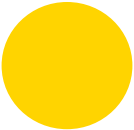


“We must establish the consciousness amongst everyone not to let their children marry before the age of 18, only then can we totally eradicate marriage of children.”



Nasima Akhter

Deputy Director
The Hunger Project



Child Marriage is a very important issue in Bangladesh. The whole world including Bangladesh is committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and preventing child marriage forms a crucial part of it. The Hunger Project is working with National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (NGCAF) along with 186 organisations on the field level in different ways to combat the issue.

They are currently running a school based campaign in 874 schools in 10 regions, a few of which are Jessore, Meherpur, Nougā and Rajshahi. 4 schools and 1 madrasa is targeted from each union. Firstly, a discussion is done with the head teacher. After taking permission, 6 types of short films are shown to the students on subjects related to self confidence and stopping child marriage. Later, 5 children are chosen from each class to form a committee from classes 8 to 10. They are given the responsibility to see whether anyone from their classes are dropping out. If yes, they investigate into the matter. If they discover that their classmate is getting married, they inform their teachers, who is also their mentor. Together they try to solve the matter through discussion, but if that doesn't help, they approach the Union Parishad. Building groups among children gives them strength and confidence, and enables them to talk to each other about their problems. This

way it becomes easier to find a solution. If there are complaints of eve teasing, the committee takes the responsibility of identifying the perpetrators and educating them.

Some schools don't have proper toilet facilities which is one of the main reasons why girls drop out after puberty. The Hunger Project makes sure that schools have separate toilets for girls, and that water and sanitary napkins are always available. They also organise a yearly programme where schools are awarded on the basis of the children's results, rate of dropout, sanitation and response to complaints.

There is still a lot to be done to eradicate child marriage and other related issues like sexual harassment and gender based violence. In spite of all the efforts there are reports where parents take their children to another area to have them married. Marriage of children can be completely eradicated only when the consciousness is aroused among parents not to let their children marry before the age of 18.



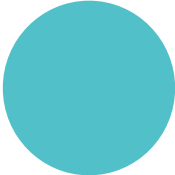
“When different organisations working on an issue come together on one platform, their voice becomes stronger.”

Nishath Sultana

BRAC


Programme Coordinator

Gender Justice and Diversity




Girls Not Brides is a global network which is working with almost 1000 organisations from 90 countries across the globe. In Bangladesh, they are working with 26 organisations which includes national, international and local NGOs. If any organisation wants to be a member of Girls Not Brides, they must have at least 3 years of experience in the field. For the progress and success of a movement, one must approach collectively. When different organisations working on an issue come together on one platform, their voice becomes stronger.

In July 2016, with the help of funds from Amplify Change, a project called “Empowering Girls on Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights towards Combating Child Marriage” was initiated which involved the grassroots network to fight against child marriage. 12,000 students were reached with the help of this project. Through an endline survey that was conducted in July 2018, it was discovered that there was a huge change in the thinking of students regarding child marriage and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH). This report was shared in a national learning/ sharing meeting. This way the grassroots findings were brought to the national level.



Ambassadors from the grassroots are brought to every learning/ sharing meeting. Previously, there was one ambassador, a student who collected 1tk from every student from his school every day. This money was used to help the families of girls who were vulnerable to getting married due to financial hardships and economic pressure. Girls Not Brides encourages people like this to come forward to share their stories. Another project that will be initiated in the future aims to engage men and boys to raise their voice for ending violence against women.

This way Girls Not Brides brings organisations from different platforms together to spread awareness and conduct workshops among students, parents, teachers, imams and other members of society.






“To bring a change,
we must make a
girl realise her own
dream, help her
believe in it and
teach her how to
achieve it.”



Tazeen Hossain

Head of Programmes- Youth and Health
Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO)



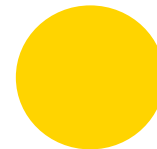
Volunteer Service Overseas has been working on the issues of child marriage and SRHR (Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights) from the last two and a half years. They have a very strong connection with communities at the root levels. The most unique part about VSO (Volunteer Services Oversees) is that they work with volunteers on a national and international scale that includes parliamentary volunteers as well.

We have two projects- International Citizen Service and National Citizen Service. About 300-400 volunteers are recruited every year and sent to different zilas for a period of 3 months. There they are responsible for mobilisation and carrying out campaigns along with other youth networks. They work with local youth communities to reduce the rate of child marriage in those areas. They create committees along with local service providers, police, chairmen and members of the Union Parishad. This helps them to communicate and build relationships, which further enables them to get information on what is happening at the local levels. Our volunteers take advantage of this information to stop child marriage in different places. In some cases they take help from the Chairman of their respective areas. Other

methods to conduct messages to masses involve stage dramas, this method has proven to be very interactive, effective and youth friendly. The volunteers themselves create the scripts and enact them.

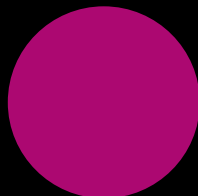
One of our long-term volunteers from Indonesia conducted a research to find out the root causes behind child marriage in Northern Bangladesh. Out of many reasons, one reason that came forward is that parents fear that once their children reach adolescence they are going to get into a relationship and bring dishonour to the family. VSO is currently designing a program based on the findings of this research for future implementation.

Eradicating child marriage is a very challenging task as it has been prevalent in certain communities from generations. VSO is working to make sure that the Child Marriage Restraint Act is implemented properly and that the Special Clause is not misused.





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