BANGLADESH

COUNTRY PROFILE

UNFPA–UNICEF
Global Programme to
End Child Marriage

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partner in development

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ZONTA INTERNATIONAL
EMPOWERING WOMEN
THROUGH SERVICE & ADVOCACY

end child marriage
A voice. A chance. A future.

UNFPA

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for every child

BANGLADESH COUNTRY PROFILE

Bangladesh is home to 42 million child brides. Of these, 21 million married before age 15.

Source: UNICEF global databases, 2020. Demographic data are from United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019, Online Edition. Rev. 1.
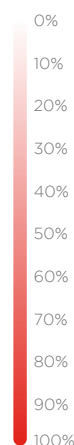
Notes: For details on the calculation of girls and women married in childhood, see: United Nations Children's Fund, Child Marriage: Latest trends and future prospects, UNICEF, New York, 2018. Estimates refer to population year 2019. Values above 2 million are rounded to the nearest million.

42 million
Married before age 18

21 million
Married before age 15

Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18

0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%

Note: This map is stylized and not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNFPA or UNICEF on the legal status of any country or area or the delimitation of any frontiers. Source for child marriage prevalence data is the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2014.

Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 15 and before age 18
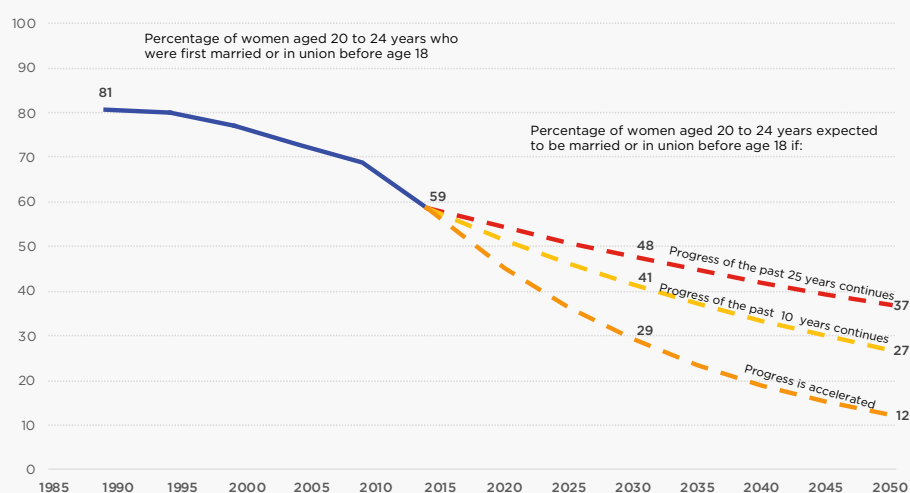
Source: Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2014

Note: This trend analysis is based on the prevalence of child marriage across age cohorts, as measured in the latest available survey.

Before age 15 — Before age 18

81
46
59
22

1989 1994 1999 2004 2009 2014
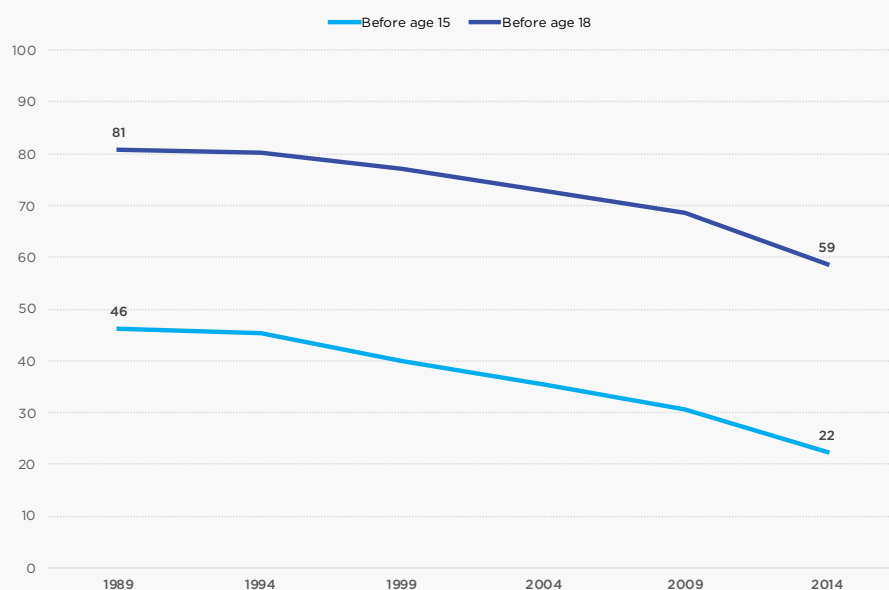
Projections of the prevalence of child marriage

Source: UNICEF analysis based on the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2014

Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18

Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years expected to be married or in union before age 18 if:

81
59
48 — Progress of the past 25 years continues — 37
41 — Progress of the past 10 years continues — 27
29 — Progress is accelerated — 12

1985 1990 1995 2000 2005 2010 2015 2020 2025 2030 2035 2040 2045 2050

Message from UNFPA and UNICEF Bangladesh country representatives

Dr. Åsa Torkelsson
UNFPA Bangladesh country representative

Tomoo Hozumi
UNICEF Bangladesh country representative

Bangladesh has the highest prevalence of child marriage in South Asia with half of the girls being married before the age of 18 years. Child marriage robs girls of their childhood and seriously limits their life options. It lowers their education levels and increases the risks of adolescent pregnancy and violence. It also results in the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Early marriage and pregnancy inhibit the further growth of adolescent girls. They become "small mothers" who in turn give birth to underweight babies. Small babies grow up to be small girls and underdeveloped adolescents, and the vicious cycle starts again.

While the practice of child marriage has slowly decreased in Bangladesh over the last 30 years, it remains unacceptably high nationally with more married children in rural areas and urban slums and particularly among poor and less educated. The percentage of women aged 20—24 who were married before age 18 has declined from 65 per cent in 2011 to 58.6 per cent in 2014, but the decline is small and the social norms enabling child marriage continue to be persistent.

During the last four years, we worked closely with the government, development partners, civil society and women's organizations to place child marriage on the national development agenda through policies, legislative reform and multi-sectoral response. This resulted in the launch of the National Action Plan on Ending Child Marriage in 2018.

While some positive results were achieved at the district level, progress at the national level has been slow, so efforts need to continue to scale up the successful interventions nationally. This has become even more crucial under the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic as its socioeconomic impact forces many families to adopt negative coping strategies including child marriage.

We sincerely thank the donors for supporting our collective endeavour and request continuous assistance to address this age-old social issue in Bangladesh.

Country movement to accelerate action to end child marriage: Key moments and achievements of Phase I

The Global Programme in Bangladesh deepened partnerships with the government to accelerate action to end child marriage and provided data and evidence with advocacy and technical support to promote policy change and legal reform at various levels, that resulted in the following:

More than **3,000 adolescent clubs** have been established by the programme to provide life-skills-based education,
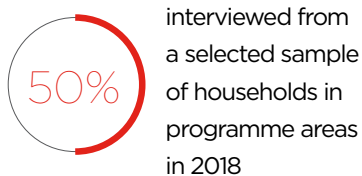
with **357,188 adolescent girls** participating actively in at least one targeted intervention in programme areas.

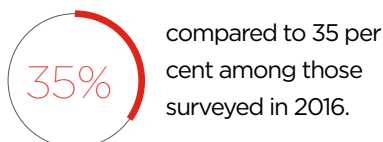**Close to 50 per cent adolescent girls**

50% interviewed from a selected sample of households in programme areas in 2018

demonstrated increased knowledge and skills

35% compared to 35 per cent among those surveyed in 2016.

**37,371 adolescent girls** were supported by the programme to enrol and continue their secondary education.

Over **half a million people in programme areas** regularly participated in dialogues promoting gender-equitable norms including delaying child marriage, with perceived incidence of child marriage among those surveyed in their households

in 2018 decreasing to 12,2 per cent

from 23.4 per cent **in 2016**.

12,2% ← 23,4%
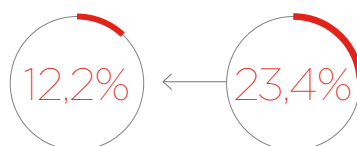
The programme launched a national multimedia campaign or ending child marriage, engaging over **190 million** people across television, radio and social media.

The programme provided support to the development of Bangladesh's first National Plan of Action to End Child Marriage.

The programme supported a scoping analysis of budget allocations to ending child marriage, to identify and analyze budget commitments and releases that have been potentially relevant for ending child marriage for the period of the fiscal year **2010/11–2015/16.**

The programme advocated and supported the enactment of the 2017 Child Marriage Restraint Act which sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 years for girls and 21 for boys.

Phase I Country Programme Strategies

A mix of intervention strategies adapted to the specific context of the Global Programme-targeted districts was used to address both demand and supply side constraints to leverage results in accelerating an end to child marriage in Bangladesh. This approach was adopted because, although the root cause of child marriage lies in the prevailing gender inequality and social norms, causality analysis has revealed that for each individual family, there can be more than one reason behind child marriage.

The intervention strategies considered the pivotal task of changing existing social norms and structural gender inequality in society, including strategies that addressed some of the key immediate drivers in target districts over a short- to medium-term period.

Strategies to empower girls included mobilization of out-of-school adolescent girls (including boys in conservative districts such as Bhola) into adolescent clubs, alongside those who are in school, with the aim of providing them with leadership, life-skills development and peer education training, focused on prevention of child marriage and adolescent development issues such as health, water, sanitation and hygiene, HIV/AIDS and nutrition; integrating life-skills into the school curriculum; and providing vocational training to the most vulnerable girls targeting technical and vocational education and training and apprenticeships. In partnership with the Government of Bangladesh and other partners, the programme also leveraged national schemes to target the most vulnerable girls in programme areas to provide livelihood support and financial incentives aimed at enrolling and retaining girls in school.

Country programme strategies
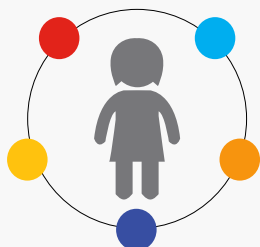
EMPOWER ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Mobilizing and training girls on life skills and sexual and reproductive health

Creating opportunities for girls' alternative learning

Integrating life skills and sexual and reproductive health education into national education curriculum

Developing girls' skills for employability

ENHANCE THE ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF HEALTH, EDUCATION AND PROTECTION SERVICES

Upgrading adolescent-friendly corners

Promoting menstrual hygiene management in schools

Providing water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools

Implementing guidelines for training on gender-responsive adolescent-friendly services

Formation of anti-sexual harassment networks

FOSTER AN ENABLING LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Providing data and evidence with advocacy to promote policy change and legal reform

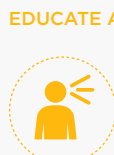Supporting development of national plan of action to end child marriage

OFFER ECONOMIC SUPPORT AND INCENTIVES FOR GIRLS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Leveraging other funding streams to support education

EDUCATE AND MOBILIZE PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Participatory dialogues with religious and traditional leaders

Formation of gender groups for dialogue and education

Multimedia campaigns

Strategies to educate and mobilize parents and communities for social and behaviour change included dialogues and education within gender groups formed at community level. The programme also launched national multimedia campaigns on social media platforms, television and radio. The education dialogues and media campaigns focused on mobilizing and engaging families and communities to challenge prevailing beliefs and attitudes, build ownership and facilitate collective action to ensure girls attend school and are not married before age 18. Focus was also placed on social reinforcement of abandonment of these norms and uptake of new attitudes and actions through mobilization and engagement of key community-level influencers such as religious and local leaders, as well as service providers, to achieve a 'critical and irrevocable' mass of the population that have changed their beliefs and norms.

Strategies to enhance the accessibility and utilization of quality health, education and protection services by adolescent girls included approaches aimed at upgrading facilities (e.g. sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools) to be adolescent girl-friendly, promoting menstrual hygiene management in schools, and developing and supporting the implementation and training of teachers on gender-responsive adolescent-friendly guidelines.

To foster an enabling legal and policy framework, the programme implemented approaches that aimed at providing data and evidence with advocacy to promote policy change and legal reforms, including technical assistance and support towards the development of a national plan of action on ending child marriage.

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EMPOWERING ADOLESCENT GIRLS WITH SKILLS AND INFORMATION

Results from 2016–2019 programme implementation

Through the Global Programme support, more than 3,000 established adolescent clubs provided life-skills-based education to 70 per cent of the adolescent girls in targeted programme areas. The adolescent clubs were used as support platforms for out-of-school girls to register with the Alternative Learning Programme (skills development through informal apprenticeship linked with employment). In the clubs, the adolescent girls and boys receive life-skills lessons in a participatory and interactive way and interact with each other in a respectful manner. The modules also cover child rights, reproductive health, child marriage and trafficking and intergenerational dialogue to facilitate communication between family members through Community Based Child Protection Committees (CBCPCs). The CBCPCs, which mobilize adolescents to join clubs, are formed with 12–14 community members headed by an elected local government representative (female). Social workers from the government or a non-governmental organization are secretaries of the committees and at least two adolescents active in the community are members, other members include teachers, parents and village police.

To deliver health information and provide life-skills education to adolescent girls, the Global Programme in Bangladesh has worked with 20 partners, including government ministries and departments. The Global Programme has strengthened efforts of scaling up adolescent empowerment interventions by supporting the mainstreaming of life-skills-based education in primary and secondary schools.

Through the engagement of adolescent club facilitators with community leaders, 1,716 child marriages were annulled or cancelled and girls were linked to programmes that supported them to go back to school. In 2019, information and counselling on nutritional needs of adolescent girls was added to the adolescent clubs' package. Using leveraged resources, the programme is supporting the capacity development of adolescent clubs' facilitators, health and education managers in scaling up nutrition.

The draft Standardized Adolescent Empowerment Package (SAEP) for scaling up life-skills education in all adolescent clubs was pretested in more than 50 adolescent clubs in urban and rural settings, reaching over 2,000 adolescents in 2019.

In 2019:

89,974
adolescent girls aged 10-19
in programme areas actively participated in at least one targeted intervention

131,586
adolescents
(89,974 girls and 41,612 boys) completed the 38 life-skills sessions in the adolescent clubs

1,716
child marriages
cancelled or annulled

Since 2016:

357,188
adolescent girls aged 10-19
in programme areas actively participating in at least one targeted intervention

Over 50,000 boys aged 10–19 in programme areas have also actively participated in at least one targeted intervention

Proportion of adolescent girls in programme areas demonstrating increased knowledge and skills
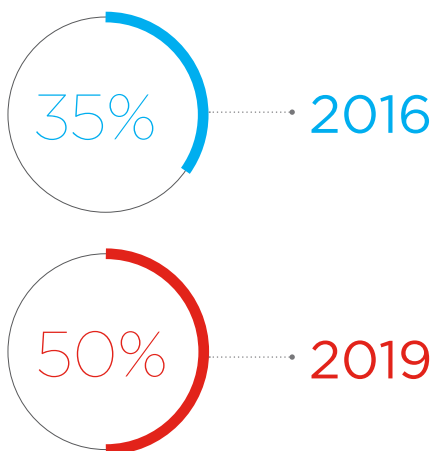
Number of adolescent girls (aged 10–19) in programme areas actively participating in at least one targeted intervention

35% 2016

50% 2019

Target Result

Year	Target	Result
2016	100,000	93,166
2017	101,500	87,024
2018	84,230	87,024
2019	103,142	89,974

Bangladesh has made significant progress in systems strengthening and started to build on the success of the Global Programme on life-skills education by institutionalizing such education into the national education system, using the adolescent girls' club platform to empower and educate girls about their 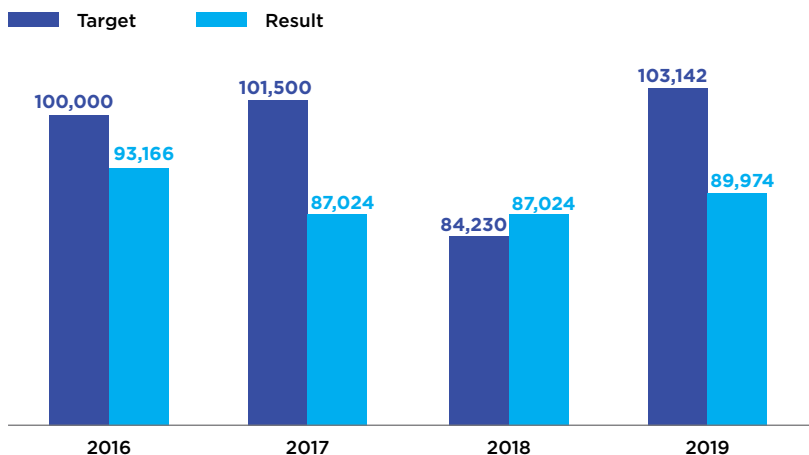rights in relation to marriage. The programme is currently supporting the development of a Standardized Adolescent Empowerment Package (SAEP) for scaling up life-skills education in all adolescent clubs.

To date, close to 50 per cent of adolescent girls interviewed from a selected sample of households in programme areas have demonstrated increased knowledge and skills. This level of knowledge and skills is up from 35 per cent among those surveyed in 2016.

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Taahira, 15, recalls not being interested in talking to her parents before joining the life-skills-based education training.

She then started sharing her thoughts and feelings with them. At the time the research team who conducted a survey for the Global Programme in 2018 met her, she considered her family to be the best support system in her life.

Challenges

Keeping adolescent girls engaged in the adolescent clubs with only life-skills education has been challenging. Girls, and their families, are more eager to come to adolescent clubs when these provide access to learning skills which are perceived to be more practical and will result in a return on investment, in addition to life skills, such as learning English and/or how to use computers.

Adolescents involved in child labour, children with disabilities and those already married are most likely not to enrol in the adolescent clubs, not to attend on a regular basis or drop out. Securing their participation and regular engagement in the adolescent clubs remains a challenge and the programme is working with local actors to arrange flexible hours for their engagement as well as promoting visits by peer leaders to engage parents and in-laws to send these vulnerable girls during flexible hours.

Another challenge is sustaining adolescent girls' clubs with skilled facilitators at the community level. In addition to limited resources available to enhance the capacities of the adolescent clubs' facilitators, conservativism within some communities has resulted in harassment of facilitators while supporting programme interventions. The programme is working with implementing partners to intervene and provide additional encouragement as well as to take protective action to address these concerns.

Lessons learned

- Adequate resources and time are important to develop the capacity of club facilitators to effectively engage with adolescent girls.

- Community engagement needs to be intensified to ensure the safety and protection of adolescent clubs' facilitators.

- Flexible arrangements are needed for participation of the most vulnerable and marginalized girls in adolescent clubs.

- To institutionalize and scale-up transformative interventions, there is a need to strengthen multisectoral coordination and action across sectors and across administrative levels.

- Partnerships must be strengthened to ensure understanding of adolescent needs and realize the potential for demographic dividends that has implications for evidence uptake, policy reforms, investments and action.

Shifts in Phase II

In terms of strengthening life-skills-based education, in Phase II the focus will be on working with the government to scale-up institutionalized adolescent clubs nationwide.

In addition, the programme will facilitate the transitioning of adolescent graduates from the clubs into appropriate occupational skills, leveraging on the Generation Unlimited initiative, a global multisector partnership to meet the urgent need for expanded education, training and employment opportunities for young people, aged 10–24, on an unprecedented scale. Moving forward, the programme will focus on system strengthening by supporting the Upazila (sub-district) Social Services, the Department of Women Affairs and related government departments to be more accountable towards child rights issues. In many areas the adolescent clubs have achieved recognition by community people and service providers as a platform for community mobilization on child rights issues.

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"

I chose to become a peer leader because I want to become a teacher. I enjoy influencing the community through knowledge dissemination on life-skills development. I see myself as a role model and try to promote social change. I go to people's houses to prevent and stop child marriages. If the parents do not listen to me, I come back with 25 members of the Adolescent Club and usually, it works.

Adolescent boy, Bhola district

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EMPOWERING GIRLS THROUGH EDUCATION SUPPORT

Since 2016:

37,371
adolescent girls

in programme areas supported to access and remain in primary, lower secondary school or non-formal education

This includes 10,372 out-of-school girls from urban slums supported to enrol and remain in school and 5,305 girls who were successfully mainstreamed back to formal primary schools

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Results from 2016–2019 programme implementation

An ability-based accelerated learning package was used to provide non-formal primary education to out-of-school adolescent girls. 5,305 girls were successfully mainstreamed back to formal primary schools, and 10,372 who had dropped out of school were supported to enrol and continue with secondary education since 2016. In addition, 500 of the most marginalized out-of-school adolescent girls received on-the-job informal apprenticeship training with theoretical and life-skills training, and finally linked with job opportunities.

Overall, the Global Programme in Bangladesh worked with 184 secondary schools to support 37,371 adolescent girls to enrol and stay in school.

In addition, the programme has been successful in leveraging with other programmes and funding streams to support the education of the most vulnerable adolescent girls in the programme areas. Over 80,000 girls in programme areas have been supported to enrol and remain in school through support leveraged from other programmes.

Bangladesh has maintained progress in tackling barriers to girls' education. Data from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey show a 95.8 per cent transition rate to lower secondary school among girls in 2019, a slight increase since 2012–2013 (94 per cent).

Challenges
The education support is resource-intensive and can only be leveraged with other programmes and funding streams.

Lessons learned
Generic and light interventions through life-skills development for in-school adolescents can be a strategy to make education programmes effective, but not as suitable as 'ending child marriage' interventions in education. Global Programme funding into regular education programmes has been stopped, and instead a catalytic implementation research project has been designed specifically for contributing to ending child marriage.

Shifts in Phase II
Ensuring the removal of barriers to education can contribute to reducing child marriage. In addition, adolescent girls will be supported to enrol and remain in formal and non-formal education, including through the transition from primary to secondary school. The capacity of the national system will be strengthened to develop a gender-responsive and skills-based curriculum, textbooks and pedagogy. There will be a special focus on empowering the most marginalized and vulnerable out-of-school adolescent girls (unmarried, married, divorced and widowed) with skills and assets to act on personal and social transformation through informal apprenticeship and links with employment.

SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE COMMUNICATION TO INFLUENCE SOCIAL AND GENDER NORMS

In 2019:

560,412
individuals

in programme areas regularly participated in dialogues promoting gender-equitable norms including delaying child marriage

1,523
community stakeholders

(twice the 600 originally targeted because of increased community engagement events) were reached through community stakeholder meetings to speak up against child marriage at events conducted

In 2019, the programme continued to support multimedia campaigns. Within the programme focus areas, independent media monitoring by partners indicated that an estimated **1 million individuals** in targeted programme areas were reached with continuous media messages focused on social and gender norms transformation.

Results from 2016–2019 programme implementation

Through a combination of dialogues engaging community members and key actors as well as awareness-raising campaigns, community-based social and behaviour change interventions reached an estimated 891,783 parents and adolescents, community-members and local leaders in Phase I, of which 234,780 were men and adolescent boys. The interpersonal communication and open dialogues galvanized social change that resulted in 93 rural councils or unions declaring themselves child-marriage-free. Research to assess the effect of community engagement interventions showed that knowledge of fathers about unacceptability of child marriage had increased from 8 per cent to 32 per cent.

In addition, the programme partnership with Bangladesh Betar, a national public broadcaster, had an estimated 5,000 adolescent girls and boys participating in 200 adolescent radio listening groups to raise awareness and share knowledge and skills on ending child marriage.

The programme partnered with the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs to launch the first ever trans-media initiative focused on social norms to promote public intolerance against child marriage and create social momentum. The '#Raisethebeat4ECM/ Dhol Campaign' launched in 2017, reached an estimated 190 million people through mass and social media, with 95 million engaged through Facebook, and received several national and international awards for contribution towards social change that have been recognized at the highest levels of government.

In late 2018, a complementary multisectoral entertainment-education drama-series titled 'Icchedana' ('On the Wings of Wishes') was successfully launched to address the well-being and empowerment issues of adolescents. The campaign engages adolescents and their parents through entertainment. The first season of this interlinked adolescent-focused drama-series completed broadcast on five TV channels and state-owned radio, and reached more than 50 million people including engagement of 10 million through social media.

The Global Programme piloted a child marriage module within the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics real-time household monitoring survey system on effective coverage of basic social services. Results from the household survey show an increase in knowledge on some of the adolescent wellbeing issues. For example, 83 per cent of respondents knew that there is a law against child marriage, 95.7 per cent could suggest a negative consequence of child marriage and 55.7 per cent knew of a reporting point for child marriage. Surveys among communities by one of the programme partners reflected significant change in knowledge regarding child marriage. Respondents to the 2018 survey believed that the incidence of child marriage has decreased to 12.2 per cent in the community from a believed 23.4 per cent in 2016.
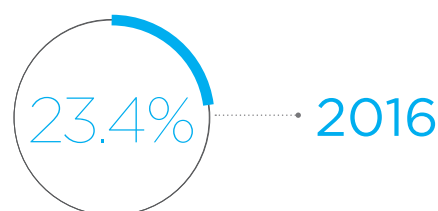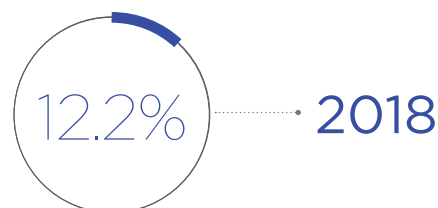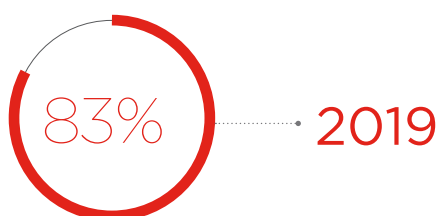
Since 2016:

891,783
individuals

in programme areas
who regularly participate
in dialogues promoting
gender-equitable norms
including delaying
child marriage

This includes 234,780 boys and men

Proportion of individuals who believe that child marriage has decreased in their community
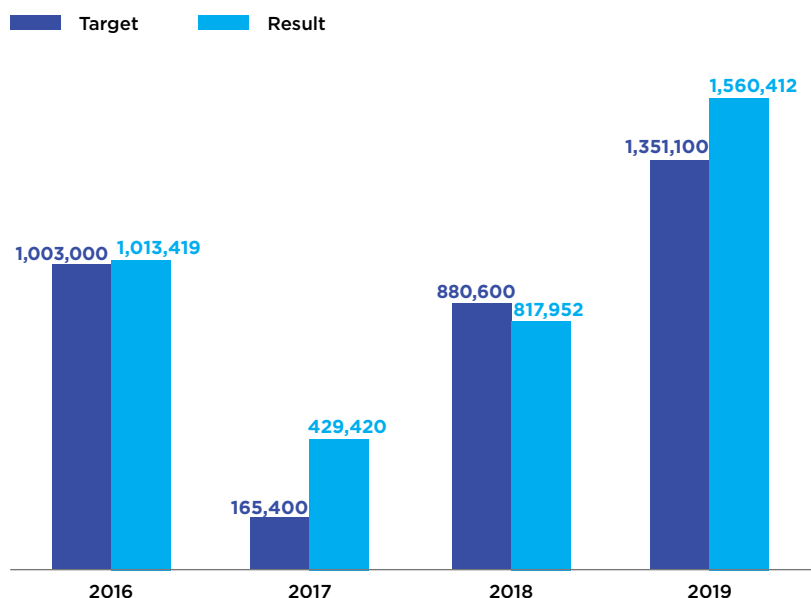
83% 2019

12.2% 2018

23.4% 2016

186 million
people estimated

to have been reached
through national multimedia
campaigns supported by
the Global Programme
across television, radio and
social media, engaging
close to 95 million people
through social media

Number of individuals in programme areas who regularly participate in dialogues and/or are reached by media campaigns promoting gender-equitable norms including delaying child marriage

■ Target   ■ Result

Year	Target	Result
2016	1,003,000	1,013,419
2017	165,400	429,420
2018	880,600	817,952
2019	1,351,100	1,560,412

Challenges

The key challenge in Phase I in terms of communication and partnerships was managing the extensive engagement garnered by social media campaigns, which reached over 190 million people between 2017 and 2019. For effective engagement, it is important to not only monitor the hundreds of comments each social media asset obtains, but also to respond to followers and adapt key messaging. This means recruiting, training and retaining human resources to continue to engage and respond in a timely way to followers. For social media it is essential to respond to the comments within the shortest possible time to lock a user's attention and to maintain individual relationships. Having enough funding and human resources is vital to making the most effective use of the huge social media reach and transforming the 'Icche Dana' Facebook page into an engagement platform.

One of the cornerstones of communication for development programming is interlinked multimedia initiatives and community engagement activities to address equitable gender norms, which garner mass attention to the positive norms. However, delaying marriage and adolescent empowerment are complex, cross-cutting areas, entailing multisectoral and interministerial coordination that can slow approval processes and impact timely, good-quality implementation. Intensive advocacy with relevant stakeholders and partners was undertaken to address these challenges and the project timelines were revised several times. Concerns over viewership numbers have continued, as highlighted by findings of a midline survey, and innovative solutions have been sought to promote the programmes through on-ground community

'#Raisethebeat4ECM/Dhol Campaign' reached an estimated 190 million people across TV, radio and social media, engaging close to 95 million through social media since its launch in late 2017 and received several national and international awards

The 'Icche Dana' adolescent-focused drama-series addressing overall empowerment issues reached an estimated 50 million people through mass and social media, engaging approximately 10 million through social media.

> We are three daughters and my father treats us same way as his son. We are allowed to play in the field, move independently and allowed education. But my father has received a backlash because he supports his daughters.

Adolescent girl

engagement and other media. However, resource constraints led to limited coverage of community-based social norms change interventions, proving a challenge to major contribution to a decline of child marriage.

Community engagement interventions to facilitate knowledge-sharing and social mobilization through massive and repetitive interpersonal communication and periodic dialogues are human resource-intensive and expensive. Government institutions lack sufficient skills and human resources to carry out extensive community-level initiatives to address norm-led practices.

A major challenge during the community engagement component was to maintain the interest of male community members in community meetings and other activities. Often, male community members are busy with income-generating activities and do not value the community meetings.

Lessons learned

Feedback received from the national multimedia campaigns ranged from highly positive to extremely negative and even harmful. Comments included: "Sports do not promote safety, they promote rape. Religion is the only way to ensure women's safety"; "Just you wait and see – rapes will increase. Conduct a survey and see how many girls who play sports are virgins"; "Child marriage is a crime but having sex in parks and hotels and aborting babies is not?". Although multimedia campaigns are effective in reaching large audiences and stimulating discussions, they must be supported and supplemented with more dialogue sessions especially in communities that hold negative gender-equitable norms and attitudes.

Shifts in Phase II

Addressing prevalent social norms and associated beliefs requires long-term investments and therefore will also be a fundamental strategy of Phase II. However, there will be a stronger focus on changing underlying gender norms and power structures by engaging men and boys and key community leaders as allies. In doing so, the programme will also focus on how communities can sustain the work on social norm change and eventually ascribe to gender-equitable norms.

STRENGTHENING PREVENTION AND PROTECTION SYSTEMS

In 2019:

67
service delivery points

in programme areas implement guidelines for adolescent girl-friendly health and protection services

115,609
adolescent girls

in programme areas have utilized health or protection services

96
non-formal, primary or secondary schools

implement interventions to improve the quality of education for adolescent girls
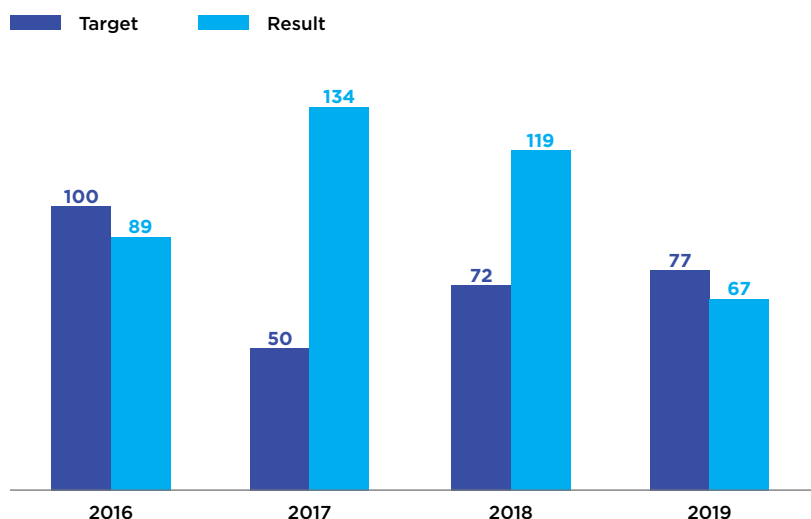
Since 2016:

409
service delivery points

in programme areas implement guidelines for adolescent girl-friendly health and protection services

Results from 2016–2019 programme implementation

Girls' access to secondary education has been hampered because of the social stigma of reporting rape and sexual assault in a largely conservative Muslim-majority society. During Phase I, the Global Programme supported the Government of Bangladesh to develop and implement guidelines for establishment of anti-sexual harassment committees in secondary schools. 72 secondary schools in targeted programme areas benefitted from support towards pilot training of anti-sexual harassment committees. Based on the results from the pilot schools and programme advocacy with other partners, the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education in the Ministry of Education issued a circular to all secondary schools to establish anti-sexual harassment committees as per the High Court Guideline on Sexual Harassment. Complaint and referral mechanisms have also been set up in each of the 72 schools to address any sexual harassment incidences within and around the school premises.

In the district of Sherpur, with 82 per cent prevalence of child marriage, anecdotal evidence and reports from schoolteachers suggested that the lack of sanitation, safe water and menstrual hygiene management facilities was a major contributor of absenteeism from school, especially among adolescent girls. With support from the Global Programme, 5 schools had blocks for water, sanitation and hygiene constructed, 37 schools had toilets renovated, 37 schools had handwashing stations installed and 18 schools had hygiene corners installed. Within the district, 29 poor families with daughters were provided with bathing cubicles, which helped to ensure the privacy of the adolescent girls and create a sense of security among the parents, contributing to a reduction in the prevalence of child marriage.

Number of service delivery points in programme areas implementing guidelines for adolescent girl-friendly health and protection services

Legend: Target (dark blue), Result (light blue)

Year	Target	Result
2016	100	89
2017	50	134
2018	72	119
2019	77	67

In 2019:

Programme advocacy and support

towards the implementation of guidelines on anti-sexual harassment in schools were boosted with a circular from the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education within the Ministry of Education, which required all secondary schools to establish an anti-sexual harassment committee as per the High Court Guideline on Sexual Harassment.

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Mastura Yesmin Mira is the youngest of the four daughters of Mr. Masud Rana and Ms. Sahirun Begum. Mira is 16 years old and a student in eleventh class. After witnessing the suffering of her two elder sisters as a result of child marriage, Mira decided she would say "no" to being married early if asked. In early 2018, when Mira was 14 years old, her parents wanted her to be married – Mira rejected strongly. However, she was not confident about her stand against child marriage and felt she needed to find some friends to support her.

After a few months, in August 2018, Mira was asked to be a member of an adolescent club. Being an active member, she was even asked to be president of the club, and offer that Mira accepted gladly. Within six months, in addition to her own attempt, her club prevented four attempts of child marriage. All four girls are now continuing their education.

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Since 2016:

902

non-formal,
primary or
secondary schools

implement interventions
to improve the quality of
education for adolescent girls

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In total, 409 service delivery points in programme-targeted subdistricts (upazilas) provided adolescent-friendly services. The programme provided technical support towards the development of the National Strategy for Adolescent Health 2017–2030 and implementation through the National Plan of Action for Adolescent Health. In addition, the national guidelines and operating procedures for adolescent-friendly health services were revised and training was provided to 207 service providers and 450 adolescents oriented in the five targeted upazilas of Nilphamari district. The revised accreditation tool developed with support from the programme was piloted in 67 adolescent-friendly facilities. Overall, 298,205 adolescent girls received adolescent-friendly services in the programme-targeted districts of Nilphamari and Bhola during Phase I.

Number of non-formal, primary or secondary schools implementing interventions to improve the quality of education for adolescent girls

■ Target ■ Result

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Target	47	70	96	96
Result	620	72	114	96
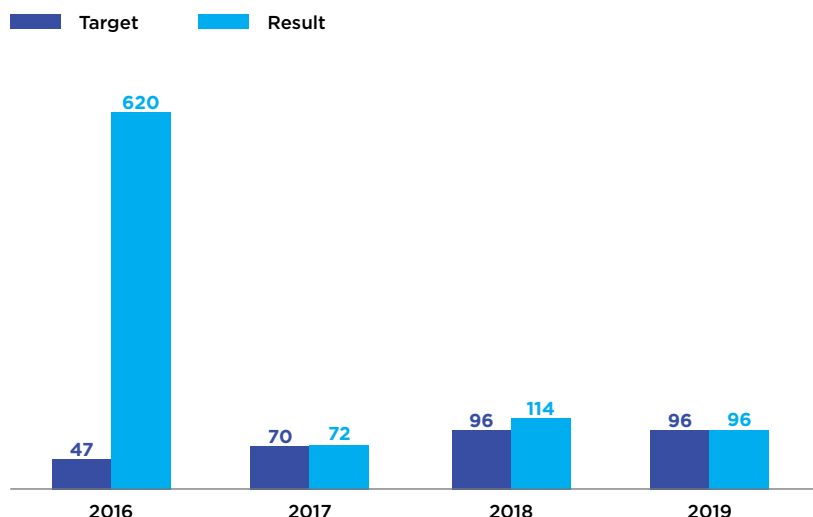
Challenges

Disapproval of sexuality education by community gatekeepers and some teachers has restricted access to adolescent-friendly health, education and protection services for adolescent girls. This has also affected referrals of adolescent girls for adolescent-friendly services. The programme will support the government in Phase II to increase awareness of referral services in adolescent clubs along with strengthening the capacity of satellite health services in provision of adolescent-friendly services.

Secondary school anti-sexual harassment committees were not given priority within the school management committee structure and this has hampered the implementation of the anti-sexual harassment guidelines within schools. The programme will support the government in strengthening the capacity of these committees to prioritize anti-sexual harassment in schools.

The Rohingya refugee crisis response was another factor that delayed implementation of some activities.

Lessons learned

The anti-sexual harassment interventions linking schools and adolescent clubs are increasing demand for adolescent health services in some areas of implementation. There is demand for inclusion of psychosocial counselling to address mental health among adolescents.

Remedial support for in-school adolescent girls at risk of dropping out may be misunderstood as coaching, so special attention has been given to screen adolescent girl learners and identify key areas for improvement. An innovative pedagogical approach will be used to improve the competencies of girls at risk of dropping out to support continuous academic development of learners.

Intensive capacity development of the anti-sexual harassment committee members and follow-up of activities of the committees is required to ensure that schools are taking measures to prevent sexual harassment. Moreover, most secondary schools at the district level have limited budgets so funding is required to ensure quality of interventions.

Shifts in Phase II

In 2020, a key shift will be to strengthen adolescent-friendly health services to make them more gender-transformative to tackle the root causes of gender-related inequalities faced by adolescents in terms of their health. This will incorporate a greater focus on working with boys as agents of change for gender equality and to advocate for delaying marriage, strengthening gender analysis, gender planning and implementation, linking with the communities and parents, fostering partnerships with civil society organizations, improving synergies and links to other sectoral interventions on education, and support for an enabling environment and protection. In addition, focus should not solely be on protection but also prevention as a result of the overall shift in the Global Programme to include married, divorced and widowed girls.

The programme will strengthen links with community-based structures to increase acceptability of adolescent-friendly health services and use of the services by adolescent girls and boys. Interventions will be targeted at engaging adolescents in planning and improvement of services to the needs and constraints faced by adolescents, especially the most marginalized out-of-school, married, divorced and widowed girls, and boys. It will involve adolescents in demand generation and adoptive accreditation system to ensure the quality of adolescent health services.

The adolescent-friendly health services will also work with civil society organizations to link the adolescents with other services and opportunities.

The education programme is conducting implementation research that will continue up to March 2021. It is critical to continue support the research in Phase II to obtain evidence that will help to influence the secondary sub-sector programme to scale-up interventions to reduce child marriage. Priority is to be given to design, examining and scale-up an alternative learning programme for the most marginalized married adolescent girls.

Phase II will focus more on promoting behaviour change interventions, specifically focusing on strengthening boys' and men's engagement through secondary schools in the programme areas. Innovative approaches including the use of technologies will be a key focus for engaging and facilitating adolescents' participation, amplifying their voices, sustaining engagement with them and reaching out to a larger number of community stakeholders.

Starting in 2020, the number of schools where sexual harassment prevention activities are being implemented will be increased from 72 to 322. Interventions will also increase engagement with students to develop young changemakers in the community.

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STRENGTHENING LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

The country **has a national strategy and costed national action plan with identified funding sources and a monitoring and evaluation framework on** **ending child marriage**

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Results from 2016–2019 programme implementation

UNFPA and UNICEF, together with other development partners and civil society, advocated with the Government of Bangladesh to finalize the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 2017 and to exclude the special provision that allows for marriage of children below the age of 18 under specific circumstances. While this special provision is included in the revised Act, in all other aspects, it is more robust than the Act of 1929. The programme continued to support the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs to develop the rules of the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017, so that the special provision can only be used under exceptional circumstances, after a rigorous process of vetting by local officials and the court.

The key moment during Phase I was the development of the national plan of action for ending child marriage in Bangladesh. UNFPA and UNICEF worked jointly at the policy level to advocate with the government and the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs to foster an enabling legal and policy framework to end child marriage, which was successfully advocated for and promoted through the high-level Local Consultative Group – Women's Advancement and Gender Equality (LCG WAGE) co-chaired by the Secretary of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and UNICEF, and including all development partners in Bangladesh. UNICEF used its position as a co-chair to bring together development partners in the country to advocate for an overall policy framework which ensures that proposed laws and policies do not contradict international human rights obligations and Bangladesh's existing national laws (such as the Children's Act, which clearly mentions that a child is anyone below age 18).

The LCG WAGE platform was proactively used to hold the government, especially the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, accountable for ending child marriage and advocate for coordination and cross-sectoral collaboration with sectoral line ministries, e.g., Education, Health, Public Health, Social Welfare and others. Data and analytical support were provided to the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs to develop the national action plan for ending child marriage, which was launched in August 2018.

The programme has ensured the rights to protection of children including adolescent girls during the consultation and drafting stages of the Sexual Harassment (Prevention and Protection) Act. UNICEF advocated for universal coverage of the Act rather than confining its jurisdiction within the educational institutions and workplace, which was echoed by the participants during the consultation led by the National Human Rights Commission.

Challenges

The capacity constraints at the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs delayed the development and implementation of the national action plan. Given that the responsibility for the implementation of the action plan lies with the Ministry, UNFPA and UNICEF are exploring possibilities for working directly with the Prime Minister's Office at the national level, while collaborating with the Ministry to deliver interventions at the subnational level.

Lessons learned

Bangladesh is a highly patriarchal society, rooted in traditional, religious and social norms that are gendered and disproportionately disadvantageous for women and girls. While a lot of efforts are focused on changing social norms, it must also be recognized that such shifts in cultural practices and normative values may not occur over one programme phase. Although community-level engagement is crucial, there is a need for stronger engagement with the government and service providers at the subnational level to build their capacities. In addition, within the changing context in Bangladesh, investments will be needed for evidence-based advocacy mainly at the national level as the system is very centralized. In the narrowing space, the United Nations will be best placed to focus on ensuring systems strengthening, capacity-building at the national level and ensuring trickle down to the subnational level, advocating for budgeting of child marriage-related interventions within sectoral ministries, and modelling at the subnational level only with scale in the design and following a step-wise phaseout approach.

The context of child marriage and its implications show that child marriage is influenced by a multiplicity of causes. For this reason, a multidimensional approach is needed to prevent child marriage in Bangladesh and to minimize the negative consequences of the practice. More specifically, concerted efforts are needed at all levels – individual, community, institutional, state and policy – to affect the context of child marriage in the country. Strong synergies and collaboration are required within the relevant sectoral ministries to ensure proper multisectoral planning, implementation and monitoring.

Shifts in Phase II

In Phase II, technical and capacity-building support will be provided to the government at national and subnational levels to enact, enforce and uphold laws and policies to prevent child marriage, protect those at risk of marriage and those who are already married. Phase II will also focus on costing and developing the monitoring framework of the national plan of action for ending child marriage in addition to supporting development of subnational action plans to end child marriage.

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STRENGTHENING DATA AND EVIDENCE

Results from 2016–2019 programme implementation

With Global Programme support for elaboration of the national plan of action for ending child marriage, the government partnered with UNICEF to carry out a baseline assessment of government expenditures related to ending child marriage, which included, as a first step, a scoping study. The objective of the scoping study was to identify and analyze budget commitments and releases that have been potentially relevant for ending child marriage for the period of fiscal year (FY) 2010/11–2015/16. The scoping study identified a total of 64 development programmes and projects as relevant to ending child marriage, including 7 development programmes and 57 projects in the development budget, all funded out of the recurrent budget. The total revised budget amounts to nearly 138 billion taka (1,754 million United States dollars (USD)) for the period of FY2010/11–2015/16, or almost 23 billion taka (292 million USD) per annum. Data findings prompted the government to drill down to the subnational level and conduct further data analysis of ending child marriage spending flows and identify a mechanism to strengthen the monitoring of on-going public investments. The results of the ending child marriage assessment are forming a baseline to determine an implementation budget for the national plan of action for ending child marriage and enable better monitoring of budgetary allocations. The evidence from the study that points to the cost-effectiveness of certain interventions (adolescent empowerment programmes, including adolescent clubs) suggests that it may be worthwhile exploring the appropriateness of increased allocations for scaling up.

In 2017, UNICEF partnered with the government to strengthen systems of and capacity development and technical assistance to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics to ensure availability of credible and official statistics for the country, and programme sections of UNICEF's Bangladesh office for better implementation of programme, research and evaluation to bridge the evidence–policy gap. The Effective Coverage of Basic Social Services (ECBSS) survey was launched as a joint effort between UNICEF and the Government of Bangladesh, to collect information on access, utilization and coverage of basic social services in

Bangladesh. It is a nationwide survey of more than 210,000 households, representative at the district level, which has taken place over two consecutive years. The Global Programme provided technical assistance and support towards development and implementation of a module on child marriage within the survey. The child marriage module, which does not explore prevalence of child marriage, aimed at collecting data and information to provide a better understanding of the socio-normative factors that operate in the background to sustain or prevent the practice. Data analysis from the two rounds of survey data resulted in a discussion paper 'Ending child marriage in Bangladesh: What matters for change?', which explored the correlations between social norms and child marriage. The analysis concluded that for any transformation in the Bangladeshi context, efforts to engage boys and men as agents of change for gender equality must be strengthened and messaging to adolescent boys through adolescent clubs is key to changing gender roles and power relations that have an impact on child marriages. A related video produced on results of the data analysis was used for higher-level advocacy and engagement with the government and partners.

Another Global Programme study, 'Context of child marriage and its implications in Bangladesh', was used to produce a policy brief, which focused on the benefits of education in reducing child marriage. The findings of the study were also shared in a round table discussion conducted by Prothom Alo, a national daily newspaper with the highest circulation in the country. The policy dialogue with experts from multiple sectors brought in concrete recommendations for interventions to end child marriage. Both the policy brief and recommendations are being used for higher-level advocacy and programme design.

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BANGLADESH

Challenges

A general challenge in quality data generation in Bangladesh is the lack of local capacity in data analysis and report writing. It is important to present findings and recommendations in a coherent and comprehensible language, which can be used to ensure quality programming by implementing organizations. There is limited local capacity for ensuring the quality analysis of survey data, and a lack of adequate funding to support evidence generation and research on the intersectionality of child marriage and other relevant issues. It is therefore important to develop local capacity in the generation of robust data and evidence and the quality presentation of the same.

The Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey results of 2017 on child marriage were not officially approved by the Government as the reported prevalence remained relatively high without signs of declining. This has affected the planning and programming of interventions.

Lessons learned

More rigorous awareness-raising and advocacy is required using data generated from country studies, so that key policymakers at the national level accept the findings and take necessary action to expedite the country's efforts to end child marriage.

- Use of innovative approaches (e.g., dashboards, videos, feedback loops within TV series development) to disseminate data will enhance the timeliness, clarity and usefulness of the data and evidence produced.

- It is difficult to incorporate findings from evidence generation into programme design midway through the implementation of the programme. Thus it is important to allocate time for data and evidence generation before the implementation phase to inform programming and effective policy advocacy.

- It is useful to generate evidence of what works at the intervention level, such as the impact evaluation of keeping girls in school to reduce child marriage and the mass media campaign. This helps inform what works best at intervention level and what is effective, efficient and has a strong impact.

- It is useful to generate evidence at the budget level to understand government priorities and real areas of work, as well as understanding the real players in terms of investments in ending child marriage. This serves as a great advocacy tool on budgeting.

Shifts in Phase II

In Phase II, the Global Programme will focus on deepening the understanding of what works, including implementation research and generating evidence on approaches that have worked in urban slum settings. In addition, emphasis will be placed on supporting evidence generation and endline surveys to assess the impact midway through some interventions.

COMMUNICATIONS TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

Videos

- [Icche Dana drama-series playlist](#)

Social media posts

- [Video 01 - Facebook](#)
- [Video 02 - Facebook: Ending Child Marriage - Keshab Roy](#)

- [Photo 01 - Facebook](#)
- [Photo 02 - Facebook](#)
- [Photo 03 - Facebook](#)
- [Photo 04 - Facebook](#)
- [Photo 05 - Facebook](#)

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

NAME OF IMPLEMENTING PARTNER	TYPE OF PARTNER	PARTNER FOCUS AREA	MAIN PARTNER
BRAC	International NGO	Children's rights, youth rights, women's rights	UNICEF
Population Council	International NGO	Children's rights	Both
Caritas Bangladesh	Local NGO	Children's rights	UNICEF
Coast Trust (Bhola District)	Local NGO	Children's rights, youth rights	UNICEF
Rupantar	Local NGO	Children's rights, youth rights	UNICEF
Mukti Nari O Sishu Unnayan Sangstha	Local NGO	Children's rights, youth rights	UNICEF
Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service Bangladesh	Local NGO	Children's rights, youth rights	UNICEF
Unnyan Shangha	Local NGO	Children's rights, youth rights	Both
Sabalamby Unnyan Samity	Local NGO	Children's rights, youth rights	UNICEF
Ministry of Women and Children Affairs	Government body		Both
Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education	Government body		Both
Directorate General of Family Planning	Government body		UNICEF
Directorate General of Health Services	Government body		UNICEF

PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION AREAS

GEOGRAPHIC AREA	Output 1.1: Life-skills and economic support	Output 1.2: Education support	Output 2.1: Social and behavioural change	Output 3.1: Quality health and protection services	Output 3.2: Quality education
Sherpur	■	■	■		
Khulna	■		■		
Bhola	■		■	■	
Kustia	■		■		
Nilphamari	■		■	■	
Jamalpur	■		■	■	■
Netrokona	■		■		■
Chapainawabgonj					■
Bogra	■		■	■	■

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