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Accelerating action to end child marriage in Bangladesh—Project brief

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ACCELERATING ACTION TO END CHILD MARRIAGE IN BANGLADESH

Duration
Jan 2017 - Dec 2020

Location
Bogura, Jamalpur

Partners
UNFPA, MoWCA, Population Council

BACKGROUND

In 2016 the Population Council completed the [Bangladeshi Association for Life Skills, Income, and Knowledge for Adolescents \(BALIKA\)](#), a four-arm randomized controlled trial (RCT) that rigorously evaluated three community-based alternative skill-building strategies. BALIKA reduced child marriage, reduced school dropout, improved health knowledge and health seeking behaviors, and improved gender normative attitudes. Building on the experience of BALIKA, **Accelerating Action to End Child Marriage** is another program, evaluated with an RCT, being implemented to generate evidence of an adolescent skills-building program in reducing child marriage. The unique feature of the additional community engagement component of this program identifies the best strategy for engaging the community to reduce child marriage by testing three alternative community approaches against each other. This program is part of UNFPA-UNICEF Global Program to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage (GPECM).

WHAT WE DO

The Population Council is partnering with UNFPA and Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) to delay marriage. The project works to empower girls with life-skills, livelihood and gender awareness trainings, and engaging communities to address normative drivers of child marriage. Council's role is to:

- ➔ Design and implement baseline, midline and endline surveys.
- ➔ Develop and implement an effective M&E system.
- ➔ Develop guidelines for MoWCA to implement the community engagement intervention.
- ➔ Provide training and technical assistance to MoWCA in project implementation.

Bangladesh ranks among the five countries with the highest rate of child marriage in the world with **59%** girls marrying before 18. Community norms and values are among the underlying factors that support the practice of child marriage in Bangladesh.

The project aims to identify scalable and sustainable approaches to **reduce child marriage** by working with the **Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA)**. The project offers **skills-building opportunities** to adolescent girls in combination with **three approaches to community engagement** that vary in terms of who in the community are engaged as supportive allies.

COMMUNITY COMPONENT

- ➔ One that engages only by reaching adolescents but does not otherwise engage community;
- ➔ One that reaches adult male support groups in addition to adolescent girls; and
- ➔ One that reaches adult female support groups in addition to adolescent girls.





Picture 1: Adolescent Girls, Bogura

WHO WE WORK WITH



The project intends to reach more than 13,000 girls aged 10-19, who may be in or out of school and married or unmarried.



In addition, groups of adult men and women aged 25-35, who are identified as supportive allies by the adolescent girls, are engaged in separate group meetings as part of community outreach.



The project recruited 36 young women known as Gender Promoters who conduct sessions and carry out community outreach activities.

WHERE WE WORK

This project is being implemented in Bogura and Jamalpur districts that are among the 21 districts identified by the United Nations Development Assistance Framework as vulnerable. The project is implemented in 96 randomly selected unions (rural administrative units) of Bogura and Jamalpur districts.

The intervention approaches are evaluated in a four-arm cluster randomized control study with 72 intervention villages allocated to three arms and 24 control villages. The design intends to assess the impact of skills, as well as the added contribution of community engagement activities involving women and men.

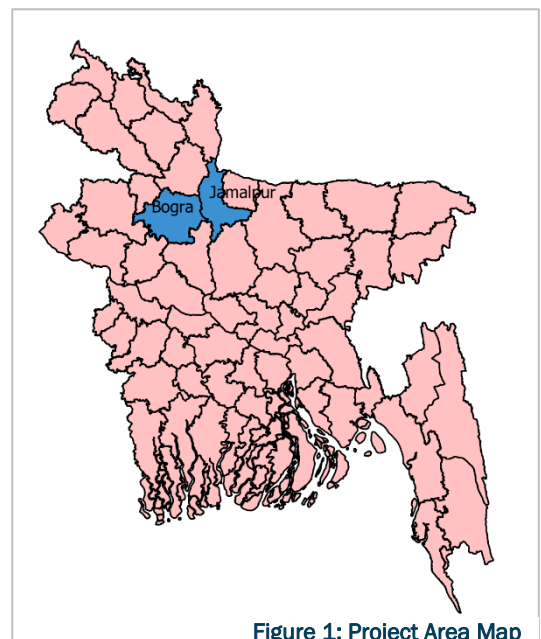


Figure 1: Project Area Map

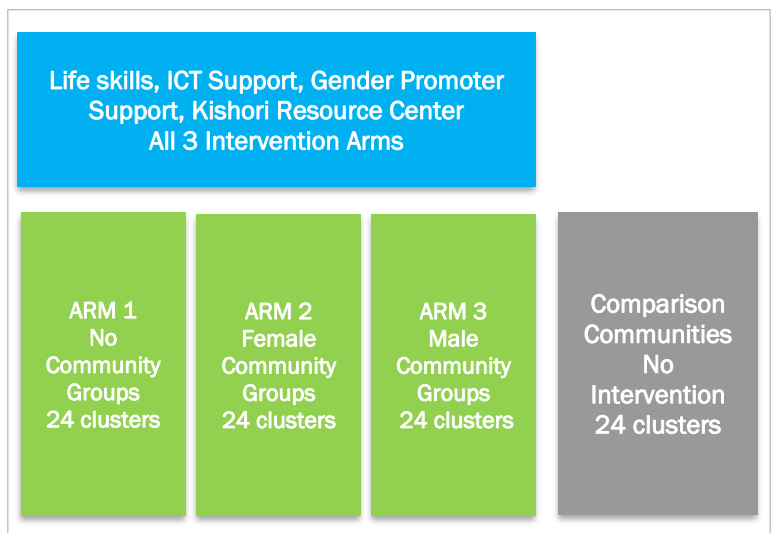
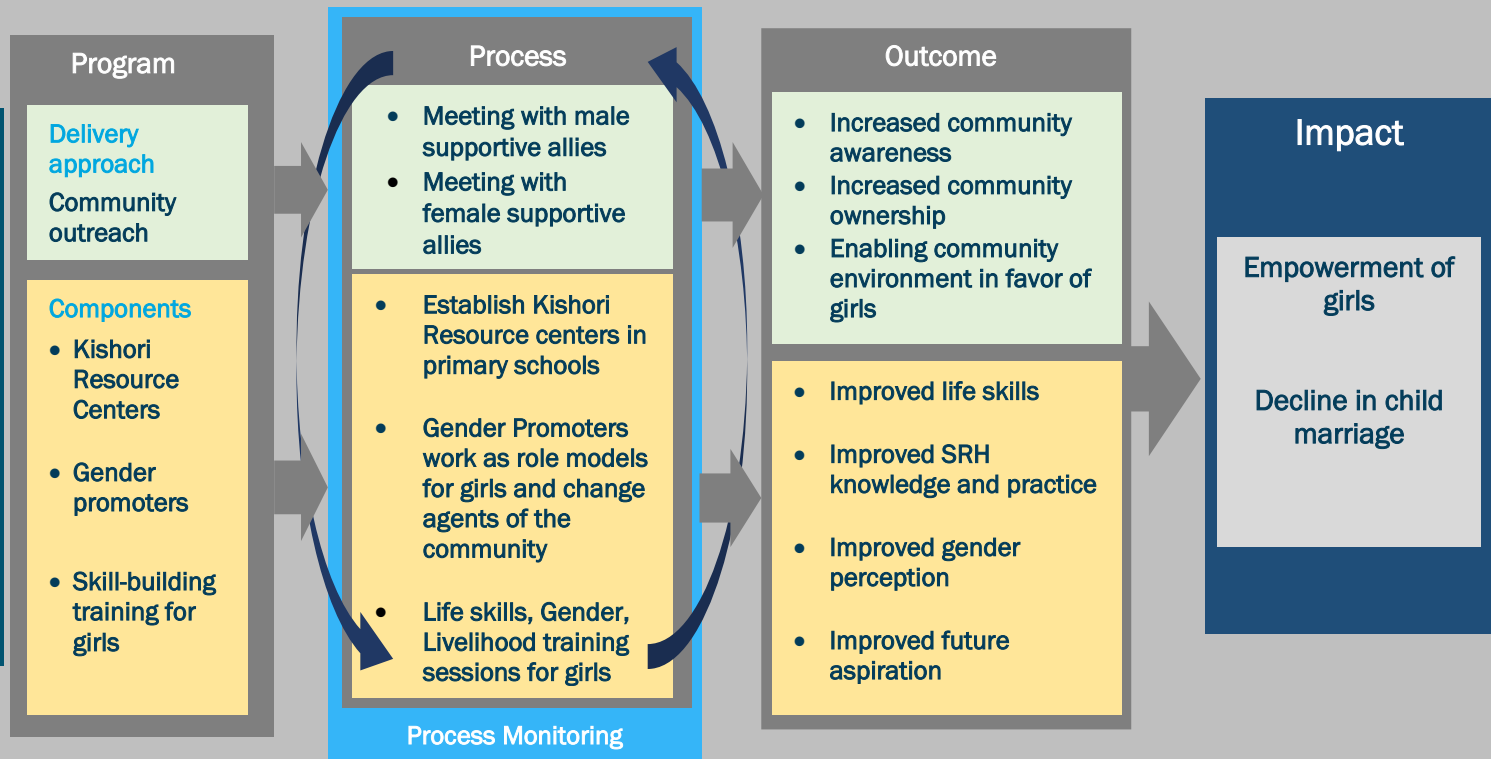


Figure 2: Research Design

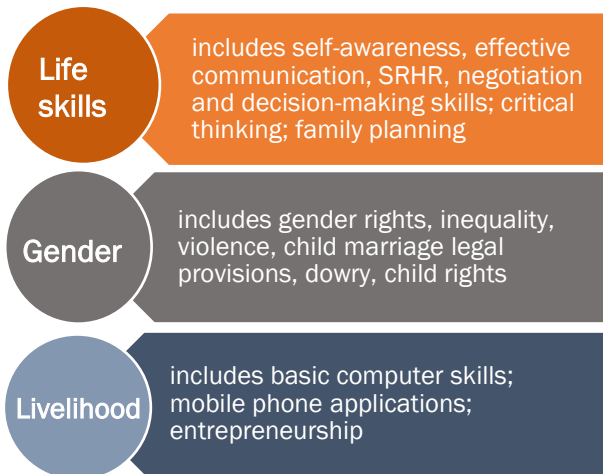
THEORY OF CHANGE



HOW WE WORK

Skills training intervention

The skill-building intervention includes 17 hours of life skills curriculum, 19 hours of gender awareness curriculum and 28 hours of livelihoods curriculum. The Curriculums of this project are reproduced based on the curriculums of BALIKA.



Kishori Resource Centers

Skill-building intervention for girls takes place in 72 union-based Kishori Resource Centres (located in primary schools). Each center has laptops, internet connection, and associated reading materials to run the sessions for 2 adolescent groups.

Each adolescent group has 30 members containing both married and unmarried and in-school and out-of-school girls. Each group receives equivalent hours of curriculum-based training; however, some parts of the curriculum are customized to be appropriate for age, and marital status. The program will run for a period of 12 months for each cohort.



Kishori Resource Center

Adolescents receive a 2-hour afterschool session once a week. Each group of adolescents will receive 64 hours training on structured curriculum of life skills, gender awareness and livelihood.

Gender Promoters

Gender Promoters (GP) are the key person to implement project activities. 36 young female graduates aged 25-30 years known are recruited from the intervention locality by MoWCA as mentors to the adolescents to serve as GPs.

Each GP is responsible to implement project activities in 2 unions. Their primary responsibility includes training sessions for girls at the Kishori Resource Centers and conducting community outreach activities. GPs take various trainings to become mentors, session leaders and role models for girls. GPs receive training on life skills, gender and livelihood curriculum as well as training on conducting community outreach activities, session facilitation and skills on basic computer. With their level of capacity and engagement GPs act as change-makers within communities, specially in rural areas. As mentors, GPs become empowered and financially independent as well.

Community outreach

Engagement with the community forms the basis of long-term sustainability of the program. Community engagement meetings discuss issues relating to child marriage such as schooling, gender perception, safety security and livelihood for girls with the gatekeepers of the community as identified by the girls as their supportive allies. These gatekeepers can work as advocates against child marriage and ensure local ownership of the project.



Picture 2: Community Meeting, Jamalpur

other hand, engaging adult women may be more effective because they have more natural affinity and sympathy with adolescent girls and can become more effective advocates for girls in the community.

Kishori Resource Center management committee

The project also forms a group known as Kishori Resource Center management committee that will be involved in both Kishori Resource Center management and advocacy for girls in the community to ensure local ownership of the project and to harmonize activities. Management committee is composed of local UP Chairman, member: both male and female, parents, schoolteachers and locally influential people. GPs convene meetings with this committee on regular intervals.

Program monitoring

The Council developed a real-time online/offline monitoring system to visualize data through dashboard and to enable data reporting to multiple levels. SurveyCTO, a web-based software is used to create dashboards for session and activity monitoring. Attendance of the girls during after-school sessions and quality of the sessions are monitored by the dedicated project staff.

Video sparks on specific issues can trigger critical and analytical thinking

Community engagement involves bi-directional discussion meetings using **Video Sparks (short theme-based videos)** among women and men community groups separately.

Community engagement meetings are conducted with:

- ➔ adult male support groups
- ➔ adult female support groups

Outreach activities conducted separately with men and women group identifies diverse benefits or challenges of community involvement in achieving program goals. Working with adult men may be effective for promoting choice for girls where patriarchal barriers dominate the practice of child marriage. On the

Reference

1. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2015). Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2012-2013 Progotir Patheyh.
2. Amin et al. 2018. Skills-building programs to reduce child marriage in Bangladesh: A randomized controlled trial. Published in Journal of Adolescent Health.

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