

## **Semi-annual Report (January 2023–June 2023) Year 4**

**Supported by: LAMB Health-UK**

### **Summary:**

The Adolescent and Community Transformation (ACT) Project aims to improve the mental health and psycho-social well-being of adolescents.

Key objectives include improving sexual and reproductive health (SRH), addressing gender-based discrimination, protecting children's rights, and reducing child marriage, domestic violence, sexual abuse, harassment, and suicide rates. The project included school-based life-skill sessions, 144 wedding buster groups, and 400 Aunties.

The life-skill review sessions covered essential topics such as early marriage, sexual and reproductive health in intimate relationships, abuse and suicide prevention, drug addiction, social support, and the connection between sexual and reproductive health and mental health.

Married adolescent girls were involved in talking with young people about the consequences of child marriage and the importance of education, and promoting the use of family planning methods.

Positive outcomes have been observed, with 2 new adolescent-friendly health service corners being established in this 6 months in government health centres, and an increased use by adolescents of the local government health facilities. Local community committees, community groups, management committees, wedding buster groups, and school management committees have been established to promote new attitudes and behaviours related to SRH, mental health, child protection, and equal rights, and ensure provision of quality services and the prevention of child marriage and abuse.

At the beginning of 2023, the people in the project area faced both cold and heat waves, which significantly impacted their livelihoods with the prices of daily commodities rising in the local market. 8 out of 12 Adolescent Facilitators resigned due to better opportunities and personal commitments, significantly affecting the implementation of activities and 11% of Aunties (45) dropped from the program due to reasons such as migration, lack of willingness, and physical illness.

The Aunties and other volunteers were busy in the fields these last 2 months harvesting, and many of the adolescents had mid-term examinations at school, so some activities needed rescheduling. We have been greatly helped by the support of the Local Government staff.

### **Major Achievement during reporting period (January 2023 to June 2023)**

- The Wedding Buster Groups (WBG) organized an additional 247 meetings with various agendas, including raising awareness within the groups, compiling lists of vulnerable adolescents, and advocating for risk reduction. During these 6 months, WBGs stopped 38 child marriages.
- The joint efforts of aunties, community leaders, and local government and administration successfully prevented 32 child marriages and an additional 38 adolescent girls from the groups stopped their own early marriages using strategies they learned from ACT project, and with the support of their peers.

- 37 adolescent girls who were at risk of dropping out of secondary school received study assistance from community support to continue their education, and 39 disadvantaged adolescent girls were able to resume their education. 104 adolescent girls received education support from school management committees (SMCs), local government and Upazila administration in Y4.
- 194 young people have accessed the healthcare services available at the adolescent friendly healthcare corners, following recommendations from Aunties, peer educators, and Adolescent Facilitators.
- 2,724 girls from Year 4 received SRH services from community centers (CCs), Upazila health and family welfare centers (UH&FWCs). The project has also brought about significant improvements in healthcare services. 24 community clinics, 8 Upazila Health and Family Welfare Centers (UH&FWC-MC) have been reformed, functionalized, and are now capable of arranging bi-monthly meetings to address the health needs of adolescents and communities. These facilities collaborate to develop plans and strategies for the well-being of adolescents. As a result, two Adolescent-Friendly Health Service (AFHS) Corners have been established under the UH&FWC and CCs, with additional centers planned for the future.
- 1957 (Service Count) married adolescents received the counseling service on family planning methods and menstrual care and 580 married adolescent girls received antenatal, delivery or postnatal care.
- In the last 6 months, trained Aunties (known as active listeners) provided 15,597 counseling services (Service Count) to vulnerable adolescent girls, addressing a wide range of physical and mental health issues and offering end support at the community level.
- Adolescent group members successfully arranged 28 parents' gatherings within the community to raise awareness among adolescent parents regarding sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and mental health (MH) issues.
- Through advocacy efforts with the local government, 21 adolescent girls who had discontinued their education were successfully linked to income generating activities (IGAs) such as tailoring, handicrafts, and agro-based training programs.
- Trained school teachers conducted life-skills sessions at nine schools, guided by the ACT team. 270 adolescents participated in these sessions which various topics, including healthy relationships, active listening (part 1 and part 2), coping with stress (part 1 and part 2), decision-making, positive social support, reality testing ability, mental health basic SRH-early marriage, SRH-intimate relationships and abuse, suicide prevention, drug addiction, and SRH- dowry.

When the community members take ownership of wedding buster groups, Aunties Bench, school based life skill session, and community committees which has happened in many places, there as an increased possibility that activities will continue even after the closure of the project.

## Case study/Stories of change:

### Change Story-1

#### Shatabdi is an Example of Inspiration

Shatabdi is a 14-year-old girl who lives in a village in Nawabganj Upazila. She is the younger of two sisters, and her parents are day laborers. Shatabdi has always been a bright student, but her family's low income made it difficult for her to continue her education. The school she attends is far from her home, daily management of the van fair was beyond her capabilities so she has to walk every day. This takes up a lot of her time, and she sometimes missed important classes and tests.



Despite these challenges, Shatabdi never gave up on her dream of getting education. She is determined to succeed, and she knows that education is the key to a better future for herself and her family. She said "I saw my classmates riding a bicycle to school; I wished I also had one, but the reality was different for me. When I requested my mates to bring their bicycles to pick me up, they frequently refused. I felt frustrated and down because of these things. I wasn't feeling well;

therefore I couldn't focus on my studies. I always prayed to God to remove this circumstance".

Shatabdi is also a member of a girl adolescent group, where she learns life skills that help her cope with the challenges of adolescence. She was facing a new challenge. Her parents were planning her wedding, which would have forced her to drop out of school. She was devastated, but she knew that she had to do something to keep her study continued. She talked to her teachers and aunties, who helped her to get a bicycle from Upazila Adibasi Academy.

Now, Shatabdi is able to get to school on time and without having to walk. She is also able to focus on her studies, and she is confident that she will be able to achieve her dream of getting a good education. Shatabdi's story is an inspiration to us all. She showed how to fulfil requirements for life without giving up. She is a role model for girls in her community.



Consent Form  
(Sotabdi).pdf

## A Transformative Story of Trained Aunty

Shayma Khatun (35) lives in a village in Kushdaha Union of Nawabganj Upazila. She was married at a young age and suffered physical and mental abuse from her husband. After giving birth to a child, her husband divorced her and married another woman.



Shayma returned to her parents' home, but the community did not accept her. She was blamed for the divorce and was often the target of disparaging remarks. This made her feel despondent and ashamed, and she attempted suicide. Fortunately, she survived. She said, "Parents are my trustworthy protectors, and I am still alive because of their help". With their help, she was able to get back on her feet.

She joined the LAMB-Adolescent and Community Transformation Project to provide counseling services for adolescent girls. Adolescent girl's group chose Shayma to be their Aunty (Active Listener) for their mental health care. Shayma received extensive training in counseling, ARH, active listening, and basic mental health from the project. She was now able to help other young girls in her community who were struggling with mental health problems. She said "I am realized now how I made a significant error in judgment by not resolving my issues, she wants to bring change in her community". She is employed at a cap-garments factory and earns money to care for her children well. She shares her experience with other women and girls, encouraging them to be aware of this issue.



## The Power of Community Action: A Story of Hope and Change

Polimirzapur is a small village situated in Kushdaha Union under Nawabganj Upazila where most of the villagers are farmers and illiterate. They face many challenges, such as gender discrimination, violence, child marriage, divorce, and illiteracy. Adolescent girls often married off before they finish their studies at high schools. This has become a cultural norm in their community, and no one has stood up to challenge it.



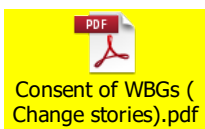
Since 2020, with the support of the ACT project, an Adolescent Group was formed. This group sits regularly to learn about life skills and how to cope with the challenges they face in their community. They also share their experiences and help each other to overcome obstacles. As a result of the work of the Adolescent Group, a Wedding Buster Group was established in 2021. This group is working to prevent child marriage and to ensure that adolescent girls have equal opportunities. They are raising awareness about the issue of child marriage,

organizing parent gatherings, and creating a list of vulnerable girls. They are also working with local government and other NGOs to ensure that girls who have been married off can return to school.

One of the members of the Wedding Buster Group, Murad, said, "We didn't know that we had responsibilities and duties towards society and family before. We just watched things happen without doing anything. But now, after receiving life skills sessions and joining the Wedding Buster Group, we are working to change our community."

Another member of the group, Ayesha Begum, said, "I had given up hope, but the Wedding Buster Group saved my life by stopping my marriage. Now, I can continue my studies."

The Wedding Buster Group is making a positive change in the community. They are helping to break the cycle of stigma and to give girls the opportunity to reach their full potential. They are an inspiration to others, and they are the proof that change is possible.



### Section K: Financial Report

The financial report is attached as a separate file.