



Research on Discriminatory Social Norms  
as they Impact on Violence Against  
Women and Girls in Bangladesh



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## Acronyms

ASRHR	Adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights
BIAAG	Because I am a Girl (Plan International campaign)
CM	Child marriage
CSO	Civil society organisation
CSP	Country Strategic Plan
CO	Country Office
DALA	Developing Aspirations and Livelihoods for Adolescents (Plan project)
DFID	Department for International Development (UK Government)
FGD	Focus group discussion
GEMS	Gender Equity Movement in Schools
GBV	Gender-based violence
GESA	Gender Equality Self-Assessment
GPP	Girl Power Project (funded by Plan Netherlands)
IPV	Intimate partner violence (also known as 'domestic violence')
KII	Key informant interview
MER	Monitoring, Evaluation and Research
PPA	Programme Partnership Agreement (DFID supported programme with Plan UK)
POVC	Protection of Vulnerable Children (Plan Bangladesh programme)
PU	Programme Unit
PUM	Programme Unit Manager
YED	Youth Economic Development programme (Plan Bangladesh project)

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# 1. Background and aims of the research

**Aim:** Plan UK commissioned research in Bangladesh, Egypt and Pakistan in order to have a better understanding of how Plan's programmes are responsive to girls' needs and rights in relation to violence as a result of discriminatory norms in each country context.

Bangladesh and Egypt were selected as recipients of support from the Girls' Fund, a resource created by Plan UK for supporting gender transformative work. Plan Pakistan was selected due to its work on girls' education, supported by Plan UK's DFID-funded PPA programme on addressing the barriers to adolescent girls to access and remain in secondary education.

According to the terms of reference, the research intended to address:

- How discriminatory norms in Bangladesh, Egypt and Pakistan are defined and enforced, and how they affect young girls (9-12 years old), adolescent girls (13-16 years old) and young women (17-20 years old).
- How these are different to girls' life stages compared to boys.
- Based on girls' and boys' experiences (those who Plan works with and those who do not), what are the central challenges in tackling discriminatory norms, what support do they have in addressing these challenges and what are some of the key strategies / actions they see as ways of overcoming these barriers?
- How is violence as a result of these norms being addressed by Plan and other actors, what are the challenges, successes and lessons learned from these interventions?

In Bangladesh, however, given that a recent, comprehensive report was produced for the Plan Bangladesh Girl Power Project in April 2013 (*Customary Laws, Norms and Practices in Bangladesh: Gender Based Violence Perspective*), these objectives were adapted slightly in consultation with key staff in Plan UK and Bangladesh to explore:

1. How girls, boys, women and men feel about existing gender norms;
2. What factors they think influence and impact on these gender norms;
3. What (if anything) they would like to change about these gender norms and why [What, to them, would represent 'gender transformation' in their own lives, in the community and more broadly in society?];
4. From their perspective, what works and what doesn't work to make these changes happen and why.

The research also aimed to give Plan Bangladesh staff an opportunity to reflect on these issues.

A team of three consultants worked together to refine the research questions and develop a methodology for the work. It was agreed that it was not possible in the scope of the research to assess the different approaches of Plan to addressing social norms and the research would not evaluate Plan's work. Instead the research would prioritise hearing from different age groups of girls, boys, women and men in two selected communities to explore their experiences and priorities for change. Each consultant visited a different country. The approach taken was to facilitate participatory research, with staff or volunteers in each country taking the lead to facilitate the research as much as possible. Hence, in each country the approach was adapted to respond to staff interests, priorities and the local context. This report details the findings from the research undertaken in collaboration with staff from Plan Bangladesh. Key findings and learning from all three countries are summarised in a separate report.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Summary

A total of 192 people were consulted, 96 female and 96 male, through the following methods:

- 16 focus group discussions (FGDs) in Dinajpur PU
- 18 semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) at CO, PU and community levels
- 1 workshop with 19 staff members and partners from the three northern PUs (Dinajpur, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari)

In addition, the researcher conducted informal observations of communities, English language newspapers, local television, Plan offices, school text books and school classrooms.

A desk review of relevant documents provided by Plan Bangladesh was conducted prior to the field work.

### 2.2 Research locations

- KIIs with Plan CO staff and the central government representative took place in the capital, Dhaka.
- The workshop with staff members and partners from the three northern PUs (Dinajpur, Lalmonirhat and Nilphamari) took place in the Nilphamari PU office.
- FGDs and community-level KIIs took place in two communities in Dinajpur PU, selected from each of the two main *Upazilas* or sub-districts where Plan works (Chirir Bandor and Khansama). More specifically, one *Union Parishad* (local council) was selected from each of these *Upazilas*: Tetulia – closer to the main Plan office - and Alokjhari –more remote and with greater ethnic diversity.

### 2.3 Key informant interviews (KIIs)

A total of 18 semi-structured KIIs were held at CO and PU levels and with key stakeholders in the two communities (9 female, 9 male). KIIs with Plan staff and the central government representative were conducted by the international researcher directly in English. For the community-level KIIs, Nasima Akter (Research and Evaluation Coordinator, MER) acted as Bangla interpreter for the international researcher. On two occasions Shahnaz Sultana (Deputy Area Coordinator, Dinajpur PU) interpreted. Each KII lasted from 20 minutes to an hour, depending on the availability of the participant and general timetabling constraints. In the lists below, (f) indicates female participants and (m) indicates male participants.

- **Plan CO.** All these KIIs took place in the CO in Dhaka on Tuesday 18 March 2014 apart from Md Munir Hussain, Sunday 30 March 2014, and Nasma Akter with whom multiple discussions took place throughout the period of the field research in Dinajpur).
  - Farhana Afroz (Project Implementation Manager, Protecting Human Rights) (f)
  - Nasima Akter (Research and Evaluation Coordinator, MER) (f)
  - Ashish Damle (Regional Project Manager, Missing Child Alert) (m)
  - Md Tarekul Hoque (Adviser, Youth Economic Development Programme) (m)
  - Dr Muhammad Munir Hussain (Project Manager, Generation Breakthrough Project) (m)
  - Syeda Laslima Jamal (Communications and Project Specialist) (f)
  - Mohammad Masud (Girl Power Project Manager) (m)
  - Nazmun Nahar (Gender Adviser) (f)
  - Jannatul Ferdous Ruma (Adviser, Child Protection) (f)

- **Plan Dinajpur PU**
  - Nurafa Arju (Area Coordinator, Dinajpur PU) 25 March 2014 (f)
  - Nurul Haque (Programme Coordinator – Protection of Vulnerable Children, Dinajpur PU) 19 March 2014 (m)
- **Other**
  - Ashraf Hossain (Director General of the Department of Women's Affairs, Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs) 18 March 2014 (m)
- **Community-level Kills**
  - Nahida Akhtari (Primary School Head Teacher, Tetulia) 23 March 2014 (f)
  - Dipak Chakraborti (Purohit - Hindu religious leader, Tetulia) 23 March 2014 (m)
  - Chobi Rani (Female Member of the Union Parishad, Tetulia) 24 March 2014 (f)
  - Joyonti Roy (Young woman, Plan beneficiary) 24 March 2014 (f)
  - Abdul Salam (Imam at the Kanchama Sub-District Mosque) 27 March 2014 (m)
  - Krishna Kumar Sarkar (Police Inspector, Kanchama Sub-District Police Station) 27 March 2014 (m)

## 2.4 Focus group discussions (FGDs)

16 FGDs were held in Dinajpur PU, 8 in Tetulia and 8 in Alokjhari, divided by age and sex. A total of 155 community members took part (79 female, 76 male):

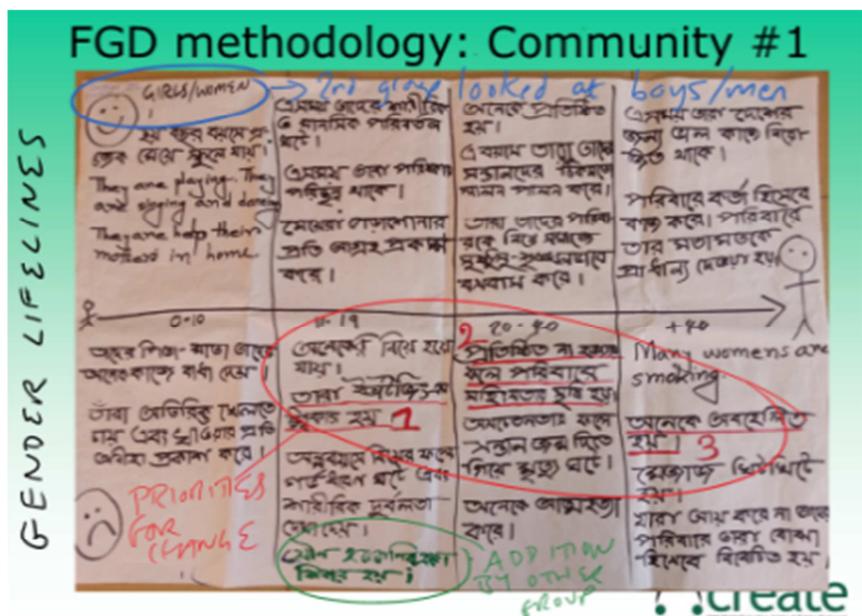
- 20 girls and 19 boys aged 12-15 (39 in total)
- 16 girls and 19 boys aged 16-19 (35 in total)
- 23 women and 17 men aged 20-40 (40 in total)
- 20 women and 21 men aged over 40 (41 in total)

Each group consisted of 6-13 participants who were selected by local Plan staff. Because of the long history of Plan intervention in the area, it was estimated that nearly all FGD participants would have heard of Plan, but an effort was made to invite a mixture of participants, i.e. those with minimal Plan contact with those whose involvement is more substantial. The selection of participants in Tetulia was based on people's availability and ability to engage in the discussion in some way. In Alokjhari the selection was made to deliberately mix participants with a range of experiences. Interestingly, Plan was only rarely mentioned spontaneously in the FGDs and participants did therefore not give the impression of being 'Planified' or 'spouting the party line'.

FGDs for the 12-15 year-olds mostly took place in school classrooms (a village courtyard in one case). FGDs with 16-19 year-olds mostly took place in local Plan offices (a school classroom in one case). FGDs with adult women and men mostly took place in village family courtyards, sitting under trees, or on the porch of someone's house - apart from the men in Alokjhari who came to the local Plan office and a school classroom after school had finished for the day.

The methodology was different for each of the two communities selected.

**'Gender lifelines' and the 'footsteps exercise':** In Community #1 (Tetulia) each FGD group was divided into two to complete a 'gender lifeline' for girls / women and boys / men in the community, highlighting 'good' and 'bad' life experiences for each at different stages of life: aged 0-



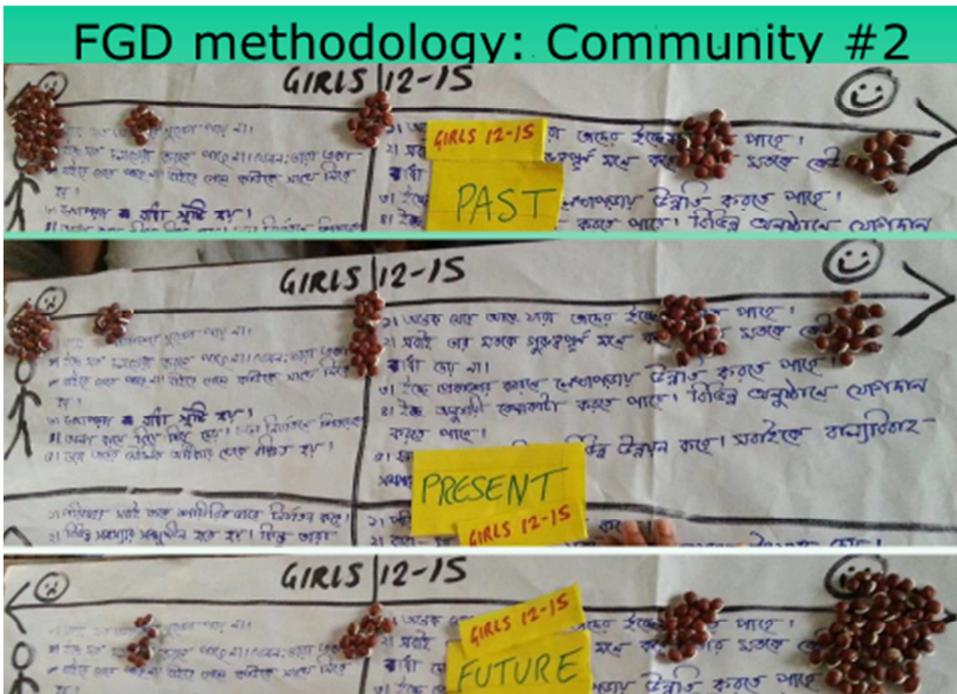
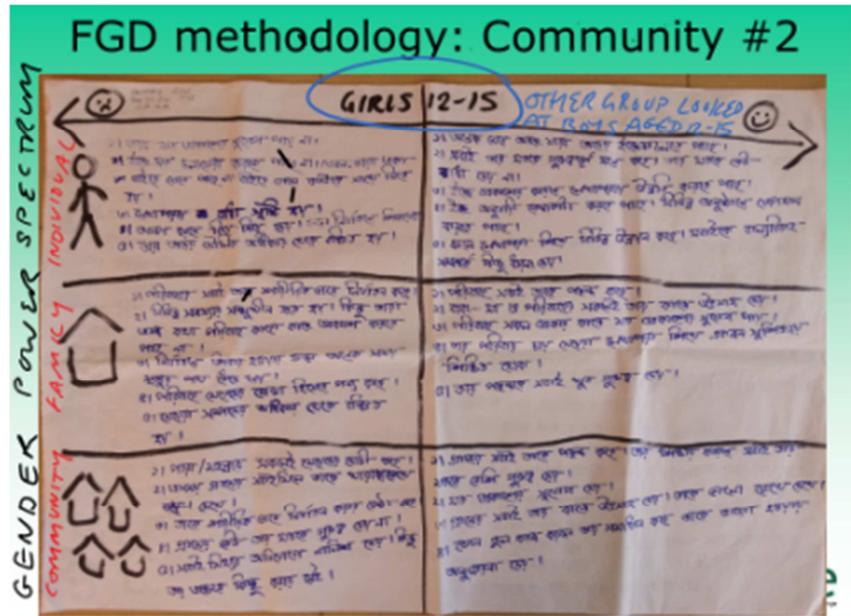
10, 11-19, 20-40 and over 40. Where time allowed, the two groups swapped sheets and added, in a different colour, any additional points they felt were missing. Each group then prioritised three of the 'bad' experiences they would like to change. These desired 'changes' were then taken forward into a plenary group discussion based on the 'footsteps exercise'.



In the 'footsteps exercise', the desired changes are represented as the 'sun' or 'vision' of where you want to get to on your journey. 'Footsteps forward' towards this vision are identified, as are obstacles, which are presented as a 'brick wall' blocking progress. Finally, ways to overcome these obstacles are represented as rungs on a 'ladder', to climb over the brick wall. This visual framework was presented either on a blackboard or a flipchart, depending on the FGD location.

**'Gender power spectrum' and mapping:** In Community #2

(Alokjhari) each FGD group was divided into two to complete a 'gender power spectrum' for females and males of their own age group in the community, highlighting characteristics of 'powerful' and 'not powerful' females and males at the individual, family and community levels. Each group then used a pile of beans to illustrate the distribution of females or males of their age group in the community along the power spectrum line in the present, past (in the time of their grandparents) and their wishes for the future. This was followed by general plenary discussion.



This shows an example of how 12-15 year-old girls in Alokjhari perceive the distribution of 'power' of 12-15 year-old girls in their community in the past, present and future. The left side represents lack of power ☹ and the right side lots of power ☺. For example, they feel there has been a slight improvement from the past until now, but they hope for much more power in the future. These results are discussed in full in section 7.

## 2.5 PU workshop

A workshop was held with 19 staff members and partners (8 female and 11 male) from the three northern PUs of Dinajpur, Lalmonirhat and Nilphamari. It took place on Wednesday 19 March 2014. It was due to last about 3 hours but had to be cut short as many participants arrived late from an important previous meeting. It therefore lasted just over 2 hours.

The aims of the research and of the workshop were presented, i.e. to get perspectives from staff and partners on key issues and to provide staff and partners the opportunity to reflect on some of these issues in more depth. Each participant was then given a small booklet made out of one sheet of folded A4 paper, colour coded for each of the three PUs. These booklets consisted of 8 pages, one for each step of the workshop. Participants noted their reflections on each page for each step, either individually or as a result of pair or group work. These reflections were then compiled on flipcharts and shared for general discussion in plenary. Participants were encouraged to keep their booklets after the session as a reminder of the importance of addressing discriminatory social norms. The 8 steps are as follows:

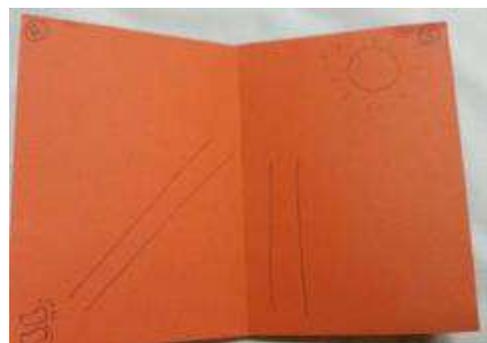
**1. Visualise a girl you know from a community in your PU (10 minutes):** draw an image of this girl on page 1 and think about her individual character and family and community situation. Introduce this girl to the person sitting next to you. A few examples were shared in plenary, eliciting a range of experiences of empowerment or lack thereof. For example, Lina, aged 16, goes to school, take part in sports, but still has no decision-making power at home; Mou, aged 6, loves to do traditional dancing but she has just been withdrawn from school to go to a madrasa; the girl in the picture here walks with her head down and has to look after younger siblings.



**2. What change is needed for this girl? (10 minutes):** On page 2, identify up to three changes you would like to happen for this girl. Stop and reflect: if she were here now, would she agree with you or would she identify different things? Are we making assumptions about the girls in these communities? How are they participating in the identification and design of interventions? Again, a few examples were shared in plenary.

**3. How can this change be made to happen? (15 minutes):** On page 3, take one of the changes identified on the previous page and list up to three ways in which this change can be made to happen, *without being constrained or limited by the framework of existing Plan programmes and projects*: 5 minutes individual reflection, 5 minutes discussion with your neighbour, and 5 minutes plenary feedback.

**4. and 5. 'Footsteps exercise' (45 minutes):** See the description of this in section 2.4. Participants divided into three groups, mixing representatives of different PUs by using the colour-coding of the booklets as a quick guide. Based on previous discussions in step 2, the group identified one 'change needed' and represented this as the 'sun' on a group flipchart. Thinking about social norms, rather than evaluating specific Plan projects, the groups noted steps forward (or enabling factors for change), barriers to change, and solutions to overcome these barriers. The flipcharts were then shared in plenary. Alternatively this could be done as an individual exercise in the booklet.

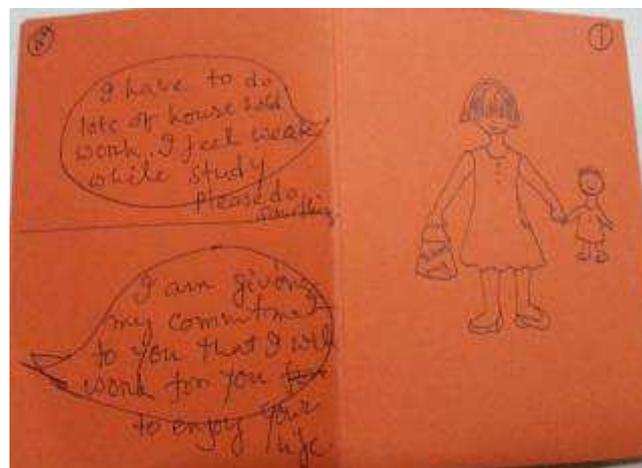


**6. Recommendations for Plan (15 minutes):** Considering all of the other steps so far, think about Plan's work on these issues. Is it addressing the key issues? If yes, how can it be improved? If no, what are some possible interventions or different ways of working? Note down approximately 3

recommendations for Plan on page 6. Feed back to the plenary. [This was originally planned as a longer 30 minute session in PU groups, but due to time constraints it had to be cut short and was therefore done more as an individual reflection.]

**7. 3 wishes** (10 minutes): Imagine you had a magic wand. What would you wish for? Write down three wishes on page 7: 5 minutes individual reflection and 5 minutes plenary feedback.

**8. Messages to and from the girl in the community** (5 minutes): Open out the booklet to show the first and last page together. On the top half of page 8, draw a speech bubble and write a message you think this girl would like to give you. On the bottom half, write a message you would like to give to this girl. Examples of messages were shared in plenary.



Participants were invited to open up the last page of the booklet and to write some personal action points of things they will do differently as a result of these reflections. This could be on a professional and/or personal level. Because of the way the booklet was folder, these action points are hidden and do not have to be shared with others, to encourage a personal commitment to change.

In the last 10 minutes of the workshop, participants discussed the overall strengths and weaknesses of Plan's approach based on the 8 elements of the UNICEF Protective Environment Framework: 1. Government commitment to fulfilling protection rights; 2. Legislation and enforcement; 3. Attitudes, traditions, customs, behaviour and practices; 4 .Open discussion, including engagement of media and civil society; 5. Children's life skills, knowledge and participation; 6. Capacity of those in contact with children; 7. Basic and targeted services; and 8. Monitoring and oversight. In theory, change needs to happen across all eight elements, simultaneously, in coordination with other partners and networks.

## 2.6 observations

The researcher conducted informal observations as part of the research. For example, noting types of activities being carried out by girls, women, boys and men in the communities, how the different sexes are portrayed in (English language) newspapers, on television, and in school textbooks and classrooms, and the types of visual materials in Plan offices promoting gender equality (e.g. posters and photographs from the 'Because I am a Girl' campaign).

## 2.7 Desk review

A desk review of relevant documents provided by Plan Bangladesh was conducted prior to the field work. See Appendix 1 for a list of these documents.

## 2.8 Successes and challenges regarding methodology

### What went well:

- For the PU level research, the international researcher was very fortunate to have the full-time assistance of Nasima Akter (Research and Evaluation Coordinator, MER) to co-facilitate and translate FGD activities and to translate community level KIIs. Her ability to lead the FGD activities herself saved valuable time which would otherwise have been spent on translating

instructions from the international consultant. Without her invaluable expertise it is unlikely that the same amount of information could have been gathered in the limited time available for each FGD (1.5-2 hours).

- The international researcher greatly benefitted from being able to discuss, clarify and contextualise key issues arising from the research with Nasima on a daily basis during the long journeys to and from the communities and over dinner in the evenings.
- Informed consent was obtained verbally from each group to participate in the discussions, record the discussions on the dictaphone, and to take photographs for use in the report.
- The FGD methodology was designed to minimise researcher and maximise respondent 'talking time' by eliciting key information through small group work. This worked very well and resulted in two written flipcharts per FGD group summarising key information which Nasima quietly translated for the international research whilst the group work was ongoing.
- It was very useful to be able to conduct CO level KIIs with key programme staff and thematic advisers before going into the field in order to gain an overall understanding of Plan's approaches, the successes and constraints of gender work and recommendations from the CO perspective.
- The logistics at PU level were very well organised. The international researcher is very grateful to all those involved.
- The workshop with Plan staff and partners from the three northern PUs was well received and introduced participants to new methodologies through which to encourage reflection on difficult issues.

#### **Constraints:**

- The FGD women aged 20 to 40 and over 40 had much lower literacy and education levels than men of the same age. More time was needed to explain the exercises compared to other groups and, where necessary, a 'scribe' (either a younger girl or Plan staff member) helped to document the women's discussions.
- 15 out of the 16 FGD groups were enthusiastic and interested to participate. However, the 20 to 40 year-old men in Community #1 (Tetulia) – led by one particular individual - expressed impatience and annoyance at being asked to take time away from their work. In response the researchers cut this FGD short.
- The unavailability of accommodation close to the research communities resulted in long journeys each day to and from the villages (1.5 to 2 hours each way) which was very tiring for the researchers.
- Many of the FGDs took place in school classrooms (for the children), household porches or courtyards. Curious onlookers frequently had to be kindly but firmly moved on in order to ensure privacy for the discussions.
- Plan staff are extremely busy and clearly under a lot of pressure to respond to multiple demands and deadlines. Any external research places a significant additional burden on staff time, even if a budget is available to cover logistical issues.

## 3. Country context

### 3.1 Overview

The Constitution of Bangladesh grants equal rights to women and men in all spheres of public life and has been supplemented by a number of Acts and Ordinances to safeguard girls' and women's equal rights. However, implementation of legislation is poor and in practice women and girls experience overwhelming inequality across all spheres (social, cultural, economic and political). The resultant very high levels of gender-based violence (GBV) are widely accepted as 'normal', except perhaps in limited geographical pockets where the intervention of civil society organisations (CSOs) has had an impact.

In the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2013<sup>1</sup>, Bangladesh ranked 75 out of 136 countries in the report's overall measure of gender-based biases. Its overall ranking has fluctuated over the past seven years, but significant progress appears to have been made since it placed 91 out of 115 countries in 2006 when the Global Gender Gap Report was first established. However, the improved 2013 rating is largely due to its high ranking in relation to 'political empowerment' (7/136 countries). In other areas it remains low: 115/136 in relation to educational attainment; 121/136 in relation to economic participation and opportunities; and 124/136 in relation to health and survival.

### 3.2 Gender-based discrimination and violence – types and causes

The most persistent types of discrimination or violence against women and girls in Bangladesh, along with their causes, have already been documented in existing publications such as those listed in Appendix 1. For example, the 2013 report '*Customary Laws, Norms and Practices in Bangladesh: Gender Based Violence Perspective*' – written for the Plan Bangladesh Girl Power Project (GPP) - lists no less than 51 types of 'customs, norms and practices' related to GBV which are summarised in Appendix 4.

This section of the report summarises the key issues highlighted in existing documents.

In summary, girls are denied access to food, health services, education, recreation and sports activities, free time and - later in life - employment, and are at extreme risk of violence, abuse, and harassment. Violence includes incest, sexual abuse, rape, dating and courtship violence, trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, child labour, harassment and exploitation at school and in the workplace (e.g. garment factories) and child marriage. According to the CSP, one-third of girls younger than 15 and 74% of those younger than 18 find themselves married, often against their will. GBV in the forms of forced marriages and coercive demands for dowry and dowry-related violence are rife. 'Many cases' result in suicide or running away and ending up in a brothel. Girls, especially between the ages of 14 and 17 years old, are more likely to commit and attempt suicide than boys due to insecurity and sexual harassment – known locally as 'eve teasing', although this term has been banned by the government<sup>2</sup> - including acid throwing). According to Plan Bangladesh documents, almost half of women and young children experience violence in the home and Bangladesh ranks second in the world in the rate of IPV<sup>3</sup> committed against women by men. Corporal punishment is a socially-accepted practice. According to the Children's Opinion Poll of 2008, 75% of children experience corporal punishment at home, 90% at school and 25% in the workplace. 78% of rural and 65% of urban girls married before 18. There is a high demand for sexual and reproductive health services but adolescents who are unmarried have almost no place to turn, resulting in a very high incidence of unwanted pregnancies and other negative consequences.

The underlying causes and perpetuating factors for this discrimination and violence can be analysed according to the eight elements of UNICEF's Protective Environment Framework<sup>4</sup>, which was introduced to various research participants in the staff and partner workshop and in some KIIs and which can also be used to group and analyse strengths and weaknesses of programme responses.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GenderGap\\_Report\\_2013.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2013.pdf)

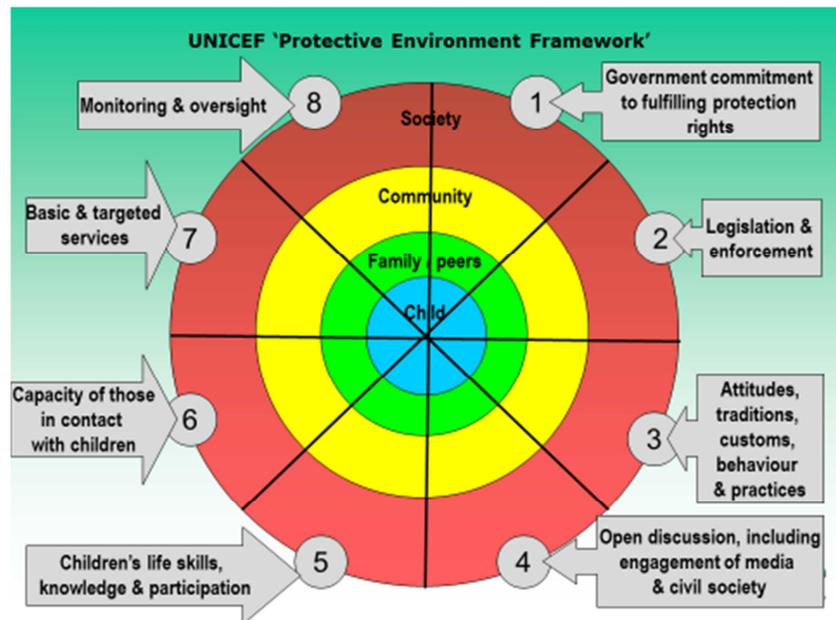
<sup>2</sup> During the field work, 'sexual harassment' was referred to at community level as 'eve teasing'. For the purposes of this report, however, the preferred term of 'sexual harassment' is used, except in direct quotations where the text remains faithful to the original language.

<sup>3</sup> As with the term 'eve teasing' (used locally but replaced throughout this report with the term 'sexual harassment', except in direct quotations), the term 'domestic violence' was used locally but has been replaced throughout the report for greater clarity by the terms 'intimate partner violence (IPV)', 'family violence' and 'violence against women and girls (VAWG) in the home', depending on the context.

<sup>4</sup> 'The Protective Environment: Development Support for Child Protection', Karin Landgren, in *Human Rights Quarterly*, 2005 [<http://www.unicef.org/tdad/karinlandgrenarticle.pdf>, accessed 17 July 2014], and *UNICEF Child Protection Strategy*, June 2008 [<http://www.unicef.org/tdad/unicefcpstrategyjune08.pdf>, accessed 17 July 2014].

## 1. Government commitment to fulfilling protection rights:

- **Lack of interest / sensitivity / awareness among duty-bearers:** standing committees in UPs (local councils) rarely devote any attention to child protection issues; local government bodies lack awareness about and sensitivity to child rights issues and do not consider them in their development plans.



## 2. Legislation and enforcement:

- **Gaps in legislation:** no legislation to stop violence against women at the family level although there are laws against child marriage, dowry, acid throwing and 'women and children repression'.
- **Impunity and lack of enforcement of legislation and policies:** because socio-cultural norms regarding child abuse result in greater suffering and social exclusion for the abused than for the abuser, incidents of abuse are not usually reported. Awareness of the illegality of child marriage has little bearing on behaviour because customary laws, social norms and poverty-driven economic needs often trump national policies and legislation.

## 3. Attitudes, traditions, customs, behaviour and practices:

- **Low awareness of rights and gender / lack of a 'rights culture' in general;**
- **Socio-cultural norms:** marriage is considered necessary and inevitable by children and adults; it is the parent's responsibility to marry their daughters and protect their chastity until they are married; fear of sexual violence on the one hand and girls choosing to begin sexual activity on the other hand lead to child marriage of daughters (fuelled by the trend for self-initiated child marriages); primary role for women is seen as that of wife and mother and parents therefore see little merit in delaying a girl's marriage once she reaches puberty; men's relative power in decision-making also means that girls are rarely encouraged to express their opinions to adult males in the household, particularly with regard to major life choices like the timing of marriage and choice of spouse. Sons are more likely to be heard. In some contexts, a daughter is treated as a commodity and exchanged in marriage in return for a bride for the son of the house, irrespective of her age. The rationale that only young girls are sexually attractive to men highlights the importance given to men's desires.

### Patriarchal values as factors in child marriage<sup>5</sup>

- Emphasis on virginity – fear of sexual violence, compounded by insecure public spaces.
- Fear of elopement – damage to family honour.
- Poor communication between parents and girls -inexperience of girls in articulating dissent and negotiation.
- Women and girls as commodities for exchange between families.
- Belief that men are only attracted to young girls.

- **Religious and cultural barriers** to discuss and seek ASRH services.

<sup>5</sup> Asia Child Marriage Initiative: Summary of Research in Bangladesh, India and Nepal, Plan Asia Regional Office and International Centre for research on Women (ICRW), 2013, p.27.

- **Safety and security:** parents feel that an unmarried girl is vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse. Marriage is seen as a preventative measure to protect young girls from potential danger. Sexual harassment to and from school can lead to taking girls out of school.
- **Fear of the rise of Islamic extremism** / push back against 'western' values (see section 8.2.1 for further discussion of this issue).

#### 4. Open discussion, including engagement of media and civil society:

- **Lack of capacity, coordination and collaboration between CSOs** working on child protection; lack of capacity and skills; due to the extremely sensitive nature of speaking out on girls and young women's rights and other harmful practices CSOs have been reluctant to compromise their relationships with communities and government. They also work in isolation and fear of sharing ideas and resources due to false competition. They are also sometimes politically biased (resulting in 'under' or 'over' engagement with government).
- **Culture of silence / lack of open discussion:** People of all social categories fear negative sanctions when they disrespect the taboo by breaking the silence about the practice of rights violations of girls and young women and other harmful traditions.

#### 5. Children's life skills, knowledge and participation:

- **Lack of child agency / participation:** socio-cultural norms discourage children from expressing their opinions before adults and participating in decision-making processes; rarely take part in school management activities or make decisions about their reproductive health; not fully aware of their rights and lack the capacity to claim their entitlements; not involved in monitoring the child rights situation (including shadow UNCRC reporting).
- **Self-initiated marriages** by young girls (and boys) occur with and without parental consent – increase linked to increased intermingling of girls and boys in schools and access to mobile phones.

#### 6. Capacity of those in contact with children:

- **Poverty:** school drop-out for girls (both a cause and consequence) due to hidden costs; in some contexts, parents need to give a smaller dowry for younger girls; poor parents sometimes marry a younger daughter along with an older sibling to avoid the costs of a separate marriage later. A period of relative financial success (such as a good harvest) may bring parents to decide to marry a daughter before the dowry needed disappears into other household costs.

#### 7. Basic and targeted services:

- **Lack of education and high levels of illiteracy** due to hidden costs<sup>6</sup> and poor quality with very high drop-out rates; boys are prioritised over girls for continued education (primary enrolment is greater for girls but girls achieve poorer outcomes and are more likely to be withdrawn from school due to poverty, domestic chores and child marriage); preference for boys' over girls' education in face of limited resources and if a girl is not in school, parents are more likely to get her married; however, even girls from poor families continue with their education if there is determination and a desire to study; research links education levels to GBV – both males as perpetrators and females as victims/survivors; school drop-out is both a cause and a consequence in relation to GBV; women with more years of education marry later; being enrolled in school was not enough to delay marriage of girls but girls who were not enrolled were very likely to have their marriages arranged.
- **Low levels of birth registration:** 40% of births have not been registered and ages are falsified for child marriage. The government is addressing this issue, but there is much room for improvement.

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<sup>6</sup> Up to 1/3 of a poor family's expenditure goes to primary-level education / 73% of students drop out because of poverty.

- No clear consensus on whether **engagement in paid work** led to a delay in a girl's marriage. More than engagement in paid work per se, it seems to be the nature of her work and the level of education that is more likely to prevent child marriage.
- **Rapid urban migration** resulting in insecurity, criminality and poor housing;
- **Limited opportunities** available to women / limited exposure to possibilities for women.

#### 8. Monitoring and oversight:

- **Structural weaknesses:** weak governance, endemic corruption, centralised institutions, and the lack of democratic mechanisms for public participation.

However, it must be remembered that, as in any country, there is a huge range of experience amongst women and girls based on individual circumstances, even within the same socio-economic stratum. For example, one highly educated and professional, middle class working woman in Dhaka City can make her own decisions regarding most things (except, perhaps, a major household expenditure), whereas another has very limited decision-making power in the household and, even when heavily pregnant, is made to wait by her mother-in-law until all the male members of the household have eaten first – even if the only male member of the household present is a 2-year-old boy. At the rural level, one girl is allowed by her family to continue into secondary education with a view to going to university whereas her next-door neighbour is married at the age of 14 against her wishes.

### 3.3 Plan Bangladesh country strategy

Plan has been operating in Bangladesh since 1994. It currently operates in eight districts: Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat and Dinajpur in the north; Gazipur in the centre; Barguna in the south; Jessore and Satkhira in the border belt; and Dhaka City. It implements sponsorship programmes through its 'child centred community development approach' which involves establishing community fora to draw up community development plans, funded through sponsorship resources. In addition, it implements grant-funded programmes.

The Plan Bangladesh Country Strategic Plan (CSP) (July 2010 – June 2015) prioritises four programme areas: Quality Primary Education; Community-Managed Health Care; Protection of Vulnerable Children (POVC); and Disaster Risk Management. The majority of interventions relevant to GBV fall under the POVC programme (see Section 6 for more details). The CSP states that the 'Enabling Environment Programme' from the previous CSP (which addressed participation, protection and gender) will be mainstreamed into these four programmes. None of the current CSP's 'five key results' under 'desired impact' relate to gender or GBV.

## 4. PU context

Dinajpur, which volunteered to take part in the research, is the longest-established PU in Bangladesh (approximately 20 years) and is one of the country's most poverty-ridden rural districts. It is disaster-prone with seasonal food crisis (*monga*) and vulnerability to child trafficking due to its proximity to neighbouring country borders: it is only 8km from the Indian border; men from both sides can get an 8-hour visa to work in neighbouring country fields for the day; some fathers and brothers sell their daughters and sisters to traffickers. The remoteness of the area deprives most poor people from accessing development services. Poverty and fundamentalism are major threats to the protection and participation of girls and women in this area.

Dinajpur implements five projects under the POVC programme: Rights and Empowerment (through

sponsorship); and four grant-funded projects - Stop Child Marriage<sup>7</sup>; Girl Power Project; Protecting Human Rights; and Youth Employment Development.

## 5. Community context



Within Dinajpur PU, Plan works mainly in two *Upazilas* or sub-districts (Chirir Bandor and Khansama). For the research, one *Union Parishad* (local council) was selected from each of these *Upazilas* (Tetulia – closer to the main Plan office - and Alokjhari –more remote and with greater ethnic diversity).

The communities are very rural, relying predominantly on subsistence and commercial agriculture, which is very vulnerable to climate changes. Most of the

work is done by hand with very few animal ploughs, let alone mechanisation. Men are also involved in brick-making, logging, construction, clay extraction, rickshaw driving and running market and roadside shops and stalls.



Village houses are typically thatched wooden huts, with families grouped around a beaten earth courtyard. Many families keep a small selection of animals such as chickens and goats – cared for by women, although they may not be allowed to keep

any money from the sale of eggs etc. which goes directly to their husbands. Women take care of the household and children and work in the family fields. Women in Alokjhari explained that they sometimes also work as day labourers in other people's fields, but this is organised by their husbands who keep the money earned. They felt embarrassed to tell us about this kind of work as it is considered shameful and a sign of poverty for a woman to have to work in someone else's fields. Some girls ride bicycles in this area, although it is not common in the whole of the country, and some female Plan staff ride motorbikes, although one Area Coordinator states that hard line Muslim men call after her in disapproval using a term reserved for "when you see something really bad".

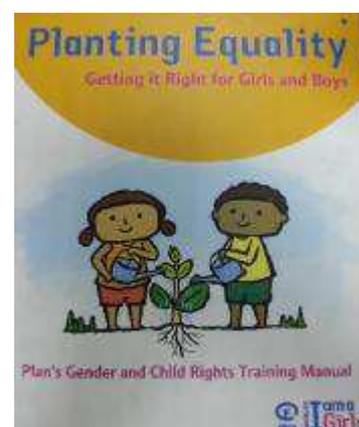
<sup>7</sup> According to the PU POVC Programme Coordinator, in Dinajpur, the mean age of child marriage has increased from 15 in 2012 to 17.62 in 2014.

## 6. Plan Bangladesh approaches and projects relevant to gender discrimination and GBV

### 6.1 Mainstreaming gender

There has been a recent push in Plan Bangladesh to mainstream gender in a much more coordinated and concerted way. A **Gender Equality Self-Assessment Report (GESA)** was conducted in February-March 2014 through FGDs, KIIs, an online survey and a literature review but it was not available for review in time for this report. The new Country Director, in place since 2014, is very gender sensitive and there is a strong belief at CO level that gender needs to be 'mainstreamed' across all areas of Plan Bangladesh's work. Based on GESA, the Gender Adviser is currently leading the development of Plan Bangladesh's first **5-year plan on 'gender transformation'**. This will be supplemented by the programmatic annual '**Gender Strategic Review Tool**', based on Plan International policy. Staff '**Individual Action Plans**' (which form the basis for performance reviews) might also include specific components on gender.

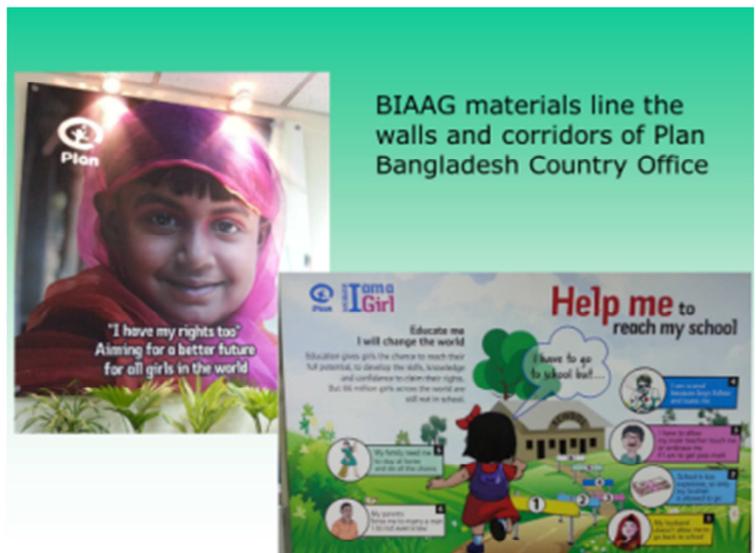
A core team of approximately 20 trainers from all sectors was trained at CO level and has been rolling out a **3-day gender training workshop to all Plan staff at field level**. 186 staff have already been trained by the core team as of mid-June, supported by the Gender Advisor acting as course coordinator. By 2015 all staff in Plan's partner organisation will also be trained. This training is based on the Plan International manual "Planting Equality: Getting it Right for Girls and Boys". According to the CO Gender Adviser, the training is expanding staff understanding of 'gender' beyond just being seen as synonymous with 'girls' or 'women'. She emphasises the need for regular refresher or 'booster' training on gender and the need to provide a safe space in which staff can speak out freely, without fear of negative recriminations at work.



In addition to this training, a **gender mainstreaming 'concept note'** is being developed, setting out a gender review tool which will help set specific gender indicators for *all* new projects or programmes being developed, regardless of their specific thematic focus. Gender will also become a key criterion for **selecting and working with partners**, in the same way that commitment to child protection is already considered to be non-negotiable in partnerships. All partners are gradually developing a Gender Policy with technical assistance from Plan.

In terms of **monitoring and evaluation**, although the current CSP does not include any gender-specific results or indicators, general data is sex-disaggregated and analysed on the basis of 'exclusion' (whether this refers to gender or other factors). The CO Head of MER is leading a process to move away from 'process-based' MER to 'results-based' MER. The indicators in the current results framework are being reviewed and new indicators will be developed as part of the process of formulating the new CSP which will come into force in July 2015. A draft of the new CSP will be ready by December 2014, based on a new child rights situation analysis and evaluation of the current CSP. It is hoped that the new CSP will strongly apply the gender lens throughout and that it will set out requirements to explicitly measure and assess progress towards gender transformation. In this way gender can also be integrated more strongly into the process of the annual 'participatory programme review'. Gender is also a 'key performance result' for reporting to the Asia Regional Office.

The Plan International campaign ‘**Because I am a Girl**’ (BIAAG) started as a ‘campaign’ in Bangladesh and had notable media success. For example, the first woman from Bangladesh to climb Mount Everest did so under the BIAAG banner and a lot of communications materials have been produced for BIAAG. However, according some CO staff, it has the potential to become an easily recognizable vehicle through which to promote gender mainstreaming in Plan Bangladesh, to link disparate project work and to map out gaps and give a comprehensive overview.



The international researcher observed that BIAAG posters and communications materials are highly visible throughout every floor of the CO building, acting as a visible ‘gender reminder’ for staff.

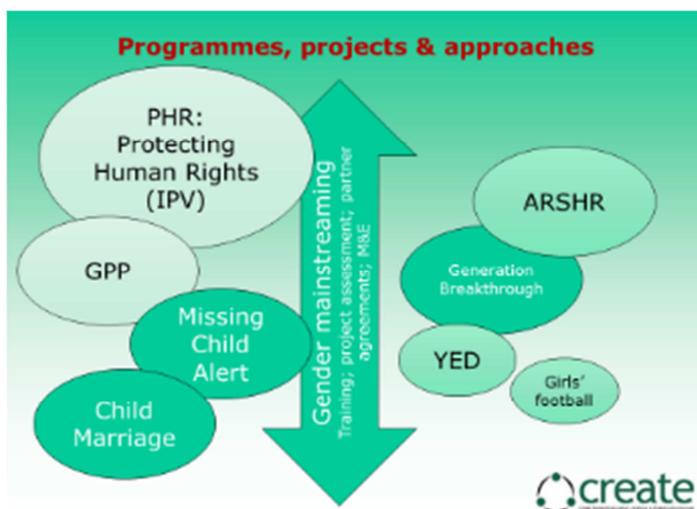
A lot of the gender mainstreaming work is very recent and it will take time to assess the impact. Staff interviewed at CO level expressed interest in this work and lots of the female staff, plus some men, were keen to see how it will address attitudes of staff outside as well as inside the workplace, particularly regarding gender roles in the home:

- *I would not say that gender is fully mainstreamed. We are working on staff sensitisation but practically it is not saturated. (Female CO staff member)*
- *We’re not comfortable to discuss gender and development. The role of the Gender Adviser is seen as ‘Alexander the Great’, like a dictator. (Female CO staff member)*
- *Plan has a gender equality policy but there are still gaps at staff and community levels. Most field managers are male and fieldworkers are female. The Country Director and some advisers are female but this is not gender equality. (Female CO staff member)*
- *Within Plan it would be good to map the stereotypes we have, which are very subtle and unconscious. Without addressing these personal issues, any gender equality programme will be superficial. (Male CO staff member)*
- *Plan has good online courses on programme cycle management, finance and so on, but nothing organisation-wide on gender. (Male CO staff member)*

## 6.2 Plan Bangladesh projects relevant to gender discrimination and VAWG

The majority of projects working explicitly on gender issues fall under the POVC programme. In addition to sponsorship-funded work on ‘Rights and Empowerment’ through the development and capacity building of community groups, Plan Bangladesh has a number of donor-funded projects of various sizes:

- Protecting Human Rights
- Girl Power Project
- Generation Breakthrough
- Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights programme
- Stop Child Marriage
- Missing Child Alert
- Girls Football Project
- Youth Economic Development Programme



Each of these projects is described in detail in Appendix 5, along with an analysis by Plan Bangladesh staff of their strengths and weaknesses. Additional comments by staff can be found in sections 8 and 9.

## 7. Community reflections on discriminatory social norms

(Findings from FGDs, community-level KIs and observations)

This section highlights the extent to which FGD groups in both communities, Tetulia and Alokjhari, spontaneously (i.e. without prompting) raised issues relating to GBV and gender discrimination during the FGD group exercises. In Tetulia this was during the 'gender lifelines exercises', when discussing positive and negative life experiences for girls/women and boys/men at different ages (0-10 / 11-19 / 20-40 / over 40). In Alokjhari this was during the 'power spectrum exercises', when discussing characteristics of empowered and disempowered girls/women and boys/men.

Responses from the small group work, 32 flipcharts in total, were coded to identify issues relating to either GBV or gender discrimination. This resulted in 200 issues being identified in total for Tetulia (57 explicit mentions of GBV and 143 mentions of gender discrimination) and 241 issues being identified in Alokjhari (42 explicit mentions of GBV and 199 mentions of gender discrimination). The issues relating explicitly to GBV are presented in section 7.1: child marriage, sexual harassment, IPV, dowry and other types of GBV. The issues relating to gender discrimination are presented in section 7.2: household work / childcare / taking family responsibility and decisions, economic independence, psychological issues, education, expressing opinions, reputation / honour / justice, bad behaviour, freedom of movement, health / basic needs, community work, religion and other issues. Section 7.3 looks at further at the 'power spectrum exercises' from Alokjhari. Section 7.4 draws together FGD discussions around what works and what doesn't work to achieve change, the barriers to change and how to overcome these.

### 7.1 Gender-based violence

(child marriage, intimate partner violence, sexual harassment, dowry and dowry-related violence, other violence against women and girls such as rape and trafficking etc.)

#### Overview for Tetulia

- 57 issues relating explicitly to GBV were identified during the 8 FGDs in Tetulia which looked at positive and negative life experiences of girls, women, boys and men - out of a total of 200 issues relating to gender in general.
- 58% (n=33) of these mentions of GBV came from the female FGD groups and 42% (n=24) from the males. In other words, the female groups raised issues of GBV more frequently than the male groups.

- Female FGD groups raise GBV issues more frequently in relation to female experience (21/33) – mostly as victims/survivors, and male groups more in relation to male experience (17/24) – mostly as perpetrators.
- 20-40 year-old men made no mention of GBV at all.
- Men over 40 only mentioned GBV in relation to men as perpetrators, not to women as victims/survivors
- In Tetulia, each of the FGD groups was asked to prioritise 3 negative life experiences they had identified for girls/women and 3 for boys/men that they would like to change. 12/18<sup>8</sup> (67%) of the priority issues selected by the female FGD groups related to GBV (5 x sexual harassment, 3 x IPV, 3 x child marriage, 1 x dowry). This compares to only 8/24 (33%) of the priority issues selected by the male FGD groups (2 x sexual harassment, 2 x child marriage, 1 x IPV, 1 x dowry-related violence, 1 x trafficking and other violence against women, 1 x 'men not behaving well towards women and children'). In other words, the female FGD groups in Tetulia put a higher priority on addressing GBV compared to the male groups.

### Overview for Alokjhari

- 42 issues relating explicitly to GBV were identified during the 8 FGDs in Alokjhari which looked at characteristics of empowered and disempowered girls/women and boys/men - out of a total of 241 issues relating to gender in general.
- 64% (n=27) of these mentions of GBV came from the female FGD groups and 36% (n=15) from the males. As in Tetulia, the female groups raised issues of GBV more frequently than the male groups.
- In contrast to the Tetulia exercise, female FGD groups raise GBV issues more frequently in relation to the male power spectrum (14/27) and male groups more in relation to the female power spectrum (10/15).
- As with Tetulia, 20-40 year-old men made no mention of GBV at all in relation to women.
- Men over 40 did not mention GBV in relation to men.

### 7.1.1 (Child marriage (CM))

CM was the most commonly mentioned type of GBV in both communities, accounting for 18 out of 57 total mentions of GBV for Tetulia (8 mentions by female groups, 10 by male groups) and 11 out of 42 total mentions of GBV in Alokjhari (6 mentions by female groups, 5 by male groups). CM was given roughly the same attention by both female and male FGDs. In Alokjhari 9/11 times it was mentioned by groups under the age of 20.

CM was always considered to be negative, being associated 8/11 times in Alokjhari with female lack of power. All of the female FGDs in Tetulia mentioned it as a negative life experience for 11-19 year-olds girls *and* boys.

- *I got married at 12 and was pregnant at 14. It was very tough to take care of the baby and my own needs. This is why I'm against child marriage.* (45-year-old woman, Tetulia)
- *Under 18, girls are not physically or mentally developed.* [There was no mention of rights in these discussions] (16 and 18-year-old girls, Tetulia)
- *Powerless girls our age become victims of child marriage because parents think they're a burden.* (16-19 year-old boys, Alokjhari)

However, discussions revealed a lot of complexity around attitudes. For example, some groups considered it negative in the case of 'love CM' and were disapproving of girls and/or boys selecting their own partners.

- *Now girls have mobile phones and communicate with boys. Parents are worried about their girls getting into trouble so are arranging child marriages, even though they know it's bad.* (18-year-old girl, Tetulia)

<sup>8</sup> The women aged 20-40 did not do the prioritisation exercise due to lack of time.

- *In the last 5 years I have been approached by about five or six families wanting child marriage and this happens in the case of 'love matches' where the girl and boy have run away to a neighbouring village. When they come back they have to get married due to social norms. The ages involved in these cases ranged from 17-21, but with 15 in one case. Sometimes the couple are the same age, sometimes there is a few years' age difference.* (Dipak Chakraborti, Purohit (Hindu religious leader), Tetulia)

As well as mentioning CM in relation to 11-19 year-olds, male FGDs in Tetulia also cited it three times in relation to women and men over 40 either arranging or preventing it. Likewise, in Alokjhari, on 2/11 occasions older men stated that women over 40 create pressure for it to happen. In Alokjhari, trying to stop CM is associated with a 'powerful'<sup>9</sup> person.

- *If a girl is well educated, she encourages others to stop doing child marriage. Her family thinks about her like and dislikes.* (12-15 year-old girls, Alokjhari)

There were several discussions about the changing ages of marriage across generations.

- *My mother got married aged 4. My parents had a very good friendship but now girls are aware of their rights and boys are aware of their power. This causes a clash and leads to more emotional and physical violence.* (32-year-old woman, Tetulia)
- *Our grandmothers got married at 10. We got married at 13. The age is increasing but it's still happening. We will marry our daughters at 18.* (25-year-old woman, Tetulia)
- *Before it used to be aged 9-10 but now it has increased up to when children are mature – about 18. As children get education and parents get more awareness about the law, this has led to a change in the situation. I advise people that the perfect age for marriage is 25 for women and 30 for men, although I know that the legal age is 18.* (Dipak Chakraborti, Purohit (Hindu religious leader), Tetulia)

The female Union Parishad (local council) member interviewed stated:

- *Child marriage is a big problem nowadays. Girls get married young but want to go back to live with their parents. If a girl or boy has [sexual] relations and the parents force them to marry someone else it causes a problem in the community and problems for the couple later in life. Child marriage is very common in the Union but the rate is decreasing. Within one month, if there are ten marriages then one of these will be a child marriage. A few days ago there was a child marriage. Both were underage and had started higher secondary education.* (Chobi Rani, female UP member, Tetulia)

The imam interviewed from Alokjhari, however, gave a different impression of the scale of the problem:

- *Child marriage requests are not frequent. They happen maybe once in two years.* (Abdul Salam, Imam, Kanchama sub-district mosque, Alokjhari)

None of the girls or boys in the FGDs (aged 12-19) were married yet and they all stated their intention to get married over the age of 18. A lot of emphasis was put on the need for economic independence before getting married. For example, 16-19 year-old boys in Tetulia said they'll get married aged approximately 28 to a woman aged 25. They also said they want to let their future wives work. 12-15 year-old boys in Alokjhari want to get married at age 21-25. Of the ten 16-19 year-old boys in Alokjhari, five wanted to get married age 25 and five over age 25. Six of them want their wife to be age 20-25 and the others want their wives to be over 25.

- *I have to get established first, then get married. Girls under 18 are like a child. They can't concentrate on the household. They want to go and play outside like a child.* (15-year-old boy, Alokjhari)

<sup>9</sup> Whenever 'powerful' or 'powerless' women and men are referenced in these discussions it refers to the characteristics the FGD participants in Alokjhari attributed to boys, girls, men and women of their own age in the community who they perceive to be 'powerful' or 'powerless' (see section 2.4.1 for a description of the methodology). It was up to each group how they interpreted this, and the details of specific characteristics are integrated throughout the findings here, but generally speaking 'powerful' people were those perceived to be better educated, with higher incomes, able to provide for their families, with more freedom, and living in happy, violence-free families with harmony between different family members. 'Powerless' people exhibit the opposite characteristics.

- *If girls get married at 18 they can study, earn money and contribute to their in-law's family. This will generally increase their power and status and society will be improved.* (20-40 year-old women, Tetulia)
- *I want to marry after I'm 18 because of population growth. If you have children early then they will have their children early and there'll be too many people.* (15-year-old boy, Alokjhari)

### ***7.1.2 Sexual harassment***

This was the second most commonly cited GBV issue in Tetulia, accounting for 14/57 total mentions of GBV (8 mentions by female groups, 6 by male groups) and the third most commonly cited GBV issue in Alokjhari, accounting for 8/42 total mentions of GBV (3 mentions by female groups, 5 by male groups). In one case in Tetulia, 16-19 year-old boys complained about groups of girls 'teasing' single boys in the street, but the vast majority of cases are females being harassed by males.

- *Powerless girls of our age become victims of eve teasing and some boys do this along with smoking and sometimes taking alcohol* (12-15 and 16-19 year-old boys, Alokjhari)
- *[Bad] men our age have a 'bad eye' towards other women in the community [i.e. leer at them].* (Women over 40, Alokjhari)
- *Girls wear sensitive clothes so they're victims of eve teasing* (16-19 year-old girl, Tetulia)

Nearly all of the mentions of sexual harassment in Tetulia referred to adolescents, i.e. 11-19 year-olds girls experiencing it and 11-19 year-old boys perpetrating it. However, the 12-15 year-old girls mentioned it as a negative experience of girls as young as under 10, and 16-19 year-old girls mentioned sexual harassment not just of girls but also of women aged 20-40 at home, on the road and in the office. In general it was given more attention by the female groups in Tetulia, but – interestingly – none of the 20-40 year-olds (women or men) mentioned it at all. In Alokjhari it was particularly mentioned by younger males (under 40) and older women (over 40).

20-40 year-old women in Alokjhari cited it in the context of women being powerful when – experiencing sexual harassment in the community – they continue to go out anyway.

- *Sometimes when women our age go outside the community, people tease them on the road. Although they are teased, powerful women are still going out.* (20-40 year-old women, Alokjhari)

Older boys in Tetulia were asked how they think girls feel about it.

- *Sometimes the girl likes it, sometimes she gets angry, cries or reciprocates. It depends on the situation. If the girl is with her relatives she gets angry, but if she's with her friends she enjoys it.* (16-19 year-old boys, Tetulia)
- *Both girls and boys enjoy it in early adolescence but as they get more mature they get angry.* (16-19 year-old boys, Tetulia)

This raises the question to what extent some degree of so-called 'eve teasing' is considered – by both boys and girls - to be an opportunity for flirting, depending on the context and whether it is mutually desired.

- *Society gives no opportunity for boys and girls to talk together.* (12-15 year-old boys, Alokjhari)

At the other end of the spectrum, 16-19 year-old boys in Alokjhari link it to girls committing suicide.

- *The parents, family and even the girl herself feels ashamed to be a victim of eve teasing and sometimes the girl commits suicide.* (16-19 year-old boys, Alokjhari)

### ***7.1.3 Intimate partner violence (IPV) and family violence***

This was the second most commonly cited GBV issue in Alokjhari, accounting for 10/42 mentions of GBV (8 mentions by female groups, 2 by male groups) and it was the third most commonly cited GBV issue in Tetulia, accounting for 11/57 total mentions of GBV (7 mentions by female groups, 4 by male groups).

In Tetulia, it was the most commonly mentioned type of GBV for female groups when talking about the negative life experience of females – especially in relation to women aged 20-40.

- *Sometimes women aged 20-40 are being tortured in the family.* (20-40 year-old women, Tetulia)
- *Our husband gives us food to eat and a stick to beat us.* (40-year-old woman, Tetulia)
- *It's very usual and almost a right for a husband to be angry and beat his wife. It's not that big a deal.* (40-year-old woman, Tetulia)

It is important to note how frequently IPV was raised by the female groups and how infrequently, if at all, by the male groups. Whereas all four female age groups in Tetulia raised it in relation to women's experiences, only the 16-19 year-old males cited it as being a problem for women. In Alokjhari, no male groups at all mentioned it being perpetrated by males or experienced by females, but it was mentioned by all of the female groups, half of the mentions referring to female lack of power (as victims/survivors, including one mention of suicide and one other mention of death as a result) and half referring to male lack of power (males perpetrating violence were perceived to be on the negative side of the power spectrum compared to males who behave well and provide for their families). Similarly, both women and men over 40 in Tetulia cited it as a negative life experience of male perpetrators.

- *Girls of our age without power experience child marriage, family violence and might even commit suicide because of the violence in their husbands' houses. Boys of our age without power commit violence against their wives as they don't understand the consequences of this because they got married early [they were excusing the IPV committed by young boys in child marriages].* (12-15 year-old girls, Alokjhari)
- *For women over 40, it is common that a man will beat his wife at least once a week – like medicine. He believes if he doesn't do this she will leave and be independent.* (Nurafa Arju, Plan Area Coordinator, Dinajpur PU, Alokjhari)

Older women in Alokjhari also emphasised psychological violence.

- *Sometimes our husbands beat us. [Bad] men of our age beat and torture their wives over very small things. They always tell their wives to leave the house, even after a very small quarrel.* (Women over 40, Alokjhari)
- *We experienced lots of violence when our husbands were younger. The physical violence is now less than before because both men and women are weaker. Some still experience physical violence but the mental stress for all of us is very strong, from our sons as well as our husbands.* (Women over 40, Alokjhari)

The two mentions of family violence by male groups in Alokjhari were men over 40 stating it is done by mothers-in-law.

- *Newly married daughters-in-law are tortured by their mother-in-law and sister-in-law and the mother-in-law takes the daughter-in-law's sari, telling her to leave the house. Usually women under 40 are victims of family violence but over 40 they commit it.* (Men over 40, Alokjhari)

### ***7.1.4 Dowry***

In Tetulia this accounted for 5/57 total mentions of GBV (3 mentions by female groups, 2 by male groups) and 4/42 mentions of GBV in Alokjhari. However, in Tetulia it was mentioned only in relation to boys' and men's life experiences, not girls and women. 'Taking dowry' was considered in Tetulia to be a negative action done by males and this was noted twice by 12-15 year-old girls and once by 20-40 year-old women. In Alokjhari, taking dowry is also associated with the negative side of the male power spectrum.

- *Most of the time parents of powerless boys our age arrange marriage so they can take dowry and improve the economic conditions in the family.* (12-15 year-old girls, Alokjhari)

However, one 45-year-old woman in the Tetulia small group discussions was questioning why her group wanted to include 'taking dowry' as a negative action by men. Apparently the practice is so common that she did not realise it was bad, although others in her group thought it was. Furthermore, some women over 40 in Alokjhari indicated that it is good for a man to arrange a dowry for his daughter.

- *Good men of our age save money and arrange a wedding and a dowry for their daughters.* (Women over 40, Alokjhari)

12-15 year-old boys in Tetulia criticised men over 40 taking dowry during their son's wedding, but only one group (16-19 year-old boys) linked it explicitly to men perpetrating dowry-related violence against women. Dowry-related violence was also mentioned in Alokjhari.

- *A 16-year-old girl got married in this school a few days ago and the groom's family took dowry. Most people are illiterate and take dowry. Lots of women are victims of violence as a result of dowry, so it's a bad thing.* (14-year-old girl, Alokjhari)
- *There are about 7-8 cases of violence against women per month with about 1-3 related to dowry.* (Krishna Kumar Sarkar, Police Inspector, Sub-District – Kanchama Police Station, Alokjhari)

A 45-year-old woman in Tetulia, during general discussions following the group exercises, linked dowry to violence by in-laws rather than by husbands.

- *The amount for dowry is increasing on a daily basis causing violence by in-laws. There is no implementation of the law.* (45-year-old woman, Tetulia)

Apart from the explicit references to violence, there was no particular discussion of why 'taking dowry' was considered to be negative. However, the high cost of dowry is likely to be a factor.

- *When girls get to our age, parents get worried they'll have to give dowry. This is a cause of worry for families.* (12-15 year-old boys, Alokjhari)

According to the Hindu *purohit* (religious leader) interviewed in Tetulia<sup>10</sup>, "dowry has become a disease in society, for both Muslims and Hindus". According to him, the minimum amount for a dowry is 80,000 to 100,000 *taka* (approximately £600-750 GBP). If a girl or woman is empowered and earns money, or is pretty, the dowry is less. If the future husband is working in a good job with a high income, the dowry is very big. He gave the example of a marriage a few days ago between a male eye doctor and a female Masters student where the dowry was 1,700,000 *taka* (approximately £12,900 GBP). Apparently, if the woman wasn't so highly educated her family would have had to have paid even more, presumably because a highly educated, high-earning husband is greatly sought after, with much competition amongst potential brides' families. In this competition, a highly educated woman has more to offer in terms of compatible companionship and potential higher earning power for the family longer term, and thus she is able to 'offset' these attributes against the greater financial incentive (dowry) that would need to be offered by a bride who does not have these advantages. He states that some Hindu marriages happen without dowry if the father of the groom requests this, not on the basis that he is educated (and disagrees with dowry in principle) but because he is very religious and understands that Hinduism actually prohibits dowry: "The practice of dowry is cultural, not religious and most people only follow Hinduism superficially." He has conducted about six marriages without dowry in the last five years.

According to Nurafa Arju, Plan Area Coordinator, Dinajpur PU, Alokjhari:

- *If a boy gets spoiled and the parents arrange a marriage for him, they will select a highly educated girl who is working but will not ask for a dowry as the girl will be expected to support the family.*

### ***7.1.5 other types of GBV***

These accounted for 9/57 total mentions of GBV in Tetulia (7 mentions by female groups, 2 by male groups) and 9/42 total mentions of GBV in Alokjhari (7 mentions by female groups, 2 by male

<sup>10</sup> KII with Dipak Chakraborti, Purohit, Tetulia, 23 March 2014.

groups). Girls aged 12-15 and 16-19 in Tetulia both mentioned suicide of women aged 20-40 as a result of GBV.

Girls aged 12-15 in Tetulia and Alokjhari mentioned 'rape', along with 20-40 year-old women in Alokjhari - who also referenced marital rape in relation to female powerlessness: "*some can refuse sex, but not all*" (20-40 year-old women, Alokjhari).

Other types of physical and psychological violence - such as trafficking, murder, kidnapping and 'violence against women' in general - were mentioned in Tetulia by girls aged 16-19, boys aged 12-15 and men over 40. 16-19 year-old girls in Alokjhari talked about powerless women "living like a slave" in the household and women over 40 in Alokjhari stated:

- *[Less powerful men] always tell women to leave the house, even after a very small quarrel.* (Women over 40, Alokjhari)

Girls aged 16-19 in Tetulia mentioned women being forced into prostitution by poverty and insecurity. 12-15 year-old girls in Tetulia mentioned women over 40 perpetrating violence against children. 16-19 year-old girls and 12-15 year-old boys in Alokjhari mention boys experiencing corporal punishment at home but this was not brought up as being experienced by girls.

According to the Police Inspector interviewed at the Sub-District Kanchama Police Station, Alokjhari<sup>11</sup>:

- *Simple cases like simple land disputes, misunderstandings and 'quarrels' between husbands and wives are dealt with by the Community Policing Committee [and salish – the non-formal community justice system]. Cases like serious violence, murder and rape are dealt with by the police. The majority of serious cases are land disputes. The most serious cases are, for example, murder [of men] in relation to land disputes.*

Cases of rape and sexual assault are sent to court. In his career "of course" he has come across such cases, but he did not have any details to share about local cases and seemed to imply it is not happening this area. Instead he gave an example of a case he "handled very well" in Rangpur: a girl in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade (aged approximately 14) was being sexually harassed. A woman helped lure her to three of these men aged 18, 19 and 20 who raped her and then set fire to her. The police found her already burned and she gave them the names of the men before dying. The Police Inspector did the charge sheet on her behalf and the men received sentences of life imprisonment or the death penalty.

When asked about trafficking cases the Police Inspector replied:

- *There are very few cases of real kidnapping. There are love affairs where girls go willingly but the father doesn't accept this.*

According to Plan Area Coordinator, Dinajpur PU, Alokjhari, Nurafa Arju:

- *Dinajpur is only 8km from the Indian border. Indians can get an eight-hour visa to work in the fields in Bangladesh and vice versa. Fathers and brothers can sell their daughters or sisters to traffickers.*

## 7.2 Gender discrimination

(e.g. access to education, preferential treatment of boys, access to – and types of - economic and other opportunities, and behaviours associated with, or judged differently, for females and males, etc.)

### Overview for Tetulia

- 143 issues relating to gender discrimination were identified during the 8 FGDs in Tetulia which looked at positive and negative life experiences of girls, women, boys and men - out of a total of 200 issues relating to gender in general.

<sup>11</sup> KII with Police Inspector, Krishna Kumar Sarkar, Sub-District – Kanchama Police Station, 27 March 2014, Alokjhari.

- 41% (n=58) of the mentions of gender discrimination came from the female FGD groups and 59% (n=85) from the males. This is the opposite proportion compared to GBV where more issues were cited by female groups.
- 2/18<sup>12</sup> (11%) of the priority issues selected by the female FGD groups related to gender discrimination (16-19 year-old girls complaining about women over 40 getting involved in politics and corruption, and women over 40 complaining about boys aged 0-10 getting mixed up with 'bad friends'). This compares to 12/24 (50%) of the priority issues selected by the male FGD groups (8 relating to females: school drop-out of girls (including for CM), women being upset if their husbands are unemployed, women perpetuating 'old views' about how to treat their daughters, girls and women getting addicted and hanging out with bad boys, girls spending time on mobile phones and computers, and women over 40 suffering from 'female diseases'; 4 relating to males: boys ignoring their parents and watching pornography, taking risks, unemployment and stealing, and feeling helpless and lonely).

### Overview for Alokjhari

- 199 issues relating to gender discrimination were identified during the 8 FGDs in Alokjhari which looked at characteristics of empowered and disempowered girls/women and boys/men - out of a total of 241 issues relating to gender in general.
- 53% (n=106) of the mentions of gender discrimination came from the female FGD groups and 47% (n=93) from the males.
- Both female and male groups had a roughly equal distribution of positive or negative associations with power, however amongst the female groups 32/54 mentions of power were in relation to males (compared to 21/54 for females). Amongst the male groups, 24/45 mentions of power were in relation to males (compared to 21/45 for females).

### *7.2.1 Household work, childcare, taking responsibility for the family and decision-making in the household*

This was the most commonly cited type of gender discrimination in Tetulia, accounting for 32/143 gender discrimination issues in total. It was given equal emphasis by both female and male groups (16 mentions each). 20/32 issues were raised as positive life experiences and 12/32 as being negative. The findings were similar amongst females and males: both associate household work and childcare with females, and financial responsibility for the family with males. Both sexes in Tetulia were mostly positive about women enjoying being wives and mothers, for example, the following issues raised by 16-19 year-old girls and women over 40 in Tetulia were all considered positive: girls aged 11-19 start cooking; women aged 20-40 do household work, take care of babies and children, like family life and enjoy being a mother; women over 40 try to keep the family well and healthy.

However, amongst the negative issues raised in Tetulia, the female groups talked more about the burden placed on women whereas the male groups criticised women who do not take proper care of the household and family:

- *11-19 year-old girls don't like their family roles. (Women over 40, Tetulia)*
- *Women aged 20-40 are not able to properly look after and maintain the family and women over 40 don't take care of their husbands when they are sick or as soon as they can no longer earn money. (Men over 40, Tetulia)*

Discrimination in relation to household decision-making accounted for 13 out of 199 mentions of gender discrimination in Alokjhari (8/13 mentions by female groups, 5/13 by males). Once again, females are more powerless compared to males and where they do have decision-making

<sup>12</sup> The women aged 20-40 did not do the prioritisation exercise due to lack of time.

opportunities these are more limited than for males, although it appears that younger girls have a more positive experience than older women.

- *Most [powerless women] can't cook what they want. Usually the man tells them what to cook and he buys the food in the market. Some [powerful women] can cook what they want.* (20-40 year-old women, Alokjhari)
- *Men can do everything according to their will, whenever they want. They can do jobs and business and earn money. They can study at their own will, do farming, go to the bazaar and choose who to marry.* (20-40 year-old women, Alokjhari)
- *Nowadays women and men can make joint decisions about how many children to have.* (20-40 year-old women, Alokjhari). This seemed to be one of the few areas where this is the case.

### ***7.2.2 Economic independence***

This includes opportunities to earn money, make financial decisions, inherit and control assets and take economic responsibility for the family. In Alokjhari this was the single most common issue associated with power, accounting for 33 out of 199 gender discrimination issues in total (17/33 mentions by female FGD groups and 16/33 by males). In Tetulia it was the third most commonly cited gender discrimination issue, accounting for 15 out of 143 issues in total (6/15 mentions by female FGD groups and 9/15 by males). It came up again and again in discussions and was frequently cited as a way forward to combat gender inequality (see Section 8).

The experience of economic independence is heavily gendered in both Tetulia and Alokjhari. In Tetulia, 10 out of 15 times this refers to male experiences and, of these, 9 out of 10 are positive. For example, men can get jobs and earn money.

- *Men over 20 take care of their parents by having a job and they feel good because they can provide financial support.* (Women over 40, Tetulia)

In comparison, of the 5 mentions in Tetulia referring to women, 3 are negative: women have no economic opportunities, are financially dependent on males and will become destitute if their husband leaves or dies.

- *If the husbands of women over 40 left them, they would die.* (20-40 year-old women, Tetulia)

In Alokjhari, the same issue was frequently cited on both sides of the male and female power spectrums, with economic independence strongly associated with power and lack of it associated with lack of power. However, the examples cited of women's economic power in Alokjhari were significantly more limited than the men's: 'most' men have economic power but 'very few' women.

- *We cannot do business in society. If a woman starts a business, they will call her a bad woman and will consider her husband a bad man for not taking care of his wife.* (Women over 40, Alokjhari)
- *Women feel very vulnerable as they don't own any assets.* (42-year-old woman, Alokjhari)
- *When we bring any assets from our fathers, our husbands will search us and act like a policeman, confiscating anything we bring.* (50-year-old woman, Alokjhari)
- *We are allowed to look after chickens, but not allowed to sell the eggs or earn any money from them.* (Women over 40, Alokjhari)
- *If a girl earns money, the man will take her paycheque at the bank.* (Nurafa Arju, Plan Area Coordinator, Dinajpur PU, Alokjhari)

On the other side, men's perceived value, worth and power in the family is strongly and directly linked to his ability to financially provide not only for his wife and children, but also his parents. This places a different kind of stress on men, but 20-40 year-olds in Alokjhari, when questioned directly, said that this did not worry them; instead they felt proud (compared to Tetulia where the same age group of men complained of frustration, stress and mental health problems – see section 7.2.3 below).

- *The family thinks that boys will earn money. They're the tool to earn money. Boys are a source of money.* (17-year-old boy, Alokjhari)

- *The aim in education has changed. Now it's focused on money, not for knowledge. Parents educate boys to take care of them as parents, knowing that the money invested in boys will come back to them. But girls will give money to their husbands, not their parents so it's not worth investing in them. (17-year-old boys, Alokjhari)*

There was a difference between the highly constrained experience of older women and the possibilities open in some cases to younger generations. The older women in Alokjhari just want to be able to sell their eggs. In comparison, a 17-year-old girl from the same community said that her preferred type of work would be either an office job (which would allow her time to do the housework and look after the children), a primary school teacher, or she would like the opportunity to work abroad. It is not clear the extent to which she will be able to achieve these dreams, but her aspirations are higher than the older women in the community.

Not surprisingly, the employment aspirations of boys include a broader range of jobs which are better paid. 12-19 year-old boys in Alokjhari wanted to be engineers, businessmen, teachers, work in a bank or in commerce, be a manager, a doctor and a police officer. 20-40 year-old men in Alokjhari stated:

- *Working in education or health is appropriate for women and men can work in factories or industry. (20-40 year-old men, Alokjhari)*

### ***7.2.3 Psychological issues and problems***

Interestingly, this was the second most common issue in Tetulia, accounting for 17/143 issues relating to gender discrimination in total (4/17 mentions by female FGD groups and 13/17 by males). The majority of these mentions (14/17) refer to females (rather than males) having psychological problems. For example:

- *Girls aged 0-10 start thinking that in this society they will not be able to grow up very well. Parents don't think about the psychological thoughts of girls aged 11-19. Women over 40 feel frustrated in their lives and worry how they will continue their family lives. They don't have anyone to talk to about their lives, even about violence. (Women aged 20-40, Tetulia)*
- *Girls aged 11-19 become depressed all of a sudden for very silly, small things. Women over 20 become introverted and make a very unhappy situation in the family by quarrelling with others. (Men aged 20-40, Tetulia)*

This last issue of 'family harmony' was also picked up in discussions in Alokjhari, accounting for 7/199 issues relating to gender discrimination in total (2/7 mentions by female groups, 5/7 by males). Creating family harmony and getting on well with family members was associated positively with power of both females and males, although the issue itself was raised more by male groups.

- *Some women quarrel, not considering the man's psychological state [women should first consider their husband's mood]. Everyone in the family is unhappy. Sometimes the daughter-in-law complains to her husband about her in-laws and wants to be independent. Because they're newly married, the son follows his wife and doesn't think about his parents. The extended family often separates in this way. Relations between the son and his parents become unhappy. (Men over 40, Alokjhari)*

Back in Tetulia, only 2/17 comments in relation to psychological issues are positive. 16-19 year-old boys state that women over 40 are happy when they can gossip and talk to other women and 12-15 year-old boys state that women over 40 "remember their childhood activities and want to get back to that time", although no further explanation was given for this. The 3/17 issues in Tetulia relating to men were all cited by men aged 20-40 who mentioned 20-40 year-old men feeling "mentally sick" and "losing their judgement" and men over 40 feeling "helpless and lonely". In this same group it was observed during the small group work that one participant was asked: "Why don't you write down that you're an addict?" This man looked physically unwell and had jaundice.

He was embarrassed but wrote instead that men aged 20-40 “become mentally sick”. He also later suggested the following as a way to overcome barriers to change:

- *More individualism. If someone has the responsibility to look after five people he will be unhappy. If he only has to look after himself he'd be very happy.* (25-year-old man, Tetulia)

### **7.2.4 Education**

This was the second strongest association with power in Alokjhari, accounting for 26/199 issues relating to gender discrimination. 16/26 mentions were positive (i.e. educational opportunities relate to power, for both females and males) and 10/26 were negative (i.e. lack of education – both in general and particularly at secondary and tertiary levels - and school drop-out relate to lack of power).

- *Girls don't have equal education and this causes differences.* (17-year-old girl, Alokjhari)
- *Women don't get the chance to get higher education. They're dropping out before this.* (20-40 year-old men, Alokjhari)
- *When girls get the opportunity to study they'll be empowered and not under the power of their fathers and husbands.* (17-year-old girl, Alokjhari)

In Tetulia, education accounted for 10/143 issues relating to gender discrimination in total (6/10 mentions by female FGD groups and 4/10 by males). Once again the positive experiences are associated more with males whereas the negative ones relate to girls and women: boys and men have opportunities for education, including tertiary education whereas girls and women have much more limited opportunities and girls leave education to get married.

- *Lack of proper education for all is the main barrier [to gender equality].* (14-year-old girl, Tetulia)
- *Women aged 20-40 get married, leaving their education.* (20-40 year-old men, Tetulia)
- *Education is the only thing that can help us.* (25-year-old man, Tetulia)

### **7.2.5 Expressing opinions and being listened to**

This was the third strongest correlation with power in Alokjhari, accounting for 21 out of 199 issues relating to gender discrimination, but it was raised much more frequently by female (14/21) than male groups (7/21), possibly indicating the emphasis girls and women place on this whereas it might be assumed that boys and men take this more for granted.

- *Powerless women of our age can't take decisions independently, without their husbands. When these women make decisions, family and society doesn't accept this. They can't take decisions to buy anything or about expenses in the family. In the family it is an unequal situation. If a man makes a bad decision, nothing is said. If a woman has a good idea, she is always put down. However, some women [implication being that this is a minority] can express their opinions and take decisions like buying things for their children. If they earn money then everyone in the family listens to them.* (20-40 year-old men, Alokjhari)
- *When discussing things in the community, if boys our age interrupt to disagree, the elders don't accept this and don't give importance to their opinions.* (16-19 year-old boys, Alokjhari)

In Tetulia, this accounted for 5 out of 143 issues relating to gender discrimination, all mentioned by female groups. As with some of the women in Alokjhari, a few groups in Tetulia mentioned that more weight is given to a woman's opinions and decisions in the household as she gets older (over 40), but even here there was disagreement over how much decision-making power women really have, even at the household level.

- *Girls under 10 become rigid and reserved and don't express their feelings. Men aged 20-40 take responsibility in the family but give no responsibility to women and girls. Over the age of 40, these days men and women can take decisions independently but if husbands and wives don't listen to each other's opinions they start quarrelling.* (20-40 year-old women, Tetulia)
- *Men over 40 get priority in making family decisions.* (Women over 40, Tetulia)

### ***7.2.6 Reputation, honour and justice***

Reputation and honour accounted for 13 out of 199 issues relating to gender discrimination in Alokjhari (5/13 mentions by female groups, 8/13 by males). This was more important for the male than the female groups and female 'bad behaviour' is judged much more harshly than the same behaviour for males.

- *Society does not punish boys. If a boy does something wrong, society forgives him. Whatever he does, the girl will be punished first [the boys in this group think this is good for them].* (16-19 year-old boys, Alokjhari)
- *When a young widow with no children gets married again then society speaks badly about her, calling her 'shameless'.* (Women over 40, Alokjhari)
- *If an educated girl does something wrong, then everyone blames her education for it.* (12-15 year-old boys, Alokjhari)
- *When women live their lives with well-covered dress, like a head scarf, everyone, especially Muslims, will like her.* (20-40 year-old men, Alokjhari)

In addition, a further 9 out of 199 issues relating to gender discrimination in Alokjhari referred to gender-based injustice being perpetrated in the *salish* proceedings (non-formal community justice system) (7/9 mentions by female groups, 2/9 by males). This was raised particularly by female groups and particularly in relation to negative female experiences of powerlessness.

- *If boys and girls have a love affair, the salish and everyone else will blame the girl and the girl's parents. Sometimes men destroy women's lives, for example the salish will make a judgement in favour of the man, even though they know the woman is innocent.* (20-40 year-old women, Alokjhari)
- *At the salish in the village, the boy's family will bribe the Head Man and blame the girl. Most of the time girls are blamed.* (14-year-old girl, Alokjhari)
- *When a man does something wrong they let it drop because he's a man but if it's a girl or woman she is always punished in the salish.* (25-year-old woman, Alokjhari)

In Tetulia, 'interest in the opposite sex' accounted for 7 out of 143 issues relating to gender discrimination, all referring to females, and 6/7 criticising girls and women for showing interest in boys and men. Only one group (20-40 year-old men) mentioned 'start making themselves beautiful' as a positive experience for girls aged 16-19, and even then they also noted the exact same thing, 'making themselves attractive to the opposite sex' as negative as well.

- *Girls aged 11-19 spend time with, and want to start love affairs with boys [seen as negative].* (16-19 year-old girls, Tetulia)

### ***7.2.7 Idleness, bad behaviour, alcohol, drugs, gambling and crime***

Idleness and bad behaviour accounted for 10/143 gender discrimination issues in total in Tetulia (1/10 mentions by female FGD groups and 9/10 by males). They are all negative and are mostly (7/10) in relation to males: getting involved in illegal activities, gambling, pornography and bad company. The 3/10 referring to females are about them keeping bad company.

- *Girls aged 11-19 and women aged 20-40 spend time and hang out with bad boys.* (Men over 40, Tetulia)
- *Boys aged 11-19 don't care about their parents. They go to bad places where boys take drugs and watch pornography.* (12-15 year-old boys, Tetulia)
- *Men aged 20-40 get involved in illegal activities.* (16-19 year-old girls, Tetulia)

Alcohol and drugs more specifically accounted for 6 out of 143 issues relating to gender discrimination in Tetulia, all cited by males, 4/6 criticising males and 2/6 criticising females for

drinking alcohol, smoking or taking drugs like heroine or Phensidyl<sup>13</sup> (although the latter was said to be rare in rural areas).

- *Girls aged 11-19 and women over 40 get addicted to smoking and drinking. Men over 20 become drug addicts, like with smoking, alcohol and Phensidyl. (12-15 year-old boys, Tetulia)*

In Alokjhari, bad behaviour, alcohol, gambling and crime accounted for 9 out of 199 issues relating to gender discrimination (4/9 mentions by female groups, 5/9 by males). These issues all referred to male behaviour and were considered to be characteristics of powerlessness.

- *Powerless boys and men our age make bad decisions, to take alcohol or to smoke. They become involved in crimes. (16-19 year-old boys and 20-40 year-old men, Alokjhari)*

### ***7.2.8 Freedom of movement***

This accounted for 16 out of 199 issues relating to gender discrimination in Alokjhari (10/16 mentions by female groups, 6/10 by males). In Tetulia, freedom of movement made up 6 out of the 143 issues relating to gender discrimination. As is to be expected, the female experience of this is more negative than the males. Even where girls and women have the freedom to go out in the community this was stated as 'few' or 'very few' whereas 'most' boys and men can go out freely. This covered issues like playing outside and playing sports for younger children and going out in the community and going to the market unaccompanied by a husband for women.

- *Powerless girls our age can't go out alone. If they go out, they have to go with a brother or male relative. A powerful girl can go around independently. It's OK for them to play outside and they can play football. They can go shopping when they want and can go to social ceremonies. But there are very few of these types of girls. Most boys our age are independent. They can go to school, the bazaar and shops. They can play cricket independently. (12-15 year-old girls, Alokjhari)*
- *Powerless girls our age don't get the same freedom as boys. Even when powerful girls have the freedom to go out freely, society is not ready to accept this. (16-19 year-old girls, Alokjhari)*
- *Powerless women our age don't go to the bazaar and they can't go outside without their husband's permission. Some women can go outside when they want, but only very few here, maybe one or two. Sometimes when they go outside the community people tease them on the road. (20-40 year-old women, Alokjhari)*
- *Men have the freedom to go anywhere. (Women over 40, Alokjhari)*

### ***7.2.9 Food, basic needs, health and pregnancy***

- *The family fulfils boys' needs first and foremost and girls' needs afterwards. (17 and 18-year-old boys, Alokjhari)*

In Tetulia, gender discrimination in relation to food and basic needs accounted for 6 out of 143 issues, all mentioned by females, mostly complaining that girls and women experience discrimination regarding the amount and type of food they get, and lack of clothes and school materials.

- *Boys are breastfed until six months, then eat eggs, meat, rice and vegetables after that. Some girls under 10 can't eat good food, or eat regularly or wear good clothes. Some don't get enough materials in school like pens, pencils and exercise books. (20-40 year-old women, Tetulia)*

Health and pregnancy accounted for an additional 6 out of 143 issues relating to gender discrimination, all negative and all referring to female problems and poor health apart from one group (women over 40) which stated that older men get ill but they have to keep working to earn money for the family.

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<sup>13</sup> A cough medicine containing opiate- and amphetamine-based chemicals, produced in India and Burma/Myanmar. It can act as an anti-depressant and is illegal in Bangladesh.

- *If girls aged 11-19 get married and get pregnant, they will be physically weak and it will affect their mental health. Some girls and women aged 20-40 die while giving birth and some commit suicide. (12-15 year-old girl, Tetulia)*
- *Women over 40 get sick or affected by female diseases. They ignore their own well-being and think only about their children and family. (20-40 year-old men, Tetulia)*

### ***7.2.10 Community work and contribution to society***

This accounted for 12 out of 199 issues relating to gender discrimination in Alokjhari (5/12 mentions by female groups, 7/12 by males). This was seen as an indicator of good character, particularly for men, to have power in the community, getting involved in 'social development work' and community activities. 11/12 comments were positive associations and of these 7/11 were referring to powerful males and 4/11 to females (who presumably have less opportunity to get involved in this type of work in the first place).

- *Everyone helps when a boy our age wants to organise a social activity, but they either won't help girls, or they will stop them. (16-19 year-old boys, Alokjhari)*
- *Powerful men our age lead the community and get involved with social clubs like football teams and social development work. Men get involved in the salish. (20-40 year-old women, Alokjhari)*

### ***7.2.11 Religion***

In Tetulia there were 4 mentions of the importance of good religious behaviour by women (according to men), accounting for 4 out of 143 issues relating to gender discrimination.

- *Women over 40 say their prayers and lead their life according to Islam (men over 40, Tetulia)*

In Alokjhari, religion accounted for 5 out of 199 issues relating to gender discrimination (1/5 mentions by female groups, 4/5 by males). In comparison to Tetulia, where male groups emphasised the importance of good religious behaviour by women, in this exercise in Alokjhari, all of these mentions were about males, i.e. that good religious behaviour by males is associated with male power.

- *Powerless men don't follow religion but people will identify a powerful man as a religious person and think him a good friend of society. (20-40 year-old men, Alokjhari)*
- *Older men think 'I need to change' because they're about to die. They become more focused on religious activities and nicer to their wives. (Women over 40, Alokjhari)*

### ***7.2.12 other issues***

A further 29 out of 199 issues in Alokjhari and a further 8 out of 143 issues in Tetulia all reveal other types of discrimination against females. Some examples are as follows.

- *Sometimes girls under 10 don't get enough time to play with others. (16-19 year-old boys, Tetulia)*
- *Powerless women our age can't choose who to marry. When a husband or father spends money on his daughter or wife he calculates a lot and decides whether or not it's worth it. Parents are happy when they give birth to a boy because this makes a family powerful. Sometimes they will sell their land to get money for bribes to get a better job for their sons, but not for daughters. As boys earn money they get more food and the family says 'you don't have to do any household work'. (20-40 year-old women, Alokjhari)*
- *If a couple has problems having a child they will still blame the woman, even if she has been medically cleared and everyone knows the problem is with the man. (20-40 year-old men, Alokjhari)*

## 7.3 Perception of female and male power distribution in the community

The second part of the gender power spectrum exercise in Alokjhari involved each group distributing a pile of beans along the power spectrum for females and males of their own age group to represent the distribution of power in the present, past (in the time of their grandparents) and their wishes and expectations for the future. Each group did this for their own sex and for the opposite sex. Photographs were taken to record the results. Subsequently, the number of beans at each stage of the power spectrum was counted, turned into a percentage of the overall power distribution and transformed into graphs (see Appendix 2) to compare FGD groups' perceptions of their own power and that of the opposite sex in the past, present and future. Below is a sample image of what this looked like in practice, showing 20-40 year-old women's perception of women's power in the past, present and future on the left, and their perception of men's power in the past, present and future on the right.



### 7.3.1 The increasing power of girls and women

For all age groups, in relation to the perceived power of girls and women in the community, there is a clear progression from the past, through the present to the future, with both females and males thinking that girls and women are becoming increasingly powerful. For the over 40s this shift in power is dramatic: both women and men over 40 perceive that women in the time of their grandmothers were 100% powerless whereas they both hope and want them to become 100% powerful in the future. However, in the present, men over 40 think that women have more power than women themselves do: men consider women to be currently 56% powerful/very powerful whereas women consider themselves to be only 27% powerful/very powerful. (See Appendix 2 for full size graphs)

- *In the past, men had more power and women much less. For example our grandmothers weren't even allowed out of the house, but now they can come here and talk to us.* (Women over 40, Alokjhari)
- *Both men and women are getting education now so things are changing. Men used to think of their wives as servants or recreational things, but now there is friendship and men are having fewer affairs.* (46 year-old man, Alokjhari)

The 20-40 year-old groups also acknowledge a dramatic shift in power for women of this age but whereas women consider themselves to be 100% powerless in the past, 78% powerless in the present and hope and want to be 100% powerful in the future, the men consider that women were already 32% powerful/very powerful in the past and are currently 50% powerful/very powerful in the present – although they, too, want women to be 100% powerful in the future.

This trend of males perceiving females to be more powerful than females themselves do is continued with the 16-19 year-old groups. Girls consider themselves to be 93% powerless in the past, 37% powerless / 12% powerful in the present and they hope to be 94% fully powerful in the future (they felt that 100% might be too optimistic).

- *In the future, we want all to be equally powerful but it is likely that some girls will still be behind to some degree.* (16-19 year-old girls, Alokjhari)

In comparison, the boys consider that girls were already 15% powerful/very powerful in the past and are 32% powerful/very powerful in the present – although they want girls to be 100% powerful in the future.

The 12-15 year-old groups had a more nuanced approach. The girls consider themselves to be only 46% powerless in the past and 30% powerless / 38% powerful in the present but they expect to be only 77% powerful/very powerful in the future. The 12-15 year-old boys consider that girls were already 32% powerful in the past and are still 32% powerful in the present – but they want girls to be only 83% powerful (not ‘very powerful’) in the future.

- *Now that girls have education they can be powerful, but in the past they were less powerful.* (12-15 year-old boys, Alokjhari)
- *Girls are getting education opportunities so they are getting power.* (15-year-old boy, Alokjhari)

In addition to seeing an increase in female power demonstrated *within* each age group, from the past, through the present and to the future, another generational shift can be seen *across* age groups: girls who are currently 12-15 consider themselves and their grandmothers to have more power than the older groups of girls and women consulted, indicating that things are changing for the better.

### ***7.3.2 The changing power of boys and men***

The 12-15 year-old boys were the only group who perceive males as increasingly gaining power from the past, through the present to the future. They consider themselves 61% powerful in the past, still 61% very powerful in the present and they hope / expect to be 73% very powerful in the future. All of the seven other groups indicated that males have experienced a drop in power from the past to the present. For example, 12-15 year-old girls consider boys to be 58% powerful/very powerful in the past but only 32% powerful/very powerful in the present. Likewise, there are dramatic drops from the past to the present indicated by 16-19 year-old boys and girls, 20-40 year-old men and women and those over 40.

- *Because of poverty, men are losing power.* (14-year-old boy, Alokjhari)
- *Some men are less powerful in the family and community, like those who are intellectually behind, unemployed or earning less money.* (40-year-old woman, Alokjhari)

In spite of the ‘temporary’ drop in male power perceived between the past and the *present*, all groups nonetheless indicate an expected or wished for return to power for males in the *future*, although in general, the female groups are more circumspect about this. For example, 12-15 year-old boys expect/want to be 73% very powerful in the future whereas the girls only want them to be 44% very powerful (and themselves to be 60% very powerful). 20-40 year-old men expect/want to be 100% very powerful in the future whereas the women only want them to be 100% ‘OK’ (and themselves to be 100% very powerful). Men over 40 expect/want to be 100% very powerful in the future whereas the women only want them to be 54% very powerful (and themselves to be 100% very powerful). Only 16-19 year-olds agree that they want each other to be equally 100% very powerful.

Both groups of women over 20 found this idea very appealing and amusing – that men could be less powerful than them in the future.

### ***7.3.3 The challenges remaining for girls and women***

In the present, the gender inequalities persist, however. The 20-40 year-old women consider themselves to be least powerful of all of the groups: 78% powerless and 22% just ‘OK’ (0% powerful/very powerful). They are followed by the 16-19 year-old girls who consider themselves

only 12% powerful/very powerful. The 12-15 year-old girls consider themselves to be 28% powerful/very powerful and the women over 40 27% powerful/very powerful.

- *Is life harder for men or women in the community?* Of the men over 40 in Tetulia, 6/11 said it is harder for women, 3/11 said it is equally hard for both, and 2/11 said it is harder for men because they have to work outside and earn money.
- *Powerless women our age can't marry who and when they want. Powerful men can choose who to marry.* (20-40 year-old women, Alokjhari)

This is a stark contrast to the 20-40 year-old men who consider themselves to be currently the most powerful of all of the groups: 64% powerful/very powerful. They are followed by 12-15 year-old boys who consider themselves to be 61% powerful/very powerful, then men over 40 (59% powerful/very powerful) and finally 16-19 year-old boys (51% powerful/very powerful).

- *Men can do everything, according to their will, whenever they want.* (20-40 year-old women, Alokjhari)
- *All types of boys are powerful.* (12-15 year-old girls, Alokjhari)
- *Girls should not go above boys in decisions. That would be unethical.* (40-year-old woman, Alokjhari)

Interestingly, all groups considered themselves to have a certain percentage of 'powerlessness' in the present, apart from the 12-15 year-old boys. This 'powerlessness' ranges from 12% (males over 16 talking about themselves) to 78% (20-40 year-old women talking about themselves).

Although most of the male groups expected/wanted females to be equally 100% very powerful with them in the future, 12-15 year-old boys expect/want girls to be only 83% powerful whereas they themselves want to be 73% very powerful.

- *Some boys in the future can remain in the middle [of the spectrum] because there will always be poverty in Bangladesh, so it is not realistic that all will be 100% powerful.* [Researcher: Why did you put girls as less powerful than boys in the future?] *Men can do a lot of work whereas women can't.* (14-year-old boy, Alokjhari)
- *As girls get education they will go from 40% to 80% but they will still be limited to 80% because girls and women can't do factory and construction work.* (15-year-old boy, Alokjhari)
- The 16-19 year-old boys debated a lot how to interpret the question as 'want' or 'think'. They *want* both girls and boys to be equally 100% powerful in the future. However, 9/10 *think* that boys will be slightly more powerful than girls. 1/9 thinks they will be equal.

It is interesting to note the different perceptions – and misperceptions – that males and females have of each other. For example, 12-15 year-old girls think boys were a lot *more* powerful in the past than boys themselves did, whereas girls think boys in the present are *less* powerful than boys themselves think. In turn, the boys appear to have underestimated girls' own perceived power in the past and present. In both the 16-19 and the 20-40 year-old groups, girls and women appear to overestimate male power in the past, whereas boys and men overestimate female power in the past and present. Women over 40 overestimate male power in the present and men overestimate female power in the present.

There is therefore a general, but not blanket, tendency to think of the opposite sex as being more powerful than that sex thinks itself to be.

## 7.4 Discussions at community level

Following the exercises (gender lifelines in Tetulia and the gender power spectrum in Alokjhari), the sub-groups came back together for general plenary discussion, responding to directed questions by the researchers based on the initial group work. The responses here are combined for both communities.

### ***7.4.1 What works to achieve change?***

In many cases FGD participants struggled to move beyond top level, general suggestions, even when the researchers pushed them to clarify or make their responses more specific. The most commonly cited suggestions were: awareness-raising, education, economic empowerment, legislation and enforcement, and improved cooperation, leadership and communication.

#### **Awareness-raising**

The most commonly cited targets for awareness-raising programmes were parents and families. Many participants had the simple belief that this would resolve many issues such as child marriage, sexual harassment and substance abuse.

- *The family is the main thing. If the family and the head of the family is made aware then this is the main thing.* (14-year-old boy, Tetulia)
- *If parents become aware [about sexual harassment] they will become cautious about their boys and control their behaviour.* (14-year-old girl, Tetulia)

When challenged about why this might not always work, boys in Tetulia responded that it is a long term process:

- *Maybe it will take time. Parents need to become aware of the negative consequences of child marriage. If we as children become aware of the negative consequences of child marriage, we can explain this [to parents], then one day maybe they will listen to us and we can make a difference.* (13 and 14-year-old boys, Tetulia)

A few participants highlighted the need for awareness-raising specifically with men:

- *Women can be agents. We can counsel husbands about their behaviour when they are in a good mood.* (Women over 40, Alokjhari)
- *NGOs should give training to men through social meetings for them to get outside ideas.* (38-year-old woman, Alokjhari)

Some specifically mentioned the importance of working with religion:

- *Proper religious explanations. Religious leaders sometimes give wrong explanations about girls' education. They should give the real explanation, aimed at the level of villagers.* (17-year-old boy, Alokjhari)
- *Emphasise religious education. It's like rules at the moment but instead there should be religious teaching in relation to these things [referring to sexual harassment and family violence].* (14-year-old girl, Tetulia)

The purohit (Hindu religious leader) interviewed states that he counsels couples who approach him with marriage and family problems, listening to each side of the story then picking up on an issue from the discussion and linking it to religion. The imam interviewed state that he advises parents against arranging child marriage. It is also interesting to note that the Plan PHR programme organised an award ceremony in March 2014 to acknowledge one imam (from Alokjhari) and one journalist for promoting rights and positive messages about ending child marriage and IPV. The competition was organised with District level government. 16 candidates' applications were reviewed by a panel including government officers from the ministries of Women's and Children's Affairs and Education who then selected the winners. The process was assessed and validated by someone else to ensure transparency.<sup>14</sup>

Others spoke about awareness programmes in general, or for the whole community.

- *Awareness programmes on family life so people will understand. If the programme is attractive, people will like it.* (25-year-old man, Tetulia)

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<sup>14</sup> Based on information provided by Morbarok Hossain, Dinajpur PU Manager, 27 March 2014.

- *Boys should be counselled by relatives and by the community [about sexual harassment], not just by their parents. It may take time. They may not listen the first few times but eventually they will.* (Women over 40, Tetulia)
- [Researcher: What are the best methods for preventing child marriage?] Response: *Lots of motivational activities, but they should be done at very, very grassroots level, for example between a few households only at a time, using drama and songs, discussing things in the courtyard.* (Dipak Chakraborti, Purohit (Hindu religious leader), Tetulia)

Various uses of the media were suggested:

- *Have a very attractive drama to watch on TV [between 8 and 10 pm which is a good time for both men and women to watch] including messages about these things and sanitation. But it would have to be really very attractive.* (Men over 40, Tetulia)
- *Even though the government has rules and regulations a girl in the village was still forced to get married. She started a hunger strike to get media attention. The Head Man went to the family to convince them. Girls, boys and families can stop it themselves. Working together we can achieve change.* (19 year-old boy / young journalist, Tetulia)

Awareness-raising through schools is addressed below in 'education'.

## Education

There were many calls for 'education' as a way to make progress and overcome obstacles. This includes specific awareness programmes targeted through schools:

- *Education which overcomes attitudes and traditions.* (17-year-old boy, Alokjhari)
- *Awareness programmes need to go further. Schools can take initiatives to stop these things [referring to child marriage, sexual harassment, violence and dowry].* (14-year-old girl, Tetulia)
- *Include a chapter in social science text books about child marriage and women's vulnerability and issues.* (32-year-old man, Tetulia)

It also includes equality in education to help redress gender inequality:

- *Men and women should have higher education at the same level. For example, it shouldn't be that men have the Masters degrees and women only have high school certificates.* (All men over 40 agreed, Alokjhari)
- *This [primary] school has about 300 children with roughly equal numbers of girls and boys, aged about five to ten. The enrolment rate is 100% in the community with only about 2-3% drop-out when families move away to the cities, but this is the same for both girls and boys. In the classroom, the teachers mix girls and boys to sit together but by grades 3-4 [aged 8-9] they naturally separate into same-sex groups. Girls and boys do chores equally like cleaning the floors and keeping the garden tidy, although the boys complain at first. There are seven teachers in this school, all women. There is a government ruling that at least 60% of primary school teachers must be women. There is no rule at secondary level where there are fewer female than male teachers.* (Nahida Akhtari, Primary School Head Teacher, Tetulia)

There were also some further general comments about education. For example, both religious leaders interviewed indicated that the greater their level of general education, the more likely people are to accept messages about the negative consequences of child marriage:

- *Usually I go to the family, talk to the parents and advise them about the negative consequences. If they don't listen I will ask the Upazila and sub-district Head Man to help. There are two types of reaction to messages against child marriage. Educated people react well. Uneducated people don't want to accept it. They are not aggressive in the mosque but they still continue child marriage anyway.* (Abdul Salam, Imam, Kanchama sub-district mosque, Alokjhari)
- *A few years ago some parents tried to get me to arrange a child marriage but I refused so they went to another Purohit instead. I tried to explain my reasons to them but they got aggressive, shouted and said 'Fine! There are other Purohits!' The couple was illiterate and it was difficult*

*for them to accept. They wouldn't necessarily even listen to religious explanations.* (Dipak Chakraborti, Purohit (Hindu religious leader), Tetulia)

## **Economic empowerment**

A very strong premium was placed on the economic independence of girls and women as a way to reduce gender inequalities, the total dependency of females on males and the vulnerability of girls and women to violence.

- *Earning money is the main thing. If we have the opportunity to work like a man then we can eliminate these problems.* (25-year-old woman, Alokjhari)
- *If girls get a proper education and earn money and contribute to the family, then this will reduce violence.* (40-year-old woman, Tetulia)
- *We want interventions so that girls can be empowered and so that our daughters' lives are not like our own.* (30-year-old woman, Tetulia)

Some of the women had ideas to improve their own income:

- *Distribute seeds to us to cultivate vegetables so we can feed the children and earn money.* (25-year-old woman, Alokjhari)
- *Some of us have cows, chickens and ducks. We can make a deal to look after someone else's cow and share the profits from selling the milk and calves.* (46-year-old woman, Alokjhari)

However, the majority of older women referred to income generating opportunities for their daughters rather than for themselves. Based on the testimonies of these older women (see e.g. section 7.2.2), without additional interventions addressing social norms, and given the low levels of education of themselves and of their husbands, even if they themselves earned extra money, they would not necessarily be allowed to keep it by their husbands.

- *Job opportunities for women. Jobs with higher salaries by getting higher education. Not for us but for future generations. We're already old and this is the time to die.* (50-year-old woman, Alokjhari)
- *When girls and boys get the same education, the attitude of the boys will change in the future. Our husbands are not educated.* (40-year-old woman, Alokjhari)

There is a level of recognition that this work will take a long time. With this in mind, there were also suggestions to address poverty in general, which was seen as a barrier to change.

- *Every family experiences poverty which is the cause of most arguments. Eliminate or reduce poverty and this will reduce stress and arguments.* (23-year-old man, Tetulia)

## **Legislation and enforcement**

Respondents of all ages lamented the gaps in legislation and lack of enforcement and so it was natural that they should recommend steps to address this. Some of the suggestions refer to improvements in legislation:

- *Girls are excluded from their fathers' assets. There should be a law making inheritance equal for boys and girls.* (14-year-old girl, Alokjhari)
- *It would be very useful for Hindus to have a law saying that a Hindu girl should get assets from her father. This is the reason behind large dowries as it's seen as the only money that the girl will ever be given. Otherwise she leaves home and never gets anything else from her birth family. If they have this law, then dowry will be reduced...but not abolished.* (Dipak Chakraborti, Purohit (Hindu religious leader), Tetulia)
- *NGOs should emphasise eve teasing in focused interventions. The government can make a law with punishments. The countries in South Asia should collaborate with each other.* (13-year-old girl, Tetulia)

There were also calls for general implementation of existing laws:

- *Implement our laws then people will obey them.* (18-year-old girl, Tetulia)
- *Punish those who take dowry. Most families are not aware of the harmful effects.* (14-year-old girl, Alokjhari)

Finally, there were some specific suggestions to address violence and child marriage:

- *We should be alert to violence against women and girls. When we know someone's in trouble we should go as a whole community to talk to the husband. If we can't resolve it with the husband then we should go to the police.* (20-40 year-old women, Tetulia)
- *In the youth group we work to prevent child marriage and open defecation. We inform the police or Head Man if child marriage is happening.* (16-19 year-old boys, Tetulia)
- *I believe the 'Child Marriage-Free Union' declaration will help to reduce child marriage. Already when the UP uses the megaphone in the community people come up and ask me: 'Does that mean I'll be arrested from now on if I arrange a child marriage?'. I tell them 'yes, you will be arrested'.* (Chobi Rani, female UP member, Tetulia)

### **Cooperation, leadership and communication**

Suggestions for improved cooperation ranged from the personal to the community and political levels.

- *Brotherhood and cooperation between men and women. If we have cooperation, then all problems will be eliminated – political and otherwise.* (70-year-old man, Alokjhari)
- *NGOs, girls and boys can protest for equal rights together.* (14-year-old girl, Alokjhari)
- *If the Head Man in the village is honest and works honestly with the imam and school teachers and so on, then child marriage can be stopped.* (54- year-old man, Tetulia)
- *Non-cooperation from society and lack of good leaders. If there was a very good leader this would overcome all the barriers.* (42-year-old man, Tetulia)

Improved communication with children and better relationships at family level were also discussed. These issues are relevant for improving the effectiveness and impact of the afore-mentioned awareness-raising interventions at family level.

- *If parents can take care of children like a friend and have a friendly relationship with their children then lots of problems can be solved.* (13-year-old boy, Tetulia)

### **Other**

Additional issues were raised with varying degrees of relevance for gender programming:

- *The government should provide rehabilitation for girls who have experienced child marriage like a safe home and vocational training. Some parents reject daughters who do love marriages and they are also not accepted by the in-laws and so they are very vulnerable.* (18-year-old girl, Tetulia)
- *If girls can get an opportunity to play sports that are in the Olympic games, then people will see them and change their attitudes. This type of training is only available in Dhaka.* (17-year-old girl, Alokjhari: they were not aware that there are NGOs, including Plan, that already work on sports training for girls)
- *NGOs are always busy with paper and pencil work. They should increase their work in the field to increase effectiveness.* (32-year-old man, Tetulia)
- *Control the population to improve the economic conditions of everyone and stop drug trafficking across the Indian and Burmese borders.* (32-year-old man, Tetulia)

#### ***7.4.2 What are the obstacles and challenges to achieving change?***

Some of the obstacles identified are essentially the flip side of the issues highlighted in section 7.4.1 on 'what works to achieve change?' Without prompting, FGD groups raised issues around

attitudes and social norms, poverty and lack of economic empowerment, lack of legislation and enforcement, and corruption and political unrest.

### **Attitudes and social norms**

Some participants, but not all, were able to identify social norms as barriers. Many more, however, focused on more 'concrete' issues like 'poverty' and 'lack of education'.

- *Social attitudes towards women are a barrier. We need to change social attitudes and norms.* (17-year-old girl, Alokjhari)
- *It [gender inequality] is not about education or assets but about social norms. You have to go to your in-laws' or husband's house and live as a traditional wife, even if you are educated.* (46-year-old woman, Alokjhari)

Particular attitudes were identified that perpetuate gender inequality, for example socialisation based on traditional gender roles from an early age.

- *It's more about parents' attitudes - that girls should be treated as 'girls' and boys should be treated as 'boys'. It's very separate from the beginning.* (18-year-old boy, Alokjhari)
- *Society gives power to husbands so girls have to listen to their husbands. This is the influence of family and society. The upbringing process is different so it affects education and social empowerment.* (14-year-old girl, Alokjhari)

### **Economic empowerment**

These comments can be divided into lack of economic opportunities for girls and women in particular, and poverty and unemployment in general, for both sexes.

- *Girls are not economically active which is why they don't study equally or give their opinion equally with boys.* (17-year-old girl, Alokjhari)
- [Researcher: Why are men more powerful?] Responses: *Men earn money. This is why they are more powerful* (27-year-old woman, Alokjhari); *This is the system. Men go out, make money and make decisions. Women stay at home and do housework. This is how it is in nature. In life, too* (25 year and 40-old women, Alokjhari).

Participants of all ages and both sexes mentioned general barriers to development such as poverty and lack of employment, literacy, education and awareness. They often grouped these issues together.

- *Financial problems and unemployment are huge problems in Bangladesh.* (20-40 year-old men, Alokjhari)
- *Everyone needs to know about the age for child marriage. Sometimes the police come to stop a child marriage but it still doesn't make a difference. Parents need to be made aware* (32-year-old woman, Tetulia). [Researcher: But there are awareness-raising programmes already happening. Why isn't it working?] Responses: *We have no idea how to stop child marriage.* (32-year-old woman, Tetulia); *There is so much poverty, social insecurity and little access to higher education. We need to address these and then maybe child marriage will be reduced* (30-year-old woman, Tetulia). [It should be noted that there was disagreement in the group about the lack of change regarding child marriage: other women in the group felt that it was changing, even if there were still some occasional incidents].

### **Legislation and enforcement**

Inadequacy of laws and their enforcement was a commonly cited barrier.

- *Although we have laws, they are not implemented or followed.* (18-year-old girl, Tetulia)

- *As Plan and others are already working here, there are already awareness programmes and the government already has laws, but there is no implementation or only a very low fine. They should review the law and punish people harder.* (19 year-old boy, Tetulia)
- *I want to be a police officer. I want to be a good police officer as there are not enough of these.* (16-year-old boy, Alokjhari)

According to the Police Inspector interviewed at the Sub-District Kanchama Police Station, Alokjhari<sup>15</sup>, there is no sub-district level officer responsible for women and children within the police, although this position exists within the government. Police training on violence against women is a component of the Plan PHR project, but the 36 police based at this particular station had not received any specific training on gender or violence against women and girls (although it was not clear whether the general pre-service police training includes a component on this). Every Division / divisional city in Bangladesh has a Victim Support Centre. The nearest one in this area is Rangpur which is a long way from many villages. Personnel at the Victim Support Centre apparently have special training. The Police Inspector stated there are about 160,000 police in Bangladesh of whom about 30,000 are women [approximately 19%].

The police station did not appear to be particularly woman or child-friendly, staffed as it was by armed men, with the Inspector giving the impression that he was too busy to speak with the researchers – let alone a potentially vulnerable woman or child from the community. Furthermore the Inspector himself did not give the impression of being particularly sensitive to gender-based violence.

- *Men and women in my country are equal.*
- *There are about 7-8 cases of violence against women per month with about 1-3 related to dowry. This is just quarrelling with each other - very silly things like slapping.*

### **Corruption and political unrest**

FGD respondents across all age groups and both sexes cited corruption at various levels as an impediment to change, either in general, in local or national government, in NGOs or in relation to specific practices. Men in both communities also expressed frustration with the political unrest which plagues the country.

- *Corruption in the administrative office in sub-districts. Parents give money to the registrar and police to ignore child marriage.* (18-year-old girl, Tetulia)
- *Sometimes religious leaders and elders make wrong decisions in the salish about eve teasing, violence against women and child marriage. They should be honest.* (42-year-old man, Tetulia)
- *In party politics they sometimes exploit religion.* (17-year-old boy, Alokjhari)

### **Other**

Additional comments on barriers to change include:

- *There is no community spirit of helping each other. People don't listen to others.* (12-year-old girl, Tetulia)
- *There are lots of interventions on gender equality but nothing works. Everything stays the same.* (30-year-old woman, Tetulia)

With regard to the latter comment, the impression was given through FGD discussions that the experiences of the rural, illiterate older women - living with their often violent, uneducated husbands and controlling in-laws - are so constrained as to make the possibility of change for them personally seem remote. In general there was a much greater sense of possibility for change with the educated under 20-year-olds, reinforcing once again the long term, inter-generational nature of

<sup>15</sup> KII with Police Inspector, Krishna Kumar Sarkar, Sub-District – Kanchama Police Station, 27 March 2014, Alokjhari.

change, and the older women were more hopeful for their daughters in many cases than for themselves.

## **7.5 observations**

### ***7.5.1 Plan offices***

In addition to the BIAAG campaign materials observed throughout the Plan Bangladesh CO building in Dhaka (see Section 6.1), the Dinajpur PU office and local offices in Tetulia and Alokjhari also displayed images promoting gender equality.



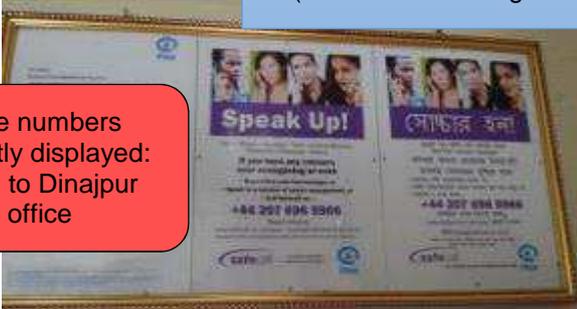
PHP project posters in Dinajpur PU office

Stop violence against women and create a society which is happy for all.  
*"We don't dishonour each other. We walk side by side and go forward together."*  
 (Students from Boghura)

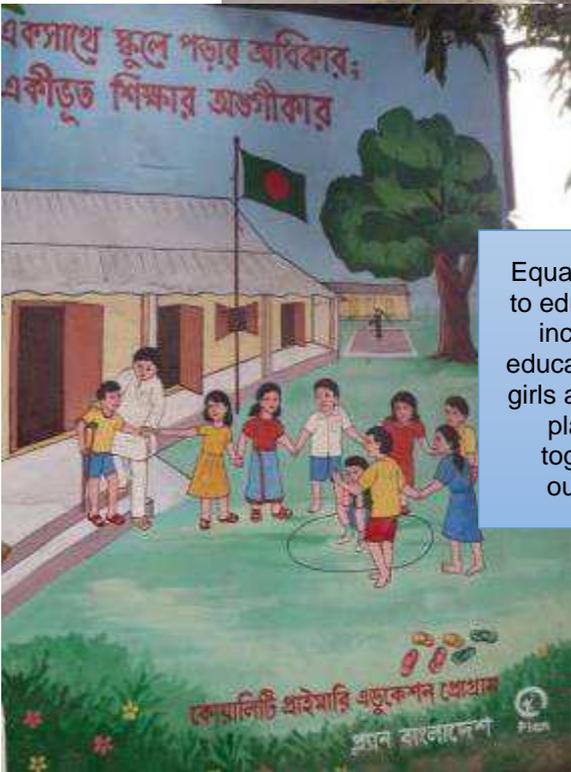


Stop violence against women and create a society which is happy for all.  
*"What is marriage? I don't understand. I want to go to school."*  
 (Sofia)

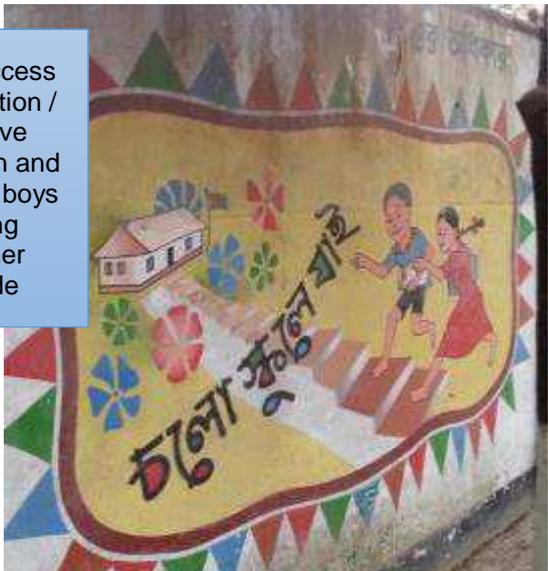
Helpline numbers prominently displayed: entrance to Dinajpur PU office

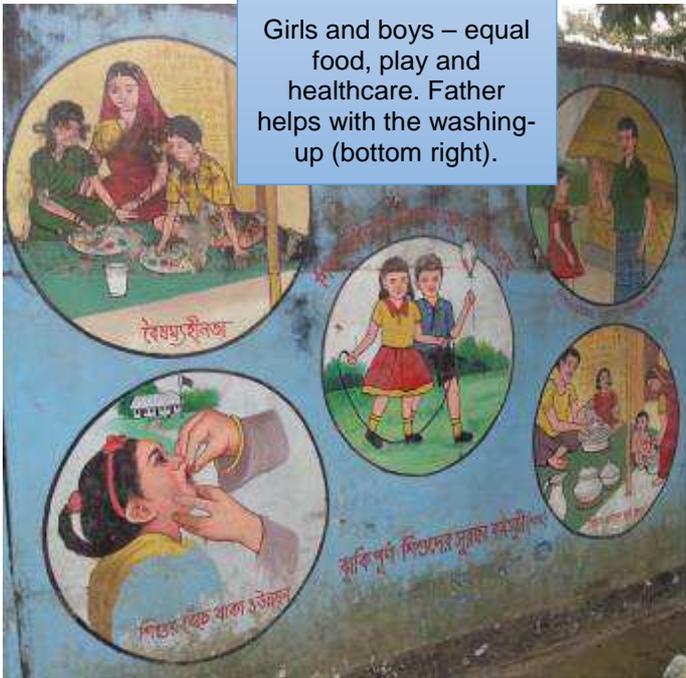


Educational murals depicting gender equality, Dinajpur PU office entrance



Equal access to education / inclusive education and girls and boys playing together outside





Girls and boys – equal food, play and healthcare. Father helps with the washing-up (bottom right).

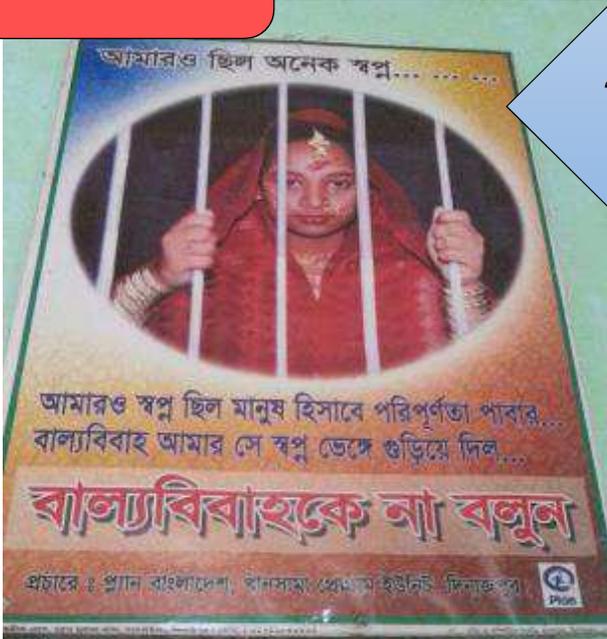


Communicate with your daughters and sons about changes in puberty.

The penalty for arranging child marriage.



Anti-child marriage poster, local Plan office, Alokjhari



"I had lots of dreams. I dreamed to be human, but child marriage destroyed my dreams."

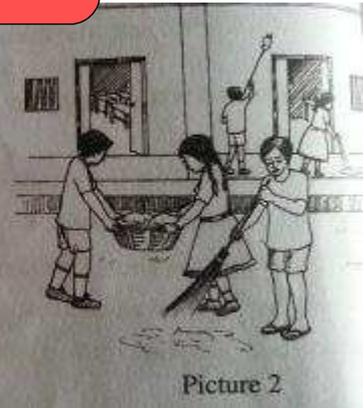
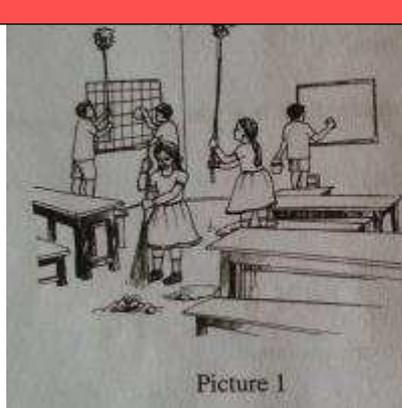


Local Plan office, Tetulia

## 7.5.2 School classrooms and textbooks

The researchers took the opportunity to flick through any school textbooks which were available in the classrooms where FGDs or KIs took place. The following images therefore represent a random snapshot rather than a systematic analysis of gender images in textbooks. Efforts have been made to introduce some gender equality. However, there is still some work to go.

**English for Today:**  
 Images of girls and boys alternate in the order in which they appear (left). Girls and boys are shown doing equal chores (right).



Picture 1

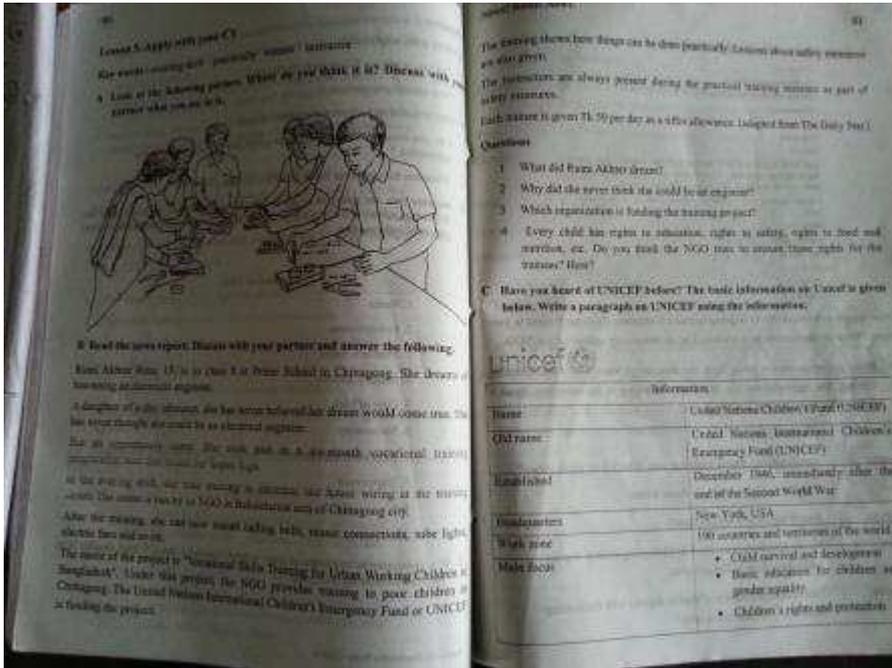
Picture 2



A story about female empowerment: a girl overcomes child marriage and intimate partner violence to gain economic independence.

A social studies textbook features issues of alcohol and sexual harassment.





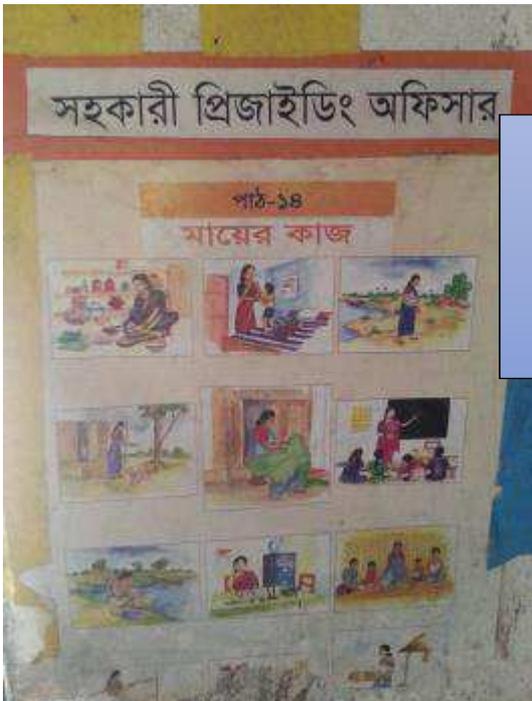
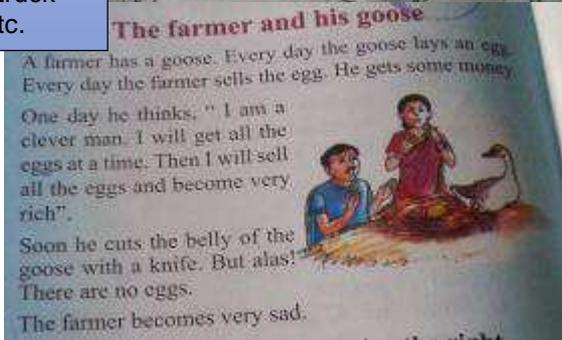
Equal numbers of girls and boys learn electrical engineering at a vocational training centre supported by UNICEF.

However, in spite of these positive examples, other images perpetuate gender stereotypes.

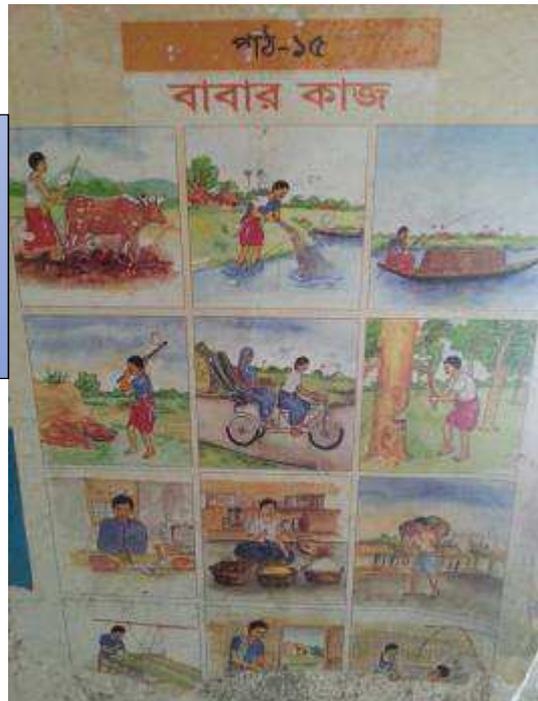


Left - women's roles: teachers, nurses and cabin crew.

Right – men's roles: doctors, farmers (who sell eggs and keep the money), engineers, truck drivers etc.



Posters in a classroom in Alokjhari: 'Mummy's role' (left) and 'Daddy's role' (right).



### 7.5.3 Media

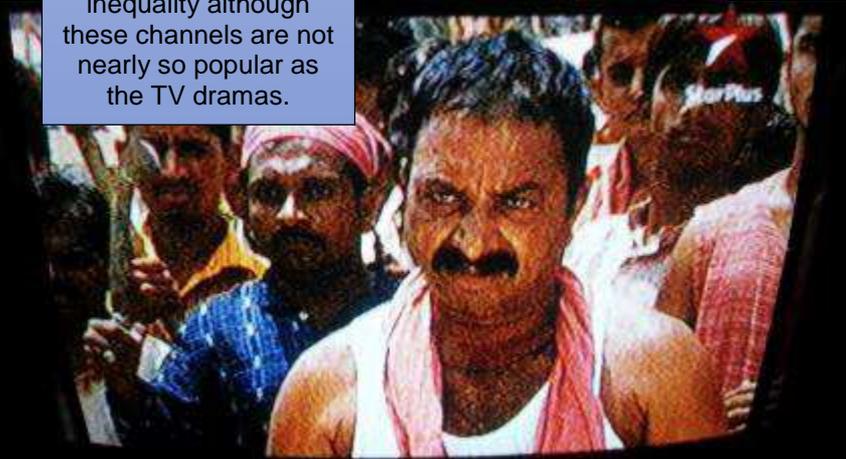
The following TV images were photographed in the space of approximately 15 minutes one evening, hopping randomly between channels available in the Rangpur guesthouse.



In popular TV dramas, women are portrayed as submissive victims or as scantily-clad dancers in entertainment shows or music videos where men stay fully clothed. Men are portrayed as aggressive and hyper-macho.



Religious channels (bottom) promote messages of gender inequality although these channels are not nearly so popular as the TV dramas.



The following images and stories from the English language newspaper, The Independent, 18-19 March 2014 show a range of articles and features relevant to gender equality. This is not necessarily representative of the Bangla language press.



Coverage is mixed. Stories of violence against women and girls sit alongside images of female students protesting and girls and boys playing alongside each other during Holi festival. (Right) Apart from the Prime Minister herself (top right), no other women are visible in photographs of government or business meetings or ceremonies.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina receives a memento for the 100th anniversary of Bangladesh Bank Limited, at Gono Bhaban in the capital recently as a gesture of paying the national Air Force Solar Bangla in making voices. Finance minister Abul Maqsood and adviser to Prime Minister Twigg-Selahi were also present.



Bangladesh Bank Limited celebrated the 64th birth anniversary of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on Monday. Professor Dr. Abul Barkat, chairman of the bank, places floral wreath at Bangladesh Bank portrait in Dharmmond in Dhaka.



Major (Retd) Dr. Md. Rezaul Haque, chairman of the board of directors of Social Islami Bank Limited, presides over the bank's 307th board meeting at its corporate office recently.



Director of Dhaka Bank, and Md. Jorishan Bahar, president of HAAIB, are signing an MOU in Dhaka recently.

### Husband murdered, wife injured over 'extramarital affairs' in city

A young man was killed and his wife critically injured in a quarrel over 'extramarital affairs' at a Police Station in the city on Sunday. At one stage they attacked each other with sharp weapons, said officer-in-charge of Turag Police Station Abir Mohammad Hossain quoting Hossain's father Haji Nur Miah. Hearing hue and cry neighbours, including deceased's brother Kabir Hossain, rushed to the house and rescued them in critical condition. They were first taken to Uttara Crescent Hospital and then shifted to Dhaka Sholito Hospital where Momir succumbed to his injuries around 5:00 am. Yasmin is still fighting for her life at the ICU of the hospital. The body was sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

### Guardians demand removal of teacher

OUR CORRESPONDENT

TANZIL: Guardians of the Board of Naba High School in Dhaka recently demanded removal of Ananda Charan Barua, an assistant teacher of the school, for allegedly behaving inappropriately with 11 girl students.

According to sources, Ananda Charan Barua recently joined the school as an assistant teacher of mathematics. Being a resident of Savar, he studies at a rented house at Chorokha village where



### DHAKA, WEDNESDAY MARCH 19, 2014



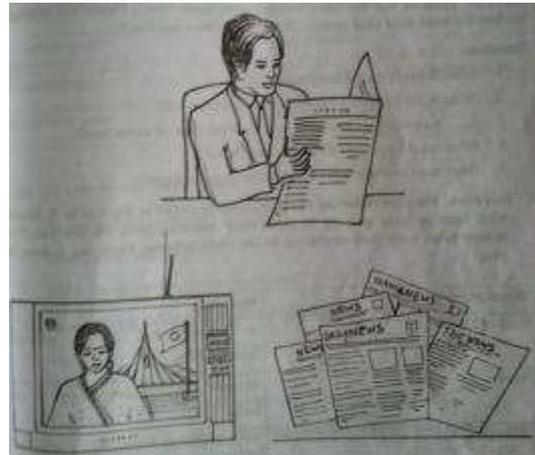
Students of Jagannath University bring out a procession yesterday under the auspices of Program of Dhaka University, a spring festival celebration with the people of the Hindu community, and also the festival of the Hindu community.



Children play Holi with each other as part of the celebration of the Hindu festival, a spring festival celebration with the people of the Hindu community, and also the festival of the Hindu community.

Soap opera television shows, especially from India, but also from within Bangladesh, reach huge audiences in rural areas. Not every household has a television, but there are enough in every village for people to gather together to watch programmes. The soap operas currently portray and reinforce very negative gender stereotypes but this could be a very effective mechanism to introduce positive, gender-friendly awareness-raising messages to large audiences of both women and men - provided that the shows are accessible (screened between 7-10pm) and highly engaging, based on good story-telling principles rather than taking an overtly 'educational' approach<sup>16</sup>.

It is possible that the only images of professional women to which villagers are exposed in some of the rural communities in Bangladesh are female newsreaders (as portrayed in this school textbook image here). According to Plan staff, and confirmed by the Plan researcher in the field, it is apparently common to watch the evening news which precedes the soap operas. There are also Islamic religious television channels, but these are apparently watched by relatively few people. A rural imam interviewed for the research stated that he doesn't have a television in his house due to his low salary. He goes to the bazaar to watch news, but not religious channels. He does not listen to the radio but will read newspapers in the office. There is increasing prevalence of basic mobile phones, but these are generally not internet-connected smartphones.



## 8. Overall analysis and editorial comments

This section draws together the findings from community level FGDs and KIIs, KIIs with Plan staff at CO and PU levels, and observations and comments from the researcher. Please note that detailed feedback from Plan CO staff in relation to particular projects can be found in Appendix 5, and detailed feedback from the FGDs and community KIIs in section 7.

### 8.1 What is and is not changing?

As seen in sections 7.1 and 7.2, FGD groups in Tetulia prioritised a variety of issues for 'change' in relation to the gender lifecycle: sexual harassment, IPV, child marriage, dowry and dowry-related violence, trafficking and other forms violence against women in relation to GBV and a range of other issues relating to gender discrimination.

When reflecting on the circumstances of individual girls at community level through a visualisation exercise, Plan staff at the northern PU workshop identified the following changes needed: need for positive attitudinal changes towards girls; people should know about rights; girls need participation in decision-making in the family (even about what colour clothes to wear, as well as family planning and birth control); need to emphasise girls' choices; girls' parents should act in their best interests; girls should continue education; girls deserve social recognition; they should be financially independent; they should have access to services; they should be self-conscious and aware; they should play with other girls (which requires time, space, recreational facilities and support); the school system should be changed as it is very gender-biased and not rights-based; need to take girls away from household work when they should be studying and playing.

<sup>16</sup> The Plan Bangladesh Research and Evaluation Coordinator identified a good example of such a show with an interesting and gender-challenging storyline (in Bengali, entitled 'Friend') but it was showing too late for villagers to watch (11.30pm).

With this in mind, the PU workshop groups identified the following visions for change:

- Our girls will be respected, protected and enjoy their rights
- Fulfilment of girls' rights
- Girls and boys enjoy equal rights

### *8.1.1 Changes*

- **More gender-equitable attitudes amongst younger generations**

*We have to target the new generation to inculcate gender-sensitive practices, addressing reproductive-related issues and making household work gender neutral. Adolescent clubs in rural areas hold debates and produce docu-dramas based on messages.* (Ashraf Hossain, Director General of the Department of Women's Affairs, MOWCA)

It is important to remember that the research was deliberately qualitative rather than quantitative and on a small scale, so it is therefore not possible to generalise the findings to apply to all children and young people in Bangladesh. However, it would appear that the younger generations who took part in the FGDs are definitely more aware of gender issues and the need for equality compared to the over 20s. For example, the FGDs looking at the gender power spectrum revealed more nuance amongst under-20s about the current distribution of power amongst their peers compared to over-20s. Younger groups (both girls and boys) were clearer about the need for girls to get secondary and tertiary education and enter the job market and they highlighted the importance of economic independence for girls and women. Those who had received gender awareness input were able to articulate issues around power dynamics more clearly.

This difference in attitude by age may well be linked to increased school enrolment of girls. It was felt by the primary school teacher interviewed<sup>17</sup> and by Plan staff that this increased enrolment has been greatly aided by the Government stipend to cover additional expenses for girls through to age 15. Beyond the fact that girls are getting a basic education (and there are obviously huge improvements still needed in the education system at all levels and in all ways), there was also positive feedback about how girls and boys being in school together contributes in some way to normalizing greater gender equality. For example, according to the primary school Head Teacher interviewed in Tetulia, she insists that chores like cleaning the floors and keeping the garden tidy are done equally by girls and boys, even though the boys complain about this at first. In the classroom, the teachers mix girls and boys to sit together (although by age 8 or 9 they drift naturally into same-sex groups). She also states:

- *Girls raise their hands first, more than boys. This has changed. Girls didn't used to be like this six or seven years ago.* (Nahida Akhtari, Primary School Head Teacher, Tetulia)
- *Since about five years ago, girls are consistently doing better academically across all subjects. Girls are more aware of the need to do well and earn money due to the economic situation and they feel responsible for families.* (Nahida Akhtari, Primary School Head Teacher, Tetulia)

She thinks that girls' empowerment will continue into secondary school because of the government stipend. It was also noted that all of the school girls aged 12-15 who took part in the FGDs were all confident to express their opinions, even those with minimal contact with Plan. They were just as much, if not more confident than the boys of the same age. The focus group discussions showed a distinct difference above and below 20 years of age: under this age, both girls and boys are much more aware of the issues faced by the other sex. Above this age there is more of a gulf in understanding and attitudes. It was only *after* noticing this particular dividing line that further exploration was done regarding the dates at which the stipend programme was introduced: the stipend was introduced in 1994, 20 years ago, thus providing an anecdotally strong correlation.

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<sup>17</sup> KII with Nahida Akhtari, Primary School Head Teacher, Tetulia, 23 March 2014.

However, the girls' educational stipend programme is subject to massive corruption and may be in danger of being abolished altogether.

In Bangladesh it would appear that the younger generations were clearer about the need for girls to get secondary and tertiary education, particularly with a view to entering the job market and accessing well-paid jobs and they highlighted the importance of economic independence for girls and women, as did other stakeholders.

- *We have achieved a lot in terms of school enrolment but drop-out and employment is problematic. Employment equals empowerment. Girls and women can then stand up against child marriage and violence against women and so on.* (Ashraf Hossain, Director General of the Department of Women's Affairs, MOWCA)

- **Increased confidence of girls involved in empowerment and life skills programmes**

In addition to the confidence gained through attending school, girls involved with Plan projects take part in groups and activities such as children's clubs, football and karate projects. The girls in the FGDs included a mixture of those with minimal Plan contact with those whose involvement is more substantial. However, all of the girls aged 12-15 involved in the FGDs were in school and, as with the older girls and young women aged 16-19, they were all confident to express their opinions in the small group work, often engaging in lively discussions amongst themselves. As was to be expected, some were more confident than others when speaking out in the plenary discussions, but in general all of the groups seemed comfortable and relaxed and all of the girls were able to make eye contact with the foreign researcher. This is in contrast to the previous experience of the same researcher in other rural areas of Bangladesh where *out-of-school* girls and those not engaged in empowerment programmes struggled to express their opinions or even make eye contact in FGDs.

Individual girls being able to raise their heads, make eye contact, speak up in mixed company, play in a football team, speak out against child marriage to others and stand fast in wanting to go to university – even in the face of family opposition – is an indication of change taking place at this level. Without school attendance, and if there were no intervention programmes to facilitate this, it is likely that these girls would still be holding their heads down - as was illustrated literally by a staff member in the PU workshop when drawing a girl in the community whose life is in need of change.



In the words of Rina, whose story is told in Appendix 6:

- *I'm very grateful to Plan and to my grandmother who are behind the strength I have now. I feel very happy and very lucky to have Plan training and work with Plan. This kind of support helps me to go ahead, despite the suffering in my life.*

- **Increased age of child marriage**

In Dinajpur, the mean age of marriage has increased from 15 in 2012 to 17.6 in 2014<sup>18</sup>. As seen in section 7.1.1, amongst the FGD groups of children and young people, both girls and boys all expressed a desire and intention to marry after the age of 18, mostly in their mid to late twenties, but also in their thirties in some cases and many of the other groups also commented on the rising age of marriage across the generations.

- **Increased representation of women in government**

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<sup>18</sup> According to Dinajpur PU Programme Coordinator for the 'Protection of Vulnerable Children' Plan programme.

According to the female UP member interviewed<sup>19</sup>, there are 12 people on the local council, 9 men and 3 women, plus the Chair and Secretary (14 in total). 3 places are reserved for women. The remaining roles are filled by open competition but in the UP in question they have been filled by men.

- *Women are not interested to go into politics. At first I wasn't interested to do this but my husband, who is illiterate, strongly encouraged me. Now I think that being a leader in the community is a nice feeling. Also not all women are educated enough. The UP prefers councillors to have High School Certificate or undergraduate degree. Male leaders have higher education.* (Chobi Rani, female UP member, Tetulia)

In spite of the gender imbalance, the quota is still resulting in women getting involved in local government.

- *I have changed. I have learned a lot and become more aware about community problems and well-being. I am grateful to my husband for encouraging me to join the UP.* (Chobi Rani, female UP member, Tetulia)
- [Researcher: Should more women be involved in local and national government?] Response: *Of course! [very enthusiastic] If girls can go outside and 'feel the fresh air', girls will change their lives.* (Chobi Rani, female UP member, Tetulia)
- *As the Prime Minister is a woman, this also means power for women.* (50-year-old woman, Alokjhari)

### *8.1.2 Lack of changes or where changes are slower*

- **Dowry:** Dowry is illegal, but families circumvent this issue by describing it as a 'gift'. It may be demanded or given freely. It is a hugely strong tradition, even amongst wealthy, middle class, educated families. Dowry and dowry-related violence against brides where a dowry may be seen as insufficient were highlighted in group discussions.
- **Inheritance and assets:** Due to discriminatory inheritance laws and deep-rooted social norms and traditions, girls and women are hugely disadvantaged and in many cases made totally dependent on men through lack of independent assets. This was referred to frequently in the FGDs and KIIs. According to Plan staff, even in some wealthy, middle class, educated families with professional career women, preference may often still be given to sons and brothers rather than daughters and sisters, even when distributing assets which should rightly belong to the girls and women.  
*Mothers should give assets to daughters, but my mother took the advice of my father and divided her assets in half. She gave half to my older sister and half to my brothers. We sisters did tutoring work to support ourselves during our undergraduate studies but our two brothers didn't do any further study. They went into business. Our father gave money to our brothers but not to us. Even we sisters gave money to our brothers. But our brothers have never given us anything in return and they don't help to look after our parents. My sisters get angry, but I advise them to accept the situation. Lots is done to keep peace in the family.* [Anonymous – female Plan staff member]
- **Poverty:** As reflected in FGDs and KIIs with Plan staff and community members, poverty is still overwhelming and an underlying factor impacting significantly on gender relations, particularly as girls and women are often totally economically dependent on men. Hard labour in subsistence and commercial agriculture places a double burden on women who are also expected to manage the household, and any financial benefits are first directed to boys rather than girls.  
*We work in the field, cook and care for the children, but our husbands only work in the field.* (Women over 40, Alokjhari)

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<sup>19</sup> KII with Chobi Rani, female UP member, Tetulia, 24 March 2014.

- **Daughter-in-laws' status in mother-in-laws' households:** According to FGDs and KIs with Plan staff, this situation is still hugely disempowering for younger women, even amongst educated, professional women.  
*A [Plan] colleague who was seven months pregnant has to wait until all the men in the household have eaten first. Even when the only male in the house was a 2-year-old boy her mother-in-law made her wait until he had eaten first. She doesn't feel able to negotiate with, or stand up to, her mother-in-law. [Anonymous – Plan staff member]*
- **Poor government commitment to addressing gender issues systematically and enforcing legislation:** Plan has a good relationship with some individual government representatives at different levels, including the Director General of the Department of Women's Affairs (DWA), Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs (MOWCA), Mr. Ashraf Hossain, who was interviewed for this research. He was the first to acknowledge these challenges:
  - *MOWCA has the mandate to promote gender equality but lacks capacity and authority.*
  - *We need one platform where stakeholders can share. We are working in a very compartmentalised way. This is a weakness. We need to address the root causes through integration, synchronisation and coordination. Networks exist but they are not so effective. There should be one 'super office' to whom we are all accountable – the Ministries of Home Affairs, Law and Justice, Communication and the several ministries responsible for vocational training and so on. MOWCA should be the lead ministry but it doesn't have the capacity. The Prime Minister's Office could fulfil this 'super office' role, leading the process, with NGOs brought in to contribute.*

Furthermore, the Plan Child Protection Adviser noted:

- *When faced by statistics, government can be reluctant to share. They admit there are problems but question the validity of data. It is easier to influence government through networks, especially those involving UN agencies. (Jannatul Ferdous Ruma, Plan CO Adviser, Child Protection)*
- **Changes may well be limited to the specific geographic areas where CSOs are targeting interventions.** Individual programmes and projects report success, but it is difficult to determine the extent of impact nationally in the face of generally very high levels of GBV and gender discrimination in general. Some limited national campaigns exist, but it was not within the remit of this research to evaluate their impact. For example, a national initiative by the Department of Women's Affairs has identified successful women at grassroots levels - e.g. mothers, those involved in economic activity and those overcoming violence - and a leaflet has been produced championing their stories:  
*We need to develop innovative advocacy to promote positive female role models as ambassadors. One successful lady can promote messages in her community (but not so much leaflets and posters), and maybe one man to promote the role of positive masculinity. (Ashraf Hossain, Director General of the Department of Women's Affairs, MOWCA)*

## 8.2 What are the key enablers and barriers to change?

(both internal and external to the organisation)

### 8.2.1 overview from the PU workshop

Plan staff at the northern PU workshop identified the following barriers to change.

- **Power and patriarchy**, e.g. power structures in families and communities, patriarchal attitudes and male domination within families.

- **Attitudes and norms**, e.g. religious norms which often reinforce patriarchal attitudes, vested interests of religious leaders in perpetuating the status quo, superstition and traditional attitudes, especially of mothers.
- **Poverty and lack of economic empowerment**, e.g. general poverty, economic and political insecurity, lack of social security, girls having less access to resources, dependency of girls and women on boys and men, and social division of labour along gender lines (i.e. men have greater choice and access to higher paying and better respected jobs).
- **Lack of individual empowerment**, e.g. girls and women are socialised to be shy, and they lack self-confidence and the information, spaces, opportunities and skills to participate in decision-making.
- **Education**, e.g. teachers' attitudes reinforce negative gender stereotypes and textbooks are not gender-friendly.

In order to overcome barriers in general PU workshop participants highlighted the need to particularly address the following:

- **Policy and legislation:** change and implement laws and policies (similar to the suggestions at community level in section 7.4.1).
- **Advocacy:** identify positive change agents and create an enabling environment at community level to facilitate the safe participation of girls and women in decision-making and advocacy.
- **Information and awareness-raising:** improve access to quality information and improve the effectiveness and impact of sensitization, awareness and publicity efforts e.g. through media, video shows, theatre for development and documentary films.
- **Education:** continue efforts to improve co-education and equality in relation to both access and quality of education, including through gender-friendly textbooks and capacity building of teachers.
- **Training and capacity building:** continue, improve and expand work to build the capacity and skills of children as rights-holders and adults as duty-bearers, for example through technical training, parenting programmes, life skills and self-defence training for girls.
- **Economic empowerment:** improve the reach and quality of income generating activities (based on beneficiaries' abilities and performance) and improve access to resources by creating better opportunities for women.

In relation to the UNICEF Protective Environment Framework (see section 3.2), participants at the PU workshop assessed Plan's strengths and weaknesses as follows:

- **Plan strengths:** attitudes, practices, behaviour, customs; open dialogue with media and civil society; capacity of those in contact with the child; children's life skills etc.
- **Plan weaknesses:** lobbying / concerted advocacy for improved legislation and enforcement, basic and targeted services, monitoring and oversight and increased government commitment.

This varies slightly from the analysis of the same framework by two Plan CO staff members in KIIs (Farhana Afroz, PHR Project Implementation Manager and Nazmun Nahar, Gender Adviser):

- **Plan strengths:** capacity of those in contact with the child; children's life skills etc.; basic and targeted services; *"There is some work at community levels on attitudes, customs, traditions and practices but this needs more attention"* (Farhana Afroz).
- **Plan weaknesses:** *"There is an initiative to improve legislation and enforcement on child marriage but in general this area is not a strength of Plan"* (Farhana Afroz); open dialogue with media and civil society; and lobbying for improved government commitment. Monitoring and oversight was considered a particular gap with no government supervisory office to oversee implementation and limited or no advocacy to address this.

## 8.2.2 External

- **Cultural strengths**

Independence for Bangladesh grew out of the struggle to defend the Bangla language. It was therefore based on Bengali nationalism and secular government, and there is general agreement that the vast majority of Bangladeshis remain moderate in their approach to religion. New ideas and practices can and will be accepted (as shown by the work of the ASRHR projects), provided that interventions start from where people are, not where we want them to be, and that they are implemented sensitively, with the participation of relevant stakeholders from the beginning. Soap opera television shows, especially from India, but also from Bangladesh, reach huge audiences in rural areas. They currently portray and reinforce very negative gender stereotypes but, as suggested by an FGD participant and agreed by various staff members and the researcher, this could be a very effective mechanism to introduce awareness-raising messages to large audiences of both women and men - provided that the shows are accessible (screened between 7-10pm) and highly engaging, based on good story-telling principles rather than taking an overtly 'educational' approach<sup>20</sup>.

- **Tradition and religion**

*A woman has no say if she is kicked out and can't claim any percentage of assets which is a huge vulnerability, created by social and religious practices and lack of legal protection. Polygamy is common – up to 4 wives. In rural areas daughters are a burden and there is no return on investment seen for expenditure on food, clothing and education. In patriarchal society females are always dependent on males: fathers, husbands and sons. There is a total lack of protection against violence against women in the home.* (Md Tarequl Hoque, Plan CO Adviser, Youth Economic Development Programme)

*Violence against women is one slice of gender discrimination. We have yet to find an intervention to significantly deal with violence against women. We are dealing with the consequences, not the root causes. Child marriage is also very challenging to prevent.* (Ashraf Hossain, Director General of the Department of Women's Affairs, MOWCA)

All of the major world religions espouse essentially patriarchal views, for example 'treat your husband like a god'<sup>21</sup> (Hinduism), 'a woman shall not have authority over a man'<sup>22</sup> (Christianity) and 'two female witnesses shall have the equivalent of one male witness'<sup>23</sup> (Islam). This is often combined with a degree of fatalism regarding gender roles and the disempowered status of women and girls which became apparent during the research, and not just in relation to the rural poor: for example, the concept of karma and reincarnation in Hinduism and the oft-heard phrase "it is the will of Allah" in Islam. Thus very high levels of GBV and gender discrimination are accepted as 'normal'. For example, a 2011 survey of 12,600 girls and women over the age of 15 conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and supported by UNFPA reveals that 87% of currently married women have ever experienced psychological, physical, sexual and/or economic violence by their current husband, 77% within the past 12 months; 80% have ever experienced psychological violence, 72% within the past 12 months; 65% have experienced physical violence by their current husbands, almost half within the last 12 months; about half have experienced economic violence, one third in the past 12 months; and more than one third have experienced

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<sup>20</sup> The Research and Evaluation Coordinator identified a good example of such a show with an interesting and gender-challenging storyline (in Bengali, entitled 'Friend') but it was showing too late for villagers to watch (11.30pm).

<sup>21</sup> "All people counsel us through religion to 'obey our husbands like a god' and they quote Hindu scripture." (40-year-old woman, Alokjhari)

<sup>22</sup> "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." (1 Timothy 2:12, The Bible, King James Version)

<sup>23</sup> "And bring to witness two witnesses from among your men. And if there are not two men [available], then a man and two women from those whom you accept as witnesses - so that if one of the women errs, then the other can remind her." (Surat Al-Baqarah 2:282, The Holy Qur'an)

sexual violence by their current husbands, nearly one quarter in the past 12 months.<sup>24</sup> This provides a challenging backdrop against which to position messages on gender equity and women's and children's rights.

- *Social practices and religion, both Islam and Hinduism, are very much against women.* (Md Tarequl Hoque, Plan CO Adviser, YED Programme)

In Bangladesh this is further complicated by the politicisation of religion with major political parties being associated with either Hinduism or Islam. The Bangla language press reports village level incidents of violence against people and property, such as the burning down of houses and attacks (even fatal) on people of the opposite religion. This is then followed by reprisals and allegations that the initial attacks were 'self-inflicted' in order to gain sympathy for their own side whilst demonising the other. The boundaries between politics and religion are very blurred, making advocacy very complicated. If a conservative Islamic party were to gain power then there is a fear, expressed for example by female Plan staff, that the slow march towards gender equality would be halted and likely go backwards. There is not enough of a positive groundswell / tipping point of female empowerment to withstand a push back at this point. This is of particular concern given the proactive, strategic and well-funded efforts of extremists to increase their supporter base and influence policy. For example, following the debate of a particular piece of legislation seen as 'anti-Islamic', the Islamic protests in the streets of Dhaka were so strong that work on the legislation was immediately dropped.

- *In 2008, MOWCA developed a 'Women's and Children's Policy'. There were huge political and public demonstrations in the street and people were scared. The Policy is still in a critical state.* (Ashraf Hossain, Director General of the Department of Women's Affairs, MOWCA)
- *Religious organisations mobilised two million people in Dhaka last year. The government withdrew a bill the very next day on the threat of Hefazat-e-Islam [largest radical Islamic movement] to hold demonstrations.* (Md Tarequl Hoque, Plan CO Adviser, YED Programme)

In contrast, the moderates are only reactive, not proactive in trying to counter regressive moves<sup>25</sup>. This is an area which deserves serious attention in the consideration of any gender programming in Bangladesh.

- *Fundamentalists incline to opposition politics which is a tragedy at the end of the day. It has led to the politicisation of gender equality which is actually a social issue. Women's development policy is seen as 'anti-Islamic'. Extremists are one-eyed and not sufficiently educated, they are confrontational and not promoting the real spirit of Islam. Islam is being used as a political tool, contrary to human rights and the Constitution. We need to face this on the development and political fronts. Gender is a way of transforming society. We must identify and eliminate opposition from those who obstruct this.* (Ashraf Hossain, Director General of the Department of Women's Affairs, MOWCA)

- **Slow rate of change with 'gender transformation' in general and especially in challenging contexts**

This is the case even in so-called 'industrialised countries'. It is hugely complex and long-term work which takes generations, beyond donor-funded cycles. Awareness and understanding of gender is like the layers of an onion – some issues may be obvious to see but others remain hidden and taken for granted. It is important to achieve a critical mass / tipping point whereby, little by little, more and more gender-equitable gains come to slowly be seen as 'normal' (e.g. girls riding bikes in northern Bangladesh, equal numbers of girls and boys sitting side by side in school, girls getting married at 17 rather than 15...and then 18, then 21... etc.). These are things that were previously unheard of but which are now accepted. Whilst it is important to have far-reaching vision and passion for large scale transformation, do not underestimate the importance of appreciating and

<sup>24</sup> *Report on Violence Against Women Survey 2011*, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and UNFPA, December 2013: [http://203.112.218.66/WebTestApplication/userfiles/Image/Latest%20Statistics%20Release/VAW\\_Survey\\_2011.pdf](http://203.112.218.66/WebTestApplication/userfiles/Image/Latest%20Statistics%20Release/VAW_Survey_2011.pdf) [accessed 20 June 2014].

<sup>25</sup> This view is supported by an article which appeared in an English language newspaper just before the researcher's departure from Bangladesh: 'Bangladesh is not Afghanistan', article by Bertil Lintner, *The Independent (Bangladesh)*, 29 March 2014, critiquing a book by Hiranmay Karlekar entitled *Bangladesh: the Next Afghanistan?*

embedding the small victories - and then move on quickly to reaching the next goalpost. This is an external challenge which applies to all work on gender equality. Issues impacting on the way that Plan addresses this are included in the next section on internal enablers and barriers.

- *Older girls can ride bikes [e.g. aged 16-19]. They were teased at first, but now people are used to it.* (Women over 40, Alokjhari)
- *Everything is accepted from decade to decade and never considered as discrimination.* (Jannatul Ferdous Ruma, Plan CO Adviser, Child Protection)
- *Gender discrimination is so deeply rooted that we can't change it overnight.* (Md Tarequul Hoque, Plan CO Adviser, YED Programme)
- *Apart from the progress on child marriage, the situation is not good. The problems are complex and difficult to address.* (Nurul Haque, POVC Programme Coordinator, Dinajpur PU)

Other external factors enabling and inhibiting change are highlighted in section 3.2.

### ***8.2.3 Internal***

#### **Staff understanding, dedication and commitment to the issues and children**

Staff interviewed as part of this research demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of gender issues and were able to provide thoughtful reflections and analysis on often difficult issues, although it appears that further work is still needed to embed gender equality in staff personal as well as professional lives.

- *Gender discrimination is deep-rooted. Even if saying the right things professionally, it is not necessarily practiced at the personal level. A man will say in the office 'I support my wife' but the power differences continue. It is still expected that women should care for families and be the main child caregivers and women are still doing the housework. The pressure on deliverables is greater for female than male staff who have less family responsibilities.* (Jannatul Ferdous Ruma, Plan CO Adviser, Child Protection)

It was clear that there is enormous commitment at the level of many individuals, and increasingly at organisational level, to achieving positive change in relation to gender equality for girls, boys, women and men.

- *I am optimistic about the future.* (Md Tarequul Hoque, Plan CO Adviser, YED Programme)
- *I'm a feminist. I'm very pleased you're looking at gender.* (Nurafa Arju, Area Coordinator, Dinajpur PU, Alokjhari)
- *Plan's 'unique selling point' is its reach from individual up to national levels.* (Md. Masud, Girl Power Project Manager)

#### **Staff overload, silo-ed ways of working and lack of time and space for reflection**

As revealed in staff KIs and the PU workshop, staff were aware of the need for integration of programme and project approaches, developing more coherent and strategic mutual reinforcing of multiple approaches (education, health, life skills for children, legislation etc.) whereby the 'gender lens' is applied to all aspects of working. A few examples were given of cross-programme cooperation and integration:

- *The Girl Power Project is taking some initiatives from PHR, for example PHR tools on school-based learning, child-to-child peer education, child-to-parent learning and working to engage males. The girls' football and karate work is being used across programmes. And the Girl Power Project is joining the child marriage campaign as a result of the social norms report.* (Md. Masud, Girl Power Project Manager)

However, there are currently limited structures in place to enable and encourage reflection and cross-fertilisation of learning between projects and programmes and there is no concerted advocacy strategy for approaching key stakeholders.

## Relevance and appropriateness of Plan approaches

The triple approach of:

- progressively 'mainstreaming gender' (in staff training, programme development, MER and partnership agreements – and through the 5-year 'gender transformation strategy' and upcoming review of the CSP) combined with...
- implementing specific grant-funded programmes directly relevant to gender issues and also...
- capitalising on the existence of sponsorship-funded community forums to build capacity and life skills...

...appears to be appropriate. As a lot of this work is in the early stages, it would be very interesting to monitor progress and for other Plan countries to learn from the experience of Plan Bangladesh over the next few years. (An analysis of specific projects from the perspective of Plan staff is included in section 6.2 and so is not repeated here.) However, the constraints listed above (silo-ed way of working and lack of coordinated advocacy strategy etc.) need addressing in order to maximise the impact of interventions. Furthermore, the organisation appears to be unwilling or unable to engage fully or systematically with religious leaders. This is undoubtedly due to the complexity and sensitivity of the religious context, a possible lack of expertise within Plan Bangladesh and lack of support from Plan internationally to deal with these difficult issues. However, this remains a key area which is not being adequately addressed at present.

## The importance of involving boys and men

Experience in Bangladesh and internationally emphasises the importance of involving men and boys in gender work just as much as girls and women. Although not all projects currently involve work with men and boys, staff consulted recognised the importance of this. They want to engage men and boys in understanding gender inequality and committing to support women and girls to secure the changes they want and which would improve their lives. This is seen as critical in enabling change around social norms in all communities.

- *'Feminist' or 'woman activist' has a bad name. It conjures up an image of a woman with short hair, smoking a cigarette. Until men start talking about women's issues nothing will change. The issues have been revealed by women but we need to mobilise men to talk about this.* (Jannatul Ferdous Ruma, Plan CO Adviser, Child Protection)
- *We need to avoid isolating men. It's not 'for and against'. It's not 'either/or'. It needs to be promoted as a win-win situation. Men are scared. We need to talk about unlocking everyone's potential as human beings [...] Our first identity should be 'human', not 'male' or 'female'. [...] An enabling environment needs to be implemented. Doing things side by side will enlighten society and help work towards sustainable development."* (Ashraf Hossain, Director General of the Department of Women's Affairs, MOWCA)

## Suggested areas that could be improved/considered to better support the gender work

As above, this includes improved space for reflection; mechanisms and approaches which strengthen cross-fertilisation of ideas and coordinated approaches; exploration of ways to influence TV soap opera storylines airing between 7-10pm; and more concerted and systematic engagement with religious leaders and institutions.

With regard to the latter, ad hoc work is being conducted with religious leaders at local level, but this could – and should – be made more proactive and systematic. For example, rather than local PU staff approaching religious leaders somewhat ad hoc and individually (depending on what area they're working in, or which programme they've got funds for awareness-raising sessions on), Plan could start working with the Ministry of Religion, the Hindu Academy and the Imam Association. The Purohit interviewed is a member of the Hindu Academy. He is trying to revive the practice of holding community gatherings on Thursdays or Sundays to discuss religion and life. This practice has faded away in the past few years. In theory it is possible to talk about gender issues in this type of gathering. Plan could explore ways to engage with the Hindu Academy. Furthermore, the imam interviewed for the research is Chair of the Imam Association in his sub-district. The imams

have quarterly meetings where they decide which texts they will preach on each Friday and the interpretation these texts will be given. After Friday *Namas* he holds discussions with men about child marriage, divorce and having extra-marital affairs. These types of leaders – and the training institutes where they get their initial training from - could be deliberately targeted with child and women’s rights messages if approached in the right way.

- *We need to dare to do this, but Plan is not that organisation. I wanted to work in madrassas but this was not accepted. Plan wants to cover 100% in the community but it is not covering madrassas.* (Plan CO staff member)
- *[We need to] work with religious institutions like madrassas: it is our fear. We can make a start and keep a close eye on it. We need to take a stand and open minds. The problem will not disappear. Extremism is not being given enough attention.* (Md Tarequl Hoque, Plan CO Adviser, YED Programme)

### **Benefits of the participatory/reflective methodology for staff**

Staff in the PU workshop appreciated the time to reflect and the creative, participatory methodology which allowed for extended reflection and easy note-taking (the ‘booklet’ of learning, completed throughout the workshop, was considered memorable and easy to keep on-hand afterwards as a reminder of the issues covered). The Research and Evaluation Coordinator found the FGD methodology interesting and productive and indicated that she would share it with others in her team for future reference.

### **Management of risks, including child protection**

Care must be taken to carefully consider and minimise any risks to which children, women and staff in communities are exposed as they are increasingly empowered to speak out about gender issues in sensitive contexts.

## **9. Recommendations and issues to consider**

### **9.1 From communities**

During the community FGDs and KIIs, suggestions emerged which are useful for Plan to consider in its future planning. These were either articulated directly as recommendations, or they were embedded in the discussions on what works to achieve change. As such see section 7.4.1 for these issues.<sup>26</sup>

### **9.2 From Plan staff**

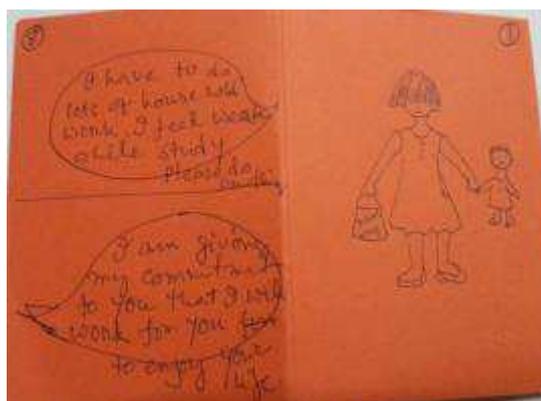
During the PU workshop, staff reflected on the situation of some specific, individual girls in the communities where they are working. At the end of the workshop, staff wrote personal messages for these girls and they imagined what messages the girls themselves would want to share. Some of these messages are as follows.

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<sup>26</sup> The only community level recommendations not already included elsewhere in this report are from the imam interviewed, which the researcher promised to pass on: “*Imams get a very small salary from the government, about 4000 taka per month [approximately 30 GBP]. When Plan invites us for discussions they only give snacks, not an honorarium. This would help with motivation and enthusiasm.*” “*Some sanitation equipment is distributed by the Head Man at village or sub-district level. Plan could give the equipment to imams to distribute to families to encourage people to value and trust them more. The way we live now we are not valued.*” Imam at the Kanchama sub-district mosque, Abdul Salam, Alokjhari.

### Messages from girls

- *I'm feeling lucky. Please keep your words.*
- *Please do something for me.*
- *I want to live as you wish.*
- *This is not charity. These are my rights.*
- *Your commitment is our fulfilment.*
- *Your feeling is good.*



### Messages for girls

- *I will try my best for you.*
- *Be safe always.*
- *Work together.*
- *Change yourself with your courage.*
- *Enjoy your rights.*
- *Wake up and join the movement. Together we'll make children happy.*

Participants at the PU workshop also identified the following recommendations for Plan:

- Conduct a power / stakeholder analysis
- Apply the gender lens to the child rights situation analysis and new and existing projects and programmes
- Collect and analyse sex-disaggregated data
- Identify structural causes and then address them
- Target duty-bearers as well as children
- Improve access to justice
- Provide livelihood and life skills opportunities
- Engage in national level advocacy
- Training for teachers on gender-friendly classroom management and positive discipline, and provision of gender-friendly learning materials

Suggestions and recommendations from CO staff relating to specific projects can be found in Appendix 5. Additional recommendations from the CO KIIs are as follows.

Farhana Afroz, Project Implementation Manager, Protecting Human Rights:

- *There is not much focus on policy-makers and duty-bearers. We need more of this rather than only working at field level.*
- *Plan is very rigid. There should be more scope to be more flexible. Grant support has different rules than for sponsorship. There is very little scope for sharing of ideas. Plan should integrate thinking across programmes. There needs to be better coordination between programmes where we can share and replicate lessons learned. There are management team meetings but not between programmes. Strategic development is needed to expand possibilities for sharing, even though everyone is under pressure.*

Ashish Damle, Regional Project Manager, Missing Child Alert:

- *Plan should have a section in the CSP on mainstreamed issues where Plan's position is very clear. Currently there is more emphasis on activities than impact.*
- *Have regular programme meetings to exchange experience.*
- *Plan doesn't have an integrated position of (e.g.) Advocacy Specialist. There are very interesting gender programmes but they are all approaching government separately. Synchronising of messages and approaches is not done.*
- *Within Plan (not the community) it would be good to map the stereotypes we have, which are very subtle and unconscious. Without addressing these personal issues, any gender equality programme will be superficial.*
- *Plan has good online courses on programme cycle management, finance etc. but nothing organisation-wide on gender.*

Dr Muhammad Munir Hussain, Project Manager, Generation Breakthrough Project:

- *ASRHR is often side-lined as a minor component of the overall 'health' domain, but it is hugely important and has clear links to education, child marriage, girls' empowerment and GBV. A comprehensive plan and corresponding resources are needed to work in this area<sup>27</sup>. There is a strong need to develop replicable models.*

Jannatul Ferdous Ruma, Adviser, Child Protection:

- *Female staff should get better vehicle support after dark.<sup>28</sup>*
- *When developing any project proposal it should include and integrate work to address discriminatory social norms.*
- *Annual and quarterly PU planning should be part of resource mapping: what are the cultural and social issues?*
- *Conduct capacity building based on mapping – to help staff deal with discriminatory social norms – across all programmes.*

[See also Appendix 3 for a compilation of various stakeholders' 'three wishes', some of which may be interpreted as recommendations].

### 9.3 From the international researcher

The following issues emerged from the research as ways to effect change: gender responsive education, especially at secondary and tertiary levels; life skills and empowerment for individual girls and boys; working with boys and men as well as girls and women; positive gender role models; economic empowerment for girls and women; training of professionals; targeted and creative awareness raising regarding social norms and attitudes, including use of the media; reforming and enforcing legislation; centralised government oversight; quotas for women in government. However, it is often the synchronisation of work across these different areas which needs further improvement. In order for change to be more effective, to have a greater impact and to be sustainable, there is value in mapping out the existing and future work of Plan, its partners and of other stakeholders across these different areas more systematically. The researcher finds the eight elements of the UNICEF Protective Environment a useful framework to facilitate this<sup>29</sup> (see the diagram in section 3.2: it is more effective to coordinate with others to work across all eight elements simultaneously as they are so interdependent and mutually reinforcing).

The final reflections of the international researcher are therefore as follows:

- Keep up the good work and continue to learn from, and improve, existing projects addressing gender equality.
- Keep moving forward with, and monitoring, gender mainstreaming (e.g. the training roll-out, integration of gender into proposals, review of the CSP and the revised MER system and indicators).
- Be more strategic in project / programme design using, for example, the UNICEF PEF framework for mapping and planning.
- Improve coherence, communication and cooperation between programmes and projects (e.g. through regular meetings / exchange between programme staff; all staff to apply the 'gender lens' to all projects – not just new projects; consider the value of a combined advocacy position).

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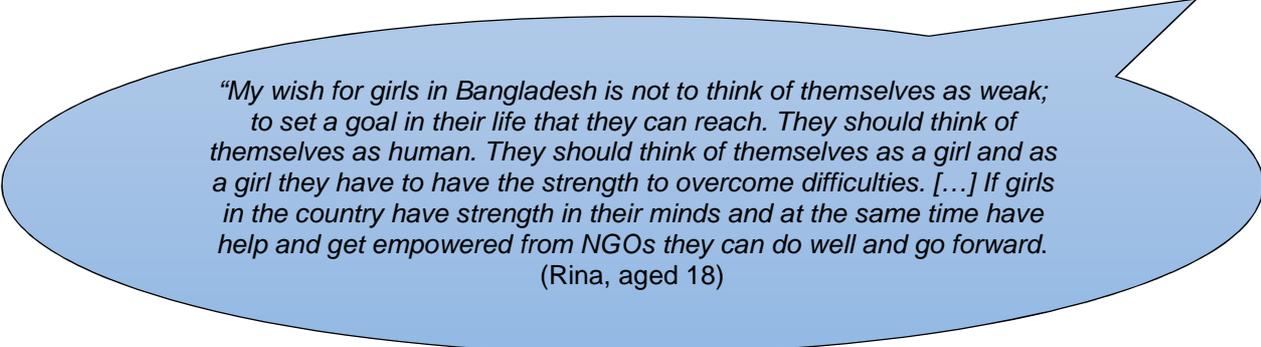
<sup>27</sup> Dr Hussain notes that there is donor interest in this area and that Plan could fill a niche here as there are no organisations in Bangladesh specialising in ASRHR. The government Health and Family Planning Department has emphasised adolescent reproductive and sexual health in its current 5-year plan.

<sup>28</sup> Staff are supposed to leave at 17.00 but this is considered unrealistic. Transport is available after this time but it needs to be signed off by a supervisor and booked in advance.

<sup>29</sup> 1. Government commitment to fulfilling protection rights; 2. Legislation and enforcement; 3. Attitudes, traditions, customs, behaviour and practices; 4. Open discussion, including engagement of media and civil society; 5. Children's life skills, knowledge and participation; 6. Capacity of those in contact with children; 7. Basic and targeted services; and 8. Monitoring and oversight.

- Go deeper into staff and partner attitudes to explore discrepancies between what is said in the office compared to what happens at home, providing a safe space for staff and partners to discuss their concerns without fear of recriminations.
- Explore some specific issues. For example, capitalise on, improve and expand existing work with religious leaders through (e.g.) Ministry of Religion, Imam Association, Hindu Academy etc.; influence storylines and gender portrayal in TV serials airing between 7-8pm and 10pm.

As shown by this research, the work is hard but change is possible.



*"My wish for girls in Bangladesh is not to think of themselves as weak; to set a goal in their life that they can reach. They should think of themselves as human. They should think of themselves as a girl and as a girl they have to have the strength to overcome difficulties. [...] If girls in the country have strength in their minds and at the same time have help and get empowered from NGOs they can do well and go forward.*

(Rina, aged 18)

# Appendix I – List of documents reviewed

## Plan Bangladesh documents

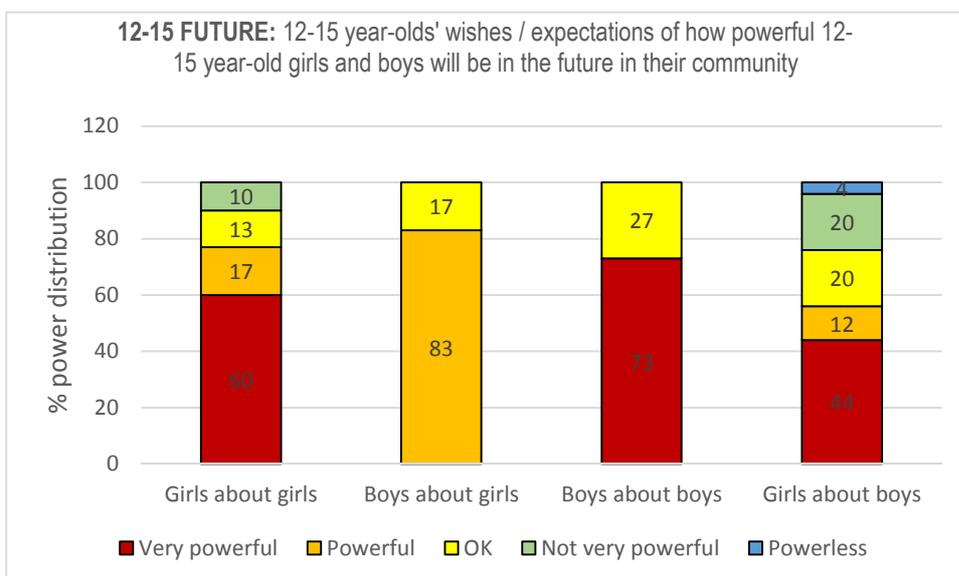
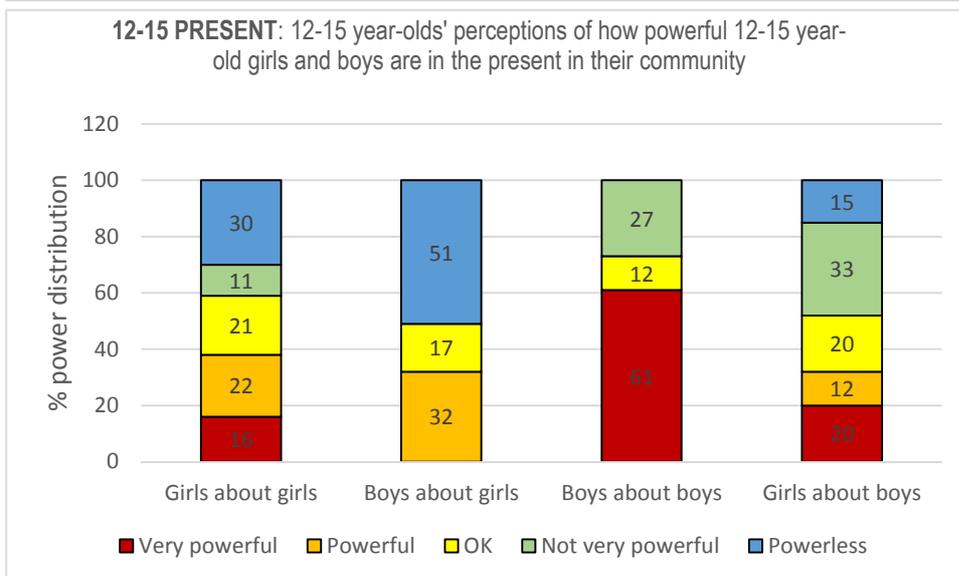
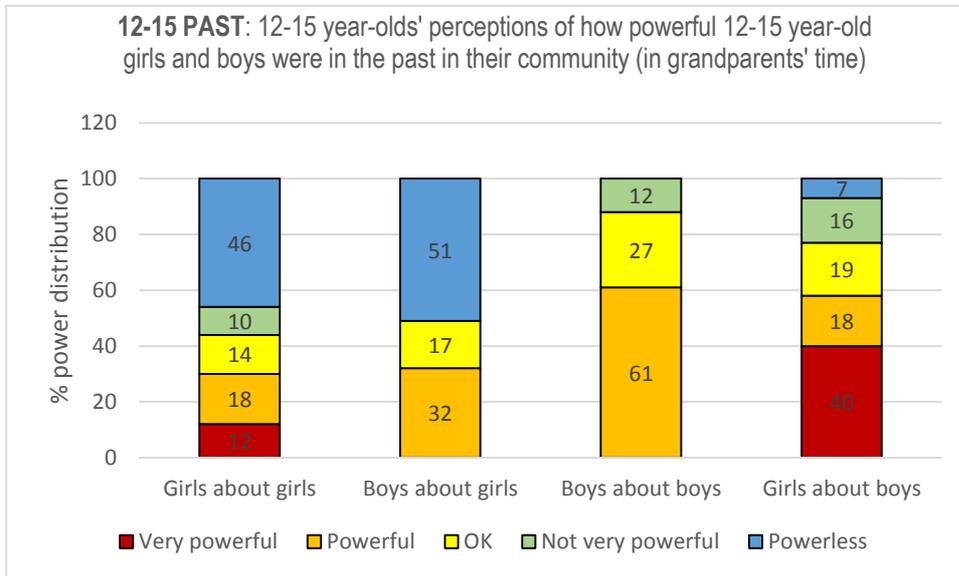
- *Plan Bangladesh Country Strategic Plan: July 2010 - June 2015 and Annex 3 (Country Programmes)*
- *Customary Laws, Norms and Practices in Bangladesh: Gender Based Violence Perspective*, Md. Tajul Islam and Md. Rokon Uddin for Plan Bangladesh GPP, April 2013
- *Child Marriage in Bangladesh: Findings from a National Survey*, ICDDR,B, ACPR and Plan Bangladesh, October 2012
- *Study on issues in prevention and rescue operation of cross border child trafficking and roles of Law Enforcing Agencies (BGB, Police, BSF) in Jessore and Satkhira districts*, Centre for Women and Children Studies for Plan Bangladesh MCA, December 2013
- *The Missing Child Alert: Fight against Cross- border Trafficking - country proposal*, Plan Bangladesh, January 2012 (Revised March/April 2013)
- *Country Programme Proposal: Girl Power Project*, Plan Bangladesh, Revised May 2012
- *Stop Child Marriage of Girls in Bangladesh, Plan UK Request for Proposal*, March 2012
- *Stop Child Marriage of Girls in Bangladesh, UKNO Quarterly Report*, April 2012 to March 2013

## Other documents

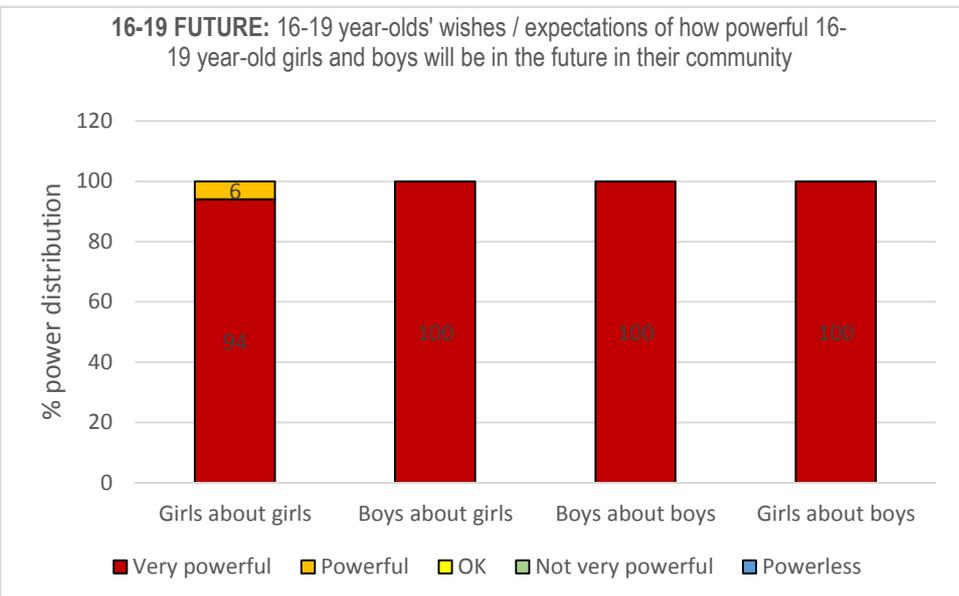
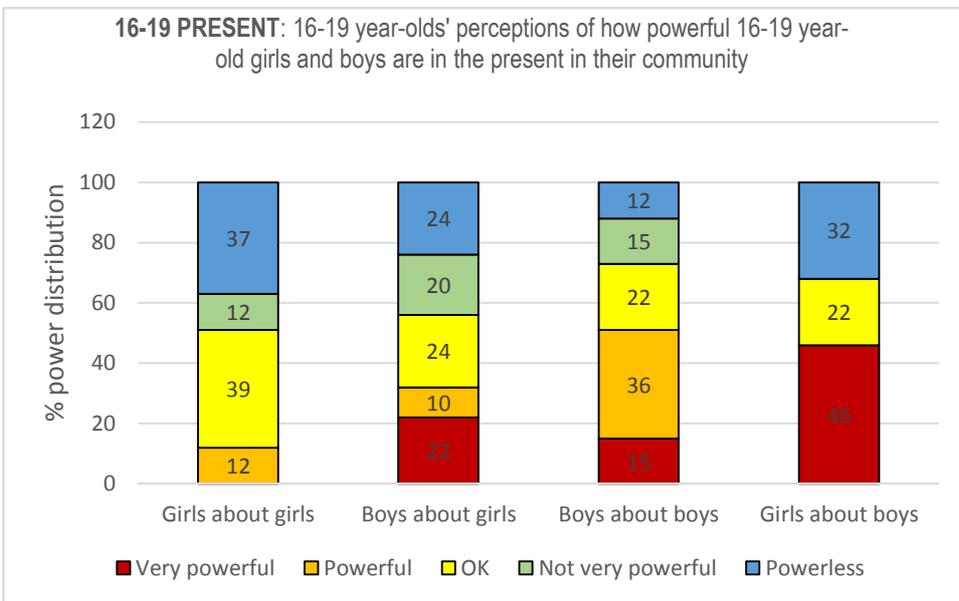
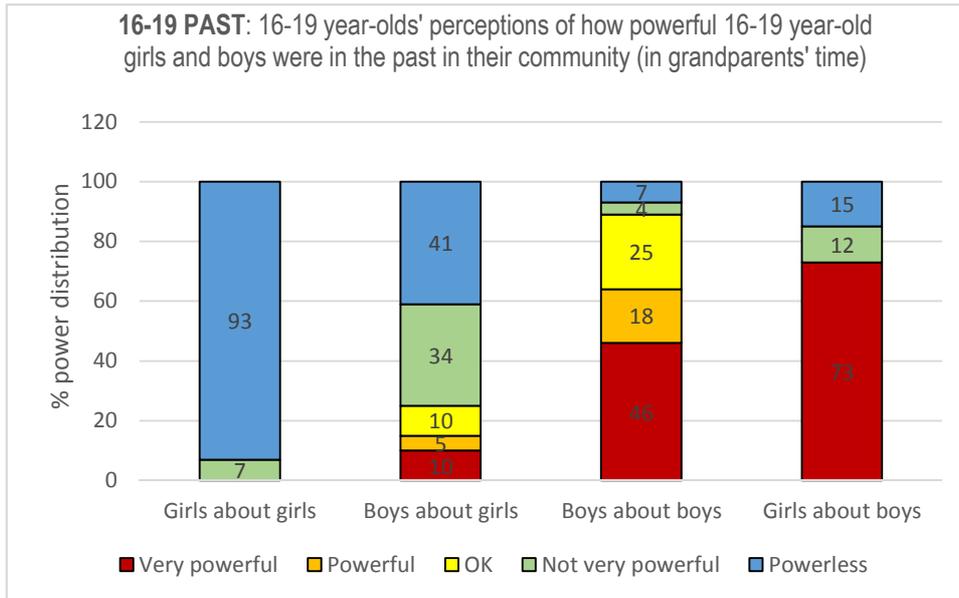
- *Report on Violence Against Women Survey 2011*, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and UNFPA, December 2013
- *Men's attitudes and practices regarding gender and violence against women in Bangladesh: Preliminary findings*, icddr'b, UNFPA, Partners for Prevention, the Change Project, November 2011
- *Asia Child Marriage Initiative: Summary of Research in Bangladesh, India and Nepal*, Plan Asia Regional Office and the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW), 2013
- *On Norms and Agency: Conversations about Gender Equality with Women and Men in 20 Countries*, Ana Maria Munoz Boudet, Patti Petesch, and Carolyn Turk with Angelica Thumala, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2012
- *Introduction to the Girl Power Programme*, Plan Pakistan, 2014

# Appendix 2 – Perception of female and male power distribution in the community in Alokjhari

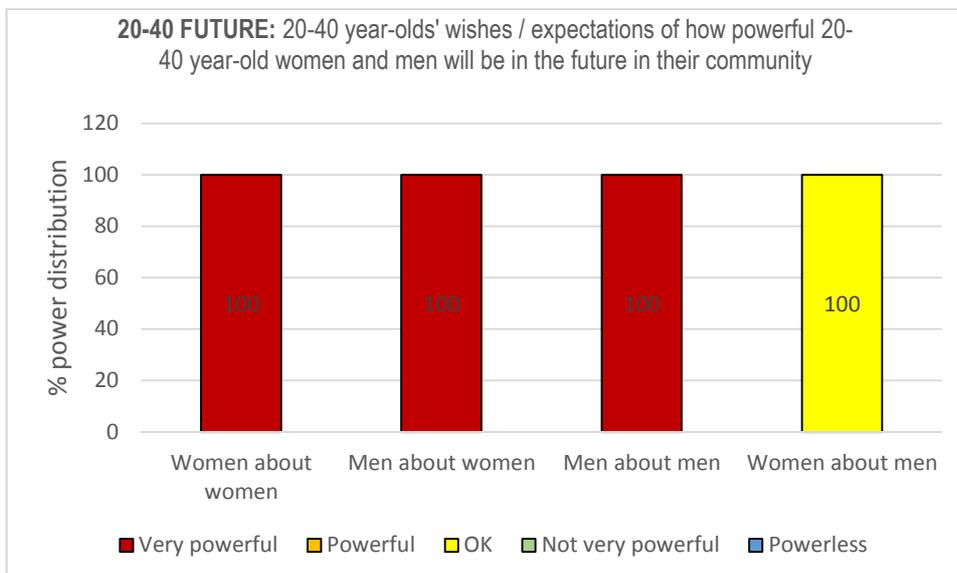
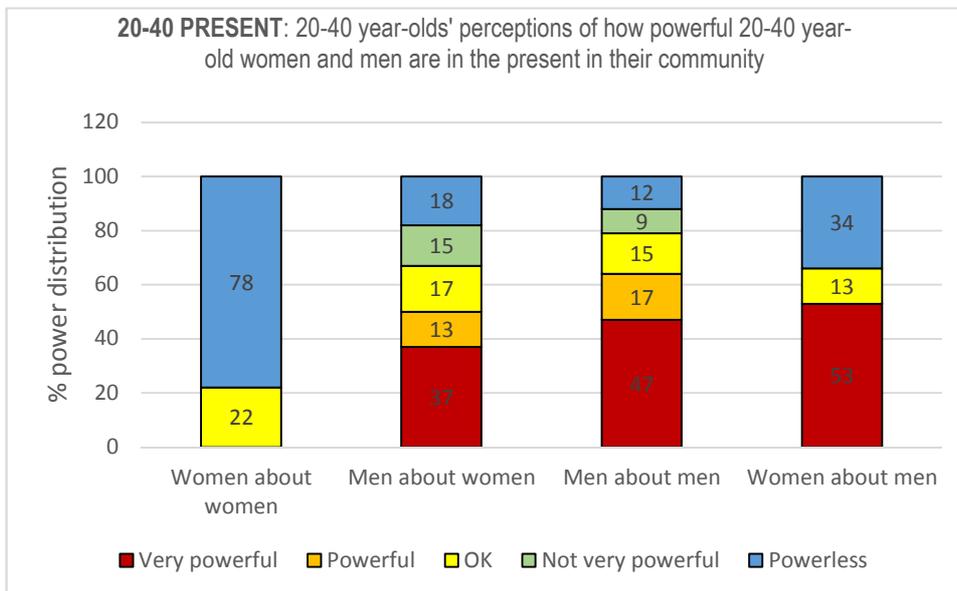
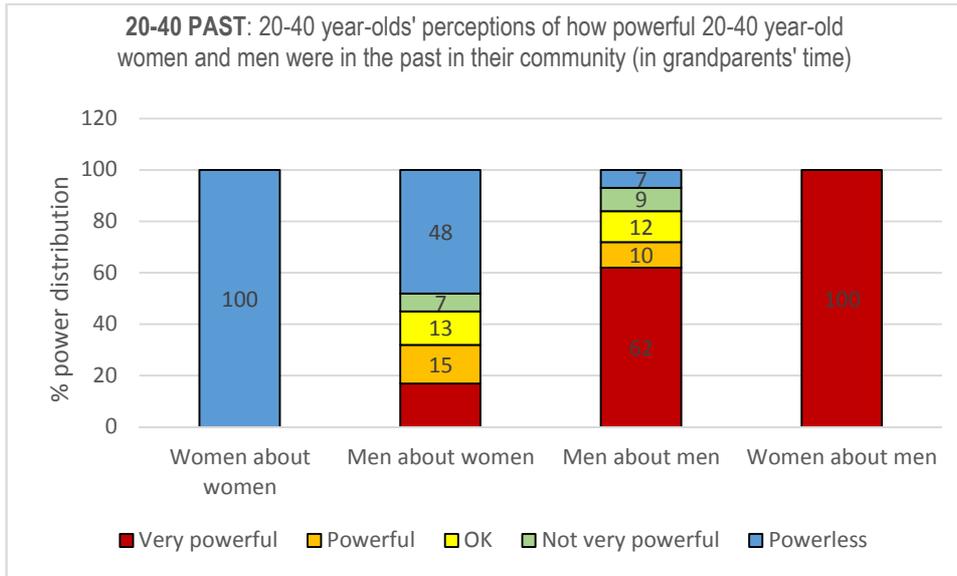
## Findings for 12-15 year-olds



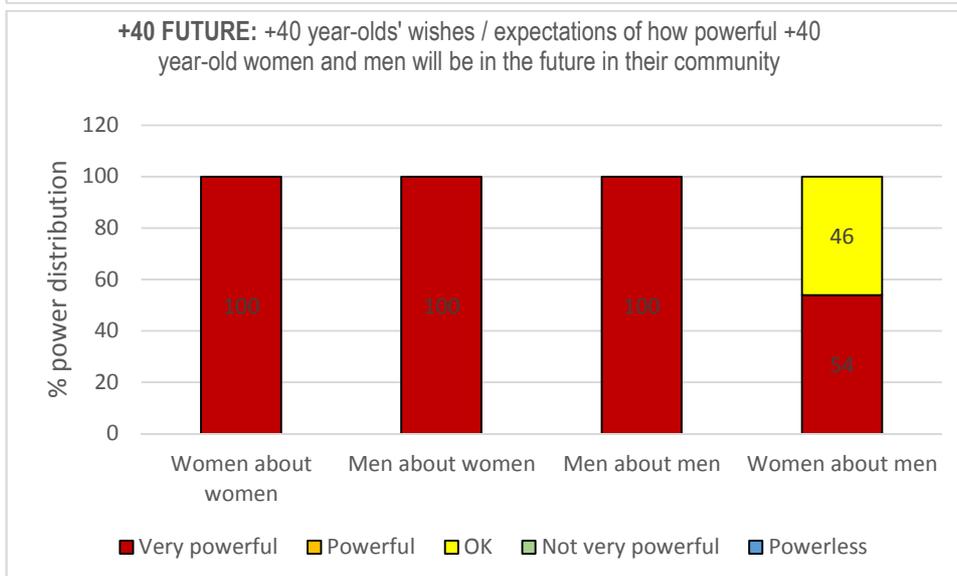
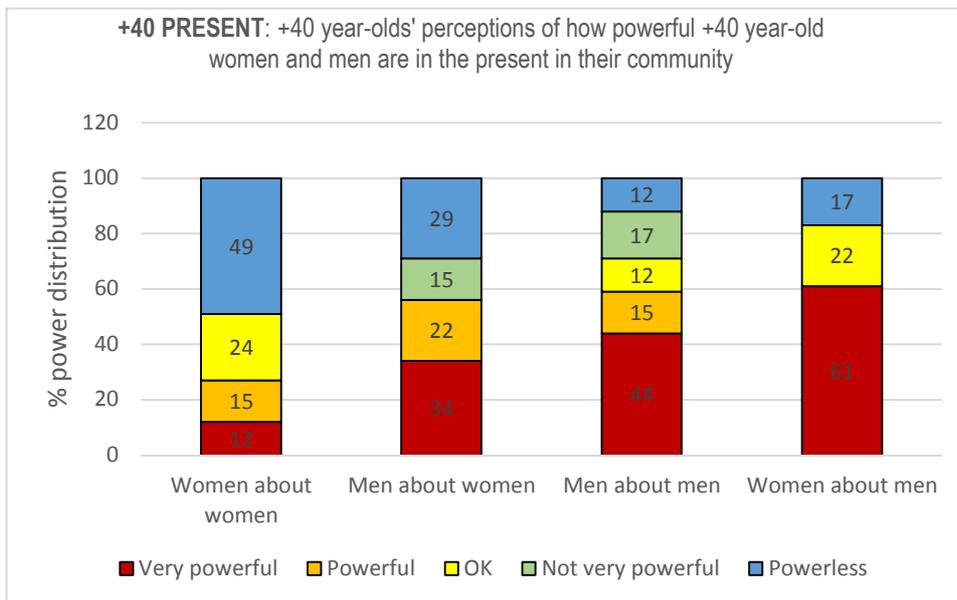
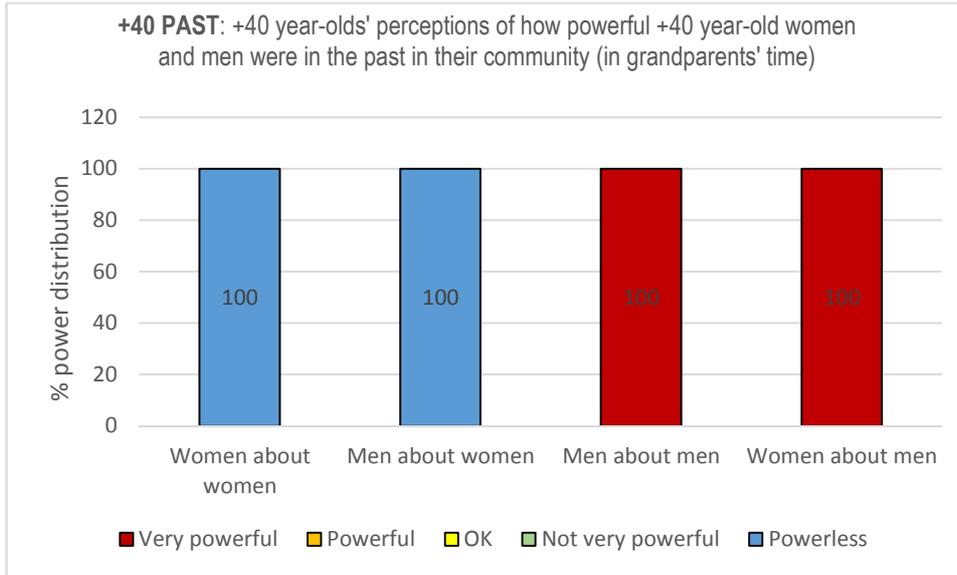
## Findings for 16-19 year-olds



## Findings for 20-40 year-olds



## Findings for +40 year-olds



## Appendix 3 – Compilation of '3 wishes' as expressed in KIIs and some FGDs

Where time allowed, participants in KIIs and FGDs were asked, if they had a magic wand, what would be their three wishes. It was up to each respondent how they interpreted this – in relation to global, national or community level gender issues, or in relation to a particular project or programme.

### PU workshop

(personal '3 wishes' compiled through flipchart feedback)

#### Equality and respect

- All are equal
- No more male-dominated society
- Balanced power relations in society
- Elimination of all forms of discrimination
- Mutual respect
- All women and girls in Bangladesh will be respected in the family, community, society and nationally
- Eliminate gender / social division of labour
- Gender-friendly environment
- [Women and girls] access property and have decision-making power
- Equal access to cultural resources
- Equal access to opportunities and enjoyment
- Parents' positive attitude towards both boys *and* girls
- Schools which are gender non-biased

#### End to violence

- No child will be abused
- No woman will be abused or raped ever in my country

#### Misc

- Expression of girls
- Aspiration of girls
- Positive thinking
- Committed government
- Poverty-free society
- Secure social environment

### Plan staff KIIs

#### Jannatul Ferdous Ruma, Adviser, Child Protection

1. End child marriage. It is one problem with multiple solutions: impacts on education, respect for the girl as a future citizen, economic empowerment and health improvements.
2. Street children, especially girls living on the street: I want the problem to vanish. I want all children living with their families or in a secure place.
3. That no one will fixate on whether a foetus is a boy or a girl. Girls and boys should get equal property rights.

### **Md Tarequl Hoque, Adviser, Youth Economic Development Programme**

1. Design rigorous programmes and work in the community for a very long time: we have changed many things in two decades but we can't do anything revolutionary in the field. We have to be cautious.
2. Work with religious institutions like madrassas: it is our fear. We can make a start and keep a close eye on it. We need to take a stand and open minds. The problem will not disappear. Extremism is not being given enough attention.
3. Address the vulnerability of women due to total lack of assets (both parental and marital). To empower women, along with a good education, we need to create income-generation and financial independence.

### **Farhana Afroz, Project Implementation Manager, Protecting Human Rights**

1. No discrimination between men and women – then other problems will be automatically resolved due to a change of mind-set.
2. Poverty reduction. Poverty hampers the situation.
3. Education for all, equally, and equal opportunities.

### **Md. Masud, Girl Power Project Manager**

1. End to GBV. Very heartfelt feelings and wishes.
2. Responsiveness and responsibility: the role and participation of all people should be visible.
3. Creating opportunities for girls: everyone is working in a silo-ed approach. The work should be integrated, with a common platform for Plan and more broadly.

### **Ashish Damle, Regional Project Manager, Missing Child Alert**

1. There should be major programming and investment on *communications* regarding gender to help people access information in the field through mobile phones, posters and other media.
2. Research should be made an integral part of programme cycle management. The private sector invests a lot in research and development but why not us when dealing with such sensitive issues?
3. The area of policy reform should become more specialised, for Plan to become the lead organisation with government, going beyond 'CRC implementation' to have a major collaboration. We get very happy with very limited 'wins' with government, like getting one MOU signed. We should demand and expect more.

### **Syeda Laslima Jamal, Communications and Project Specialist**

1. Engaging boys and men to understand girls' and women's rights (the football project only works with girls).
2. Government involvement and improving legislation and enforcement to address discrimination in legislation, especially property laws.
3. Personal sensitisation to every child from birth to address discrimination which starts from a very young age: "dolls for girls versus guns for boys"

### **Dr Muhammad Munir Hussain, Project Manager, Generation Breakthrough Project**

1. All adolescents in Bangladesh to be aware of ARSHR and free of risks.
2. Make all service centres adolescent-friendly with universal access.
3. Media and corporates to be sensitised, aware of ASRHR and friendly towards adolescents. [Example of the 'Fair and Lovely' adverts causing adolescent girls to be worried about pimples rather than thinking about school].

### **Nazmun Nahar, Gender Adviser**

1. To have a separate budget for gender rather than struggling to get money ad hoc from human resources and some projects.

2. Develop a plan to implement, in a very systematic way at field level, all gender tools and indicators.
3. For everyone to think that gender is not a women's issue.

### **Other Kills**

#### **Ashraf Hossain, Director General of the Department of Women's Affairs, MOWCA**

1. Consider woman and girls as human beings first or negative stereotypes will be perpetuated.
2. Unlock the potential embedded within women, keeping consideration of 'human' identity first and foremost.
3. An enabling environment needs to be implemented. Girls and boys, women and men doing things side by side will enlighten society and work towards sustainable development.

#### **Dipak Chakraborti, Purohit (Hindu religious leader), Tetulia**

1. Peace in the nation.
2. All people to be happy in their families and in the nation.
3. To abolish discrimination based on religion. [Other villagers treat Hindus like a minority and they feel discriminated against and treated differently].

#### **Abdul Salam, Imam at the Kanchama sub-district mosque, Alokjhari**

1. End child marriage.
2. Good sanitation.
3. Encourage people to do paid employment.

#### **Nahida Akhtari, Primary School Head Teacher, Tetulia**

1. Nice building for the school.
2. Lots of play materials for outdoor games.
3. Play facilities related to ICT like video games.

#### **Chobi Rani, Female UP Member, Tetulia**

1. Reduce child marriage.
2. Reduce dowry.
3. That people in the community remain healthy. A woman died giving birth yesterday.

#### **Krishna Kumar Sarkar, Police Inspector, Sub-District – Kanchama Police Station**

1. Gender equality.
2. Education for all.
3. Everyone should obey the law.

### **FGDs**

#### **20-40 year-old men, Tetulia**

1. End to corruption
2. Everyone to take responsibility (government officials, teachers, doctors and everyone).
3. Abolish political unrest.

#### **Men over 40, Tetulia**

- All said that education was the biggest priority. Some individuals gave their own wishes as well.
- 1. Education, 2. Assets, 3. Social development (and wants to go to England) (32-year-old)
- 1. Control population to improve economic conditions of everyone, 2. Stop drug trafficking across the Indian and Burmese borders [England should think about this] (32-year-old)
- 1. Child protection, 2. End child marriage, 3. End violence against women...and 4. End corruption (45-year-old)

- 1. Reduce arms imports, 2. International donors like Plan to address open defecation. (50-year-old)

**12-15 year-old boys, Alokjhari**

- 1. Poverty, 2. Unemployment, 3. End discrimination between men and women. (15-year-old)
- End superstitions like restricting girls' education. (15-year-old)
- Eliminate child marriage and poverty (14-year-old)
- Change the fact that children don't obey their parents (14-year-old)
- End dowry (14-year-old)

**20-40 year-old men, Alokjhari**

1. Opportunities for financial empowerment
2. Job opportunities for men and women. *Working in education or health is appropriate for women and men can work in factories or industry.*

**70-year-old man, Alokjhari**

1. Brotherhood and cooperation between men and women.
2. Reduce political unrest.
3. If we have cooperation, then all problems will be eliminated – political and otherwise.

# Appendix 4 – Customary Laws, Norms and Practices in Bangladesh: Gender Based Violence Perspective

(Final Report), Md. Tajul Islam and Md. Rokon Uddin, 7 April 2013 for the Girl Power Project (GPP), Plan Bangladesh, pp.37-39

## *At a Glance: List of Customs, Norms and Practices against particular GBV*

Sl.	Customs, Norms and Practices	Gender based Violence
1	The practice of considering wives as the property of husband after marriage	Physical Torture, Conjugal Rape, Trafficking
2	Minor violence or violence at initial stage is not considered as an offense	Physical Torture, Sexual Harassment
3	Prime responsibility of the wife is to satisfy her husband	Physical Torture, Conjugal Rape
4	The practice (social tendency) of blaming the victim ultimately defends the perpetrators	Physical Torture, Sexual Harassment, Rape, Acid Throwing,
5	Poverty: Violence in poor families is tolerated as usual, but not as serious	Physical Torture, Child Marriage
6	Incidents of violence are not published due to fear of humiliation and disgrace	Physical Torture (middle and upper class family), Rape, Conjugal Rape, Sexual Harassment (Stalking)
7	Individual protest by the victim increases further violence	Physical Torture, Conjugal Rape, Sexual Harassment,
8	Protest against husband incites suspicion of having extra-marital relation	Conjugal Rape, Physical Torture
9	Girls give their consent to prove that they do not have love affairs with other places	Forced Marriage
10	Disagreement or conflict with husband or in-laws justifies torture to husband	Physical Torture
11	When violence to particular woman happens regularly or frequently, nobody care	Physical Torture, Sexual Harassment
12	The 'apprehension of being divorced' forces women not to protest against violence	Physical Torture, Conjugal Rape
13	The practice of polygene influences violence in various ways	Physical Torture, Conjugal Rape
14	Practice of completely dependency of wives on their husbands	Physical Torture, Conjugal Rape

15	Unconscious or no family-planning contributes in physical torture	Physical Torture, Child Marriage
16	After child marriage of girls, they are expected to act like adult	Physical Torture
17	Man try to express or to maintain their authority over the family whatever force is required	Physical Torture, Conjugal Rape, Rape, Acid Throwing, Forced Marriage
18	Addicts and gamblers lose conscience to be well-mannered with their wives	Physical Torture, Conjugal Rape
19	As conjugal life gets older, the tendency to torture wives increases	Physical Torture
20	Women are tortured if the demand for dowry is not fulfilled	Physical Torture, Dowry
21	Women are strictly restricted to contact or to make affiliation with man outside family	Physical Torture, Forced Marriage
22	Strong social tendency to give the victim in marriage to the rapist or stalker	Rape, Sexual Harassment
23	Female sexuality and virginity of unmarried women is considered as women's family honor	Rape, Sexual Harassment, Conjugal Rape, Child Marriage
24	Miscarriage of justice encourages the torturer and discourages victims to seek justice/ Women's opinions are not accepted but suppressed	Physical Violence, Sexual Harassment, Rape, Acid Throwing, Trafficking, Dowry, Child Marriage, Forced Marriage,
25	The practice of immediate cleanliness (after being raped) sweeps away medical evidence	Rape
26	Porn videos are available digitally at local computer shops	Sexual Harassment, Rape, Conjugal Rape, Physical Torture
27	Girls with absence of guardian are targeted for violence	Sexual Harassment, Rape, Forced Marriage
28	Men try to exclude women from participating public forums	Sexual Harassment, Rape, Conjugal Rape, Physical Assault, Child Marriage
29	Gender insensitive environment at work place inopportune girls to be sexually abused	Sexual Harassment, Rape, Physical Torture
30	Nature of movement required by particular jobs makes girls vulnerable to sexual violence	Sexual Harassment, Rape

31	Repeated rape by blackmailing to circulate the video document of first rape	Rape
32	Stalking is considered as a credit by boys	Sexual Harassment
33	As long as daughters are remained to marry, neighbor's tantalizing continues	Child Marriage, Forced Marriage
34	Nothing to bother if the bridegroom is highly demanding, especially foreign migrant	Child Marriage, Forced Marriage, Dowry
35	Demanding bridegrooms choose girls for marriage	Child Marriage
36	Love affairs at childhood	Child Marriage, Forced Marriage, Physical Torture
37	Early marriage requires less amount of dowry	Child Marriage
38	Raising the age in the birth registration from Union Council or Notary Public to legalize early marriage	Child Marriage
39	Neighbors and public representatives resist less because of their relation or vote bank	Child Marriage, Forced Marriage
40	Demand of daughter decrease in marriage market as the age increases	Child Marriage, Forced Marriage, Dowry
41	Parents prefer early marriage if the girl is not good at study	Child Marriage, Forced Marriage
42	Girls opinion is not valued but suppressed	Forced Marriage, Physical Torture
43	The pre-requisite of marriage is dowry	Dowry
45	It looks unsocial to ward of new bride as well as son-in-law in empty hand	
46	The belief that gifts are used by the daughter which make her happy	
47	Gifts are more important than the bride herself to the people at or around husband's house	
48	As the dowry increase, it increase the social status of bride, bridegroom and his family	
49	The practice of depriving women from inheritance	
50	Dowry compensates the lacking of a daughter	
51	Match-makers who demand commission on the amount of dowry	

## Appendix 5 - Staff analysis of Plan Bangladesh projects relevant to gender discrimination and VAWG

**Please note:** The information provided in this section is based on KIIs with CO staff (see section 2.3 for details of these KIIs). The analysis of strengths and challenges in relation to these particular projects conveys the reflections of the staff themselves, which was a key aim of the research. It is not an evaluation by the international researcher. See also sections 8 and 9 for more general comments and analysis from staff.

### *Protecting Human Rights (PHR)<sup>30</sup>*

**Overview:** USAID-funded 5-year project from March 2011 aiming to reduce domestic violence (intimate partner violence - IPV) by 10% in targeted areas (against a baseline of 53% prevalence of all types of IPV); operating in 6 districts (Barguna, Jessore, Dinajpur, Sylhet, Chittagong and Bogra), 8 *upazilas* and 102 *unions*. 5-pronged approach: i) **advocacy** for legislative reform and enforcement to reduce IPV, ii) **capacity building** for key-actors involved with the protection and promotion of human rights, iii) increasing **access to justice** for the survivors and vulnerable ones, iv) providing **survivor services** for the survival of victims of IPV and human rights abuses, and v) building **mass awareness and public education** on IPV and other human rights abuses. A mid-term review by external consultants was being conducted in March 2014.

#### **What is going well / what works?**

- Doorstop services, especially legal support (combatting lack of faith in the justice system which is not woman- or child-friendly; girls and women are not prepared to speak out and/or believe it is 'normal' to be beaten); even men are using this service to request advice and support to deal with conflicts between mothers- and sisters-in-laws and their wives which is an indication that men are taking the anti-violence messages seriously;
- Good impact at school level: certain percentage of boys are committing not to be violent and not to take dowry from their bride's family, and girls are committing not to marry under 18; increased understanding that housework is not just the role of girls and women etc.;
- Community meetings with men, including discussions in tea shops: very important and this is always the first step when working in a new area; PHP project has more engagement overall with men compared to women.

#### **What is not going so well / what are the challenges?**

- Target of 10% reduction is overly ambitious and likely to be revised down as a result of the mid-term review.
- Work with survivors is challenging due to very limited resources for referral. Survivor-friendly police stations are not very successful due to lack of female police officers, attitudinal problems towards VAWG issues (lack of maintenance of confidentiality) and poor infrastructure at local level, e.g. no separate rooms. The courts have no separate space and no child-care arrangements.
- Police training is very complex as lists of individual officers have to be vetted by the US State Department.
- The mind-set of government officials is challenging, as is their very high turnover: their attitude is "we already have legislation and policies like educational stipends for girls, Domestic Violence

<sup>30</sup> Information and reflections provided by the CO PHP Project Implementation Manager, Farhana Afroz, 18 March 2014.

Act (Prevention and Protection), Child Marriage Restraint Act etc. Why are we focussing so much on women? What about men's issues?"

### *Girl Power Project (GPP)<sup>31</sup>*

**Overview:** Multi-country Plan Netherlands-funded 5-year project from July 2011-2015 aiming to reduce violence against girls and young women with objectives and activities in 4 areas: 1) individual level (life skills, karate, livelihood training, livelihood and job placement support); 2) socio-cultural level ('Girls and Young Women Forum' foundation and operation; child rights training; theatre for development shows; message dissemination through national and community radio); 3) institutional level ('Child Protection Group' formation and operation; gender and child rights training; advocacy workshops); 4) civil society level (civil society network formation; gender and child rights training; media sensitisation). Aims to reach 50,000 girls and young women aged 10-24, 2,000 communities, 200 CSOs and 1,000 duty-bearers. Operates in 8 districts (30 *upazilas* and 10 zones of Dhaka City).

#### **What is going well / what works?**

- At individual level: the livelihood, life skills, child protection and gender training is going well, addressing corporal punishment in schools and sexual harassment; the self-defence karate training initially faced lots of resistance but now there is a recommendation for it to be included in the national curriculum: "*We are not receiving this training to hit people but to feel confident!*"
- At socio-cultural level: theatre for development performances by girls and boys have large audiences with lots of key stakeholders present; video shows and message-giving is going well.
- At institutional level: it cannot be said that child marriage or VAWG has stopped, but at sub-district level, through the 'Child Protection Group', Women and Children's Affairs Officers, Upazila and UP Chairs, District Commissioners and other department heads are taking VAWG cases seriously and are responding, even to the point of giving out their cell phone numbers so that girls, their families and communities have direct access to the authorities.
- At civil society level: CSOs are actively doing advocacy with local leaders, government duty-bearers and journalists (on ethical reporting issues).

#### **What is not going so well / what are the challenges?**

- At individual level: the project is still working to engage men and boys. This has been challenging so far.
- At socio-cultural level: ethnic minorities have their own traditions and norms. Although it is very important to work with them, this has been limited so far.
- At institutional level: alliance building and cooperation at community and national levels is challenging.
- At civil society level: more work is needed to build local capacity to ensure local ownership and sustainability for the work and allow an exit strategy for the international NGOs. This is difficult in a short project period.

### *Generation Breakthrough<sup>32</sup>*

**Overview:** Netherlands Embassy-funded UNFPA 3.5-year project, April 2013 – December 2016, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs. The project is aiming for the primary prevention of GBV, healthy relationships and meeting adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights (ASRHR) needs. 10-19 year-olds will be responsible, non-violent, positive future adults and parents with gender equitable attitudes and practices. Plan is the

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<sup>31</sup> Based on information provided by the CO GPP Manager, Mohammad Masud, 18 March 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Based on information provided by CO Dr Muhammad Munir Hussain (Project Manager, Generation Breakthrough Project), 30 March 2014.

umbrella NGO providing technical support to the project under 4 outputs (the Ministries are responsible for implementation at field level): 1) access to comprehensive ASRHR and prevention of GBV through media campaigns (community radio, posters, leaflets, stickers and street drama) and community advocacy meetings; 2) access to comprehensive ASRHR services through increased capacity of government and NGO service providers, referral of GBV survivors to existing one-stop centres, and distance counselling services (contact with a call centre / helpdesk and clinical psychologist via mobile phone); 3) developing gender-equitable attitudes amongst 10-14 year-olds through the Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS)<sup>33</sup> and Coaching Boys into Men (capacity building for football coaches on GBV and ASRHR); 4) MER regarding effective models to prevent GBV and develop gender-equitable attitudes.

Outputs 1, 2 and 3 are taking place in 2 rural districts (Putuakhali and Barguna – in 150 and 100 schools respectively); Output 3 is also taking place in 2 urban areas (50 schools in Barisal and 50 schools in Dhaka). Generation Breakthrough is not duplicating the PHR programme. The only geographical overlap is in 1 sub-district in Barguna (10 schools). PHR has different target groups, is concerned with adult IPV and does not address ASRHR. Generation Breakthrough takes a 'cognitive affective approach' in a more in-depth way than PHR.

It is too early to talk about successes and challenges at this stage, but it is anticipated that the website, apps and digital games component of the project will not be feasible as very few people use smartphones and computers are not accessed easily by students at school. (Plan was not involved in the project design). In general Generation Breakthrough seems like a very interesting project to watch in the future, particularly given the specific MER component under Output 4.

### *ASRHR programme<sup>34</sup>*

**Overview:** The project goal is to improve ASRHR free from coercion, discrimination, and violence for disadvantaged adolescent in Barguna. This ongoing work is closely linked to the ASRHR component of Generation Breakthrough. It involves providing information and awareness, facilitating adolescent clubs, building the capacity of service providers and sensitisation through community advocacy with government and CSOs. Much improvement has happened during the implementation period.

#### **What is going well / what works?**

- Increased levels of understanding, knowledge and changed attitudes of local level duty bearers. The project is also helping to develop ownership by the health department and local level service providers resulting in increased quality of Adolescent Friendly Health Services provision by NGOs and government health service providers at Union and Upazila levels.
- Increased capacity and expertise of CSOs to address and lobby for ASRHR issues with service providers. Good CSO relations with communities and government have resulted in the provision of spare rooms and spaces for adolescent clubs.
- Communities *will* accept talking about ASRHR in relation to unmarried adolescents *but* it is essential to prepare the communities very well first, through careful explanations. In Barguna they didn't work with adolescents directly for a period of 6 months but instead spent a long time working with adult community groups to prepare the way: *"Reality has changed a lot in Bangladesh. Communities are not necessarily as reactionary as one might expect."*

<sup>33</sup> GEMS is an international programme of the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), implemented in India and Vietnam: <http://www.icrw.org/where-we-work/gender-equity-movement-schools-gems>. The 2-year curriculum will be adapted into Bangla by Plan and training of trainers courses will be run in June and July 2014 to develop 'master trainers' in the Ministries of Education and Women's and Children's Affairs. The master trainers will train teachers in September and the project will roll out in 350 schools and 150 clubs from October 2014. Impact will be monitored by comparison with control groups those with no intervention, with GEMS only, and with GEMS plus other initiatives.

<sup>34</sup> Based on information provided by CO Dr Muhammad Munir Hussain (Project Manager, Generation Breakthrough Project), 30 March 2014.

- Successful messages include: explaining about changes that happen from age 10; we can't prevent these changes (such as puberty, wet dreams and the availability of pornography on mobile phones) - they're happening whether we like it or not; someone needs to give them correct information by developing life skills for children and young people; it doesn't promote sexual behaviour but helps them to manage risks; they should be spending more time thinking about education rather than (e.g.) worrying about their penis size or their skin complexion.
- When adolescents are exposed to training, this shapes their attitudes. Going deeper at a cognitive level helps them to learn from their lives but this takes time: it's not just about sitting with them for an hour each week. We need to engage them to learn from their lives and help them take positive decisions.

### **What is not going so well / what are the challenges?**

- The adolescent population is bulging and it is an important cohort for the country. However, due to the media and traditional attitudes, ASRHR is under threat.
- ASRHR is often side-lined as a minor component of the overall 'health' domain, but it is hugely important and has clear links to education, child marriage, girls' empowerment and GBV. A comprehensive plan and corresponding resources are needed to work in this area<sup>35</sup>. There is a strong need to develop replicable models.

### *Stop Child Marriage<sup>36</sup>*

**Overview:** 4-year project (April 2012-March 2016), supported by Plan UK's Girls Fund currently operating in 2 districts (Gazipur and Dinajpur) and 3 Upazilas, expanding to 9 Upazilas in the second half of the project. It is directly targeting 2,000 adolescent girls from 400 Children Organizations, 200 representatives from 100 NGOs and 300 local government representatives from 50 Unions within Plan PUs. It hopes to indirectly reach an additional 8,000 girls and boys from the 400 Children Organizations and 20,000 parents and 10,000 younger siblings aged under 10 who are related to the 10,000 direct and indirect child beneficiaries. The project is an extension of Plan Bangladesh's existing 'stop child marriage' initiative. It has 4 components: 1) awareness raising on child marriage and media campaign (media partnerships, workshops for children and parents, meetings with key stakeholders, youth media group); 2) capacity building on child marriage protection mechanisms (peer education and life skills training for girls, reporting mechanisms at police stations); 3) birth registration and economic safety nets; 4) coalition advocacy.

### **What is going well / what works?**

- A Plan Bangladesh position paper was developed on child marriage, including a 'theory of change', at a national workshop in February 2014, with staff from POVC, child marriage and PHR projects coming together. As a result of the 'norms' report, the GPP is joining the 'stop child marriage' campaign.
- 120 villages have declared themselves to be 'child marriage free'. Although this does not spell the end of child marriage (as those who are determined can go to a different village to have the ceremony performed), it nonetheless indicates a strong, joint commitment from key actors.
- Tackling child marriage impacts positively on many other issues such as education and respect for girls, economic empowerment and health improvements.
- *Don't underestimate the importance of small gains: delaying the age of child marriage is a milestone. After raising the age – and thus increasing protection and health benefits - we can move onto the next target, and then the next. If a girl can get to 18 she can explore other opportunities. Even minimal awareness of the negative consequences of child marriage leads to awareness of other things and helps to develop life skills.* (Child Protection Adviser)

<sup>35</sup> Dr Hussain notes that there is donor interest in this area and that Plan could fill a niche here as there are no organisations in Bangladesh specialising in ASRHR. The government Health and Family Planning Department has emphasised adolescent reproductive and sexual health in its current 5-year plan.

<sup>36</sup> Based on input from CO Adviser on Child Protection Jannatul Ferdous Ruma, CO Adviser for the Youth Economic Development project Md. Tarequl Hoque CO Gender Adviser Nazmun Nahar and CO GPP Manager Mohammad Masud.

- *By delaying the age of marriage at least we're at least protecting some basic physical health and malnutrition issues. Men lose interest in their young wife if she is constantly sick, leading to polygamy.* (Gender Adviser)
- It is important to address not only poverty and social pressure but also girls' lack of aspiration and vision for a better life. It is important to disseminate images of positive female role models.
- *"Stop child marriage" as a standalone message is meaningless at village level: a family first needs to understand the education, health and social consequences; then it is possible to move onto issues around rights, choice, decision-making and how religion emphasises the importance of consent and how it is illegal. Different tools need to be used in a comprehensive and integrated approach.* (Girl Power Project Manager)

### **What is not going so well / what are the challenges?**

- Life skills and capacity building of children without corresponding capacity building of duty-bearers to create a supportive and protective environment is likely to have limited success. Girls may be blocked by family and community opposition and may also be put at risk.<sup>37</sup>
- It is hugely complex to address the multiple, overlapping root causes of child marriage. In general it will take time and better coordination of efforts.

## *Missing Child Alert (MCA)<sup>38</sup>*

**Overview:** 5-year project funded by the Netherlands 'National Postcode Loterij' (2012-2017 and beyond). The objective is to develop and implement a sustainable, technologically enabled cross-border anti-child trafficking alert system in Bangladesh, India and Nepal which focuses on prevention, tracing and rescuing trafficked children and women, repatriation, rehabilitation, reintegration, lobbying and prosecution to ensure an effective and efficient approach to end child trafficking in South Asia. It is operating in 2 districts in Bangladesh (Jessore and Satkhira). The pilot phase (January 2012 – December 2014) focuses on advocacy and community and stakeholder capacity building to develop community-based child protection systems. The roll-out phase (January 2015 – December 2016) will establish and test the MCA system. The scaling-up phase of the MCA system (January 2017 onwards) aims to institutionalise and make sustainable the MCA system.

### **What is going well / what works?**

- The project was deliberately designed to address gaps identified in previous interventions which focused more on prevention, rescue and repatriation: these gaps are transit areas (from being lured away from home to arriving in the brothel or sweatshop) and regional policy reforms.
- Important in-depth qualitative research with survivors has been done by Sanjog<sup>39</sup> on disclosure by girls and women who traditionally hide facts and are unwilling to share details, even when they know they have been wronged. The findings revealed that survivors who had lived at home, in a brothel and in an institution found all three settings equally restrictive; 'in all three somebody else was determining our fate and we had no control over our decisions: we were told we *had* to go to court'. They have very strong feelings that when they get independence they feel good (even within brothels, to some degree). They don't find freedom in the type of rehabilitation and reintegration we want to do. They don't want to go back home to their villages: 'when sending money home, nobody questions it, but when we come back we're not accepted'.
- Engagement with men and boys is very important, determining practices they see as positive and negative, strengthening community protection mechanisms and then mainstreaming them to government.

<sup>37</sup> There appear to be no cases of physical reprisal against girls speaking out against child marriage in Bangladesh, but they may face disapproval at home and in the community.

<sup>38</sup> Based on information provided by Ashish Damle, Regional Project Manager of MCA, 18 March 2014.

<sup>39</sup> *Where have all the flowers gone? An evidence-based research into sex trafficking of girls – Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal*, Paramita Banerjee and Roop Sen, Sanjog, 2010:

[http://issuu.com/priyamabarua/docs/where\\_have\\_all\\_the\\_flowers\\_gone?e=1977751/2685370#search](http://issuu.com/priyamabarua/docs/where_have_all_the_flowers_gone?e=1977751/2685370#search)

### **What is not going so well / what are the challenges?**

- People are clear about what they want (access to basic rights, roads, communication and information) but not how to get it. Both women and men understand the benefits of girls and women being educated and doing salaried work, but under the patriarchal system, the means of achieving this and the limits of what is acceptable are decided by men.
- Expecting attitudinal change is a long process, across generations, but we need to engage in it. Otherwise we will see some superficial changes but there will also be a rise in VAWG alongside women's empowerment.
- Coordination and documentation still require improvement. Investment in documentation, dissemination and replicating good practice is not synchronised or proportional to other efforts. Evaluations are limited to grant-funded opportunities rather than integrated throughout. The CSP doesn't include a strategic and concerted approach to research.
- There is no integrated 'advocacy' position in Plan. There are very interesting projects addressing gender issues but each one is approaching government and other stakeholders separately. There is no synchronisation to maximise impact.

### *Girls Football Project<sup>40</sup>*

**Overview:** 3year project funded by UNIQLO, Japan (2013 – 2016). The objectives are to work with the Bangladesh Football Federation (linked to the international FIFA) to organise girls' football tournaments as a means to develop girls' life skills and leadership skills and to demonstrate the use of football and sports as a development tool. It operates in all 64 districts although in practice only 45 districts are participating. 10 districts chose not to participate due to social taboos, religious factors and the lack of available trained girl footballers. 1152 girls were involved in district level championships. Of these, 810 have remained with the project. Of these, 210 aged 10-15 (but mostly 14-15) were selected to take part in one of seven 5-day residential training camps to learn about child protection, gender, life skills, ASRHR and livelihoods. There has been no drop-out from these 210 girls and the long term aim is to select an under-15 national team. The project developed out of a 2011 BIAAG-inspired 15-school championship in Dhaka. More extensive life skills training is planned for more intensive implementation in 2014. It is a very small project and draws on expertise from other Plan gender projects.

### **What is going well / what works?**

- The girls are very eager to learn. The topics addressed in the camps were new to girls outside of Plan areas and they wanted a more extensive programme with more information and discussion on issues like relationships, masculinity and femininity, and body image.
- Sports are a very good way to empower girls and develop skills of organisation and team work. In a country where girls' behaviour and dress is strictly regulated, and where it is common to see girls standing at the edge of school playgrounds and public spaces watching on as the boys play football or cricket, it is a very powerful image to see girls wearing a football strip (shorts and T-shirt) in public, running together and having fun. It sends a very visible message of equality to communities and they act as positive role models.
- Once security of the girls in the camps was ensured, and parents had the opportunity to visit the camps, families are happy and have seen the benefits of girls getting more confident.
- To establish the project in different areas, sensitisation workshops were organised in the districts, unions and communities with government and NGO representatives, religious leaders, teachers and other stakeholders.

### **What is not going so well / what are the challenges?**

- Some strongly religious and traditional areas (such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts) are resistant.

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<sup>40</sup> Based on information provided by CO Communications and Project Specialist, Syeda Laslima Jamal, 18 March 2013.

- The project has to overcome parental fears, for example, that running too much will cause reproductive health problems later in life such as problems with pregnancy and that training will interfere with studying for school exams.
- Girls in some communities face high levels of peer pressure and sexual harassment.
- A security protocol had to be established in the residential camps to reassure parents.
- Some girls who were not used to extended physical activity were getting sick in the camps.
- The lack of female coaches meant that male coaches had to be sensitised regarding appropriate behaviour.
- Greater involvement with the Bangladesh Football Federation would result in more impact. This has so far been limited.
- This project only engages girls. Work on gender sensitisation is also needed with boys and men.

### *Youth Economic Development (YED) Programme<sup>41</sup>*

**Overview:** This was established in 2012 and covers 5 projects which have evolved from previous Plan programmes such as the 'Family Economic Security Programme' and 'Sustainable Livelihood Programme'. All projects consider gender discrimination and emphasise the empowerment of young people and women. The 5 projects are:

- 1) Vocational Training School linked to job placement and income generation (8 trade courses are offered for 40 girls and boys aged 14-18 each year but girls tend to focus on industrial sewing<sup>42</sup>);
- 2) Youth Apprenticeship Project (recruitment of 1900 (300 so far) very vulnerable young women aged 18-30 (mostly abandoned, divorced or experiencing IPV) from rural areas into the garment trade; 3-month apprenticeship followed by on-the-job training with guaranteed minimum wage, day care for children, primary health care and 2-year follow-up by Plan);
- 3) Developing Aspirations and Livelihoods for Adolescents (DALA) (working with 9-18 year-olds in 30 secondary schools to develop life skills and gender-equal involvement in sports through a peer education approach; also supports adolescent clubs for out-of-school children, providing a safe environment, peer education play facilities and interaction with parents and community leaders);
- 4) Young Women Entrepreneur Development (small project supported by Japan for 20 women in the Dhaka area; will close in June 2014);
- 5) Youth Micro-Enterprise Development Project (starting April 2014, will work with 200 young people of whom 40% female: currently only 0.83% of businesses in Bangladesh are owned by women).

#### **What is going well / what works?**

- Economic empowerment and financial independence is hugely important for women. Without it, it is difficult to address the total dependence of girls and women on men and the resulting GBV and other problems they face.

Youth Apprenticeship Project:

- These young women are the first generation of paid employees in their families and there is a very strong push to break social norms and taboos.
- Recruitment of vulnerable women from rural areas is very difficult, but involving the Union Parishad from the beginning and disseminating information in the community from the beginning is effective and essential. It helps to have a champion within the local government.
- It was important to secure good quality, safe accommodation as part of the job placement.

DALA:

- Successful adaptation of UNICEF modules on life skills.

<sup>41</sup> Based on information provided by CO Adviser for the Youth Economic Development project Md. Tarekul Haque, 18 March 2014.

<sup>42</sup> E.g. 80% of industrial sewing trainees are girls compared to only 10-15% in relation to house wiring and electricity. Only 1 out of 40 motor driving trainees is a girl.

- Peer educators are selected through a competitive process children consider this a prestigious role.

**What is not going so well / what are the challenges?**

- The Vocational Training School is expensive but job placement is relatively low (only 60%). This led to the approach being re-designed as the Youth Apprenticeship Project, with a focus on marginalised youth, especially girls in difficult marital, economic and educational situations.
- It is difficult to make links with the corporate sector who are naturally mistrustful and fearful of the human rights sector. Plan tried for 2 years to get a meeting and finally had to 'trick' them into a meeting via a partner organisation.
- Although 80%-90% of workers in the garment sector are women, facilities are very poor: no gender-sensitive toilets or primary health care and no day care for children. Plan and partners are working hard to address these issues and to overcome prejudices about employing women with children.
- Social and religious beliefs and practices, both Hindu and Muslim, and lack of legal protection are huge barriers to working on gender issues. Combatting religious extremism is not being given enough attention in the country as a whole, by government and civil society.
- Plan is not working in the whole community in intervention areas because it is not working in the madrassas where children are extremely vulnerable. It takes courage to do this work but it is necessary.

## Appendix 6 – Case study of empowerment: one girl's story<sup>43</sup>

The value of Plan's capacity building interventions for girls at individual level are clearly demonstrated by this life story, recounted by a young woman who is now 21 years old, although her official age is 18 as her birth certificate was falsified to enable her to access education. She thinks of herself as being 18. This is her story of empowerment.

### *Family background*

- *When I was born, my father was angry that I was a girl.*

When she was 6 months old, her father was violent towards her and her mother, at one time breaking her mother's leg. Her father no longer wanted to see her, so at this age she was sent to live with her maternal grandmother. He didn't let her mother come to look after her so she had no parental affection growing up.

- *At the time I didn't understand but as I got older and went to visit my father I saw him beat my mother which made me feel uncomfortable so I stopped visiting one day because of the way he was torturing my mother.*

Unlike her, her two younger brothers, now aged 17 and 18, lived with their parents and were supported to study. All of the children were beaten by their father, but the less she visited her father, the less opportunity he had to beat her. Her brothers lived with their parents until aged 10-12 at which time they were sent to their mother's brother in Chittagong. One brother is now a mechanic and the other is a trainee mechanic.

Rina's grandmother had seven sisters and one brother and although she went to school, it was for a very short time as she had to drop out to look after her siblings. Although Rina's grandmother only had a few days' schooling, Rina nonetheless describes her as being "very wise". Rina's grandmother was also a member of the Union Parishad (local council). Rina's mother completed school up to grade 5 (approximately aged 10) and married at age 15.

### *School and studies*

In 2010 she failed one subject, maths, in her Secondary School Certificate, causing her father to be "very cruel" with her. She was very discouraged about continuing her education.

- *I felt I wanted to die, to no longer live. However, I joined a Plan children's organisation and learned many things to help me overcome my difficulties. I got confident to retake my exam in 2011, although my father refused to pay the entrance exam fee. I passed with a good result and at this time my father started to value me.*

Having not supported her before, he now wanted to send her to a school of his choosing, near his house. However, she and her grandmother preferred a different school, closer to where they themselves lived. Her father was very angry and refused to pay her living expenses and school fees. She and her grandmother talked with the teacher who agreed to reduce the tuition fees. She passed her Higher Secondary Certificate with a very good result. Her grandmother wanted her to stop studying at this point and start working as it was expensive to keep her.

In Bangladesh there is a choice of a 3-year undergraduate degree or a 4-year honours degree. Rina understood the value of the 4-year degree, knowing that without this she would not be able to later

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<sup>43</sup> Based on a KII with Rina, Monday 24 March 2014. Please note, the name has been changed to protect the young woman's privacy.

go on to do a one-year Masters in commerce and get a good job. She therefore really wanted to do the 4-year course, but her father, mother and grandfather were all against this, saying she either had to do the 3-year degree or leave her education and earn some money.

- *Nobody was on my side. I wanted to show my father that being a girl is not a sin or a crime.*

She asked her uncle for help and he counselled her and talked to her grandmother. She also went on a three-day hunger strike. Her grandmother then agreed to the 4-year management course. Rina received coaching, gained 136<sup>th</sup> place in the admissions test and enrolled on the course.

- *It was my choice to do management as I had heard a lot about it and I really like it. I'm very enthusiastic and eager and it is my dream to work in a bank. There are a few female bankers in Bangladesh, but not many.*

Although she is enrolled, and started studying, she doesn't have enough money to buy books, so she is doing private tutoring to earn money to pay for herself. Her studies are therefore temporarily on hold. On the management course there are 244 students of whom about two-fifths are girls. There are only four girls there from her secondary school.

### *overcoming difficulties*

Plan's training on child protection has also been very valuable to her and helped her to overcome the negative psychological impact of an attempted sexual assault she experienced at the age of 15, perpetrated by a friend's brother.

- *I felt bad and guilty and didn't tell anyone, not even my grandmother. But later I got Plan training on sexual abuse which taught me not to feel guilty. After the training I understood how to identify sexual abuse. I felt relaxed and no longer went to my friend's house. As the boy didn't manage to do anything [assault me], I relaxed and tried to forget it. I continued studying. All of the programmes in the local council invite me to speak out and say something and to sing and dance. I can now speak in front of many people. I feel happy at the moment because my father is behaving well.*

### *The value of Plan's interventions*

- *Plan helped to include me in the children's organisation in my village. I then got lots of training on life skills and child protection.*
- *The life skills training is so important in my life. In the child protection training I learned to live life in society and how to protect myself. As I got the opportunity to talk with other children and Plan staff I made a goal in my life to be strong and empowered. Plan helped me overcome my situation. I feel good. I hope I can reach my target, even though I still have financial problems.*
- *I think I'm in a very good position. I will try hard to succeed.*
- *My wish for girls in Bangladesh is not to think of themselves as weak; to set a goal in their life that they can reach. They should think of themselves as human. They should think of themselves as a girl and as a girl they have to have the strength to overcome difficulties. Other organisations like Plan and LAMB should support girls through orientations and training. If girls in the country have strength in their minds and at the same time have help and get empowered from NGOs they can do well and go forward.*
- *I want to be well-established in my life and show my father that I can be just as successful as a son.*