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NEW BEGINNINGS

Constructive Male Engagement

USAID Bureau for
Humanitarian Assistance
supported Nobo Jatra -
New Beginnings Project
in Bangladesh



A Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Promising Practice

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) promising practice on male engagement was developed and implemented by World Vision Bangladesh, in collaboration with World Vision USA. The team is grateful to all reviewers and contributors. We are also grateful for the partnership with Columbia University in New York, Prof. Shannon Marquez. World Vision greatly appreciates the financial support from USAID to implement the project, and to Imago Dei Fund to document the promising practice. Special appreciation goes to the following individuals:

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The Nobo Jatra Project is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of World Vision and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

NEW BEGINNINGS

This document presents a promising practice on integrating Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) in the **USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance funded Nobo Jatra - New Beginning project, implemented by World Vision Bangladesh**, in partnership with the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Government of Bangladesh and Winrock International (2015-2022). The project's overall goal is to improve gender equitable food security, nutrition, and resilience of vulnerable communities in four sub districts of southwest Bangladesh. Gender equality and social inclusion was considered as a cross-cutting theme critical to the implementation of all project activities. It was also an integral stand-alone pillar with targeted interventions on male engagement and youth development. **This promising practice focuses on the evidence of impact on the extent to which male engagement activities resulted in GESI transformation.**



The project's deeply contextualized male engagement for gender equality approach aimed at addressing the needs of couples to improve gender relations within families, prevent gender-based violence including child marriage, and improve male engagement in caregiving and unpaid household work. The approach encouraged men and women to reflect on and change their own attitudes, perceptions, and values around a range of gender equality issues including domestic and care work, household decision-making, women's mobility and autonomy, equitable participation in social and economic activities, violence against women and girls, and access and control over resources.

This documentation is based on evidence captured through annual monitoring indicators and a study conducted in 2020 on the sustained impact of the male engagement approach. In total, 9,814 couples completed the male engagement activity from 2017 to 2020. The evidence that will be discussed further in sections to follow is clear that the project's male engagement intervention improved shared decision-making and transformed gender relations at the household level between couples. The project achieved broader community level change by promoting positive social and gender norms and equal access to resources. The project also helped to raise awareness on the risks of gender based violence including child marriage. Although evidence from annual monitoring indicators shows a significant improvement from baseline, a conclusive comparison can be made with end line data following a final project evaluation.

THE CONTEXT

Over the past two decades, Bangladesh has witnessed steady economic growth (over six percent in GDP) a consistent decline in poverty rates, and improvements around maternal and neonatal health. Commonly referred to as the “Bangladesh paradox,” however, these economic gains have not contributed to improved gender equality and social inclusion. Although the legal age of marriage for women in Bangladesh is eighteen, the country has one of the highest child marriage rates in the world. According to UNICEF, Bangladesh is home to thirty-eight million child brides, including currently married girls along with women who were first married in childhood. Thirty-four percent of girls were married before the age of fifteen. Child brides are more likely to reside in rural areas, have low formal education and reside in poorer households.¹ The 2017-18 Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) found that fifty-nine percent of women age twenty to twenty-four were married before the age of eighteen and twenty-eight percent of teenage women (15–19 years) have begun childbearing.² The poorest and least educated girls are most vulnerable to early marriage. Child marriages limit girl's access to education which in turn limits their economic opportunities, trapping them in a cycle of poverty and exposing them to higher risks to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Girls and young women are also more likely to suffer from symptoms related to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. Often they experience early pregnancy which may result in many health complications and domestic violence.

A World Health Organization report indicates that Bangladesh is one of the top-ranking countries in violence against women by intimate partner.³ According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics report in 2015, over seventy-two percent of women in Bangladesh are victims of domestic violence.⁴ Men's engagement at household level is limited. Yet, research has shown that boys who grow up in households where fathers treat their mothers with respect and deal with conflicts within the relationship in a respectful and peaceful way, are more likely to understand how they are supposed to respect and treat females, and are less likely to act aggressively toward females. Likewise, girls in households with involved, respectful fathers learn how to expect men to treat them and are less likely to tolerate violent or unhealthy relationships. In contrast, husbands who are abusive and disrespectful are more likely to have children who are anxious, withdrawn, or antisocial.⁵

Women's participation in labor force in Bangladesh is still low and their ability to make decisions on health and finances, and personal mobility is very limited. According to the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI), only 6% of women in rural Bangladesh feel empowered compared to 53% of men. WEAI also reports that only 13% of women reported having agency in household decision-making.⁶ These constraints on human agency

1 UNICEF. 2020. Ending Child Marriage: A Profile of Progress in Bangladesh.

2 National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT), and ICF. 2019. Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2017-18: Key Indicators. Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: NIPORT, and ICF.

3 World Health Organization. 2012. Understanding and Addressing Violence Against Women. WHO.

4 Government of Bangladesh. 2015. Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Statistics and Informatics Division, Ministry of Planning, Report on Violence Against Women Survey. Dhaka, Bangladesh.

5 Jeffrey Rosenberg and W. Bradford Wilcox. 2006. “The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children.” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Washington, DC.

6 USAID-International Food Policy Institute. 2018. Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index. Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative.

result in poor health, women's limited mobility, and families' inability to cope with shocks and stresses. At the same time, women's contributions to food production are constrained by harmful gender norms that are at the root of poor access to and control over productive resources and inequitable access to knowledge, information, and services necessary to increase production and livelihood diversity.⁷

The national average data from the 2014 Bangladesh Demographic Health Survey indicates that for over thirteen percent of married women, their husbands controlled their cash earnings. As such, women's lack of access to and control over resources severely inhibits mothers' and children's access to food. Intra-household food distribution favors men and boys. Women, including pregnant and lactating women, tend to eat last and less.⁸ Domestic work is mostly performed by women at home but not accorded recognition or attached economic value by society. According to UN report, women do 2.6 times more unpaid care and domestic work than men. Women's decision-making and mobility are also severely limited, which undermines their ability to seek out health care for themselves or their children. Husbands, mothers-in-law, and community and religious leaders exert significant influence over women's and children's health and nutrition; however, these groups are rarely targeted in health and nutrition activities.

Nobo Jatra is implemented in four sub districts (or Upazilas) under two districts located in the southwest coastal region of Bangladesh. In Khulna district, the sub districts are Dacope and Koyra and in Satkhira district the sub districts are Shyamnagar and Kaliganj. The region is one of the most natural disaster-prone areas in Bangladesh and has been identified as one of the world's most vulnerable to the effects of a rise in sea level caused by climate change. In addition to the gendered barriers highlighted above, both Khulna and Satkhira districts are affected by chronic poverty, malnutrition in addition to being vulnerable to flooding and water logging, high salinity in surface and ground water – making safe drinking water scarce and difficult to access. The area is also characterized by loss of agricultural land due to salinity, high unemployment rates, unstable livelihoods, and food insecurity.



OBJECTIVES OF THE MALE ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

The project's male engagement approach sought to change inequitable social norms by engaging men and women (all were husbands and wives) through systematic group education activities as a means to promote food security, nutrition, and gender quality in households. The objectives of Nobo Jatra's male engagement approach are to:

- 1 Promote shared decision-making around household budgeting and investments, agricultural production, income generation activities and employment, food purchases, intra-household food distribution, and mobility.
- 2 Promote the equal division of domestic and caregiving tasks between men and women.
- 3 Improve and support healthy relationships within families that support gender equality and non-violence and discourage child marriage.

Male engagement groups re-examined rigid gender roles and their consequences while also addressing harmful practices like child marriage. In these groups, couples, and partners, critically reflect on societal norms and beliefs that perpetuate and reinforce inequitable gender relationships and power dynamics in their families.

7 USAID. 2015. Bangladesh Food Security Country Framework, 2015- 2019.

8 USAID. 2015. Bangladesh Food Security Country Framework, 2015- 2019.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

World Vision considers GESI evidence of impact as transformational along five domains of access, decision-making, participation, systems, and well-being. In addition to capturing annual monitoring data, Nobo Jatra also commissioned a study in 2020 on the sustained impact of the male engagement approach. The study findings supplemented annual monitoring data and showed that 9,814 couples within households who graduated through male engagement for gender equality sessions became catalysts of change, sharing their knowledge with others in the area and setting a good example to their own children. There were clear positive changes in perceptions related to gender equitable practices at the household level.

The evidence discussed here references both annual monitoring indicators and the 2020 study (*hereafter referred to as the study*).⁹ The male engagement approach helped thousands of couples improve their relationships, communicate better with each other, value women's and children's nutritional health, and understand the risks and consequence of gender-based violence on women, girls, families, and communities.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE MALE ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS



LET'S BEGIN

Introduction, pre-test on attitudes and information



THE MAN I AM IN THE FAMILY

Social and biological difference, 'masculinity' and its impact, attitudes and behaviors related to equality at home



MAXIMIZING FAMILY WELL-BEING AND PROSPERITY

Importance of men's support and sharing of decision-making at home, sense of contribution and ownership, skills to build gender equitable relationships



PEACE IN THE FAMILY

Targets men as partners in ending violence/child marriage, skills for healthy relationships at home, measure attitudinal changes and identify future actions



GRADUATION

Celebration, Recognition and Acknowledgement

The male engagement sessions were staggered over a period of six months where group members would meet with a facilitator every fifteen days. Gender-specific sessions for men only consisted of not more than twelve males, and mixed-sex sessions included men and their female partners and did not exceed a total of twenty-four participants per session. The first four out of 12 sessions were attended by male participants only and the subsequent eight sessions were attended by both males and females – couples within a household. The sessions considered participants' needs and circumstances such as household and family obligations, harvest season or weather, health conditions, and so on, and facilitators made necessary adjustments to the time or day of the session to accommodate participants. The sessions encouraged men and women to reflect on their own attitudes and values about a range of issues—namely gender, women rights, domestic and care work, household decision-making, women's mobility, and violence and the related issues of power and control—in order to help men to promote gender equitable relationships within their families.

The male engagement interventions included three thematic modules along with interactive activity-based sessions. The activities were informed by a commitment to social justice, gender equality, and engaged citizen activism. Each activity was interactive, participatory, and reflective, allowing participating individuals the opportunity to reflect on their own values, discuss their personal experiences, and explore equitable alternatives to rigid and harmful gender norms and associated practices. The goal was to ensure that these critical reflections would translate into a long-term commitment and positive change in terms of individual and collective attitudes and behaviors related to equitable gender relationships at the household level.

The following were the three thematic modules on male engagement that were applied:

1 THE MAN I AM IN THE FAMILY

This module focused on the **importance of men's support for women** and how to **engage in shared decision-making** with their spouses at household level. It provided practical knowledge and alternatives to rigid and inequitable versions of masculinity. It included building knowledge and skills on improving men's understanding of how gender inequality at home impacts relationships between men and women, and prevents women's access and participation to social or productive activities. The session critically analyzed negative practices and perceptions on household leadership, and shifted norms around power relations in access to and control over resources, and dominant masculinity at family level. It also provided skills to build gender equitable relationships. This module was organized into twelve sessions offered to both men and women. The first four sessions were offered to men, and the remaining eight sessions were offered jointly to groups of couples of women and men.

2 MAXIMIZING FAMILY WELL-BEING AND PROSPERITY

This module focused on the **benefits of shared decision-making around**: household budgeting and investments; agricultural production/income generation activities/employment; food purchases; intra-household food distribution; mobility; and the equal spousal division of caregiving and domestic tasks. Also, joint decision making of family planning, childcare, child education and prevention of child marriage. It used examples of positive role model families that had demonstrated positive social norms and established women's equal participation in decision making within their households.

3 PEACE IN THE FAMILY

This module focused on **improving and supporting healthy marital and family relationships and well-being** by emphasizing gender equality and non-violence. It offered space for critical reflection about the manifestation of gender inequality, including awareness of how to prevent sexual and gender-based violence and child marriage. The session also focused on establishing respectful intimate relationships and healthy emotional attachment between couples. It challenged abusive behavior that threatened peaceful co-existence in the family by highlighting how abusive relationship harm family life and children, reduce socio-economic advancement, and limit the well-being of all members of the family.

The male engagement sessions were designed to be participatory and a number of tools such as role play, flipcharts and flash cards are used. A time diary was also used to analyze men and women's tasks from dawn to dusk and reflect upon how men could support women in household tasks and childcare. A power analysis tool was applied to understand the power relation between men and women in family and community context with regard to decision making. Stickers and posters were used to raise awareness on the risks of sexual and gender-based violence, particularly child marriage, the laws pertaining to it and the health risks it poses.

World Vision staff led learning exercises with facilitators, and participating couples to gauge feedback on the effectiveness of sessions and identify adaptations. The findings of the learning exercise were first validated by stakeholders and presented during a 'pause and reflect' workshop. The learning exercise found that the sessions were well received by participants and facilitators. The couples became catalysts for change, sharing their knowledge with others in their communities and also setting a good example to their own children.

Notable impacts of male engagement sessions that will be discussed further in this document include the following: women mobility have increased, majority of couples were making joint decisions and sharing household tasks, improved communication and relationship among couples, contributed to reduction sexual and gender-based domestic violence and conflicts and shifted harmful social norms related to child marriage and low value of girls education.¹⁰ These impacts are summarized along the five GESI domains.

ACCESS

The evidence drawn from the 2020 study on the sustained impact of male engagement found that women's mobility had increased following participation in the male engagement activity. Women were engaged in events outside the home, including access to work, markets, and shopping. Nobo Jatra baseline data in 2015 showed that 80.9% women below 30 (and 66.3% women above 30) had limited access and needed to seek permission from males to engage in similar activities outside the home or visit certain locales. The 2020 study found improved access with a reduced percentage (50.5% of case women aged below 30 years) needing male permission to move around. This is a significant improvement from baseline and is remarkable in the context of southwest Bangladesh where women's mobility and access to public spaces or services has been restricted due to prevalent socio-cultural norms.¹¹ The male engagement sessions contributed to increasing women's access and mobility in specific areas: 39.2% of women were able to go and buy groceries without permission and 65.1% were able to go shopping for household goods.

More women were able to access the market more freely, gain greater access to literacy programs, and engage in economic activities such as Nobo Jatra's 24 month Ultra Poor Graduation program which was not the case at baseline prior to participation in the male engagement activity. The intense Ultra Poor Graduation program enabled women's access to skills and training on entrepreneurial literacy, business development, savings groups, and how to run small businesses. Qualitative feedback from men indicated that male partners appreciated women's access to income generating activities as this had a positive impact on the household economic status. Husbands supported their wives' economic and livelihoods activities, including making bamboo products or paper boxes. Men who participated in the sessions encouraged women to go outside of the home to engage in income generating activities while they took care of the children at home. More men in the participating couple appreciated women engagement in income generating activities as it impacts positively on their household income and well-being.¹² After being trained in male engagement sessions, a fair majority of men (44.16%) believed that women and girls should enjoy full mobility and access to economic opportunities.



As suggested by one male participant,
 “They (women and girls) can go outside of the home according to their will!”

10 WV Bangladesh. 2020. Sustained Impact of Male Engagement in Southwest Bangladesh.
 11 Farhana H, and Stephen C D. 2019. "Energy of Corpuscular Wave Mechanism." *Int J Conf Proc.* 1 (2).
 12 WV Bangladesh. 2020. Sustained Impact of Male Engagement in Southwest Bangladesh.

PARTICIPATION

One of the key impacts of the male engagement activity was increased participation of men in household unpaid work and childcare traditionally considered women's work. Prior to the project, female participants were almost entirely responsible for domestic tasks, including child and elder care in the family. The sessions promoted equal division of domestic and caregiving tasks between men and women. Annual monitoring indicators showed improvements in household division of labor, with 71% of men undertaking housework in comparison to 38.2% at baseline. Men recognized women care work as actual work and actively engaged in redistribution of care work among the family members. A large percent of male participants (90.2%) spent up to 6 hours per day with their children. Prior to the project, it was considered a shame for men to undertake domestic care work. When Nobo Jatra first started implementing in 2015, only 8.3% of men thought that they should share household and childcare tasks.¹³ The evidence from the study revealed that husbands were supporting wives in the household work, taking care of children, collecting drinking water, and supporting women's income generating activities such as making paper boxes or weaving bamboo products. Male engagement helped to shift norm that household work was shameful for men, and that women's participation in society was a weakness. More men acknowledged that household work was a very important task that contributed to the overall well-being of the family.

Male engagement paved the way for women to participate in public societal affairs, including literacy programs, and economic activities such as Nobo Jatra's 24 month Ultra Poor Graduation program, and other public social activities discussed above, without any unintended impacts at the family level. Male engagement paved the way for women to participate in a range of Nobo Jatra activities including nutrition safety nets, agriculture and alternative livelihoods activities and village savings and lending associations.

The following is a testimony from a female participant:

“Day by day, I saw the behavior of my husband was changing. Yesterday, I asked my husband to take our child to school, and he took care of it.”

One woman mentioned:

“Before Nobo Jatra “I didn't imagine our relationship could be like this. My husband has changed a lot. He helps take care of our child and in household work. He never did this in our last four years of married life.”

As a female participant testified:

“Before this class, my husband didn't acknowledge me, he didn't give me any recognition. He would say, 'You are doing nothing. I am earning outside.' Sometimes when I asked if he could hold our girl, he would reply, 'This is not my work.' Now he has changed. He takes care of the children and lets me work outside the home too.”

DECISION-MAKING

The male engagement approach promoted shared decision-making in the household for participating couples. This was documented by the positive changes in perceptions that was captured through the study where couples acknowledged that they now made joint decisions on many issues in the household, which were previously decided by husbands alone. For small expenditures such as food, clothing, healthcare, household appliances, both husbands and wives took 77% of decisions. Equally, for larger investments such as buying assets, or land, livestock, agriculture, and fisheries, 78% of decisions were taken by the couples jointly. 83.8% couples decided together on when to invite or visit friends and family members, 74.1% jointly decided on children's education and 87.3% took health and treatment decisions together.

The study also examined changes in perceptions by both women and men participating in male engagement sessions. The findings suggested that women felt empowered to share their opinions and ideas and inform decision-making because they knew that men would listen, and their opinions were more valued. The evidence on male perceptions suggested that 89% of men felt that women should be consulted on household budgeting and other purchases in comparison to 43.3% at baseline in 2015.

A male participant mentioned:

“Now I can depend on the suggestions given by my wife. Because I found that her suggestions are fruitful in shaping good decisions, and help to increase our family income.”¹⁴

SYSTEMS

The male engagement approach included interventions that sought to promote equal and inclusive systems by tackling discriminating/harmful formal and informal laws, norms, and attitudes relating to women's engagement and gender-based violence, particularly child marriage. The project worked closely with government structures such as Child Protection Committees, Child Marriage Prevention Committee, local government structures known as Upazila and Union Parishads, and the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs to advocate for the male engagement module (particularly modules on child marriage and gender-based violence) to be included in existing training and outreach programs led by the government. The project also supported the formation and re-establishment of 40 youth clubs which are government structures at the union level. Training of youth club members included sessions of child and early marriage from the male engagement module.

As already indicated, child marriage is a major societal challenge in Bangladesh and, consequently, high rates of intimate partner violence and early pregnancy. One of the major impacts of male engagement sessions was a positive shift in attitudes and mind-sets around child marriages. Majority of participants (male 98.1% and female 94.7%) agreed that child marriage was harmful for adolescent girls and that it was a punishable offence. 93.6% men and 93.3% participants said they were encouraging and supporting their daughters to go school. Couples perceived that investment in education in girls/women was not a waste of money and time as 95.2% male and 96.7% female among case couples in the study consider educating their daughters as an important investment, and equally valued girls as important in families.

The male engagement activity established a system of collaboration and coordination with the government of Bangladesh, faith-based and community-based leaders and networks, international non-governmental organizations, academia to share results and advocate for scale up. The goal was to advocate for the uptake of key modules from the male engagement activity by the government of Bangladesh and to integrate key messages across government efforts at the local level. The project leveraged findings from its assessment on the impact of COVID-19 on child marriage to raise community awareness and local level coordination on existing government structures such as Child Management Protection Committees at sub district and Union level. These committees are government mandated and play a key role in building awareness on the risks of child marriage, the laws and regulations pertaining to the harmful practice and also report or mitigate instances in communities. Further, the project tapped into village courts to build competencies on the laws pertaining to child marriage and engage influential local leaders, teachers, and faith leaders to mitigate child marriage and other incidents of gender-based violence.

The study established that 95.5% participants in the project areas knew that there were laws to protect children from violence. Almost 58% of male engagement sessions participants indicated that they would act to stop any violence that they see taking place in front of them. Participants also were aware of reporting procedures, who the authorities were and how to communicate with them on issues of violence against children. For example, during a focus group discussion, participants mentioned hotline numbers to report incidents of child marriage, and knew about Village Courts, local elected chairpersons and police as the main stakeholders who can arbitrate child marriage.¹⁵

WELL-BEING

Male engagement sessions improved and supported healthy relationships within families. The sessions emphasized family bonding, mutual respect, and open communication between couples. Participants who graduated from the sessions mentioned that communication had improved in their marriages and incidents of violence and family conflicts had been reduced. Women mentioned that prior to participation in male engagement sessions, they did not perceive domestic violence as a form of violence or as a violation of their rights. The male engagement sessions created awareness of their rights and challenged the norm of intimate partner violence. It also created openness to share burdens, improved skills on better communication between couples, and promoted mutual respect.

The sessions used role-plays and commitment sessions to shift stereotypical perceptions on males and females and their place in the family and society. These role-plays and commitment sessions helped participants to realize and be respectful of each other's feelings, roles, and worth. Participants developed skills on anger management and positive communication. They reported to feel better able to peacefully resolve conflicts in their families. The participation on men in childcare and domestic tasks provide an opportunity for children in many of the participating households to spend more time with their fathers. Research indicates children whose fathers assumed 40% or more of the family's care tasks had better academic achievement than children whose fathers were less involved¹⁶ It has also helped to improve the relationship among couples. The improvement in marriage relationships had a great impact to the well-being of children.

15 WV Bangladesh. 2020. Sustained Impact of Male Engagement in Southwest Bangladesh.

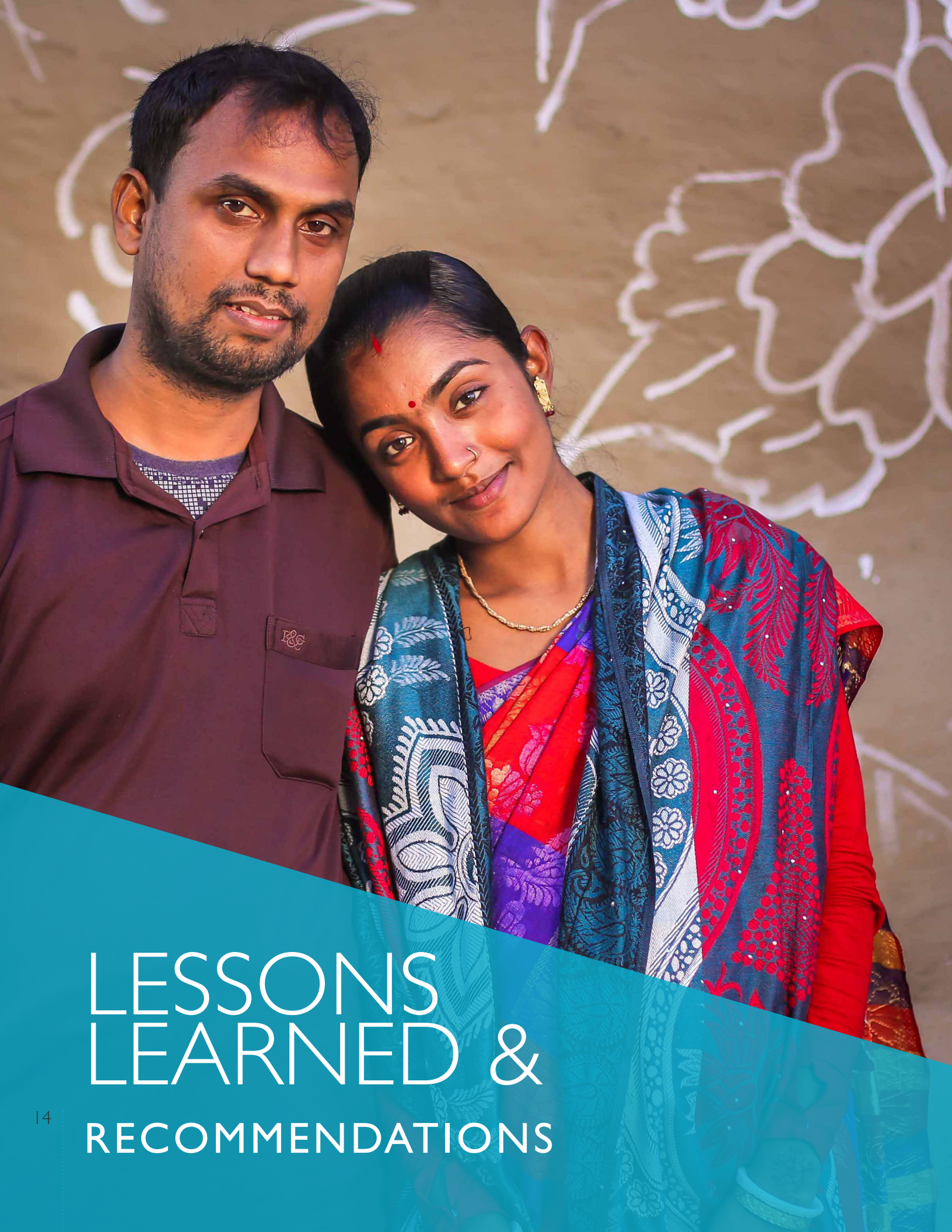
16 Jo Jones, and William D. Moshe. 2013. "Fathers' Involvement with their Children: United States, 2006–2010." *National Health Statistics Reports*, Number 71.

Child marriages is a major societal challenge in Bangladesh and, consequently, high rates of intimate partner violence and early pregnancy. As such, one of the major impacts of male engagement sessions was a positive shift in attitudes and mind-sets around child marriages. Majority of participants (male 98.1% and female 94.7%) agreed that child marriage was harmful for adolescent girls and that it was a punishable offence. 93.6% men and 93.3% participants said they were encouraging and supporting their daughters to go school. Couples perceived that investment in education in girls/women was not a waste of money and time as 95.2% male and 96.7% female among case couples in the study consider educating their daughters as an important investment, and equally valued girls as important in families. Men in families indicated greater valuing of girls and their promotion of girls' educational advancement.

The project worked with the government of Bangladesh Ministry of Education to implement Life Skills Education programs across all 120 secondary schools in its 4 working sub districts and also conducted sessions in the community for out of school adolescents. A key focus in these sessions was to build confidence, skills, and knowledge on the risks of child marriage and pave the way for adolescents to act as champions to circumvent the practice in their families and local communities. The project's multi-sectoral approach integrated male engagement and gender-based violence (GBV) prevention interventions with other programming interventions on water sanitation and hygiene (WASH), maternal child health and nutrition, agriculture and alternative livelihoods, disaster risk reduction, and prevention of gender-based violence particularly child marriage. Critical messages on GBV prevention and overall well-being were integrated across all activities. These included during household visits for nutrition counselling, village savings and loans group meetings, and in all forms of Social Behavior Change (SBC) such as mobile phone-based health messages, courtyard sessions, household visits, billboards, leaflets, and posters. Faith leaders included messaging on the risks of GBV and child marriage in their weekly sermons and public announcements.

As Jaharul, one of the male engagement graduates mentioned:

“My dream is for Sumaiya {my daughter} to become a doctor one day. When Sumaiya tells us that she wants to be independent and provide for the family, I feel proud and blessed to have a daughter. I work doubly as hard so that I can invest in my children's education – because that way I am investing in the future.”



LESSONS
LEARNED &
RECOMMENDATIONS

The evidence suggests that the male engagement approach made significant contributions to promoting GESI-transformational programming. Conclusive evidence will be drawn at the end of the project using final evaluation data. Recommendations include the following:

FAITH-BASED APPROACH

The Nobo Jatra project relied on mobilizing and involving faith-based actors, structures, and networks. Yet, the impact of this mobilization and engagement was not well documented. The involvement of faith leaders, women of faith networks, and faith communities could have been more intentionally included in the monitoring and evaluation processes and indicators. This can be better enhanced in future.

EVIDENCE-GATHERING

Evidence-gathering on the impact of male engagement interventions can be more robust, utilizing mixed methods and both qualitative and quantitative data. The evidence presented here relied primarily on monitoring data. Other methods of data gathering can be used, including qualitative feedback and formative research. Investing in formative research focusing on the project's working areas helps to dig deeper into gender attitudes and gender dynamics at the household level to design a male engagement approach that responds to local challenges and reflects the needs of participants. For example, the project's male engagement module focuses on child marriage and improved communications between couples – these are areas identified for support by participants in the formative research.

REPLICABILITY

The male engagement practice can be scaled across settings and contexts – however, a degree of adaptation is essential to ensure that the approach is attuned to local contexts and specific socio-economic challenges relating to gender equality and social inclusion. In World Vision, the approach has been scaled across multiple countries (India, Armenia, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe to name a few) – however, there has been a process of adaptation based on experiences, learnings, and local context. Evidence from the male engagement implementation has shown that the approach can change negative perceptions and enhance gender equality and social inclusion within the households, communities, and societies.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustaining the impact of male engagement is a critical area that requires strategic engagement with other partners. The male engagement groups are not intended to sustain, rather the behaviors and practices should persist. Engaging government counterparts early and consistently is critical. Strategies for sustainability include advocacy to ensure that male engagement interventions are adopted in government trainings, structures, and programs. To pave the way for sustainability, Nobo Jatra worked closely with the government of Bangladesh through its national and local mechanisms, Child Protection Committees, Child Marriage Prevention Committee, local government structures known as Upazila and Union Parishads, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, and government-affiliated youth clubs.

Including sustainability planning in the design phase and identifying key stakeholders to 'handover' to is very crucial. Involving resource persons from the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs at sub-district level to facilitate male engagement sessions and including these officials in trainings related to male engagement would be an effective way to increase government ownership into the approach from early design and start stage of the project.

MITIGATING COVID-19 IMPACTS

The project pivoted its interventions to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic. The project conducted a series of COVID-19 impact assessments in 2020 and 2021 that found that COVID-19 had contributed to loss of livelihoods and increased poverty. This exacerbated the risks of child marriage as families sought to cope with eroded economic stability and prolonged school closures. The 2021 COVID-19 impact assessment found that 59.3% of respondents reported that risks of child marriage and GBV had increased during COVID-19 (a substantial increase from 28% in the programs July 2020 COVID-19 Assessment). Some households reported they had to marry their children before the age of 18 due to COVID-19 and reduced incomes.

Additionally, COVID-19 increased the burden of unpaid domestic and childcare work for everyone, especially mothers, adolescent girls, or female caregivers. The closure of schools, the disruption of livelihood activities, and movement restrictions resulted in entire families staying at home. Further, 74.3% of households reported increased time on cleaning (unpaid work). Furthermore, 40.2% of households reported increased time spent on childcare. In this situation girls and young women were at significant risk to be pushed to take on significantly higher labor roles in household chores and care work instead of studying at home.

Data from the COVID-19 impact assessments was used to inform and pivot implementation to meet the challenges faced by the project's direct participant households. For example, the project ramped up COVID-19 social and behavior change initiative that was inclusive of messaging on sexual and gender-based violence and child marriage. Information was provided on the risks, law on child marriages, and government hotline number to report incidents. Over 48,068 pregnant and lactating women received voice messages twice weekly on COVID-19 and sexual and gender-based violence. Additional digital social and behavior change sessions with 8-10 participants per session were conducted via laptops, tablets or smart phones and a portable speaker in villages. These sessions included messaging on health and nutrition, hygiene behaviors and SGBV/child marriage. A total of 14,792 sessions were conducted by April 2021, reaching 117,070 participants, 104,479 of whom were female including pregnant and lactating mothers, adolescents, grandmothers, and youth.

The project also supported 40 Village Courts and their members to raise awareness on and mitigate the risks of sexual and gender-based violence during COVID-19. The focus was on sensitization of members of the village courts on government legislation, how to prevent, respond, and report incidents. The members were provided with information on the hotline to report incidents of sexual and gender-based violence, child marriage, and violence against children, and how to respond in cases while maintaining confidentiality, respect, safety, and non-discrimination of victims.

LEVERAGING RESOURCES AND TOOLS

Leveraging existing resources on male engagement both within World Vision and externally improves project effectiveness and efficiency. There is a plethora of resources, tools and research on engaging men and boys to improve gender equality and social inclusion. Therefore, training manuals can be adapted to fit context specific needs at very little cost and effort. For example, World Vision Bangladesh leveraged and built upon World Vision's successful adoption of the *MenCare - Global Fatherhood Campaign* in Armenia India¹⁷, and Sri Lanka¹⁸, to develop and pilot Nobo Jatra's' male engagement manual titled *Family Well-Being and Prosperity*'.

Periodic review of male engagement resources and tools to better align with GESI domains and enhance specific areas is critical to keep the approach relevant and attuned to the local context it is being implemented in.

APPLYING A MULTI-SECTORAL APPROACH TO MALE ENGAGEMENT

Integration of male engagement participants into other activities across the project helped to increase access, participation and strengthen well-being. In doing so, male engagement participants were able to permeate messages to other program participants and act as catalysts within communities. For example: 2,902 households that participated in male engagement sessions also participated in Nobo Jatra's 15 month nutrition safety net activity targeted to pregnant and lactating women. Further, 2,147 male engagement participants also participated in agriculture and alternative livelihoods activities to boost household nutrition and incomes.

17 World Vision, Promundo. 2013. A MenCare Manual to Engage Fathers to Prevent Child Marriage. Washington, DC.

18 World Vision, Promundo. 2013. MenCare Fathers' Group Manual. Washington, DC.

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The Nobo Jatra Project is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of World Vision and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.



