

## Stories of change

“ I was suffering from some form of sexual disease. I was ashamed to go to the health centre and see a doctor for it. After I became a member of this group, I went to the health centre. The doctor there checked my ovaries and identified the problem. She gave me medicines. I am cured now. ”

**Gender Activist Group member,  
Sajulpur, Jashore**

“ There was a lot of pressure on me. My husband and in-laws would mentally abuse me as I was seen as a burden to the family. Now that I am self-reliant, have my own income and contribute to the family, I am free from all pressures. I feel as if a new chapter in my life has begun. ”

**Small business group member,  
Nurpur, Cumilla**

“ We are 40 members, 30 of whom are girls. Following our own training, we have conducted three workshops at the YWCA office where 120 of our friends have participated. We have also talked to others about eve teasing, organising street theatres on this. ”

**Gender Activist Group Member, Cumilla**

## Project dashboard: Improving sexual and reproductive health and resilience of vulnerable young women in Bangladesh

### Goal

To improve the sexual and reproductive health and resilience of young people, in particular vulnerable young women, in four districts of Bangladesh by providing vocational skills training, access to health care and education on sexual and reproductive rights.

### Implementing partners:

YWCA Bangladesh



### Funding Partners:



Fresh Leaf Foundation  
James Tudor Foundation  
Y Care International

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### Duration:

1st March 2016 – 31st December 2018

### Cost:

£448,550

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Y Care International creates opportunities for vulnerable young people across the globe to change their lives for the better. Inspired by and faithful to our Christian values, we work with people of all faiths and none to build a more just world, free from poverty.



## Improving the sexual and reproductive health and resilience of vulnerable young women in Bangladesh

From 2016 to 2018 Y Care International and YWCA Bangladesh worked in partnership to empower young women to make positive and informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. We supported marginalised young women and men in 22 villages to strengthen livelihoods, gender equality, sexual and reproductive health awareness and disaster risk reduction.

# The results

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## Context

YWCA Bangladesh and Y Care International implemented a 3-year project to improve the Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) and resilience of young people, specifically young women, in 22 rural villages of 4 districts in Bangladesh.

On average women marry early in Bangladesh and are likely to conceive their first child at a very young age. 72.6% of married women indicate that they have experienced one or more forms of violence, yet most women never report their experiences to others. The aim of this project was to empower young women to demand their socio-economic and sexual reproductive rights, increase their economic resilience and access to healthcare and increase community awareness of gender relevant SRH issues, practices and services.

At the end of the project 93% of participants surveyed stated that they believe early marriage is harmful and would protest if they saw an incident of child marriage. Over 42% of participants had already taken part in an action to stop child marriage in their community.

## Gender Equality

Through the emphasis on young women's participation in social activism and economic activities the project evaluation found demonstrable improvements in gender equality within families and target communities. Young women have acquired the confidence and capability to make their own decisions, and their participation in economic and social activism has increased substantially.

The project's economic empowerment component created new opportunities for savings and credit, increasing young women's participation in economic activities and contributed to increased incomes. 86 young women were trained in small business management and vocational skills, and 80 young women were provided with seed funding to start and/or grow their own business. By the end of the project, 333 young women were members of 19 savings and credit groups established which has contributed to an increased sense of economic security and independence.

## Sexual and Reproductive Health

The project supported local healthcare centres to develop their service infrastructure. 508 healthcare professionals were given training to become more adept at providing youth-friendly services and access to resources through a 'Health Fund' that they used to make improvements to their centres.

Young project participants have indicated that there is increased awareness and improved service quality amongst the health clinics engaged in the project

which has in turn contributed to increasing the uptake of young people seeking SRH services.

92% of young female participants reported increased knowledge on the risk of early pregnancy with 81% noting the benefits of delaying the first pregnancy to protect themselves from these risks. Similar results were identified amongst young male participants, who reported 91% and 64.7% respectively. Overall, the evaluation found that young women and men demonstrated improved knowledge of SRH rights and related issues. Young people then used this knowledge to take a leadership role in preventing violations of SRH rights within their own communities.

## Disaster Risk Reduction

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) groups set up and trained through the project carried out vulnerability assessments of their communities. These groups, together with other young leaders engaged in the project, successfully advocated with local government authorities for canal digging and cleaning and setting up dustbins to improve waste collection. DRR group members also became involved in protecting girls from early marriage among other interventions to enhance gender equality and rights.

## Youth Leadership

The project adopted a central strategy of developing youth leaders as agents of change amongst their peers and the broader community, training 160 young activists as peer educators, gender activists, DRR and advocacy group members. The project emphasised working with young girls and women, working also with young boys and men to shift gender roles and relationships within the communities and empower them to actively contribute to changing attitudes and practices. Young activists used their knowledge to mobilise and sensitise over 16,000 community members through awareness-raising campaigns on SRH, violence against women, child marriage, women rights, dowry and gender issues. The project also provided refresher training for children and young people involved in 12 School Health Clubs and 24 teachers actively supporting the Clubs. 53.6% of young people surveyed reported that their teachers now talk about or discuss SRH issues in an open and friendly manner in school.

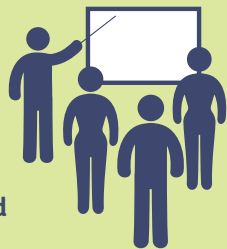
All the young people who participated in the project indicated that they feel more confident in their decision-making and are now given more space to do so within their families and communities. The mother of a young female activist in Barisal said: "Because of the new knowledge that our children have, they know a lot of things that we did not know. That is the reason we value their opinion not only for their health, but also for our health."

## What changed?

## Our project in numbers

40

young people were trained as community-based agents of change



508

health professionals were trained on youth-friendly and gender-sensitive Sexual Reproductive Health service provision

5,465

young women and

1,615

young men increased their knowledge of gender-relevant Sexual Reproductive Health issues, practices and services



320

young women can now access a healthcare fund



1,200

children and young people were engaged in School Health Clubs



1,782

community members have increased awareness of disaster risks and mitigation measures

## What next?

Gender inequalities and limited access to essential SRH services for young women remain a big challenge in communities across Bangladesh. YWCA Bangladesh – a leading women's rights' organisation with a presence in 12 districts - is committed to empowering women to demand their rights, improve their health and economic status and realise their potential as change makers.

Ongoing YWCA programming will continue to support young people to access quality, youth-friendly SRH information and services through education and awareness campaigns and training for healthcare providers. Young women will continue to be able to access finance and savings groups established through this project, with support from local YWCA branches.

Young activists who were involved in the project have organised themselves to continue to raise awareness

on SRH and DRR with the aim of reaching more young people in their own networks and communities.

We understand that women and girls' health, safety and access to basic services are directly related to their social and economic wellbeing. YCI and YWCA will continue to monitor progress in these areas, including following up with the youth activists, and use learning to inform programme design in other contexts where young people face similar challenges. YWCA will increase collaboration with stakeholders in civil society to improve community protection mechanisms and strengthen joint advocacy activities to lobby for gender mainstreaming in government policies and plans. Thereby, building a stronger movement to tackle the most pressing issues related to all kinds of violence and inequalities faced by women and girls in Bangladesh.