

**Hello, I Am (2017–2020)**

# End of programme summary of results and key learnings

## About Hello, I Am

Bangladesh has the third highest prevalence of child marriage in the world, and the second highest absolute number of women married or in a union before the age of 18 globally – 4,382,000<sup>1</sup>. Early marriage and teenage pregnancy not only violate girls' rights, they are also barriers to individual and social development. They put girls' health at risk, and lead them to drop out of school depriving them of opportunities for education and empowerment.

Hello, I Am (HIA) was a four-year programme (2017-2020) working to reduce child marriage, teenage pregnancy and school dropout in Bangladesh. By combining large-scale edutainment and community interventions (including youth and parent groups, intergenerational dialogues, local advocacy, and community outreach), HIA empowered young people to take action against harmful practices, and encouraged parents and community leaders to end child marriage and be more supportive of girls' aspirations.

<sup>1</sup> Girls not Brides (no date) Child marriage atlas - Bangladesh.  
Available at: <https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/bangladesh>

Hello, I Am envisioned a supportive social environment in which young people in Bangladesh, especially adolescent girls and young women, can make informed choices about, and enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights. It aimed to reduce child marriage, teenage pregnancy and school drop-out.



## Results

### Increasing young people's and adults' knowledge and skills to reduce child marriage

In 2017-2020, HIA reached 6,803 adolescents through **adolescent courtyard sessions**, providing life skills and knowledge on sexual and reproductive health (SRHR) and child marriage, and communicating with parents. Pre- and post-session tests showed the *Amate Ami* curriculum<sup>2</sup> increased participants' knowledge and changed their attitudes toward child marriage: adolescents' ability to understand principles of respectful relationships and identify violent behaviour in a relationship increased by 67% and 46% respectively; knowledge of how to stop child marriage increased by 50%.

In parallel, HIA involved 6,690 adults in **parent courtyard sessions**, covering topics such as puberty, parenting, relationships, child marriage, and gender-based violence, and focused on creating a supporting environment and engaging parents as key influencers of marriage.

Impact evaluation of HIA showed its meetings helped create safe spaces where participants could: openly discuss topics like marriage, education

and reproductive health; learn about sexual and reproductive health and rights and laws, such as the legal marriage age for girls and boys; and learn to use facts persuasively in discussions and presentations.

For women and girls in particular, the groups provided an otherwise rare opportunity to leave the house and connect with like-minded people, to feel understood, supported, encouraged, 'not alone' and to make friends.

### Engaging multiple generations

HIA had a strong intergenerational approach, and many members of the same families attended youth and parent courtyard sessions. Both parents and young people said HIA helped them to feel closer to other family members and discuss things more openly in the family. Parents said their children were more open with them, and adolescents said their parents listened to them more.

HIA also established three-generation dialogues, fostering conversations between grandparents, parents, and children, after learning that grandparents play an important role in decisions about child marriage. The dialogues broke down communication barriers between generations and

- 2 For the youth groups, HIA initially adapted Rutgers' *Me and My World*, a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum, and then developed *Amate Ami* (Me and Myself), a shorter and more adolescent-friendly module with expanded content on child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, and school drop-out.

## Collaborating partners

BBC Media Action created HIA's television, radio and on-line 'edutainment'<sup>3</sup> products, which were broadcast nationally and adapted for community use. Bangladeshi organisations PSTC, RHSTEP and DSK<sup>4</sup> implemented activities at community level in six upazilas (sub-districts) (Chittagong, Dharmapasha, Durgapur, Gazipur, Mymensingh and Savar); each organisation was responsible for implementing HIA in two upazilas; PSTC also acted as national host and coordinator.<sup>5</sup> Rutgers provided grant management and a range of technical advice.

- 3 'Edutainment' is an industry term meaning 'media designed to educate through entertainment'
- 4 PSTC: Population Services and Training Center; RHSTEP: Reproductive Health Services Training and Education Program; DSK: Dushta Shasthya Kendra
- 5 PSTC was responsible for Chittagong and Gazipur; RHSTEP for Mymensingh and Savar; DSK for Dharmapasha and Durgapur





encouraged better relationships. The dialogues gave grandparents space to learn about the impact of child marriage, early pregnancy, and school dropout and gave adolescents skills to talk about their ideal roles and responsibilities within their families.

**“For community leaders, it’s become a personal responsibility, no longer an organisational or government mandate.”**

– HIA programme staff

For more information see the [intergenerational approach briefing](#).

### **Increasing girls’ and mothers’ confidence to speak up within families**

The intergenerational approach had the most important impact on girls and mothers. The HIA adolescent meetings provided space where girls could build confidence to speak their minds. Girls felt less shy talking about their bodies after gaining knowledge from the meetings and became more vocal about SRH – HIA’s end evaluation found that girls talked more openly to others in their families and communities about SRH topics. Older women described gaining confidence since joining HIA

parent meetings. When daughter and mother both attended HIA meetings, they reported improved communication with one other and a foundation for their mutual aspirations for what constitutes a ‘better life’ for the daughter: education, ability to work, and waiting to get married until they complete their education or find work. Together, they had the confidence to speak their opinions to the main decision maker in the family, usually the father.

### **Improving gender relations between girls and boys and decreasing sexual harassment**

Although HIA did not set out explicitly to reduce sexual harassment, it was clear from the start that (fear of) sexual harassment is a key factor driving early marriage in Bangladesh. Demystifying the opposite sex and raising awareness of the impacts of harassment had an important impact in changing attitudes towards and incidences of sexual harassment. HIA activities taught girls and boys about puberty in their own and the other sex. Young people often only learnt about their own sex in school. This not only helped to normalize bodily changes but also served to demystify the opposite sex. For some adolescents, HIA events were the first space where they spoke with someone of the opposite sex outside their family. Changes included boys and men no longer harassing girls and women,

but greeting them normally. Parents reported understanding that if a girl got harassed, it did not make her bad; rather, it was the boy doing the teasing who should be reprimanded.

### **Building community movements against child marriage**

Alongside the more intensive engagement of youth and parent groups, over 43,000 young people and over 36,000 adults were reached through broader community activities including street drama, community campaigns and a range of other community outreach activities. People who had participated in the youth and parent groups also went on to form community networks which spread HIA messages in their local communities, convincing their families, friends and neighbours of reasons to prevent child marriage and continue girls’ education, and even to step in to prevent individual cases of child marriage, with the support of HIA staff and volunteers.

Its diverse activities established HIA as a strong ‘brand’ in all six upazilas, recognised by community and local government. Respondents described HIA as a protective ‘shield’ against child marriage and linked this brand strength to the likelihood of the project’s approach remaining beyond the end of funding. The evaluation described HIA as a connecting force



in communities, the 'glue' that holds stakeholders together. Respondents agreed that 'ownership' of the project had transferred to the community itself. As a result, accountability is generated from inside the community, with various stakeholders inside and outside of HIA assuming responsibility in their professional or personal lives for ending child marriage. The evaluation suggests the community movements will have lasting impact, continuing community advocacy and 'Stop Child Marriage' committees.

### Promoting positive role models

HIA used the Positive Deviance Approach (PDA) to encourage and enable people to resist societal pressure for young women to marry before the age of 18. The programme identified parents, young people and community leaders who actively resisted child marriage as 'positive deviants' because they deviate from the social and cultural norms. The role modelling of positively deviant attitudes and behaviours was identified as one key factor influencing changes in attitudes about child marriage, increased action to prevent child marriages and improved communication in families.

The Best Father Campaign, an activity that embodies the PDA, succeeded across all upazilas, resulting in 200 fathers taking an oath not to allow their adolescent daughters to marry before the age of 18 and to be responsible and accountable for protecting their daughters' rights. Local government officers expressed appreciation of HIA's



**200 fathers publicly pledged**

- not to marry their daughters before the age of 18
- to protect their daughters right to stay in school
- to let their daughters choose when and whom to marry

success in involving men in child marriage prevention and played an important role in adding prestige to the campaign's award ceremonies.

For more information see the [positive deviance briefing](#).

### Education through entertainment

Using edutainment to communicate the programme's messages about ending child marriage and related topics was a central HIA approach. BBC Media Action developed and broadcast TV and radio programmes across the country, content from which was shown locally through bite-size clips used in youth and parent groups and through bigger community screenings. BBC Media Action and PSTC developed a range of social media content while the intervention partners facilitated street dramas in the communities, one of the most popular interventions.

BBC Media Action's TV programmes, called Hello Check!, reached an estimated 7.24 million people; the radio show's 139 episodes reached an estimated 4.2 million people. Media

Action's evaluation found the radio show advanced young people's knowledge of gender inequality and grew their confidence to discuss limiting societal norms and take action to break them. The Bangladeshi government expressed interest in the content of the radio show, and openness to collaboration.

Since HIA concluded, BBC Media Action has approved requests to rebroadcast some of their TV episodes. They also trained more than 150 production staff from 18 community radio stations in youth-friendly radio programme design; as a result, 16 stations started producing youth-focused weekly edutainment programmes covering child marriage, girls' education, and gender equality.

**139 episodes of Hello Check!** radio programme reached

an estimated



**4.2 million**

For more information see the [edutainment briefing](#).





## Key learnings

### Shifting social norms takes time, and it requires careful, thoughtful exploration and measurement

- HIA had important impacts on knowledge and attitudes regarding child marriage and was successful in building community movements. However, we could have had more of an explicit focus on social norm change and exactly which norms we wanted to change and how.
- Future programmes would benefit from a clear vision of social norm change from the outset, jointly owned by all stakeholders, articulating which norms, attitudes and behaviours exist, which can realistically be changed, which programme interventions will influence these changes, and via which pathways the change will take place.
- To enable this joint vision, we recommend conducting participatory research to establish what norms, attitudes and behaviours currently exist specifically in the areas where and amongst the populations with whom the programme will be implemented.

### Recognise the central role that gender and sexuality norms play in child marriage

- Although HIA was successful in transforming family dynamics and in impacting relationships between boys and girls, we could have had a more conscious approach to transforming gender and sexuality norms. For future programmes, we recommend:
  - contextualizing 'gender transformative approaches' that will be applied within a project at the outset and at regular intervals with project stakeholders;
  - understanding the manifestation of gender and sexuality norms in each context and how they can and will be transformed through each project;
  - in youth-focused projects, engaging girls to strengthen their voices and agency in

decision making and to ensure the existence of safe spaces that allow them to build social support networks and have discussions about sexuality; and engaging boys to build respect between girls and boys through the promotion of gender equal norms.

### Target family decision makers, but engage all generations

- A key success of HIA was its intergenerational approach. Future programmes should build on this success and recognise that decisions on child marriage lie mostly with fathers, consistently hard to reach due to their work schedules. Activities that targeted fathers had to be scheduled at times they could attend. Mothers were also less likely to speak in groups with fathers, highlighting the importance of creating safe spaces for everyone to participate in discussions.
- Often, members of the same family went to youth groups, parent groups, and three-generation dialogues. This gave young people the sense that they had permission to attend and showed that parents and grandparents were committed to learning and engaging on the issues. Future interventions should engage all the generations within a family through parallel and reinforcing activities that foster and facilitate family dialogue.

### Choose appropriate media formats for edutainment activities

- HIA adapted Hello Check! television content to distribute across multiple platforms, including community screenings and social media which enhanced some of the community-based activities by adding an audio-visual component, furthering the return on investment.
- HIA consistently reviewed and adapted edutainment content by talking directly to adolescents, soliciting their feedback, and incorporating their insights and preferences.







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## Learn more:

Read and watch stories of change, and access all the intervention briefings at: <https://helloiamchangemakers.org>

- See other programme publications at: <https://www.rutgers.international/programmes/hello-i-am>
- For more information of the partners see:
  - Rutgers @Rutgers\_INTL
  - PSTC @pstcbgd
  - RHSTEP
  - DSK
  - BBC Media Action Bangladesh @



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HIA built upon the **Unite for Body Rights** programme that had been operating in Bangladesh since 2010. Rutgers led on grant management, technical advice, operational research, and evaluations. **BBC Media Action** Bangladesh developed educational media content and created communications training materials. Implementation partners **Population Services and Training Center (PSTC)**, **RHSTEP**, and **Dustha Shasthya Kendra (DSK)** delivered community-facing interventions. The programme was funded by the **IKEA Foundation**.