

ISPCAN International
Congress, Milan 2021



**‘Adolescents unite in Bangladesh.
The power of youth clubs in the fight against
abuse and violence’.**



Background

- Bangladesh was one of the first 22 countries to ratify the UNCRC in 1989.
- Commitment to its four principles (survival, development, protection and participation).
- As full citizens, children should be empowered to make decisions affecting their lives.
- 30 years later, the right to child participation is still work in progress in Bangladesh.



- Despite the National Children Policy 2011 and the National Children Act 2013,
- child participation is often led by tokenism, or steered by adults' directions, and
- efforts are embedded in stereotyped gender and cultural traditions.

Results Child Led Report (National Child Forum of Bangladesh, 2019-2020):

- The voices of 60% of the children in Bangladesh are not heard in the family.
- At school, the opinion of children hardly matters (20%).



Interventions

- 80,000 boys and girls participated in 2000 **child forums**, offering platforms of change to sensitize the community and local government.
- 4,883 **Youth Clubs** across the country - set up by WV Bangladesh in partnership with local government and CP groups.
- WV Bangladesh partners with the Ministries of Children and Women Affairs and Social Welfare to promote child and youth participation across the country.



Impact

- Child and youth participation received more widespread recognition in communities.
- Impact on good governance, social accountability and citizen participation.
- Best practice of meaningful, life-changing youth participation serves as an inspiration at regional and international levels.



Youth Club Leader Meghla at European Development Days

World Vision



European Development Days



- Largest development annual event, organised by the European Commission, with 6,000 participants (Global South experts, Youth leaders and policy makers), discussing current challenges and solutions to achieve a transformative 2030 Agenda.
- World Vision ensured a child-led external engagement, with three Youth leaders engaged in the campaign to End Violence against Children: Meghla (18) from Bangladesh, Agnes (23) from Uganda and Suelv (14) from Albania.

European Development Days



- They actively advocated for meaningful child participation at all levels and the need to raise awareness that put an end to harmful behaviours around violence against girls.
- Their unique and active participation pushed EU officials and EDD participants to challenge their own perceptions and views on violence against girls and boys, as well as to acknowledge the crucial transformative role they play in decision-making.
- Their testimonies and acts of braveness to end violence at home, in schools and in their communities as well as end child marriage resonated well with the EDD audience.

European Development Days



- During the event “Defining the building blocks for an EU strategy to end child marriage”, Meghla voiced her concerns and recommendations to put an end to violence against girls.. Her story became one of the most spread and repeated stories at the EDDs and on social media.
- Official acknowledgement of their positive impact by EU officials.
- Stronger partnerships of WVI with other child-focused NGOs and EU.

Meghla's Story

World Vision 

I am Meghla, 18 years old, in 12th grade, and I am the vice-chairman of Child Forum and a member of Dhaka City Youth Club. I joined WV when I was 13, attending their Life Skills Education (LSBE) programme. I learnt about Child Protection and prevention of early marriage through this programme. I attended many sessions related to child rights and early marriage.

I was a victim of child marriage because my mother pressurized me mentally to become a bride before eighteen. But I succeeded to overcome the situation and stopped my early marriage. It is a great achievement of my life!

After that I started to work to stop early marriage in the community and society. In the last year, I stopped a total of 13 early marriages with the support of my child forum friends. I stopped 5 early marriages by myself. We face lots of challenges when we create awareness against early marriage. People in our community threatened us and called us bad names.

Meghla's Story

World Vision 

At present I am working on stopping of early marriage relating to child right issues as well. I live in a slum area where almost half of the girls are of 10-16 years old. My aim is to work to protect these girls; I want that no girl will get married earlier because each human being has the rights to live an independent life. But in our society the girls are still neglected and abused. I want a society where no girl will be get married earlier, become mother earlier and in the consequence die earlier. I do not want that the girls will not face the problem which I faced before. I was not mentally and physically prepared when my mother forced me to marry at early age. I can feel the pain of the girls who got married at early age. They cannot take any action and experience a doomed life. I know that the girls who were married at a young age are not happy in their conjugal life.

When any girl tells me “sister, you saved my life”, I feel that it is a great achievement for me. It is my dream that through our work and determination we will prevent all the girls from the curse of early marriage.

Meghla's Story

World Vision 

The initiatives taken by our Youth Forum :

- We arrange a meeting with the Youth Forum when any issue like early marriage in our community arise.
- We talk with the victim's parents and try to convince them to stop arranging marriage at early age.
- If we hear that the wedding ceremony is already taking place, we just go on the spot and take action to stop the early marriage.
- We get support of the community elite persons like Urban Neighborhood Development Committees members, Child Protection Committee members, teachers of local schools and finally the nearby police station if we cannot convince the parents of the victim.

Challenges

- Child participation: often considered as a **threat** to adults, who believe that it poses a risk to their authority to raise children in a respectful way.
- **No institutionalized** venue to listen to children's views and facilitate their participation in the family, schools, communities, public services, and judicial procedures.



Take Away

- Young people can play a significant role as **agents of transformation**, engaging in decision-making processes, in accordance with their evolving capacities and gradually increasing autonomy.
- When children and youth learn to communicate opinions, take responsibility and make decisions, they develop a **sense of belonging, justice, responsibility and solidarity**.

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‘Thank you!’

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