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**World Vision**

**NOBO JATRA-NEW BEGINNING**  
*USAID's Development Food Security Activity*

**COVID-19 Learning Series**  
**Adapting to a New Normal: Digital Social Behavior Change**



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## ADAPTING TO COVID-19

### DIGITAL SBCC SESSIONS

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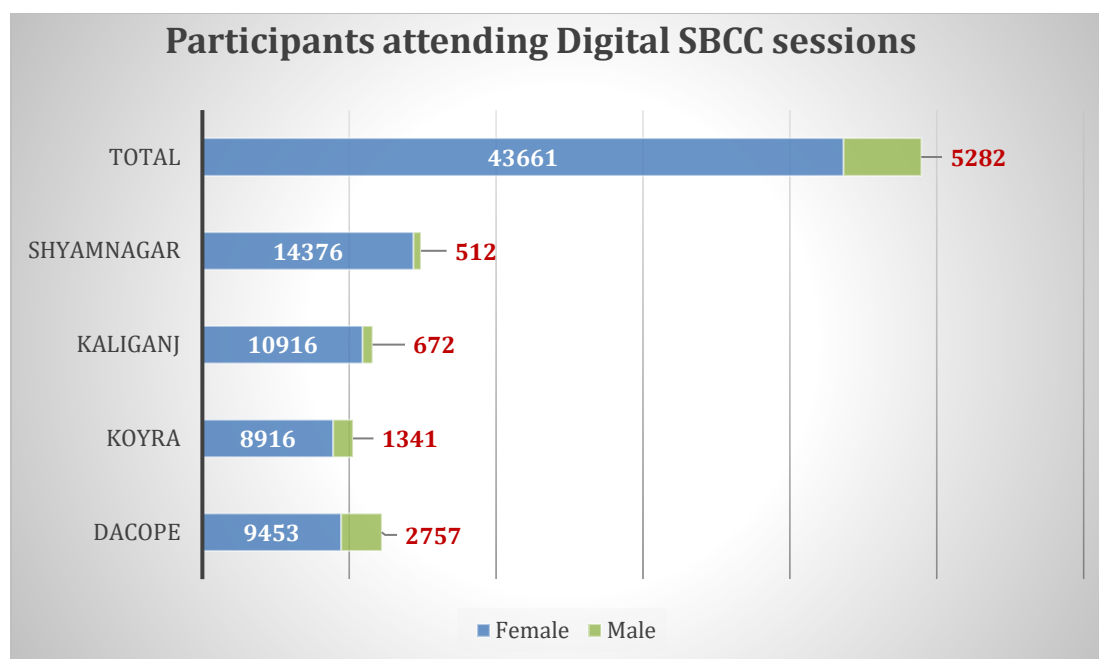
*Timely and accurate Social Behavior Change (SBC) is a critical factor in controlling the spread of COVID-19. Since 2015, USAID's Nobo Jatra project, implemented by World Vision Bangladesh has reached over 200,000 poor and extreme poor households with behavior change communication on a range of issues including Water Sanitation and Hygiene, Maternal Child Health and Nutrition, Agriculture and Alternative Livelihoods, Gender Based Violence and Disaster Risk Reduction. However, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic resulting in movement restrictions and scaling back of community gatherings – there was an urgent need to adapt SBC tactics. In consultation with communities, local Government and field staff, Nobo Jatra shifted gears to digital SBC sessions that relied on the use of laptops, tablets, smart phones, speakers and internet to implement multiple sessions simultaneously across the project areas. Physical attendance at each session was scaled back and instead the number of sessions were increased. By harmonizing plans, technologies and expertise, the efficacy of SBC sessions was strengthened and importantly, lifesaving messages on health, hygiene, Gender Based Violence and COVID-19 have continued to reach the poorest communities.*

### BACKGROUND

In some parts of southwest Bangladesh, between 25 and 34 percent of households live below the poverty line of \$1.90 a day. The COVID-19 crisis is affecting these households and having macro level impact on public services, economic systems and social dynamics that will take much longer to recover from. To make matters worse, this southwest coastal region is subject to many natural and man-made challenges. The area is frequently hit with cyclones - the most recent being super cyclone Amphan which made landfall in May 2020 – causing floods and damages to homes and livelihoods already weakened by the impacts of COVID-19

In March 2020, the Government of Bangladesh first initiated general holidays to contain the pandemic. Starting from 26 March 2020, the Government of Bangladesh announced general holidays for a period of two weeks. The general holiday was extended seven times till 30 May. During this time all Government offices, education institutions and private companies remained closed.

Since 1 June Government offices and other offices have partially opened and movement restrictions have been relaxed. Whilst these measures were critical to curb transmission of COVID-19, they also had implications on livelihoods, food security, nutrition and health. Local administrations stopped all community gatherings including meetings and SBC sessions that convened groups of more than 20 people. In this backdrop, it was essential to adapt and rethink traditional strategies of reaching households with SBC.



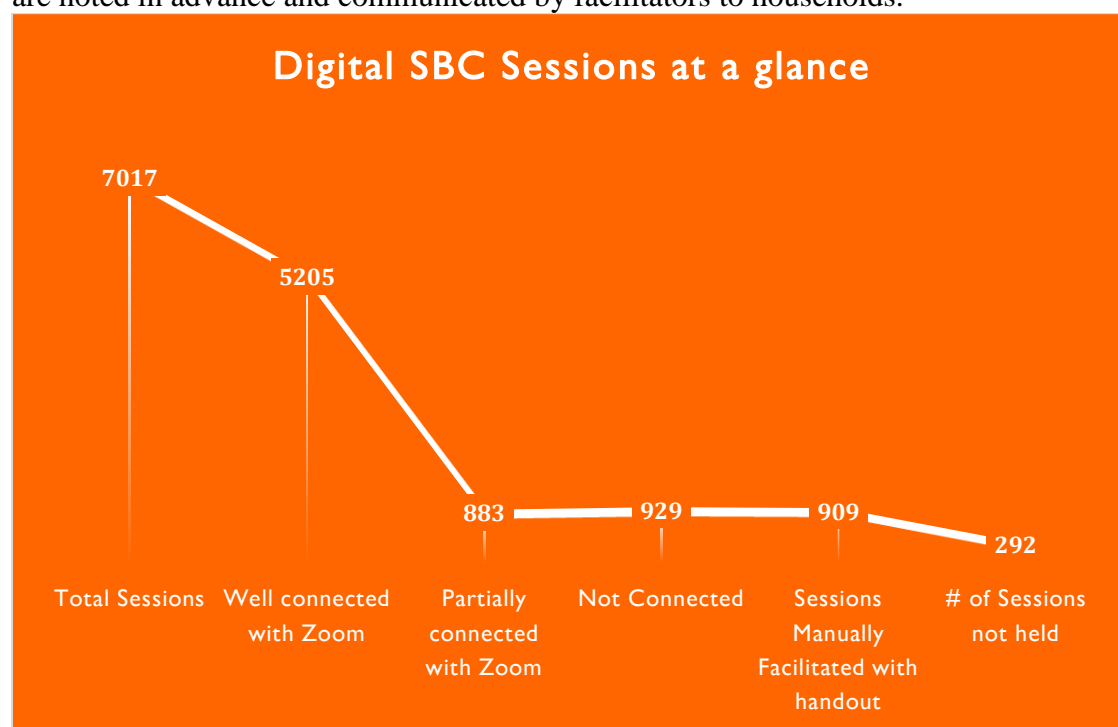
In this backdrop, the Nobo Jatra initiated digital SBC sessions to gauge how these sessions could work on ground and importantly, understand how the sessions will be received by the intended recipients. Major learning is to keep first 30 minutes of the session one-way for presenter to manage time and reduce noises having participants of around 120; and then each field facilitator summarizes for 15 minutes in the end to address questions of the participants for further clarity. Based on the learning from the pilot phase, Nobo Jatra scaled up the digital SBC sessions and 7,017 SBC sessions were held using the Zoom platform from 22 July to 29 September 2020. The sessions were on Maternal Child Health and Nutrition, Water Sanitation and Hygiene, and service delivery institutions of government and messaging on Gender Based Violence. All sessions include messaging on COVID-19. Till 29 September 2020, 48,943 people (m- 5,282, w-43,661) have participated in total across the four sub-districts. Hence, Nobo Jatra's digital SBC sessions are inspiringly aligned with the 'digital ecosystem' as U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Digital Strategy<sup>1</sup> emphasizes, "A "digital ecosystem" comprises the stakeholders, systems, and enabling environments that together empower people and communities to use digital technology to gain access to services, engage with each other, or pursue economic opportunities."

## HOW DO THE SESSIONS WORK?

**Session content:** content was developed by technical leads in consultation with field teams through a series of virtual workshops. Content is designed to cover key messages on maternal, child health and nutrition and safe water, sanitation and hygiene. Content was also developed on Government service provision in agriculture, health, livestock, and fisheries. Given the inherent risk of spikes in Gender Based Violence during a pandemic, sessions were also designed with messages on child marriage, how to reduce conflict within the family and encourage shared division of labor and childcare in the home. Critically, Nobo Jatra's existing modules were adapted and formed the basis of the content for the digital SBC sessions.

<sup>1</sup> For detail, see <https://www.usaid.gov/usaid-digital-strategy>

**Planning and execution of sessions:** Plans are reviewed and developed on a weekly basis and are informed and guided by field teams who consult with communities and also use their regular monitoring to gauge the types of sessions needed. Date, time, venue and number of participants are noted in advance and communicated by facilitators to households.



Technical managers' compile requirements and contents for sessions and zoom-links are communicated to field teams in advance, so they can prepare for the online sessions. The plan includes all the details about date, time, topics and presenters of the session, participants, field-facilitators, and observers. In each session 900 to 1200 participants from approximately 90 to 120 villages attend. Each group of participants in a village is limited to 8 to 10 participants. As per the Performance Indicator Reference Sheet<sup>2</sup> (PIRS) for SBC sessions, each group, is considered to have graduated upon completion of three sessions. The module for the digital SBC sessions was developed based on the context of the program participants and for reinforcing their learning.

**Monitoring:** There is a focal person at the field office in each sub-district for coordination and monitoring of digital SBC sessions. Organizers visit field sites to monitor these sessions. Monitoring strategies include in person monitoring of sessions, phone monitoring, monitoring through video calls. All monitoring visits are reported to focal persons in each field office; and focal persons then report to coordinators in Khulna. Usually 8 to 10 participants in each village is managed by a facilitator at field level. Facilitators, during feedback sessions over zoom, noted that initially participants were having difficulty listening to the tablet computer because of low volume and seating arrangement keeping social spacing (3 feet). After connecting Bluetooth

*I have received mini speaker and started facilitating session using this. I have successfully accomplished 12 sessions. Mobile network coverage is good to listen SBCC sessions without interruption. Our participants understand content of the session well.*  
---Ashok Chakraborty, CWF, Dacope

<sup>2</sup> A tool USAID uses to define performance indicators



speakers with the tablets/ smart phones, participants have been adequately listening to SBCC sessions.

Facilitators get 15 minutes after each session to summarize and to answer questions of the participants. Manik, Kashimari union, Shayamnagar, a field facilitator of the Nobo Jatra project noted *“I am attending the third session of this group here. It is good that we facilitate in the end of sessions, explain further where necessary, and answer queries of the participants. We also take feedback from participants. This helps better understanding of the content of the digital SBCC sessions. I am using a mobile device, a speaker and hard copies of the session-module. The speaker, connected to a mobile device using Bluetooth, gives good sound quality.”*

*Attending digital session is an achievement for facilitators (CNFs/CWFs) because we have gotten access to new technology. It's a unique opportunity and our capacity has been gradually increasing through this process. Bluetooth speaker is giving good sound and participants are happily listening these sessions.*

---Monir, Munshigonj union, Shyamnagar

#### **Digital SBC Session, 22 July to 29 September 2020**

|                                   |                |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| Total Number of Days              | 44             |
| Total Number of Sessions Planned  | 6786           |
| Total Number of Session Held      | 7017 (97%)     |
| Well Connected with Zoom          | 5205 (74.17%)  |
| Partially Connected with Zoom     | 883 (12.58%)   |
| Not Connected with Zoom           | 929 (13.24%)   |
| Manually facilitated with handout | 909 (12.95%)   |
| Session not held                  | 292 (4.16%)    |
| Total Participants                | 48943          |
| Male Participants                 | 5282 (10.79% ) |
| Female Participants               | 43661 (89.21%) |
| Average attendance per day        | 1112           |

In this way reporting and monitoring is done on a regular basis following a prescribed format

## **BCC SESSIONS MAKING DIFFERENCES IN LOCKDOWN CONTEXT**

Digital SBCC sessions are 30 minutes programs and the script of each session is written carefully, so that participants can easily understand key messages. Hard copy of the session module also contains highlighted key messages. According to some facilitators' testimonies, community participants have been enjoying these sessions. Similar to watching television or listening to a radio program, they are listening to SBC sessions. After each session, the facilitator discusses with her/his session participants and explains further where necessary. Field facilitators, during summarizing, make sure that participants have received key messages.

Participants noted, during feedback session<sup>3</sup>, *“we are very happy getting information through mobile phones and speakers about health, hygiene, and how to wash hands; these are very useful information for us.”*

<sup>3</sup> Field facilitators, officers and organizers of four field offices of the Nobo Jatra project attended a feedback session over internet using cloud-Zoom platform on 7<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> September, 2020.

Salma, Halima, and Eti, Kaliganj, during discussion<sup>4</sup> noted that listening to SBCC sessions over the phone is safe because nowadays it is impossible to have courtyard sessions due to pandemic and fear of exposure to viruses. They have learnt from these sessions that social distancing is very important and they need to maintain minimum 3 feet distance among each other while attending meetings outside home. Usage of mask and hand washing with soap is critical to protect themselves and their family members against the virus. They understand after attending these sessions that hand washing is necessary before eating, cooking and after using latrine. Information about health services for pregnant women nutrition of children under two are very useful for their families and the community. While asked question during interview they could explain negative impact of child marriage and how both mother and child's health could be at risk.

*"We now know how to protect our family members; we are very much eager to learn from these sessions. Sound in the Bluetooth speaker is good and we hear every word. We are benefitted by getting information on health and hygiene. We were in the dark and we do not have access to information; these sessions are a great source to know and become aware. We did here all three sessions without any internet interruption",* Monju Rani, Shukla Mondol, Joyonti Mondol, Khatail, Dacope, expressed<sup>5</sup> their satisfaction and happiness about digital SBCC sessions.

Parul and Nasima, Koyra, expressed<sup>6</sup> satisfaction that they are benefitted significantly by receiving information about pregnant women, health and nutrition of children under two and conflict resolution in the families. Participants have gotten new idea that men can help at household chores. They listened to all the three sessions without any internet interruption; though all participants sat 3 feet away from each other, they could hear the session well because the field facilitator used a speaker with smartphone. They emphasized that it is comparatively better to listen to virtual sessions than to hear typical courtyard sessions because digital sessions are more organized and do not have noises. Mostly they spend on an average 1 hour for listening each session including preparatory time and seating arrangement.

## PROSPECTS, CHALLENGES, LEARNING AND ADAPTATION

- In the beginning simulation of sessions were very useful to gather feedback from the participants and to adapt accordingly. Seating arrangements (physical distancing) of the participants in the field sites were monitored using video conversation. Presenters, during simulation sessions, directly talk to participants using cloud platform-zoom. Thus, feedback was gathered from the participants at different stages and learnings had been incorporated for fine tuning sessions.
- Community participants are found enthusiastic directly listening sessions presented by senior leaders of Nobo Jatra project over internet. Facilitators have been capacitated significantly through such digital SBC using Internet, Zoom cloud platform and the digital devices.

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<sup>4</sup> Interviewed over phone on 7 September, 2020. They participated in the phone interview from Kakshiali village in Kaliganj sub-district.

<sup>5</sup> Participants attended an interview over phone on 7 September, 2020 from Dacope.

<sup>6</sup> Participants, Mokeshpur, Koyra, attended an interview over phone on 7 September, 2020.

- During sessions co-hosts of the session over zoom need to keep participants muted, otherwise unmuted devices in the users' end create noises. Chat box of zoom remains open always for addressing questions, comments and queries of the participants.
- In the end of the sessions field facilitators synthesize; participants get opportunities to ask questions for further clarity and make comments. Facilitators make ensures that participants could grasp key messages out of the session. It appears very useful to have such summarizing sessions by field facilitators.
- Initially participants complained that they could not hear adequate sound from the tab, smartphone or laptop. Nobo Jatra project channeled budget to overcome this limitation; field facilitators were provided with Bluetooth speakers. Bluetooth speakers can be connected to digital devices without wire and it amplifies sound. Grassroots participants, during the feedback session, expressed their satisfaction that volume is adequate now and they can listen well these sessions.
- Some villages in four sub-districts have poor mobile network coverage, as a consequence, facilitators and participants in these villages struggle to listen to live SBC sessions due to frequent interruptions. However, the project has provided recording of the sessions to facilitators; in addition, they have hard copies of session-modules. Thus, facilitators conduct sessions when online sessions are interrupted. Facilitators noted, during the feedback session, that it is also very convenient to play recordings of the session and to discuss using hard copies of the session guidebook. Facilitators regularly report to the coordination team about these sessions.
- The Nobo Jatra project will continued facilitating digital SBCC sessions till the end of September 2020 and extend digital sessions in the next fiscal year based on the considering pandemic and available resources.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Digital SBC sessions appeared as an effective approach to inform program participants about maternal and child health, water and sanitation, gender and service delivery institutions, and covid-19. While restrictions, imposed by local administrations, stopped meetings and courtyard sessions at community level, digital SBC ushered a pathway to reach vulnerable households with the life improving information. This initiative has increased access to information by remote communities in the moments of despair. Therefore, program participants in the coastal areas of the Nobo Jatra program are contented with quality learning provided through these sessions. Digital SBC also supported communities to avoid disinformation about pandemic and other services. Staff of the Nobo Jatra project at field level have gained knowledge and significant expertise to apply digital technologies for the facilitation of SBC sessions. Success of Digital SBC sessions to reach thousands in the communities overcoming distance and contagion has set an example in the development programming for the underprivileged.