

# IMAGE Plus Dignified the Early Married Girls



SKS Foundation, in partnership with TDH- Netherlands, implemented the Initiative for Married Adolescent Girls' Empowerment (IMAGE Plus) Project. Funded by The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (EKN), the IMAGE Plus Project was implemented in 2 phases targeting the early married adolescent girls. The Project implementation covered 2 unions in Gaibandha Sadar & Palashbari Upazila, Gaibandha from December 2014 to December 2020.

The implementation of IMAGE Plus Project has contributed in increasing awareness, and creating demand & utilization of sexual and reproductive services as well as sexuality education and gender-based violence among the project participants. The Project has contributed in broadening the support for married girls through awareness raising and reached a larger audience with relevant messages through mobilization & advocacy. New, specific messages and calls to action has sensitized the civil society, media and government to promote more active support for early married adolescent girls of Bangladesh.

IMAGE Plus Project has further expanded and built the adolescent girls' relations with established networks and engaged them with existing educational institutions. The Project has also supported the target participants in exploring livelihood opportunities arranging vocational and technical educational options for them. All these have created opportunities for early married adolescent girls for formal and informal education, generate income and improve their nutrition status. The project participants also got livelihood and life skills training and engaged them in market analysis. The project intervention has sensitized the private sector (Pharmaceutical Industry) to be engaged in supplying and making reproductive health products including sanitary napkins, more attractive contraceptives, etc available close to the respective communities. Thus, the Project has opened avenues for 3,250 early married girls towards leading a dignified life realizing their rights and potentials.

Being the implementing organization, SKS Foundation consolidated the achievements & learning of IMAGE Plus Project with further validation by different stakeholders in a consultation. Development professionals, relevant service providers, academicians, media people and community allies from national, district & upazila level validated the project achievements in the consultation while they also pinpointed the learning to be scaled-up.



**Mohammad Towhidul Islam**  
Superintendent of Police,  
Gaibandha

"Bangladesh is in a faster growth stage of economic development and continuous progress. Now it's also time to move centering social development issues.

The IMAGE Plus Project has made a significant achievement in Sadar & Ramchandrapur union of Gaibandha. Considering our social need, the Project has contributed in the women's development, especially in the awareness building of teenage mothers and family members. This is one of our important social needs. The IMAGE Plus Project's contribution in ensuring women's health & social security is also in line with the Government's major focus issues. Being a part of the people, Bangladesh Police is also taking necessary steps in protecting women's security & right. On behalf of the administration, I would like to assure that Gaibandha Police will be with the vulnerable people with special focus on women issues. I hope, the common people will consider us as friends and will call us directly or, use helpline 999 for any urgency."



**Mahmudul Kabir**  
Country Director,  
TDH Netherlands, Dhaka

"Bangladesh is much concerned about early marriage. The development organizations are complementing to the government initiatives in this regard. We, in partnership with SKS Foundation, developed the IMAGE Plus Project based on this burning need and have implemented it in Gaibandha. The early married girls are always victimized due to lack of their awareness. The Project tried to make them safer building their awareness, changing the mindset of family members, and ensuring the services for the affected people. SKS Foundation has completed the successful implementation of the IMAGE Plus Project. The project participants, govt. representatives and other stakeholders have supported the project implementation while a significant change has been visible. There were a lot of problems relating to the adolescent girls in the intervention areas. But we can change the situation if we can set our determination. The IMAGE Plus Project has made us determined to achieve our target. We set the priority and made a combined effort taking community and the stakeholders into the action."



**Nargis Jahan**  
Deputy Director,  
Dept. of Women Affairs, Gaibandha

"I visited the IMAGE Plus Project areas many times and found the project outcome very encouraging. I talked to the community people during my visit. Thanks to SKS Foundation for their tremendous commitment to the community women. Department of Women Affairs is also working with women for their development especially for widows, divorcee, aged and adolescent. But early marriage is one of the key barriers on the way to women development. We have been providing lot of life skill trainings to the women for their capacity building so that they can be mainstreamed into socio-economic development and can contribute to enhance their livelihoods. Department of Women Affairs worked with IMAGE Plus Project and created scope for some participants in getting life skill training. I think, this sort of benefiting project should be implemented countrywide."



**Emdadul Haque Pramanik**  
Deputy Director,  
Dept. of Social Services, Gaibandha

"The IMAGE Plus Project has worked for developing the women and adolescent especially the early married girls and their families. And it was really an exception comparing to the traditional development projects. Department of Social Services and IMAGE Plus Project jointly worked for the affected people. The Project has made significant change to the community people especially focusing their habit, culture, behavior and mentality. The change-makers in the society also played a vital role to enroll the early married girls to the government safety net programs. Department of Social Services appreciates this type of development work and we will be with the community people although the Project has phased out."



**Khondaker Zahid Shorwar**  
Assistant Director, SKS Foundation

The IMAGE Plus Project got started with a confusion that it could be very difficult to work with married girls. 'Whether their family members will accept this program or, not' was the big question. Gradually the project intervention got positive response of the community. The respective community, Union Parishad, civil society group and local administration also got involved with the Project and helped in ensuring the expected outcome with their active participation as change-makers. Participation of family members became supportive to the early married girls. Alongside, the Union Parishad came forward and provided intensive support in achieving the progress in line with the project spirit.

As a result of the project intervention, the early married girls are now well-aware about their rights and entitlement. They now claim their rights and ask to ensure the government services to the communities including the safety net services for the poor. The adolescents now also know the source and system of getting the reproductive health services. The Project has established a better understanding between male and female members.

This has changed the traditional and dominating mindset of the male members while the males are supporting the female members in managing their household activities. And again, this changed attitude has been promoted to the community level especially among the aged people, teachers, local allies and also the adolescents. This has changed attitude of the teachers and a favorable environment has been created for the early married girls to continue with their education.

Advocacy under the IMAGE Plus Project has sensitized the service providers to ensure rights & entitlement of the poor community people especially the early married girls, adolescents and victim of domestic violence. The Project and the Family Planning Office have also jointly worked targeting the pregnant and lactating mothers to ensure their health care and nutrition status. This has created a relationship between community people and the service providers. The service departments are providing support to the community people especially the early married girls and adolescents. The government health sector has also been ensuring the ANC and PNC services for the pregnant women. As a result, maternal death rate has been reduced significantly.



**Md. Rafiqul Islam**  
Chairman,  
Ramchandrapur UP

"The Project started in 2014 and we have participated with our support to the implementation of the Project. Ranchandrapur is a remote union where the rate of child marriage was so high and we also faced tremendous challenge in mitigating family conflict before the IMAGE Plus Project implementation. The family conflict has been reduced and socio-economic status of the target families has been changed significantly as a result of the IMAGE Plus Project implementation. The Project has made different change-makers always active to stop the child marriage. The project participants are now more aware on the impact of child marriage. The project participants are also availing the health and government safety net services being aware of the proper beneficiary criteria. Married girls are more aware about their right and entitlement and they are also more aware of government health services."



**Farhana Jesmin Hasan**  
Project Director, IMAGE Plus,  
TDH-Netherlands, Dhaka

"At the starting of the Project, I had a dilemma in my mind whether it was possible to discuss issues like SRHR at the community or, whether the people would accept such discussions in their family level. But the efforts of project staff & SKS Management and the cooperation of the beneficiaries have helped overcome this obstacle. We have achieved the prime goal by getting the family members engaged directly in the project intervention. The participation of government service institutions, especially the Department of Social Services, Department of Women Affairs, District Family Planning Office and the civil society was significant. With positive response of the District Family Planning Office, the married girls came up and availed the family planning services regularly. I draw the attention of the concerned Departments to continue their services."





**Aduri Akhter**  
Early Married Girl,  
Raghunathpur, Ramchandrapur

"I got married in 2014 when I was 16 years of age. I started my conjugal life without awareness on sexual and reproductive health. I wanted to study, but my mother-in-law refused. I was just living in the dark. With starting of the IMAGE Plus Project at our community, I started attending different activities like courtyard session, training, etc relating to sexual and reproductive health. I have known about the domestic violence. I received training on livelihood and got involved with IGA activities. The IMAGE Plus Project implemented the activities focusing the family as a whole and organized different sessions with participation of other family members. As a result, my husband and mother-in-law agreed to continue my education. Now I am studding in a college. I have changed myself and am trying to make others aware."

**Md. Kajol Sarker**  
Member, Spouse Forum  
Ramchandrapur Union



"The IMAGE Plus project has tried to change our previous system. My wife and i got early married when I was only 16 and she was at 14. In our area if someone got married early, usually the parents didn't accept it. Working on the IMAGE Plus Project, I didn't face such situation. Being sensitized by the Project, my parents agreed to teach both of us. My wife has been provided with various skill trainings with the help of the Project. We both have become aware as a result of the IMAGE Plus Project. Many volunteer groups, Union Parishad and civil society networks associated with the Project have actively worked. As a result, social problems like child marriage have been reduced. The Chairman has declared our Union as a child marriage-free area."



**Sabana Begum**  
Early Married Girl,  
Pollakhada, Ramchandrapur

"I was only a 15-year girl when I got married. I had to take children under the pressure of my father-in-law's family. They didn't want me to go for study. I got myself involved with IMAGE Plus Project activities and participated in different events i.e. meeting, awareness activities, etc. Being sensitized, I consulted with my family and approached for getting admitted into a school. Having a lot of explanation from my part, the school authority agreed to get me admitted. I have passed SSC and Now I am about to complete my HSC in a college. The IMAGE Plus Project has supported me reaching at this stage. The Project has also tagged me to tailoring training under National Women Parishad and I can contribute to my family besides my education. It has contributed to increase my acceptance in my family. I really feel proud of being a participant of the IMAGE Plus Project."

**Modasseruzzaman Milu**  
District Coordinator,  
IMAGE Plus Project



"It was so tough to discuss the family planning issues under the component of Sexual & Reproductive Health & Right (SRHR). The project staff have made it a success as they emphasized the issue most important for saving women's life. In regard to this, the IMAGE Plus Project organized separate meetings of early married girls and spouses of early married girls. Family Club was formed with participation of the mothers-in-law of early married girls and some early married & unmarried girls. These events worked well and proved as the suitable platform for discussing & learning about the usage of family planning methods & services. Thus, the Project organized different innovative events and ensured the positive outcome relating to SRHR, IGA, Education and Gender-based violence centering the vulnerable women."



**Anjali Rani Debi**  
Member, Civil Society Forum,  
Sadar Union

“IMAGE Plus Project has inspired the women significantly. It was a special opportunity for me working with the early married girls and it was needed for our community and context of Gaibandha especially Ramchandrapur union. The IMAGE Plus Project has changed the mentality of family members, teachers and society and that in turn contributed to change the situation. We are requesting the Social Welfare and Police Department to develop a uniform marriage registration for all the people irrespective of Muslim, Hindu Cristian and other religion and that needs to be digitalized.”



**Rasel Ahmed Liton**  
Chief Executive,  
SKS Foundation

“SKS Foundation implemented the IMAGE Plus Project in the Sadar & Ramchandrapur union of Gaibandha district. The Project got closed on 31 December 2020 and we are capturing the best practices and learning of the Project through this Consultation. The project participants and relevant stakeholders have shared their role in achieving the success of the Project. SKS Foundation will document and share the learning with development planners and policy-makers. As a development organization, we will continue some of the activities as best practice of the IMAGE Plus Project depending on our organizational capacity. The Department of Social Services and Department of Women Affairs of Gaibandha were the key stakeholders of the Project as they are also working for women development. We request them to incorporate the best practices in their development plan. Alongside, we will document the best practices and learning and share it with national level policy-makers and international NGOs for scaling-up of the validated learning.”



### Learning Points

1. Psycho-social counselling along with the positive mindset of the family members and community people helps a lot in reducing mental pressure and frustration of the early married girls.
2. Availing health and other necessary services become easy if the women are made aware and an active linkage is set with local government institutions and other relevant service providers.
3. The positive mindset of family members, community and educational institutes can help the early married girls continue with their education alongside their family responsibilities.

**SKS Foundation, Head Office:** College Road, Uttar Horin Singha, Gaibandha-5700

Tel: +88-0541-51408, Fax: +88-0541-51492, Cell: +88-01713484430, E-mail: [sksfoundation@sks-bd.org](mailto:sksfoundation@sks-bd.org), Website: [www.sks-bd.org](http://www.sks-bd.org)

**Dhaka Office:** SKS Foundation, Joint View Tower, L-4, College Road, Ashkona, Dakshin Khan, Dhaka-1230



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