

Annual Report 2020 of Adolescent Community Transformation Project (ACT)

Introduction

LAMB Health and LAMB carried out the first year activities in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding. LAMB have well developed project reporting practices; completed quarterly, both for narrative and financial reports. This report has been compiled from the detailed activity and financial report from the ACT Team at LAMB.

These show that, despite the difficult circumstances due to the Covid pandemic, good progress has been made. This sets a good foundation for the continuation of the project over the next two years. Two stories of change have been included which bring to life what is being achieved.



The ACT team at Nawabganj taken during the visit of Dr Rosemary Croft, trustee of LAMB Health, February 2020. The Project Manager is Mr Utpal Minj (far right of the photo.)

Impact of Covid: Lock down for Bangladesh was introduced in March and schools remain closed (Jan 2021) although most other activities of daily life have returned to normal. This meant that some work was not possible eg the planned meetings with parents at schools, returning premature school leavers to school, and field visits were initially kept to a minimum as requested by the Government. Because of minimal testing, it is not known how many people were affected by Covid but Government figures show 120 were registered as infected, with 2 deaths, in Nawabganj. The Adolescent Facilitators (AFs), while waiting for the ACT project to start, were involved in sharing information about the virus and protective measures, with their villages. 600 households received food parcels.

In May, cyclone Amphan hit Nawabganj causing significant damage to crops, houses and roads.

In September 2020, the **Baseline Survey** was completed through interviewing 600 adolescents and reporting on: satisfaction with life / experience of suicide / experience of eve-teasing / experience of and attitudes towards child marriage / school attendance etc. Project activities are restricted to 6 of the 9 wards in each of the 9 unions in Nawabganj , so at the end of the project, differences between the intervention area and the non-intervention areas can be measured.



The Project Inception Workshop was held February 18th 2020 with all the local dignitaries and Government Officials invited

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The Four Outcomes (from the Logframe) & Progress made

1. **Adolescents** with increased awareness of adolescent reproductive health (ARH) and mental health (MH) issues, empowered with decision-making skills and coping strategies.

- 36 Adolescent Facilitators (AFs) started work in March and had an intensive residential initial training which will be followed by monthly training sessions. They have completed the mapping of villages, schools, households, community leaders and groups in the intervention areas. They are continuing advocacy with local leaders.
- 10800 Adolescents are enrolled in 540 groups (405 groups of girls and 135 groups of boys), and have been meeting monthly since the summer.
- 2 peer educators for each of the groups receive monthly training from the AFs.
- 21 modules have been developed on MH & ARH to be taught monthly in each group.
- An annual newsletter with articles written by the AFs was published and circulated.
- More adolescents are attending the local Health Facilities than at the beginning of the project.



Figure 2 Adolescent Group Meeting

- Adolescents in groups are saying there is less eve-teasing since the beginning of the project and that their parents are listening to them more.



Figure 1 AF's Interview Exam



Figure 3
AFs in Training

2. **Parents, leaders and community members** informed of the issues of adolescent MH & ARH.

Training has taken place with

- 9 community committees of religious leaders, government officials and the marriage registrars, trained in child protection, dowry and child marriage.
- 18 community meetings with men; each developing a code of conduct to honour the value of women and girls.
- 9 Workshops to raise awareness on women's rights, adolescent reproductive health and mental health.
- 9 Workshops for Union Health & Family Welfare Centre staff and govt. officials about listening skills, suicide prevention and trauma healing, and encouraging the formation of adolescent friendly health services.
- 3 groups of teachers and 1 group from the Community Health Clinics received information on what ACT is teaching adolescents.

The monthly Upazilla and Union staff meetings are attended to share progress of the ACT project. An end of year Regional meeting with the top officials to describe the year's achievements was held.

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- Counselling Service** A new acceptable, accessible and effective counselling service, known as Aunties benches, is available for adolescent girls.
24 groups (total of 405) 'aunties' received training on active listening and counselling skills. There is evidence that some are already receiving visits from girls wanting support. Some girls have reported back positive experiences at their group meeting; encouraging others to go.
- Vulnerable girls** are re-admitted to education or enrolled in Income Generating Activities. This work has not started due to the schools remaining closed, but lists of the most vulnerable have been drawn up.

To raise the profile of ACT the project participated in local day events:

International Women Day (8th March),

Independence Day (26th March),

National Disaster Preparedness day (10th March),

World Mental Health Day (10th October),

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women 2020 (25th November)

and World AIDS Day (1st December)

Stories of change:

Case 1 Rifat Ali - the group has changed his life.

Rifat Ali is 17years old and lives with his parents and younger brother at Loka Village. His father is a poor farmer and mother is a housewife and they have a small piece of land to grow crops but know a lot of hardship due to low income.

Despite being a student of class ten, Rifat used to spend the whole day playing mobile games so he neither studied well nor spent time with his friends. He frequently got angry and disobeyed his parents when he was asked to have meals, study, or do something. One day he lost his temper and rampaged through his house breaking things.

His parents and brother were distraught and despite giving advice, he would not listen. They worried about his future and his obvious addiction.

At this time the ACT project started to form adolescent groups in Loka village with a discussion with the community leaders about the project's goal and objectives, ie mental health improvement and a better relationship between adolescents with parents.

Rifat's parents requested the project team to enroll Rifat's in the adolescent group. This happened and he was selected by the group members as a peer educator. He therefore received training on peer education, self-care, self-esteem and spiritual values.

While receiving training and conducting group sessions, Rifat realized he was wrong and that he lacked healthy relationships with his parents and friends. Now he is much improved; "The number of my friends was decreasing day by day due to my addiction. No one wants to accompany me" said Rifat, "Now all my friends love me very much, and I am appreciated. I thank to LAMB ACT Project for helping me to change my behavior." His parents too are grateful.



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Case 2 **Rikta Begum - a torch bearer of change**

Rikta Begum, 16 years old married adolescent girl lives at Khamar Para village with parents at Binodnagar union of Nawabganj Upazila under Dinajpur District. She has a young brother who reads in primary school. Her father Rejaul Karim is a professionally small shop keeper (grocery) and mother Roksana Begum is a housewife.



Rikta has had lots of problem since being born in the family. She never gets the opportunity to do something by her own choice even her study also.

She is a meritorious student. She always wanted to be a primary school headteacher after completing his higher study.

Her father Rejaul Karim got a wedding proposal for Rikta and agreed without taking consent of her when she was just fourteen years old and reading in class eight. She didn't want to marry but rather continue her study. She became upset and went through a miserable experience. No one was there to support and counsel her. There was no way to escape this marriage so she gave in on the condition that she continue her study after marriage.

Her parents thought, maybe we won't get a good wedding proposal for her in future. Finally, Rikta got married to 27 years old Saddam Hossian at nearest village named Chakpara.

After the marriage, most of the time Rikta stayed at parents' house to continue her education. She was unhappy at her husband's behavior from the very beginning of their married life. It is to be noted that her husband Saddam Hossain never supports Rikta to continue her study.

At that situation LAMB –ACT project started to form adolescent groups in her village. Rikta was a member of Sinthia Adolescent group and selected a peer educator from the group. As a part of project activity, Rikta got the opportunity to participate in the training on life skills and peer education. She was very good in the training session and performed well which made her very confident to lead a good quality life.

One day Dr. Md. Shahjahan Ali, Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer discussed about the consequences of child marriage and self-care and self-development in the training session. This touched Rikta's heart. After receiving training, she realized that her marriage was a child marriage and she deeply analyzed the bad consequences of child marriage. She decided herself to divorce her husband and was able to convince her parents. Finally, her parents agreed with her decision. Rikta divorced Saddam Hossain and continuing her education to get her higher degree.

While she was facilitating group session, she cried out suddenly and said "I was not able to realize the situation of my miserable life. I have learnt lots about the life skills and it helps me to take the right decision for my life.

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She thanked to LAMB ACT project for such a good initiative for adolescent group formation and sessions.

“The Adolescent Group is a platform where we shall learn about life skills. I was alone, now we are many to protest against child marriage in our community” said, Rikta Begum.

Rikta transformed by herself. Now she is happy and delighted to continue her study. She wants to take higher education. Rikta’s is appreciated by all teachers, students, and friends. They all are inspired by Rikta Begum.



Rikta- Consent
Form.pdf

Finance

The first year activities were seriously disrupted by covid-19 so that project activities in the community could not start running at the level planned. The subsequent years’ activities are being re-budgeted to ensure catch up to meet the project objectives.

80% of the year’s budget was expended. The cost of people working on the project account for almost two thirds of costs, with project activities comprising a further quarter of costs. Project activities comprise primarily group formation and training, both of which were at a reduced level, resulting in the underspend against budget. All other costs were in line with the budget.

In the autumn, the problem of the delay in activities was recognised and the project plan was re-scheduled. The underspend from year 1 will be used in the subsequent periods of the project. Apart from this re-phasing of the budget the only budget increases for the next two years are in respect staff costs. This will be possible due to a more favourable exchange rate than that used in the original budget.

Originally, the budget across the years was 40% in year 1, and 30% in both years 2 and 3. Due to the re-phasing the expected use of funds will be equal at about a third in each year.

This report has been prepared by LAMB Health for the information of the donor and Stewardship.