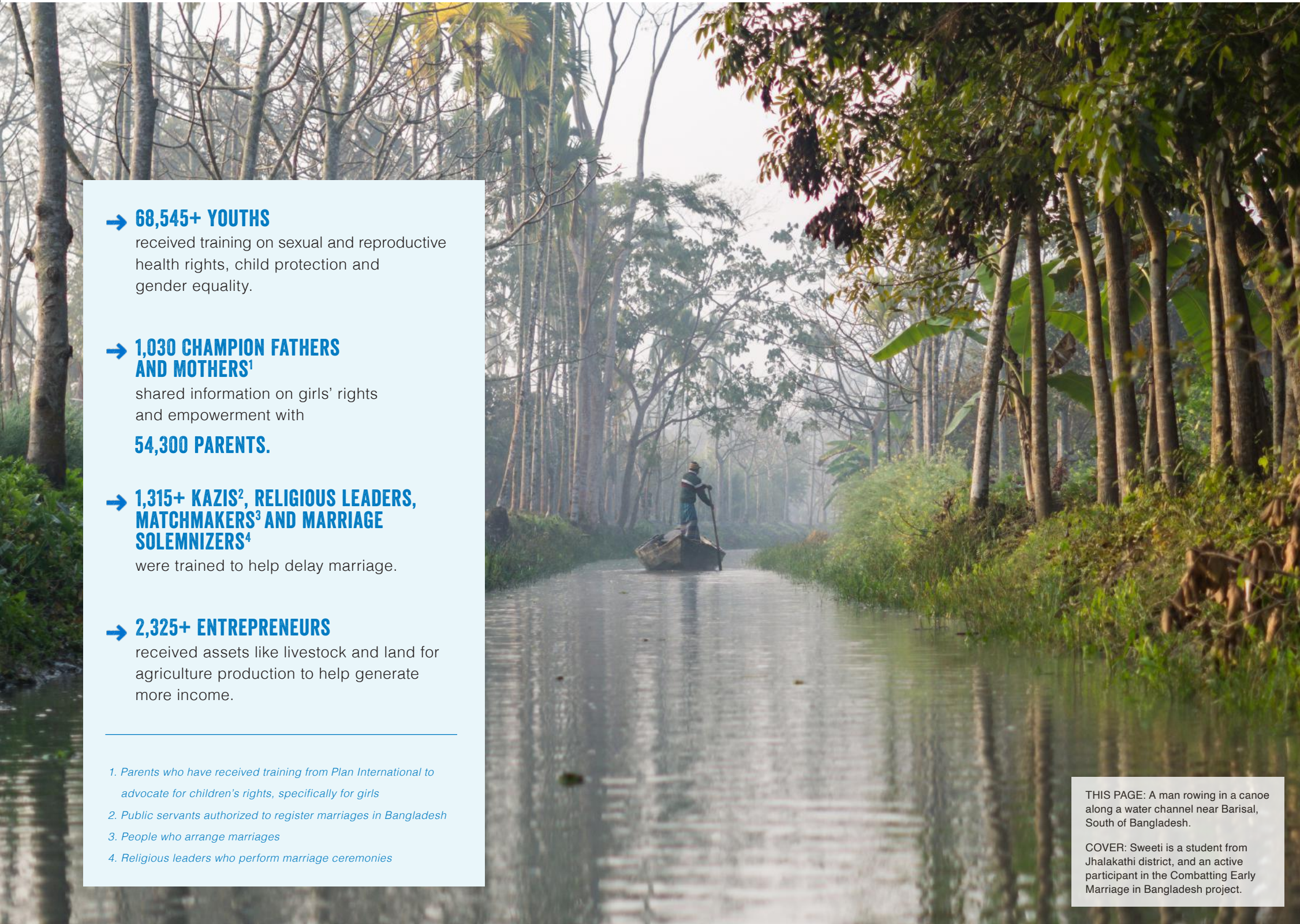




YEAR FOUR

**COMBATTING
EARLY MARRIAGE
IN BANGLADESH**



→ **68,545+ YOUTHS**

received training on sexual and reproductive health rights, child protection and gender equality.

→ **1,030 CHAMPION FATHERS AND MOTHERS¹**

shared information on girls' rights and empowerment with

54,300 PARENTS.

→ **1,315+ KAZIS², RELIGIOUS LEADERS, MATCHMAKERS³ AND MARRIAGE SOLEMNIZERS⁴**

were trained to help delay marriage.

→ **2,325+ ENTREPRENEURS**

received assets like livestock and land for agriculture production to help generate more income.

1. Parents who have received training from Plan International to advocate for children's rights, specifically for girls

2. Public servants authorized to register marriages in Bangladesh

3. People who arrange marriages

4. Religious leaders who perform marriage ceremonies

THIS PAGE: A man rowing in a canoe along a water channel near Barisal, South of Bangladesh.

COVER: Sweeti is a student from Jhalakathi district, and an active participant in the Combatting Early Marriage in Bangladesh project.

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Putul is witnessing a shift in beliefs and attitudes toward girls' rights, like the freedom to pursue careers of their own choosing.

TRADING THE ALTAR FOR AGENCY

Girls and young women forced into marriage face a higher risk of gender-based violence and health complications and death from childbirth. They also often drop out of school and have fewer economic opportunities.

THANKS TO YOU, all that is changing for adolescent girls who live in the Bhola and Jhalokathi districts of Bangladesh. With your support, Putul, an adolescent girl involved in the project, learned about her health and reproductive rights as well as the harmful consequences of child marriage.

Now, she has the confidence to stand up against gender inequality and to advocate for equal access to opportunities for girls. "My dream is to be independent and self-sufficient, and I will support my family to educate my younger siblings," she

declares. "If boys and girls are equal, we can be free from the gender norms that limit us. That's why I joined the Combatting Early Marriage project."

Putul is also aware of girls' sexual and reproductive health services and is in a better position to make decisions about her life. Later in this report, you'll also hear from Salamat, a kazi who has been a marriage registrar for 30 years.

He says that today, child marriages are down by 90% in his area.

THIS YEAR, WE FOCUSED ON THREE PROJECT OUTCOMES:

- 1** Empower adolescents, especially girls, to protect themselves from harmful gender norms that contribute to early marriage and to increase their access to economic opportunities.
- 2** Increase community acceptance of norms that value girls' rights, and support actions that help enable girls and boys to delay marriage.
- 3** Improve government officials' ability to prevent and respond to rights violations, including child marriage.

THANK YOU for helping empower adolescents, especially girls, to make decisions about their lives, protect themselves from harm and participate in economic, political and social activities.

The Scene



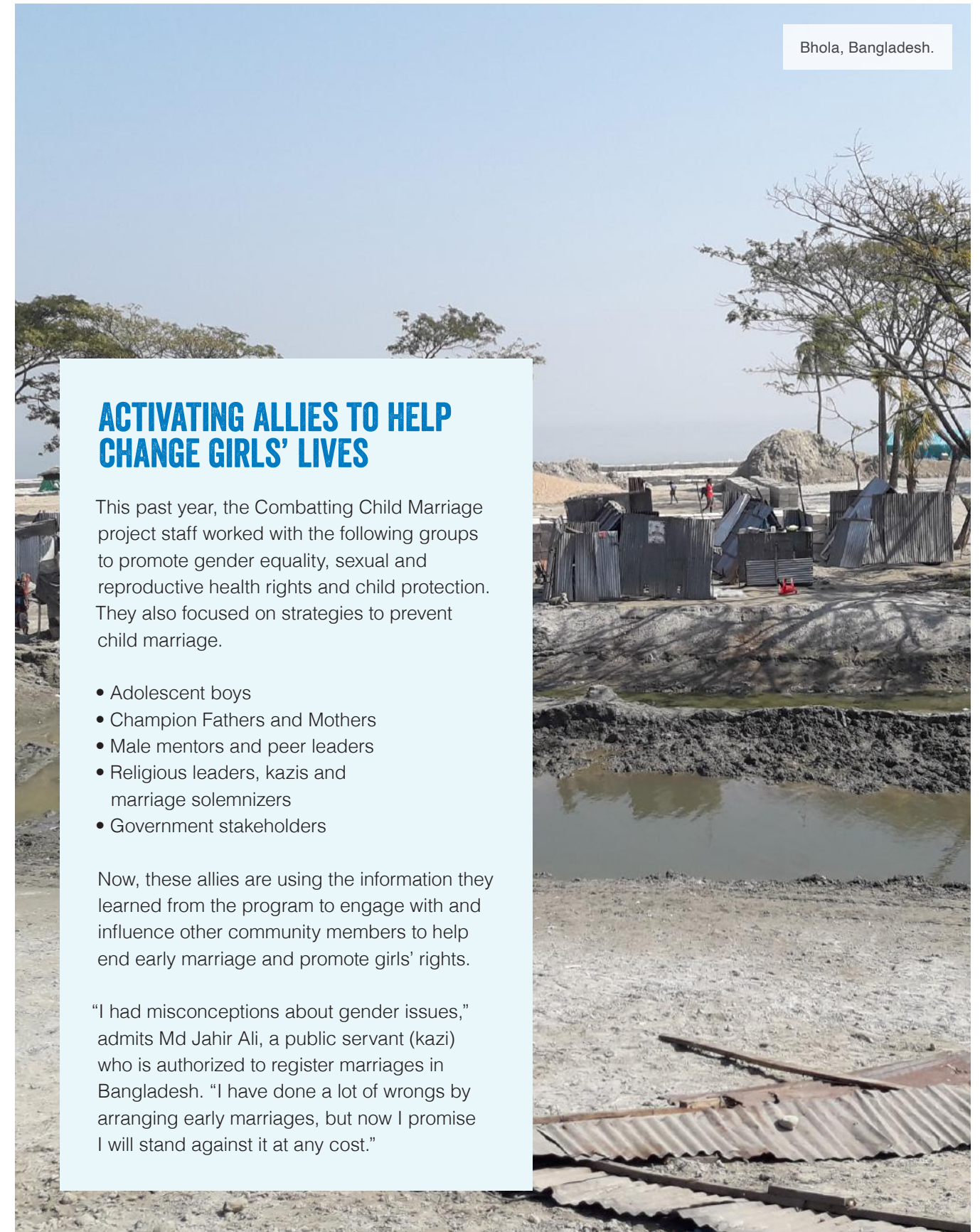
Located in the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh is a small, lush country with a tropical climate.

IT'S ALSO ONE OF THE MOST VULNERABLE COUNTRIES to climate change and natural disasters that threaten livelihoods and lead to poverty, food insecurity and child marriage. Due to COVID-19, more girls and young women are being forced to marry because having one less mouth to feed and one less child to send to school is a matter of survival for families.

Today, Bangladesh has the third-highest prevalence of child marriage in the world. At least 13,886 girls in 21 districts were forced into child marriages between April and October of 2020. Of the total, 48% were between 13 and 15 years old.

QUICK FACTS

- **59% OF GIRLS IN BANGLADESH** are married before their 18th birthday, and 22% are married before the age of 15.
- Girls with no education are **THREE TIMES MORE LIKELY** to marry before 18 compared to girls with a secondary or higher education.
- Complications during pregnancy and childbirth are the **LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH** for 15- to 19-year-old girls globally.
- COVID-19 set back efforts to end child marriage, potentially resulting in an **ADDITIONAL 13 MILLION CHILD MARRIAGES** between 2020–2030 globally.



ACTIVATING ALLIES TO HELP CHANGE GIRLS' LIVES

This past year, the Combatting Child Marriage project staff worked with the following groups to promote gender equality, sexual and reproductive health rights and child protection. They also focused on strategies to prevent child marriage.

- Adolescent boys
- Champion Fathers and Mothers
- Male mentors and peer leaders
- Religious leaders, kazis and marriage solemnizers
- Government stakeholders

Now, these allies are using the information they learned from the program to engage with and influence other community members to help end early marriage and promote girls' rights.

"I had misconceptions about gender issues," admits Md Jahir Ali, a public servant (kazi) who is authorized to register marriages in Bangladesh. "I have done a lot of wrongs by arranging early marriages, but now I promise I will stand against it at any cost."

THE RUNDOWN

Here's what we accomplished over the past year:



60,050+ STUDENTS

learned about gender equality, girls' rights, sexual and reproductive health rights, child protection and advocacy.

2,325+ SELF-EMPLOYED PARTICIPANTS

received assets like livestock and land to help generate more income.



8,495+ OUT-OF-SCHOOL ADOLESCENTS

participated in sessions about sexual and reproductive health rights, girls' rights and child protection.

54,300 PARENTS

engaged by Champion Fathers and Mothers in group sessions, during which they learned about girls' rights and how to stand up against child marriage.



1,030 PARENTS

in Champion Fathers and Mothers groups received training on how to support girls' economic empowerment and delay early marriage.



1,315+ KAZIS, RELIGIOUS LEADERS, MATCHMAKERS AND MARRIAGE SOLEMNIZERS

received training on how to prevent child marriage and support adolescents to delay early marriages.



1,045 EDUCATION WORKERS

received training on how to report and respond to situations in which children are at risk of being forced into early marriage.

40+ MEETINGS

were held with government officials to help them improve their responsiveness to children's rights violations, particularly child marriage.

Stories of Change



“

After being involved with this project, I know what child marriage is and its harmful consequences. I also learned how to protect myself and my peers from it. I stopped my own early marriage and another girl's in my group.”

– MUNNY, 16, A PEER LEADER IN THE BHOLA DISTRICT

TAKING CHARGE

Munny, a 16-year-old peer leader in the Bhola district, stopped her own child marriage as well as another girl's. Now, she has returned to school.

EVER SINCE SHE WAS A YOUNG GIRL, Munny dreamed of becoming a scientist. When COVID-19 struck, her father lost his job and could no longer afford to send the 16-year-old to school. At one point, her family considered marrying her off to help alleviate the financial strain they were facing.

But Munny had other plans! For two years, she was the leader of a peer group associated with the Combatting Child Marriage project. In this group, she learned about safe spaces, gender equality and

education rights as well as sexual and reproductive health rights and the importance of preventing child marriage. This knowledge gave her the confidence to speak up and to seek support from government services to change her family's mind. She later helped another girl who was facing the same situation.

Munny says that in addition to putting a halt to an early marriage, her participation in the group emboldened her to access sexual and reproductive health services from a local clinic where she

learned about proper menstrual hygiene. “If we had not been involved in this project, we would not know about these things,” she says.

Now that Munny is free to focus on her future again, she's back in school after a two-year break. She's also using her new skills and knowledge to help others. “Being involved in this project didn't just help me; now I can raise awareness and encourage others to overcome obstacles like I have,” she says.



Ms. Kamrunnahar, a Champion Mother.

A TRUE CHAMPION

Ms. Kamrunnahar's mission is to raise awareness about girls' rights and help prevent child marriage and gender-based discrimination and violence.

“CHILD MARRIAGE VIOLATES A GIRL'S RIGHTS,” says Ms. Kamrunnahar, a Champion Mother from Bhola. “It breaks a girl's dreams and ultimately ruins her life.”

After receiving training through the Combatting Early Marriage project, Ms. Kamrunnahar felt a new sense of responsibility and she gained the confidence to become an advocate for the prevention of child marriage. When she learned that her neighbour, Mr. Minetu, had stopped paying for his 12-year-old daughter, Piya, to attend school and was arranging her marriage, Ms. Kamrunnahar reached out to the father.

She shared with him information on child marriage laws and the health and social implications associated with a child marriage. She also talked about the benefits of staying in school. In the end, he changed his mind and Piya remained in school.

“I didn't understand girls' rights, and that's why I did not support my elder daughter continuing her education,” Piya's father shares. “But now I realize the importance of girls' education. That's why I have decided to support my other daughters to get an education, just as I would my son.”

“If I hadn't gotten support [from Ms. Kamrunnahar], I wouldn't have been able to continue my education,” says Piya. “Now my family has changed its mindset and acknowledged my value.”



Piya is happy to be continuing her studies rather than leaving school to be a child bride.

A KAZI CAN CHANGE

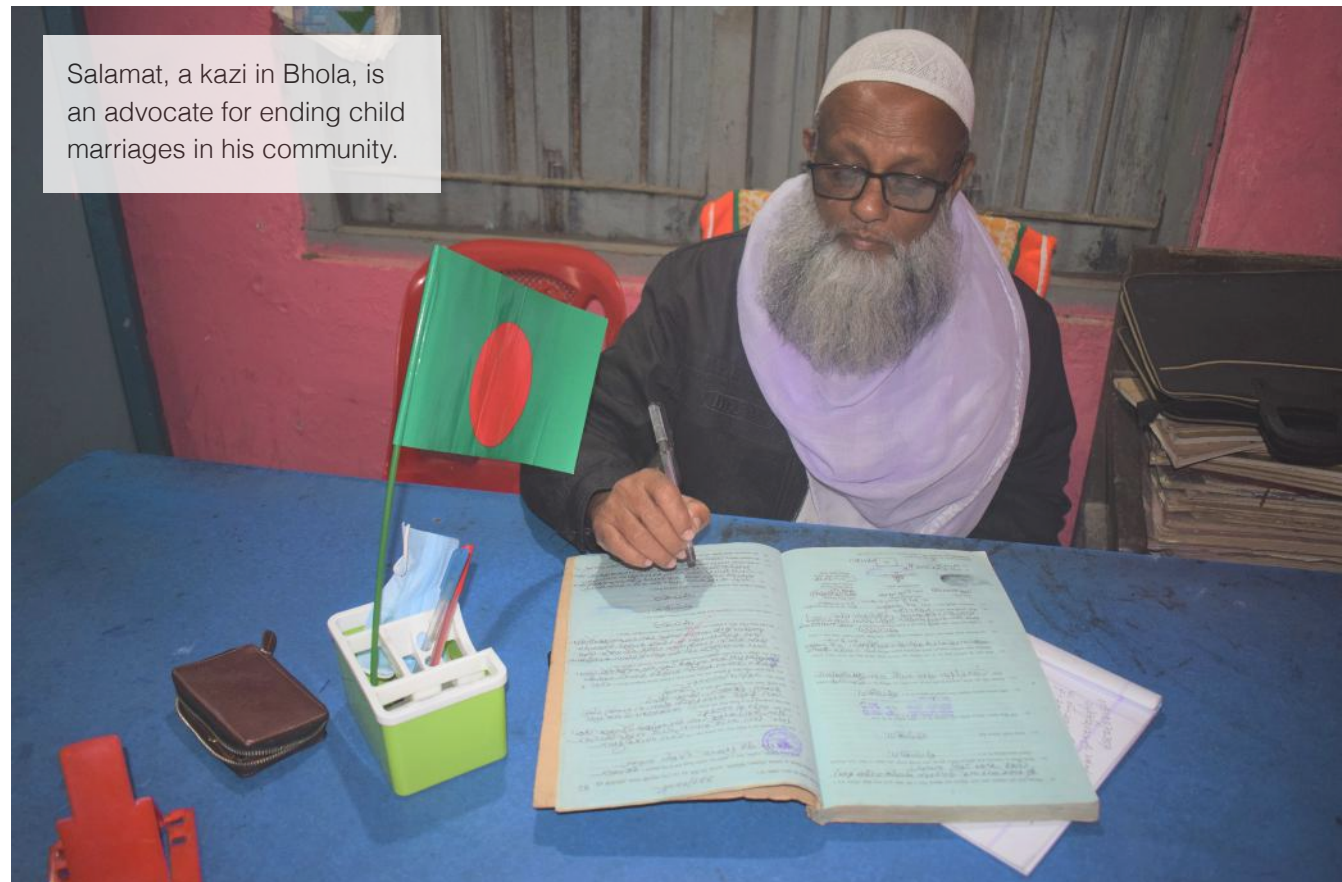
In Bhola, Salamat has been working as a kazi, an authorized marriage registrar, for 30 years. He never used to check the ages of grooms and brides. Now, he does.

SALAMAT LIVES BY A NEW MOTTO: "No more child marriage. Go ahead with a dream in mind."

He credits his shift in attitude to the training he received from Plan International and local partners on child marriage prevention laws, gender equality and child rights and protection." He recounts one story where he refused to marry an adolescent couple after he discovered they were underage. He later told them about the legal age of marriage in Bangladesh.

Today, Salamat advocates for ending child marriage in his community. "I do not register any child marriage," he says.

"This has decreased my income, but I am doing something good for the people and society. In my area, child marriage is now 90% lower than before."



Salamat, a kazi in Bhola, is an advocate for ending child marriages in his community.

**NO MORE
CHILD MARRIAGE.**

**GO AHEAD WITH
A DREAM IN MIND.**

– SALAMAT, A KAZI IN BHOLA

“

I have done a lot of wrongs by arranging early marriages, but now I promise I will stand against it at any cost.”

– Md Jahir Ali, a public servant (kazi) who is authorized to register marriages in Bangladesh.



Adolescent girls participate in a session on self-confidence, communication, problem-solving and asserting their rights.

Thank you!

Your support in combatting child marriage in the Bhola and Jhalokathi districts of Bangladesh has helped reshape and build more equal futures, especially for girls like Putul, Piya and Munny. “A significant change has been made in my life,” says Munny.

The Combatting Early Marriage in Bangladesh project is funded in part by the Government of Canada.



A group of girls who participated in the Combatting Early Marriage in Bangladesh project.



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