

# The Church of Bangladesh

## Education and Security for Girls

The Church of Bangladesh education department is implementing a diverse range of interventions to provide girls with access to education, materials, a designated and separate sanitary latrine in co-education schools, safe spaces to learn and a voice for their rights and to stop trafficking through building the capacity of the teachers and programme staff.

*Photo right: Community Development Project, Church of Bangladesh EKOTA programme, Dhaka*



Bangladesh has one of the largest primary education systems in the world with an estimated 18 million primary school-aged children (6 to 10 years) and 320,000 teachers in more than 78,000 schools. Among the students more than 45% are girls.

Over 30% of girls in this country marry before 18 years of age; around 14% do so before the age of 15. Early marriage is a risk factor for early pregnancy and poor reproductive health outcomes. Furthermore, marriage at a young age perpetuates the cycle of under-education and poverty. Although most girls enrol in school, rates of dropping out are high around puberty. Girls in poor households are more likely to drop out before reaching secondary school. In many cases girls' ability to complete schooling is compromised by poverty and the practice of early marriage in Bangladesh.

While the practice of child marriage has decreased in Bangladesh over the last 30 years, it remains common in rural areas and urban slums, especially among the poor. Adolescent poor girls are often victims of 'eve teasing' or sexual harassment and are not prepared to face such a situation. In one of its most extreme forms, violence against women takes the form of acid attacks. Although legislation exists to prevent acid attacks, enforcement remains weak. Since May 1999, there have been almost 3000 reported cases of acid throwing.

Sadly, suicide is also common among girls aged between 14 and 17. The Bangladesh Health and Injury Survey reported that more than 2200 children, including about 1500 girls, committed suicide in 2004.

The practice of dowry, a lower age at marriage, and poverty are all associated with women's higher likelihood of experiencing and ignoring violence.

A recent study noted that the drop-out rate of female students in many schools is increasing due to eve teasing.

About 45% of the population do not use improved sanitation facilities. Safe hygiene practices, especially proper sanitary napkin and hand washing, remain a challenge in the fight against disease.

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The promotion of girls' rights, especially in terms of security, are among Church of Bangladesh priorities.

The Church of Bangladesh has established almost ten boarding hostels for girls, one craft centre for girls, 30 different schools, 16 community development offices and two nursing training institutions to provide smooth and secured education for the girls.

The Church of Bangladesh emphasises birth registration that provides the first legal recognition of the child.

It has been confirming space for play in its educational institutes since its inception. From the existing infrastructures the Church of Bangladesh is



*Nurses after completing their course at convocation*

offering a secure environment for education to around 7,500 adolescent girls.

It is difficult task for this Church with limited resources where there is huge number of girls in the country deprived from their rights.

The Church of Bangladesh is helping to enhance awareness on different issues, eg, human trafficking, dowry, reproductive health; mobilise and build capacity within communities and schools, training and mentoring teachers and community leaders.



*Bollovepur Girls' Hostel*

Schools under the Church of Bangladesh are targeting marginalized and ethnic girls and slum dweller communities, with more than half of the target group living in high-risk. The Church of Bangladesh prioritises protection from child abuse through providing secured campus and hostels; safe water, sanitation, nutrition, health, education and information, and discourages child labour.

The Church of Bangladesh believes that upholding adolescents' rights to sexual and reproductive health reduces gender-based sexual violence and improves health for future generations. It enables children to achieve their full potential and ensures

their overall well-being, which can only be achieved in a protective and helpful environment.

Access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) is critical for the survival, development and well-being of children.

### Challenges

- Despite legal support, Bangladeshi women are still not receiving equal treatment in practice, and inequalities are common.
- The development partners do not have adequate scope to provide support for education issue.
- Women in the informal sector are often paid at lower grades than men for the same work.
- In divorce proceedings, women need to prove the validity of their reason for seeking divorce in order to obtain a court order to enforce their rights. Men on the other hand, do not need such proof and can divorce their wives at any time without proven reason.
- Despite anti-dowry laws by the state (and religious edicts supporting this position) traditions remain widespread, and women whose families do not fulfil requests to pay dowry to their husbands are sometimes subjected to horrifying violence.
- As it is well known, women who turn down marriage proposals are sometimes in danger of suffering violence from rejected men and there have been many cases of men throwing acid at women.

**References/sources:** *Recent documents on girls and women in Bangladesh by UNICEF, BSS, LGED ADB, WB, Google, Mundi Mix etc.- 2009, 2010, 2014, 2015), CBSDP Programme Reports, 2014*



*Girls from Girls Hostel attending a religious revival prayer*