

## Response on COVID-19 Pandemic

# COMMUNITY HEALTH VOLUNTEERS (CHVs) ARE PAVING THE WAY FOR MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTHCARE



## Project's outcome on COVID-19 response

568,312

House holds were visited by CHVs during COVID-19 period

7,698

BP sessions conducted

20,570

Awareness sessions conducted on COVID-19, nutrition and hand washing

3,200

Bottles of hand sanitizer provided to CHVs

16,000

Pieces of mask provided to CHVs

79

Miking event in 79 unions

2,764

Referral linkage to CC, UH&FWC and UHC

2,019

EPI sessions attended by CHVs

2,829

Satellite clinic attended by CHVs



## Project Background

The Community Based Intervention for Improving Sexual, Reproductive Health and Rights including Maternal and Neonatal Health (ImSRHR&MNH) has been in operation since 2018. Through this initiative funded by Global Affairs of Canada (GAC), and supported by UNICEF, CARE engaged in Patuakhali and Sirajganj districts to improve sexual and reproductive health and rights while reducing maternal and newborn morbidity and mortality.

In the early March 2020, the coronavirus-caused COVID-19 pandemic spread worldwide, including Bangladesh. Thousands of people in Bangladesh are already infected with the disease and it continues to spread rapidly. Nationwide lockdown was introduced to restrict the movement of people, in lieu with other countries across the globe. The lockdown has led to a major collapse in the country's healthcare system, especially in regards to maternal and child healthcare services. Recognizing the severity of the situation, the ImSRHR&MNH project has expanded its activities to facilitate COVID-19 response in the respective intervention areas.

CARE Bangladesh has been carrying out public awareness activities through miking, courtyard meetings by community health volunteers (CHVs), etc. aiming to raise awareness in the communities. In order to deliver the same message in all areas, a standard Bangla audio message has been prepared in consultation with all the concerned stakeholders. In addition to the COVID-19 awareness message in the audio, there is a strong emphasis on Maternal, Neo-natal, Child and Adolescent Health & Nutrition (MNCAH&N) during the pandemic.

Local government (LG) representatives, religious leaders and other local authority figures are involved in all the activities, including miking. CHVs are demonstrating and disseminating knowledge of proper and effective hand washing method, using of protective equipment like masks and making of balance diet in the communities through small group sessions and courtyard meetings. We have provided all our 1,400 CHVs sufficient masks and hand sanitizer to stay infection-free.

## Project's plan on COVID-19 response



Demonstration of maternal and child healthcare and nutrition focused COVID-19 awareness message through **632** events (SG-332, PK-300) in **158** unions.



Distribution of **76,000** pieces of mask to **1,400** CHVs (SG-747, PK-653), project staff and other stake holders to ensure personal safety



Distribution of **3,200** bottle hand sanitizer (SG-1,700, PK-1,500) and **3,000** pieces soap to CHVs, project staff and other stake holders to ensure personal protection



Ensure continuity of lifesaving services on SRH and nutrition through household visit **158,962** (SG-84,037, PK-74,925) and courtyard meeting including birth planning (BP) sessions and hand wash and nutritious food demonstration sessions **50,868** (SG-26,892, PK-23,976) by CHVs



Satellite clinic to ensure continuity of health seeking behavior of community people



Ensure participation of community people on COVID-19 awareness activities including MNC&AH and nutrition, **158** mosques and temples (SG-83, PK-75), **1530** govt. & local govt. representative (SG-810, PK-720) and **1,413** village police (SG-747, PK-666)

## Challenges

CARE adopted work from home work modality considering countrywide lockdown situation which made difficult to meet physically with the stakeholders like local government representative, health and family planning managers, core team members and CHVs. Flood and heavy rainfall hampered routine works and created worse situation alongside emerged COVID-19 situation. Therefore, project only rely on the virtual communication with all stakeholders and to continue the interventions. Most of community gathering session stopped only individual counseling by CHV continued however there was minimum physical monitoring the quality of services provided by CHV. Data validation is becoming difficult due to mobility restriction. Home delivery increased whereas institutional delivery decreased. Family planning commodity distribution is being hampered which might raise as a problem in future for birth planning.

## Future plan

As we look towards the future, it becomes increasingly clear that the emphasis on nutrition must increase with MNCAH issues. The COVID-19 situation has brought unprecedented hurdles to an already difficult situation, and we must not overlook the effect on nutrition as we focus on big-picture problems. Maternal mortality and morbidity is another after effect of COVID-19 which need different strategies and approaches to mitigate the problems. Another issue that we must take into consideration now is the impact of COVID-19 on health budgets. Failure to revise them appropriately could result in serious underfunding and inefficiency. Consequently, initiating dialogue with the local government and donor is paramount. Finally, we should collect the lessons we've learned in the past few months. The core team has much to consider in terms of moving forward with renewed focus on MNCAH&N in a COVID-19 stricken world.

## Project Kickoff activities

### Community get awareness messages through loud speaker (miking)

The miking is the biggest initiative of project for building awareness on COVID-19 at the community level. The project has taken initiative to perform miking 4 times in each union. A single audio production has been produced to deliver the same and consistent message to everyone. COVID-19 awareness message, there is a strong emphasis on nutrition for pregnant and lactating mothers, newborns, children and adolescents in line with MNCAH care during the pandemic. Community participation is ensured in all the activities including miking and community level awareness sessions. From this initiative we have received a huge positive response from the different stakes in the community where only 79 session conducted out of 636 sessions in 159 unions in both districts.



Awareness message on COVID-19 dissemination through miking at community level

Talking about the miking of CARE Bangladesh, a local government representative said, "Miking has been done by many other NGOs and the government. However the miking of CARE Bangladesh is truly exceptional. Others have asked people to wash hands repeatedly and wear masks but CARE Bangladesh has distinctly included the care for pregnant women and child differently. I like it very much."

### CHVs have taken on the role of protectors through household visit, courtyard meetings, BP sessions and awareness session

The health system of the country collapsed at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. It became difficult to get proper MNCH care in community clinics and upazila health complexes. The people in the community were panicked about getting essential services in the service centers. In these difficult times, CHVs are working tirelessly to raise awareness among the people of the community on how to get the right services at service centers. In the last three months the CHVs have completed **568,312 household visits**, conducted **7,698 BP sessions**, **14,134 nutrition sessions**, **5,150 awareness sessions** and **1,286 hand washing demonstration sessions** in the community. At this time, they also assisted to ensure attendance in **2,019 EPI centers** and **2,829 satellite clinics**. They also made **2,764 referrals**.



Awareness message on COVID-19 dissemination through courtyard meeting at community level

### Helena Begum: A shining example of maternal and child health care in the community

Helena Begum, CHV from Patuakhali district is widely known for her social work in her area. Her activities did not stop even during the COVID-19 pandemic. She visited every house in her area and advised preventives measures from Corona virus infection. In addition, she pays special attention to the care of pregnant mothers and children. She memorized the names and addresses of every pregnant woman in the area. Even in this COVID-19 pandemic situation, she has visited every home in the community and identified the new pregnant mothers, arranged birth planning sessions with them, and completed yard meetings. She confirmed pregnancy check-ups by sending all pregnant mothers to the nearest Community Clinic (CC) and hospital.



Helena Begum is working at community for disseminating awareness message on COVID-19

The statistics of her activities in the last three months during the COVID-19 pandemic period can give us a clear idea about her performance. She has performed 875 households visit, held 12 courtyard meetings and conducted 14 birth planning sessions. She identified 15 pregnant women and contacted 64 pregnant women and lactating mothers. She also referred 18 mothers to health centers for getting anti-natal and post-natal check-ups and maternity health services. In addition, she accompanied with 23 pregnant and lactating mothers to the hospital for getting various services.

After visiting the area, it is observed that Helena Begum is a very well-acceptable person to the mother and her family members in the community and they continue to follow her advice. Mothers in the community commented on her, "We consider Helena Begum is a member of our family. When a mother has a problem, she visits as soon as we call her and she helps a lot." So it can be said without any doubt that the example of social work that Helena Begum has set in her community is incomparable.



## CHVs are protected with safety equipment mask and hand sanitizer

The project is very conscious of the personal safety of its own staff and front-line service providers (CHVs). So, necessary masks and hand sanitizers are purchased and distributed. Assistance was sought from LG, representatives and the Department of H&FP to distribute the masks and hand sanitizers to CHVs. For this purpose, the project procured **3,200 set of masks** (each set contain 5 mask) and **3,200 bottle hand sanitizers** for both districts. After getting mask and hand sanitizer, one CHV expressed her feeling as **“This is the first time we got some mask and hand sanitizer. Now we can serve the community better than ever.”**



Community Health Volunteers have got hand sanitizer and mask from project

## Nutrition awareness promotion gets key focus during COVID-19

Awareness among the community people about the MNCAH&N is the key objective of the project. That's why CHVs keep a slot of raising nutrition awareness in each of their sessions. In that slot, they present the issues of proper nutrition among the mothers through a practical dummy session of arranging cooking. Based on our above information of various sessions conducted by CHVs, it is said that they have conducted around **14134** nutrition sessions in the community.



A CHV is demonstrating nutrition session at courtyard meeting

## Story of Chamely Khatun: There is a way if there is a will

Radhunibari Char under Belkuchi Upazila is a remote village on the banks of the Jamuna river in Sirajganj district. Being a char region, the people here are very poor. Here, CHV of CARE Bangladesh Mst. Chameli Khatun has been continuing regular courtyard meetings despite the COVID-19 pandemic situation even she is continuing her services during the severe flood situation in the region. In the meetings, she informs the mothers about how to prevent coronavirus infection. She noticed that some mothers attended the meeting without wearing masks and got to know that they don't have the ability to buy food, let alone mask. This was a poignant message and, for Chameli, a call to action. She kept thinking how to help these mothers get masks easily. Since she was a tailor, she decided to make a mask using unused cloth she had in her house and distributed among the mothers.



Chamely Khatun has provided mask to the women in her community

She started making masks with pieces of cloth and taking them to courtyard meetings. If a mother did not wear a mask at the meeting, she would provide them with one. When the matter came to the notice of the concerned project officer, she wanted to know about the technique of making the mask. Then Chameli Begum said, she made each mask with two pieces of cloth. The project officer then applauded her and suggested making a three-layer mask with three pieces of clothes.

The initiative of Chameli Khatun may not seem like much, but we must remember that she is not a regular salaried employee of the project. She gets only 800 taka as monthly honorarium. But considering the surroundings, there is no doubt that her work is a great initiative. Her sense of initiative is remarkable. She is trying to do something for the people of her area at the urging of her conscience.



For any query on this initiative please contact with:

Dr. Ismat Ara Hena - Team Leader, email: [ismatara.hena@care.org](mailto:ismatara.hena@care.org)

Dr. Ikhtiar Uddin Khandaker - Program Director - Health, email: [ikhtiaruddin.khandaker@care.org](mailto:ikhtiaruddin.khandaker@care.org)