



LESSONS FROM PARTNERING WITH FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS IN VERY YOUNG ADOLESCENT PROGRAMMING

“I feel like I now have more responsibility than before in promoting gender equality.”

THE IMPORTANCE OF VERY YOUNG ADOLESCENTS

Very young adolescence (10–14 years) is a time of significant physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional change and an optimal window for promoting positive youth development (Igras et al. 2014; Woog & Kågesten, 2017). As very young adolescents (VYAs) go through puberty, they increasingly experience the constraints and expectations of gender inequality. Gender inequalities have been linked to a multitude of negative consequences including child, early, and forced marriage; early childbearing; limited decision-making around sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and contraception; and increased likelihood of school dropout.

In Bangladesh, early marriage is pervasive, with 22% of adolescent girls marrying before the age of 15, resulting in early sexual debut and high rates of adolescent childbearing. The median age at first marriage is 16.3 years, and 43% of women have started childbearing before turning 18 (NIPORT & ICF, 2020). Intervening during early adolescence is critical to shift the trajectory of adolescents’ life course, including delaying marriage, improving access to and use of contraception so that young people have a choice whether and when to get pregnant, and transforming inequitable gender norms before they become firmly entrenched.

Activity at a glance

Implementation period:
August 2021–May 2022

Geographic focus:
Bangladesh (Satkhira and Dinajpur Districts)

Population reached:
661 very young adolescents,
380 parents/caregivers, and
153 community members

FBO partners:
LAMB and World Renew

STRENGTHENING LOCAL PARTNER CAPACITY TO ENGAGE IN VYA PROGRAMMING

ACTIVITY PURPOSE

Evidence suggests that gender-transformative approaches that promote critical examination of prevailing norms of femininity and masculinity can contribute to improving gender and health outcomes by addressing

the root causes of gender inequality (Woog and Kågesten, 2017). However, most gender and SRH interventions tend to focus on older adolescents (15–19 years) and adults, neglecting VYA populations (Igras et al, 2014). Given evidence that early adolescence is an optimal time to intervene before harmful attitudes are ingrained, coupled with the dearth of organizations and programs targeting VYAs, MOMENTUM Country and Global Leadership (MOMENTUM) sought to strengthen local partner capacity to apply effective programming addressing gender and SRH challenges facing VYAs.

ACTIVITY OBJECTIVES

This MOMENTUM activity aimed to achieve three objectives:

1. Increase the quality and reach of gender-transformative health programming with VYAs.
2. Develop model(s) for how to engage the faith-based community in VYA programming that can provide lessons learned and recommendations that might inform similar efforts nationally, regionally, and globally.
3. Demonstrate measurable improvements in organizational performance through a tailored capacity strengthening approach for each partner.

RATIONALE FOR PARTNERING WITH FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

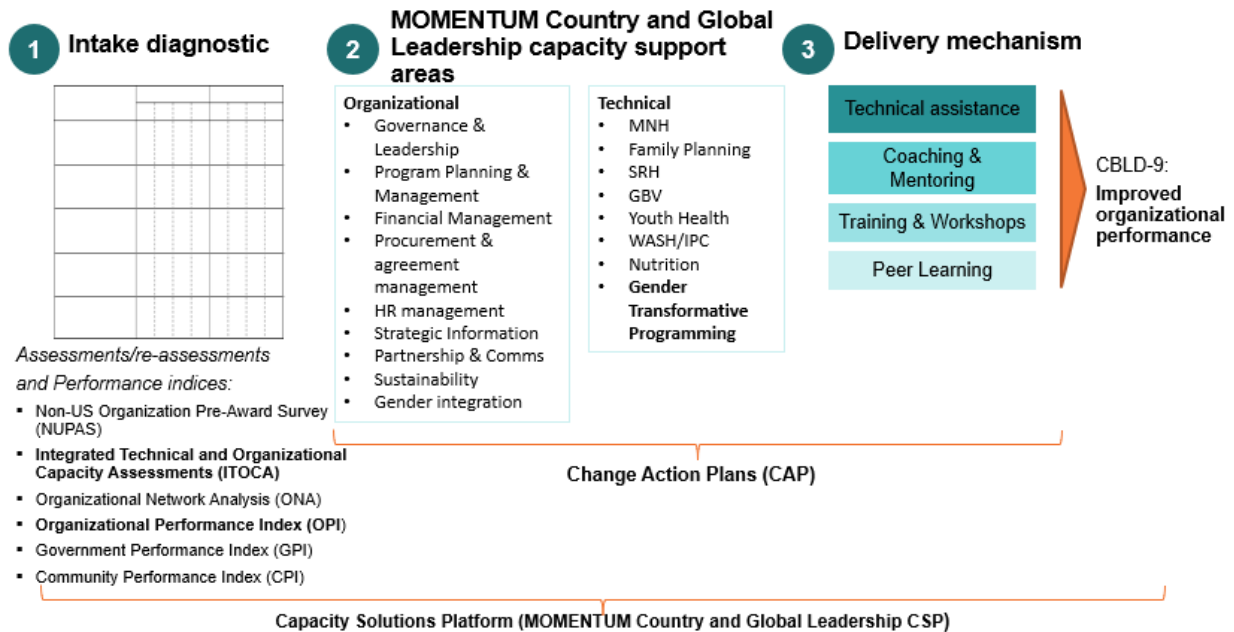
Religion is central to the social and cultural fabric of many communities, and faith-based organizations (FBOs) have significant influence within the communities they serve, including adolescents and families. In Bangladesh, FBOs have strong community connections and are trusted by families, which can provide an acceptable entry point for addressing sensitive topics such as health and gender equality for VYAs. However, FBOs are rarely equipped with the knowledge, skills, and resources specific to promoting positive health and development among VYAs or the families and communities that support them. This results in a missed opportunity for FBOs to engage VYAs alongside their families to promote more equitable gender roles, develop body literacy and fertility awareness, strengthen protective assets, prevent early child and forced marriage and pregnancy, and promote access to education and health services. To address this gap, MOMENTUM formed a partnership with two FBOs in Bangladesh—World Renew and LAMB Hospital (hereafter LAMB)—both are part of the network of MOMENTUM consortium partner, Christian Connections for International Health. In line with MOMENTUM’s mandate to improve local partner capacity and technical leadership, this activity supported the FBOs to strengthen their capacities to deliver tailored VYA SRH and gender programming, according to best practices, and improve performance and to learn from their implementation experience.

World Renew and LAMB Hospital have been operating in Bangladesh for several decades. World Renew works through local partners (such as PARI, SATHI, Faith in Action, and local people’s institutions) throughout the country on community-based programs. For this activity, World Renew collaborated with Faith in Action to deliver programming in the intervention sites. LAMB works in northwest Bangladesh directly implementing community and facility-based work. Both have previous and ongoing projects with adolescents, but have not intervened with VYA populations.

MOMENTUM COUNTRY AND GLOBAL LEADERSHIP'S APPROACH TO TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

MOMENTUM offered technical and organizational capacity strengthening support to the two FBOs using a process of organizational capacity assessment, action planning, and measurement, in line with MOMENTUM's global capacity development framework (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: MOMENTUM COUNTRY AND GLOBAL LEADERSHIP'S CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK



MOMENTUM supported the following steps:

1. Virtual orientation: The first step of the engagement involved meeting with both FBOs to share the proposed capacity development approach and tools and to hear from them about previous or ongoing initiatives around capacity development to ensure complementarity and avoid duplication. Following the workshop, MOMENTUM reviewed existing organizational policies, guidelines, and standard operating procedures shared by the FBOs to better understand the organizational context.
2. Integrated Technical and Organizational Capacity Assessment (ITOCA) tool customization: For the second step, MOMENTUM reviewed the ITOCA tool with each partner with the goal of choosing relevant organizational and technical capacity areas for the workshop. This provided an opportunity for the partners to get familiar with the statements of excellence in the tool and suggest changes needed to tailor to their operating context.
3. ITOCA and Organizational Performance Index (OPI) virtual workshops: Following steps 1 and 2, MOMENTUM held a three-day workshop virtually with each partner using the ITOCA facilitator's guide. FBO staff from a cross section of departments engaged in joint reflection and learning to score ITOCA capacity areas and analyze results using the Capacity Solutions Platform. This culminated in the creation of change action plans (CAPs) reflecting the FBOs' capacity development priorities and timelines. A

separate session was held to complete the OPI baseline assessment with the organizational leadership, which also fed into CAP activities.

4. CAP implementation and monitoring: Once CAPs were established, MOMENTUM and the FBOs jointly discussed delivery mechanisms (coaching, training, workshops, etc.) for each of the needs and identified where MOMENTUM support was needed. The FBOs led the majority of their CAP activities with support from MOMENTUM in select areas, described later in the brief. Alongside CAP implementation, MOMENTUM held routine CAP monitoring meetings with each partner to jointly review progress, identify new needs as they came up, and adjust delivery plans as needed.
5. Reassessments: Towards the end of the support period, MOMENTUM conducted endline OPI reassessments to measure changes in organizational performance, details of which are shared under the key findings section below.

As part of MOMENTUM’s approach to technical capacity development, MOMENTUM held a series of online participatory workshops with FBO staff. The workshops aimed to provide an introduction to the foundations of VYA health and gender programming as well as guidance to help the FBOs adapt and integrate evidence-based VYA programming approaches into their ongoing work. Subsequently, the project supported the FBOs to adapt and apply Save the Children’s Choices, Voices, Promises—an evidence-based, family-focused VYA approach that fosters self-reflection and documentation through focused learning activities and facilitates linkages with key ministry counterparts, national technical working groups, and U.S. Agency for International Development Bangladesh.

OVERVIEW OF INTERVENTION APPROACH: CHOICES, VOICES, PROMISES

Both World Renew and LAMB adapted Choices, Voices, Promises approach as the implementing strategy to promote gender equality and health among VYAs in their respective geographic areas. Choices, Voices, Promises was developed and tested in Nepal (Lundgren et al., 2013; Lundgren, Gibbs, & Kerner, 2018). Choices, Voices, Promises is a gender-transformative package of interventions that uses a socio-ecological approach to promote positive social and behavior change, recognizing that behaviors and norms are influenced by both individual and social factors. The approach has three distinct interventions.



Choices works at the individual level, with VYAs to empower them to make informed choices about their reproductive health and challenge restrictive gender norms through reflective age and developmentally appropriate activities.



Voices engages parents and caregivers using powerful testimonials of parents to influence change to improve VYA health and gender equity in the household, followed by a group discussion.



Promises works at the community level to create an environment where boys’ and girls’ health and education are valued equally through facilitated discussion in reaction to a poster designed to create dialogue.

Choices had been previously adapted and implemented in Bangladesh by Save the Children, but this is the first time that Voices and Promises were adapted and implemented in Bangladesh.



Intervention: Choices

- **Topics covered:**
 - Gender inequity and power
 - Small actions to promote gender equity
 - Equal treatment of girls and boys
 - Inequitable social norms
 - VYAs' hopes and dreams
 - VYA boys' role in empowering VYA girls
 - Support from family and friends
 - Puberty
- **Number and frequency of sessions:** 12 sessions held on a weekly or bi-weekly basis
- **Facilitation:** Older adolescents (ages 16 and over) were trained on the curriculum and received ongoing coaching
- **Implementation approach:** World Renew implemented the program with small, mixed-sex groups with VYAs; LAMB chose to implement sessions in sex-segregated groups
- **Location:** In consultation with VYA's families, the FBOs selected and held Choices sessions in venues such as schools that were in close proximity to VYAs' homes



Intervention: Voices

- **Topics covered:**
 - Promoting gender equitable division of household tasks
 - Providing equal homework time for girls and boys
 - Providing equal and same quality food for girls and boys
 - Promoting VYAs' girls education
 - Delaying marriage
 - Encouraging parent-child communication
- **Number and frequency of sessions:** 6 sessions held on a weekly or bi-weekly basis
- **Facilitation:** Adult volunteers/community members with prior experience working with the FBOs were trained on program materials. The FBO implementation teams provided supervision throughout the implementation period
- **Implementation approach:** World Renew held sessions with small, mixed-sex groups comprised of VYA's parents and caregivers. LAMB implemented Voices small group sessions with VYA's mothers and fathers in both mixed-sex and sex-segregated groups
- **Location:** Courtyards in the intervention communities



Intervention: Promises

- **Topics covered:**
 - The hopes and dreams of VYA girls and boys
 - The hopes and dreams parents have for their young daughters and sons
 - The practical benefits that education has brought to the lives of VYAs
 - Parents’ pride and satisfaction in their decisions to prioritize their daughters’ and sons’ health and education
 - Lost opportunities for girls who are married early
 - Community leaders’ support for keeping girls in school
 - Parents’ commitments to keep their children in school
- **Number and frequency of sessions:** 7 sessions held on a weekly or bi-weekly basis
- **Facilitation:** Implementation team members along with trained key community influencers, such as school teachers and local government authorities, led the Promises group discussions
- **Implementation approach:** Mixed-sex, small groups with key community influencers including teachers, government authorities, social workers, health care workers
- **Location:** Local government premises

LEARNING QUESTIONS AND METHODS

Throughout the nine-month implementation period, MOMENTUM supported the FBOs to apply adaptive management approaches to routinely reflect upon the implementation experience, synthesize and document learnings, and adapt activities using programmatic results and contextual analyses. In collaboration with the FBOs, MOMENTUM developed the following key learning questions.



What lessons can be learned from the process of strengthening LAMB and World Renew’s (FBOs) technical and organizational capacity to implement gender transformative interventions for very young adolescents in Bangladesh?

Sub-areas of interest



How was the Choices, Voices, Promises approach implemented and adapted?






What is the unique role of FBOs in supporting and implementing VYA health and gender focused interventions?



How did the capacity development support benefit the FBOs and the implementation of gender-transformative approaches for adolescents?

MOMENTUM applied several adaptive management methods to foster implementation learning, including: monthly reflection meetings guided by a tailored implementation tracking tool based on ExpandNet’s Implementation Mapping Tool¹, holding quarterly lessons learned review meetings, an after-action review, and interviews with key stakeholders (Table 1). The project convened FBO implementation staff on a monthly basis to collect feedback and insight on the progress of activities, discuss concerns, and identify recommendations for improvement.

TABLE 1: ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT SOURCES, PARTICIPANTS, AND PURPOSE

 Sources of learning	 Participant groups	 Purpose
Monthly reflective discussions using adapted implementation mapping tool	FBO project implementation staff	To record significant observations, adaptations, challenges, and next steps
Quarterly lessons learned review meetings (6 total, 3 per FBO)	FBO project implementation staff, MOMENTUM technical advisors	To reflect on factors contributing to positive and negative project experiences, identify lessons, and make practical recommendations
Key informant interviews	Community and faith leaders, local government authorities, staff from other local community-based organizations	To reflect on the success of the intervention or otherwise and to elicit feedback on factors that might have facilitated and hindered their implementation of the interventions
After-action review upon conclusion of program implementation	Joint session with FBO project implementation and MOMENTUM staff	To reflect on the entire experience, key learnings, and recommendations for the way forward
ITOCA and OPI assessments (pre-intervention and post implementation), CAP monitoring review meetings	FBO leadership and project implementation staff	To assess organizational capacity changes across pre-defined capacity areas; to reflect on CAP progress and emerging needs throughout implementation

IMPLEMENTATION OF CHOICES, VOICES, AND PROMISES

The program implementation period was August 2021 to May 2022. World Renew and LAMB implemented the program in Satkhira District (southern Bangladesh) and Dinajpur District (northern Bangladesh), respectively. These regions have high prevalence rates of early marriage, gender inequitable practices, and limited SRH knowledge. The FBOs leveraged their deep connections to identify program participants and inform implementation decisions.

Prior to the start of implementation, the FBOs developed and adapted the intervention materials to ensure they were contextually appropriate and could be easily understood by program participants. More specifically, the FBOs revised the Choices curriculum by simplifying language to ensure it could be understood by older adolescent facilitators and adapted Choices activities to make them more relatable and relevant for the VYA populations with whom they intervened.

¹ ExpandNet, World Health Organization. 2020. The Implementation Mapping Tool: A tool to support adaptive management and documentation of scale up. <https://expandnet.net/PDFs/ExpandNet-IMT-Updated-Oct-2020.pdf>

The FBOs implemented the Voices intervention using audio testimonials to promote reflection and dialogue among small groups of caregivers who are parenting VYAs. The Voices intervention is based around short, emotional audio stories with testimonials of parents and community members from the intervention communities who have recently adopted behaviors in their families that are positively impacting the lives of their children and increasing gender equality. The FBO staff, in consultation with community leaders and adult volunteers (program facilitators) from the intervention communities, selected parents and community members who they perceived as champions for the target behaviors and whose stories would resonate with others in the community.

To create audio stories, the FBOs collected personal testimonials from influential parents and caregivers who were liked, respected, and displayed positive gendered behaviors and attitudes in the intervention communities. After finalizing the audio testimonials, the intervention team developed take-home story cards to expand the impact and provide participants with a visual way to share stories with their family and community members. The story cards were created for each target behavior or topic covered in the audio testimonials (e.g., equitable division of household tasks) and include a short summary of the key messages and visuals linked to the topic (see Figure 2 for an example of a Voices' take-home story card).

FIGURE 2: EXAMPLE OF VOICES TAKE-HOME STORY CARD, WHICH ADDRESSES THE TOPIC OF GENDER-EQUITABLE DIVISION OF HOUSEHOLD TASKS.

রিমি আর রাশেদ। পিঠাপিঠি ভাইবোন। এক বিকেলে রাশেদের কিছু বন্ধু এসে হাজির। নাশতা বানানোর কাজ শুরু করলেন মা। রিমি মাকে সাহায্য করছে। টিউবওয়েল চেপে পানি এনে দিচ্ছে। রাশেদের বন্ধু জামিল বলল, 'রাশেদ, তোর ছোট বোনটা খেটে যাচ্ছে। আর তুই বসে বসে গল্প করছিস?' রাশেদ বলল, 'তো! আমি কী করব?' উত্তরে জামিল বলল, 'বোনকে সাহায্য কর!' রাশেদ বলল, 'ওসব তো মেয়েদের কাজ।' জামিল বলল 'কাজের আবার ছেলে-মেয়ে কী রে! সবাই মিলে কাজ করলে পরিবারের বন্ধনটা বাড়ে। কাজও তাড়াতাড়ি হয়।' শুনে বন্ধুদের একজন টিপ্পনি কাটল, 'বাড়িতে তুইও করিস নাকি?' জামিল বলল, 'করি তো। খালাবাসন ধুই, নাশতা বানাতে সাহায্য করি।' একটু পর বিশাল এক ট্রে নিয়ে হাজির রিমি। নাস্তা খাওয়া শেষ, রাশেদ ও তার বন্ধুরা এখন খেলতে যাবে। হঠাৎ নলকুপের দিকে তাকাল রাশেদ। একগাদা খালাবাসন নিয়ে বসেছে রিমি। মা রান্নাঘর থেকে খেয়াল করে ভাবলেন রাশেদ যদি রিমিকে একটু সাহায্য করত! বাবাও ইতিমধ্যে কাজ থেকে ফিরেছেন। রাশেদ মনে মনে ভাবছে- ছোটবোনটা এতক্ষণ খাটাখাটনি করল। আর আমি বন্ধুদের নিয়ে মজা করলাম। এখন খেলতেও যাচ্ছি! রাশেদ আনমনা হয়ে কিছু একটা করবার কথা ভাবতে লাগল...



“ আমার সন্তানেরা আনন্দের সাথে বাড়ির কাজে অংশগ্রহণ করে। আমি সবসময় আমার ছেলেদের শেখাতে চাই যে, সহযোগিতা একটা বড় গুণ। **”**

লাডলী আরা খাতুন, অভিজ্ঞাবক

ভেবে দেখি:

১. রাশেদ ও রিমির বাবা-মা কীভাবে বাড়ির কাজে উৎসাহ দিয়ে সন্তানদের লৈঙ্গিক মূল্যবোধ পরিবর্তন করতে পারেন?
২. বাড়ির কাজকর্মে করবার ব্যাপারে আপনার ছেলে- মেয়ের মধ্যে কেমন আচরণ দেখতে চান?

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During each session, participants listened to audio testimonials from parents and community members and then took part in facilitated discussions with this group. In some sessions, the implementation teams incorporated activities designed to help parents and caregivers build skills, such as being able to communicate better with VYAs about the topics covered in the intervention.

For Promises, the FBOs commissioned local artists from the communities to create contextually relevant visual images related to the emotion-based dialogues on the poster to promote prioritization of VYAs' health and education (see Figure 3, a Promises poster developed by World Renew). Each poster was displayed on a community board for approximately two weeks to allow social diffusion of the messages. A group of influential community members were invited to each poster unveiling session, which entailed a facilitated discussion and reflection along the viewing of the posters. Promises participants were then encouraged to discuss the poster with other their families, neighbors, and other community members.

FIGURE 3: EXAMPLE OF A PROMISES POSTER THAT CONTAINS MESSAGES FROM VYAs ABOUT THE PRACTICAL BENEFITS THAT EDUCATION HAS BROUGHT TO THEIR LIVES AND FEELING SUPPORTED BY THEIR PARENTS.

আমি গর্ভবোধ করি কারণ আমি আমার বোনকে লেখাপড়ায় মনোযোগী হতে সাহায্য করি ও উৎসাহ দিই। আমি আমার বোনকে বোঝাতে চাই যে আমরা তাকে ভালবাসি ও মূল্য দিই।

আমি আমার কাজ নিয়ে খুবই সন্তুষ্ট এবং গর্ভবোধ করি। একটি সুন্দর কর্মজীবন বেছে নিতে সাহায্য করার জন্য আমি আমার বাবা মায়ের কাছে কৃতজ্ঞ।

আমার সমাজের লোকেরা আমাকে এবং আমার বাবা মাকে আদর্শ মানুষ হিসাবে গণ্য করে কারণ আমি আমার লেখাপড়া শেষ করেছি। অন্যদেরকে অনুপ্রাণিত করতে পেরে আমি খুব খুশী।

আমার বাবা মা আমাকে নিয়ে গর্ব করে কারণ আমি আমার স্বপ্ন পূরণ করতে পেরেছি।

আমি শিক্ষিত, স্বাস্থ্যবান এবং আত্মবিশ্বাসী এবং আমার পরিবার ও সমাজ আমার সিদ্ধান্ত ও মতামতকে গুরুত্ব দেয়।

বড় হওয়ার সাথে সাথে আমার শরীর এবং শারীরিক পরিবর্তন সম্পর্কে আমি আরোও বেশী করে জানতে পারছি। আমি জানি কিভাবে সুস্থ থাকতে হয় এবং এই বিষয়ে সাহায্য করার জন্য আমি আমার পরিবার ও সমাজের লোকদের কাছে কৃতজ্ঞ।

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এরপর নতুন বিষয় আসছে চলবে

World Renew implemented the Choices intervention with mixed groups of VYA boys and girls to create a space for VYA boys and girls to participate together and practice activities. Groups were formed in close proximity to locations familiar to parents and VYAs, i.e., nearby schools, household courtyards, community resource centers. The groups included siblings, cousins, and friends in the same group. LAMB, conversely, carried out the Choices with segregated groups of male and female VYAs based on the community context and previous experience working with adolescents and parents. These sex- segregated groups were meant to encourage VYAs to share their thoughts and opinions more freely. World Renew conducted Voices sessions

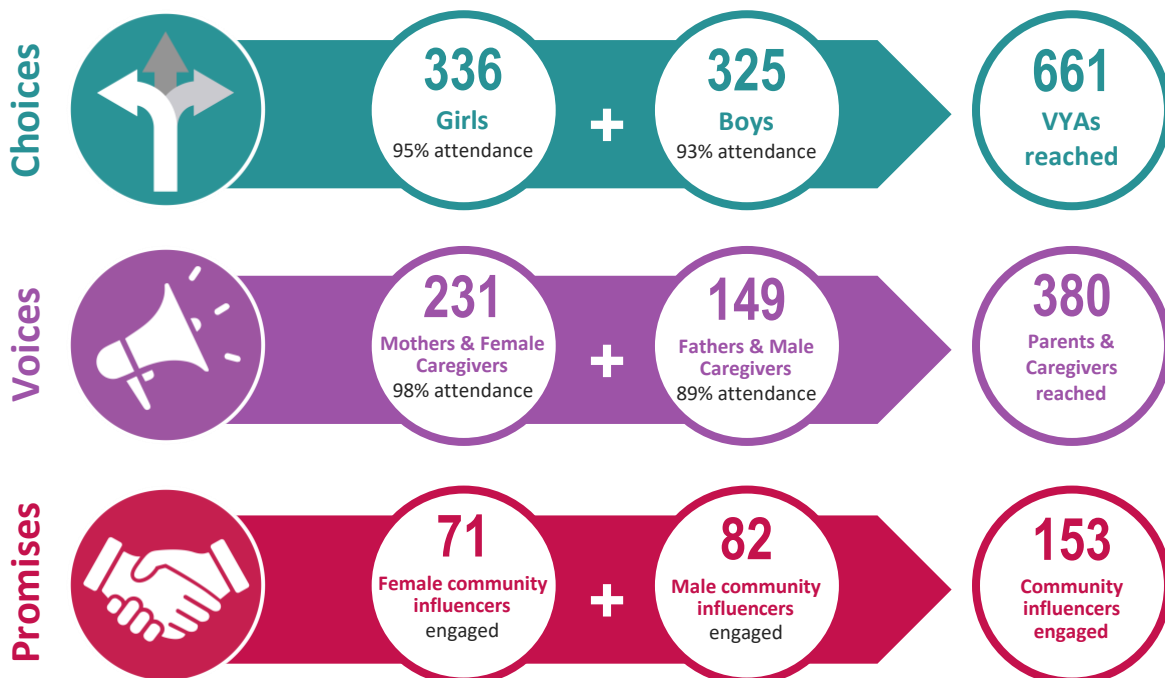
with mixed groups of VYAs’ parents, while LAMB conducted Voices sessions with VYAs’ mothers and fathers in both mixed-sex and sex-segregated groups. Both FBOs implemented Promises sessions with mixed groups of influential community members.

Trained male and female facilitators (older adolescents ages 16–19) along with volunteer adults facilitated the Choices group sessions and helped create a safe learning environment for the VYAs by having facilitators closer in age to group participants. For the Voices and Promises interventions, the FBOs carefully selected adult volunteers from the intervention communities who served as community leaders, health facilitators, and had experience either working with other community-based organizations or leading discussions in mixed-group settings. This was important to ensure that parents and community members felt comfortable participating with men and women in the same group. Further, throughout the implementation period, World Renew and LAMB provided ongoing training and coaching to the facilitators. As an incentive, facilitators were provided stipends and travel allowances.

Both FBOs engaged government officials at the national, district, and sub-district level to obtain endorsement at the onset and maintained ongoing communication to keep them abreast of progress to ensure their support throughout the implementation period. Consequently, as implementation progressed, sub-district level government authorities became strong advocates of the program by promoting the intervention in their communities and providing their billboards for the Promises posters as well as their office space for group discussion sessions.

Through the Choices, Voices, Promises intervention, World Renew and LAMB jointly reached 661 VYAs, 380 parents/caregivers, and 153 community influences across the intervention regions (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4: VYAs, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS REACHED THROUGH THE INTERVENTION



KEY FINDINGS: PERSPECTIVES FROM IMPLEMENTATION TEAMS AND PARTICIPANTS

As noted above, monitoring data and qualitative adaptive management methodologies were used to gather implementation experiences, explore specific challenges, facilitate reflection, and contribute to the key learning questions. The findings presented below are a synthesis of learnings collected through various adaptive management methods. Given the adaptive management methods used, the insights below reflect perspectives of implementation staff and program participants.

- 1. A participatory, small-group approach was an effective strategy to engage program participants.** Global evidence shows that engaging individuals through small-group learning approaches using curricula and participatory activities is an effective methodology to facilitate behavior change (Marcus, 2019). Implementation findings from Bangladesh indicate that the Choices curriculum helped catalyze reflection and changes in how VYAs understood gender privileges and puberty. Similarly, testimonies from parents who participated in the Voices group discussions suggest that parents were inspired to reconsider their gendered behaviors and attitudes. One parent shared his commitment to ensure his children are treated fairly and given equal opportunities: *“I will make sure that both my son and daughter get equal time off to complete their homework and chores and to play with friends.”* Further, take-home materials fostered inter-generational dialogue and sharing of gender-related ideas between VYAs and their parents. In the words of a parent of a VYA, *“The Voices activities were successful through effective communication, distribution of materials, taking feedback from everyone, formulating plans in a timely manner, sharing realistic stories, sharing experiences, and developing relationships.”* Both FBOs reported that implementing the interventions through different modalities—in mixed and sex-segregated groups—worked well and was appropriate for their respective contexts.
- 2. Long-standing community connections and positive perception of FBOs were instrumental in creating an enabling environment for implementing the Choices, Voices, Promises approach.** Community-based FBOs are influential and often seen as gatekeepers who are well-positioned to reach a range of diverse community members. Due to this legitimacy, FBOs can serve a unique role in creating a supportive environment for promoting and reinforcing healthy and equitable practices among VYAs, families, and communities. According to a local government authority who was engaged in the intervention, *“FBOs empower the community and build their self-confidence to bring changes on their own.”* LAMB and World Renew’s deep community connections and the communities’ positive perception of them were instrumental in facilitating the implementation of Choices, Voices, Promises. Learnings gathered through adaptive management approaches showed that the FBOs’ prior experience implementing adolescent programming, coupled with their long-standing relationships in the communities, helped to guide design and implementation of programming to ensure that the intervention was delivered in an effective and acceptable way. An FBO staff member expressed that the intervention fits within the broader scope of the organization’s existing work, *“It complements our work of raising community awareness about health and education and in bringing change in the mindset of the people about treating boys and girls equally.”* Additionally, the FBOs used their peer faith networks to obtain approval for community-level activities and mobilize support to promote VYA SRH and gender equality.
- 3. Engagement of influential community members promoted acceptance of intervention approaches and accelerated social diffusion of gender-equitable behaviors and attitudes.** Through the Promises intervention, the program intentionally engaged influential community members, including teachers, faith leaders, government authorities, health workers, and other key actors, in group discussions around inequitable norms with the goal of transforming their gendered beliefs and inspiring broader change within the community. According to the implementation teams and program participants, careful orientation at program onset along with continual engagement of parents and community members throughout implementation proved critical, not only to increase their individual knowledge and attitudes,

but also to inspire collective action to achieve improvements in equitable attitudes, behaviors, and norms. The union council chairman in Satkhira District said, *“I feel like I now have more responsibility than before in promoting gender equality in my area. I will continue to encourage parents in my area to give equal importance to both their girls and boys.”* Moreover, a religious leader spoke about the shift in his mindset and responsibilities as an influential community member due to his participation in the Promises intervention, *“I used to perform child marriages at the request of the parents. But now, I talk to the parents and tell them that if they still proceed with it then I will call 109 for legal action.”*

- Tailored technical and organizational capacity strengthening supported FBOs to implement the gender-transformative VYA approach and improved their organizational performance.** Continuous training and mentorship of FBO program staff by MOMENTUM colleagues contributed to increasing their technical capacity and confidence to effectively deliver gender-transformative programming for VYAs. Gathering feedback in real time through regular project team meetings guided by a tailored implementation mapping tool and pause-and-reflect sessions fostered a culture of learning and allowed for rapid iteration throughout the implementation period. Moreover, customized organizational strengthening activities improved the FBOs’ systems and operations plans that, in turn, translated to stronger implementation of the Choices, Voices, Promises approach within the communities. The FBOs shared that the organizational capacity strengthening support provided by the project facilitated the creation of five-year strategic plans that prioritize gender-transformative approaches to shift deeply-rooted social and gender norms that prevail in the communities where they operate. Working together on strengthening organizational processes and systems through coaching, mentorship, and training (i.e., field visit templates, women’s empowerment guidelines, monitoring and evaluation policies, safeguarding policies, resource mobilization plans, communication strategies, financial management) built organizational staff capacity. This translated to stronger implementation and lasting impact within the FBOs and their communities that will continue to reap benefits post MOMENTUM. Further, baseline and endline OPI assessments for both FBOs showed an increase in organizational performance: LAMB = 2.3 to 3.2 out of 4 and World Renew = 3 to 3.6 out of 4. Figures 5 and 6 disaggregate this by the 10 subdomains of the OPI. For LAMB, the increase was driven by subdomains of systems adaptability, social capital, and resources; for World Renew, subdomains of learning saw the greatest increase, and 4/4 scores reached in several other subdomains demonstrating impressive performance for the organization.

FIGURE 5: ORGANIZATION PERFORMANCE INDEX FOR LAMB

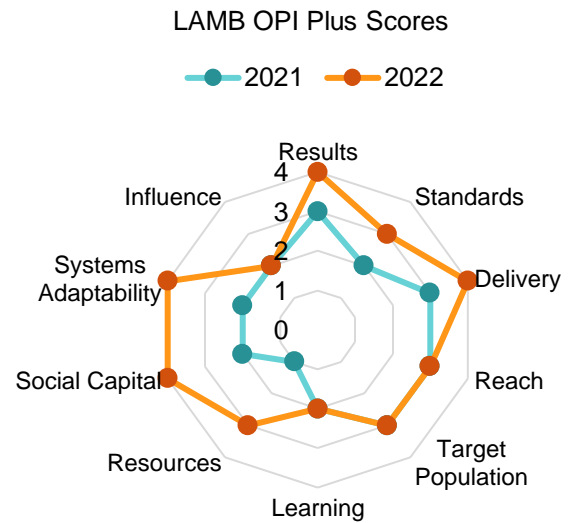
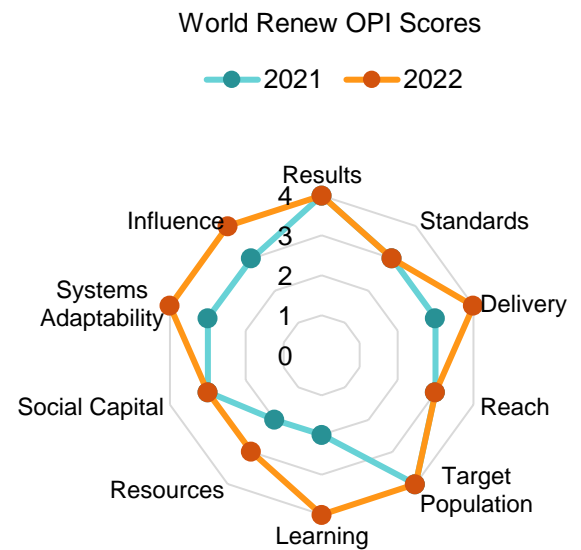


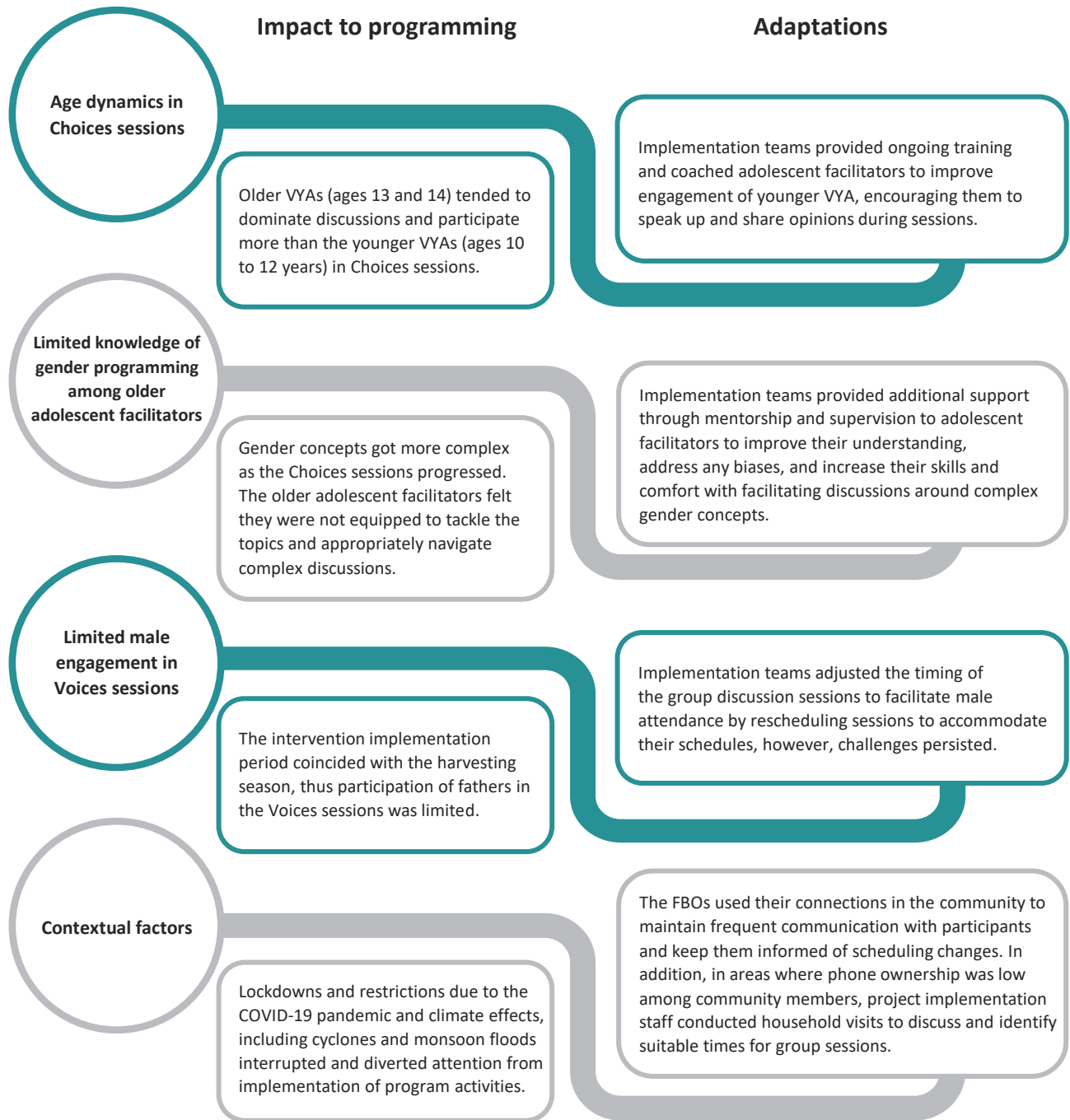
FIGURE 6: ORGANIZATION PERFORMANCE INDEX FOR WORLD RENEW



IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATIONS

Implementation challenges identified through adaptive management methods and programmatic responses to them are detailed below.

Challenges



REFLECTIONS ON THE WAY FORWARD

Through this activity, MOMENTUM, LAMB, and World Renew have demonstrated the potential of community-based organizations to meaningfully address harmful gender and SRH attitudes, behaviors, and norms among VYAs, their families, and communities in Bangladesh. Given the importance of addressing gender norms and health attitudes and behaviors that lead to child marriage, early and unintended pregnancy, and adolescent childbearing in Bangladesh, this learning can inform the implementation and scale-up of gender-transformative VYA approaches. The following section discusses reflections from the activity and highlights key considerations for future efforts:

- Tailored capacity strengthening offered to local partners as part of partnership agreements helps to support their goals in the long run. Often organizations may not have the resources (time and funding) to engage in a facilitated reflection on larger organizational issues to support their programming in the long term. Building such exercises into ongoing work with partners can create the space to do so.
- Working with and through community-based organizations, including FBOs, to address often taboo issues such as gender norms and SRH among VYAs leads to greater community acceptance and engagement. It also requires dedicated time and attention for capacity development on topics such as gender and social norms, gender-transformative approaches, and age-appropriate health information.
- Using a multi-level approach that engages VYAs, their families, and their communities in dialogue-based activities was essential for both community support and acceptance and to create the conditions for shifts in attitudes and behaviors.
- Working closely with government entities at the district and subdistrict (upazila and union officials) levels enabled support for the activities and can lead to opportunities for scale-up through government investment and ownership.
- Utilizing adaptive management approaches creates a culture of learning that allows organizations to critically reflect on implementation and make rapid adaptations to mitigate challenges. This is particularly important in the context of gender-transformative social and behavior change approaches where continuous learning and adaptation can mitigate community backlash and quickly identify needs for additional support on complex gender topics.

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