

Success Story: Bangladesh 2012

Mobilizing a community to end sexual violence against children



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Introduction

The World Day of Prayer and Action for Children (World Day), celebrated annually on 20 November, is an opportunity for all sectors of society - governments, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and religious communities - to work together to end violence against children. World Day events take many forms, including mobilization and media campaigns, workshops, religious services and vigils, and common action to protect children from violence.

The World Day was launched in 2008 at the Third Forum of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) in Hiroshima. The initiative unites secular and religious organizations and harnesses their collective power in support of children. In 2011, more than 200,000 people participated in the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children. Actions in 2012 mobilized people from 62 countries to take part in over 100 activities.

This Success Stories series tells the inspiring stories of 2011 and 2012 World Day actions in selected countries and provides resources and recommendations for organizing similar actions. This success story highlights actions in Bangladesh where a long and fruitful partnership between a local NGO and an international NGO provided a solid foundation for the launch of the first celebration of the World Day in the country.

Leveraging a longstanding partnership

Established in 1994, Breaking the Silence is an organization working to end child sexual abuse in Bangladesh. Their multifaceted approach includes awareness raising through community outreach, empowerment of children, policy advocacy, and counseling services for survivors and their guardians.

For more than four decades, Save the Children has been working to make a difference in the lives of children in Bangladesh. Headquartered in the United Kingdom, Save the Children International is a child-focused international non-governmental organization with a presence in 120 countries.

Save the Children and Breaking the Silence have a longstanding partnership in Bangladesh focused on the issue of child sexual abuse. Their collaboration began with an awareness raising campaign initiated in 1994. In 2012, they carried out World Day actions for the first time. The World Day theme of protection of children from violence aligned well with the ongoing work and priorities of both organizations. Engaging children and communities in the observance of symbolically significant days is an important aspect of the efforts of Breaking the Silence to establish a sustainable community security system for child protection. Save the Children collaborates with partners annually to celebrate international days that promote child rights and wellbeing. Recognizing that in Bangladesh, religious leaders have a great deal of influence in communities, the organizations viewed the World Day as an opportunity for community outreach and engagement.

Uniting a community to promote child protection

On 20 November 2012, in the community of Bauniabandh, participants of Muslim, Hindu and Christian faiths gathered for a day of community celebration of the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children. The celebration mobilized 220 children and 175 accompanying adults, community members and religious leaders. The program included an opening statement by a religious leader, a rally, musical and theatrical activities, a community conversation on the topic of community-based child protection systems, a drawing competition, and a prayer for children.

I feel proud that I have conducted a prayer for Bownibadh Community children, all children of Bangladesh and the whole world's children by this program of Save the Children and Breaking the Silence. It is our religious and social responsibility to protect children from all forms of abuse including sexual abuse. Islam always encourages us to establish child rights equally.

-Moulana Sanaullah, Presenter, Desh TV

The organizers leveraged existing connections to encourage community participation in the celebration. Outreach to child participants was facilitated through three preparatory meetings with Breaking the Silence group leaders representing the organization's 13 community groups. Following the meetings, the group leaders identified children from their programs to be a part of the celebration. Working with the Bauniabandh Child Rights Implementation Committee, Breaking the

Silence extended formal letters of invitation to adults in the community that had been supporting their awareness campaigns. Public announcements carried the message beyond existing networks to involve additional community members.

Empowering children and adults to speak out

Beginning and ending in the Bauniabandh Market Field, the rally sent a powerful message of child protection, which resonated throughout the community. For forty minutes, a group of 450 participants processed down the main road carrying banners and signs promoting child rights and child protection. The rally showcased the work of Breaking the Silence to facilitate child participation and empower young people to raise their voices against child sexual abuse and other violations of children's rights.



Today, I am able to speak in front of everybody because Breaking the Silence has empowered me to speak like that. I feel proud that now I am able to protect myself [from] any kind of abuse and also I can protect my peer and our community child from any kind of abuse specially sexual abuse.

-Atique, Breaking the Silence children's group member

A highlight of the program was the hour-long community discussion organized by the Bauniabandh Child Rights Implementation Committee. The session opened with testimonials from a boy and a girl who are both participants in Breaking the Silence programs. They shared about their involvement in Breaking the Silence and their support for the establishment of a child friendly security system in Bauniabandh. Ms. Nayomi Kannangara, Director of the Child Protection Unit for Save the Children in Bangladesh, spoke about the capacity of religious leaders to galvanize community-level support for child protection. Then, a facilitator from Breaking the Silence moderated the discussion during which

all members of the community were invited to share their unique perspectives on working with Breaking the Silence.

Resources for organizing World Day actions

- Access the strategy for the participation of children and youth on the [World Day website](#).
- Access the [World Day of Prayer and Action for Children Planning Guide for 2012](#).
- Access the [brand guidelines for use of the World Day logo](#).

Moving forward together

The success of the celebration in Bauniabandh was evident in a number of ways. Adult participants from the community expressed that they felt the lessons they learned during the experience would strengthen their relationships with their own children. Participants committed to being mindful of the messages from the

Quran promoting child protection. The celebration paved the way for the establishment of previously rejected *opinion boxes* to be used to gather child-development-related concerns in the community.

I feel proud to see such program where we all are jointly working against child sexual abuse in our community.

-Asma Begum, adult group member



Momentum from the celebration extended beyond Bauniabandh; another community, Kurmiotala Camp, was inspired to offer to carry out a similar community mobilization for child protection.

Tips:

- Work through partner and affiliate organizations and groups to spread the word and extend invitations within communities.
- Consider marking the World Day throughout the year by incorporating a prayer for child protection and wellbeing into different religious holidays.