

Fall 2021

# Pathways

**WORLD  
CONTRACEPTION  
DAY**

**Building  
Equity Through  
Reproductive  
Health**

**PATHFINDER**

## Dear Pathfinders,

As a global reproductive health and rights organization, Pathfinder is often at the forefront of challenging fights. Today, amidst an ongoing pandemic that continues to shift and evolve, we know one fight we must put at the forefront: the one for vaccine distribution equity. Lack of vaccine equity today permeates every aspect of Pathfinder's work—challenging our ability to support reproductive health care and rights for the women and girls who need it most.

**50%** OF AMERICANS  
are fully vaccinated,  
with ample vaccines on hand for  
those who remain unvaccinated.

**ACROSS AFRICA,** **2%**  
of the continent's  
population has been vaccinated.

Today, 50% of Americans are fully vaccinated, with ample vaccines on hand for those who remain unvaccinated. Meanwhile, other countries around the world where Pathfinder works are struggling to acquire even small shipments of vaccines. Across Africa, only 2% of the continent's population has been vaccinated—a result of inequitable distribution, limited resources, poor global policies, and lack of infrastructure. At the same time, disinformation is rampant globally, making efforts to vaccinate larger swaths of the population challenging, but doable.

At Pathfinder, we know that vaccine equity is a fight not just to protect a global population from COVID-19, but to ensure the kind of equity that is central to our programs at large. At the onset of the pandemic, we laid out a set of principles to guide us, including vaccinating the most vulnerable people first, and calling for global cooperation and generosity.

Our principles haven't changed, but the overall picture of COVID-19, as well as vaccine distribution, has shifted. We have watched as citizens of the US have had ready access to safe, effective vaccines yet millions have refused them across the country.

We have seen vaccines dumped out or go unused, as other countries have yet to receive a single dose. Today, we are discussing booster shots in the US, when frontline health workers in many of the countries where Pathfinder works still have limited access. Wealthy countries pre-purchased billions more doses than they needed, failing to distribute them equitably. We need to shift from hoarding vaccines in wealthier countries to accelerated distribution globally—this not only prevents severe disease and death among the most at risk around the world, but will also slow or prevent the emergence of even more dangerous variants.

While there are signs of hope—Tanzania and Burundi, for example, recently received their first initial doses of the vaccine due to the efforts of the global initiative COVAX—we have much more work to do. Many global commitments for equitable access are aimed for distribution in 2022. This is too little, too late. By then, variants could be more virulent and widespread. We need rapid increases in vaccine production and major shifts in where vaccine doses are being delivered and used.

In July, Pathfinder was awarded a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation for its work to advance COVID-19 mitigation and recovery by curbing vaccine hesitancy, improving equitable access to quality vaccine services, and strengthening accountability mechanisms for vaccine delivery in Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory of Abuja, and Kano and Kaduna states. This is one of the places where Pathfinder will focus its fight to bring vaccines to the doors of those who need them most—and part of our work to ensure equity stays front and center in all that we do.

The pandemic is not over. At Pathfinder, we will continue to fight for equitable distribution and access to vaccines for the global community in which we live and work.



Sincerely,

**Claire Moodie**  
Global Monitoring, Evaluation,  
and Learning Director  
Epidemiologist, MPH in  
infectious disease



# Ensuring Access to Contraception during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted essential health care worldwide, with deep impacts on sexual and reproductive health services. To ensure availability of contraceptive services, Pathfinder swiftly adapted, ensuring continued service delivery, training, and programs that share information about contraception, reaching millions of people. On World Contraception Day, we share several examples of this work.



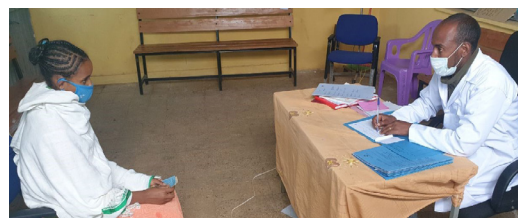
**Naya Qadam—Pakistan:** A communications campaign engaging influencers, community outreach workers, religious leaders, mobile vehicles, and using SMS (short message service) promoted post-pregnancy contraceptive services and health-seeking behaviors in six districts of Pakistan.

- **1.3+ million people reached** through cable TV announcements, **2.4+ million people reached** through community announcements, and **120,900 people reached** through mosque announcements.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, Naya Qadam **reached 263,000 people** with contraceptive services, more than doubling those reached by the program the year prior.

## USAID Transform: Primary Health Care—

**Ethiopia:** Transform integrated COVID-19 awareness with sexual and reproductive health care to ensure essential services have safely continued in Ethiopia.

- **35+ million individuals reached** with key messages about COVID-19 prevention, contraceptive services, and other essential health issues using mobile vans and audio-mounted vehicles.
- **800+ health extension workers** from nearly **700 health posts trained** to safely provide Implanon, a long-term contraceptive, and other contraceptive options at 36 primary health care units.



## Uganda Family Planning Activity:

Community health workers (CHWs) went door-to-door, providing short-acting contraceptives to community members. This included reaching young people who are often hesitant to seek services from reproductive health centers.

- **500 CHWs trained to provide health education, counseling, and short-term contraception** in communities.
- To prevent reoccurring stock-outs, the program **helped to redistribute contraceptive commodities** and methods from areas of surplus to areas of shortage, ensuring every health center can serve its community.





**SMALL BOX**

# BIG DIFFERENCE

**How an intervention for newlyweds in Bangladesh is empowering young couples to take control of their reproductive lives**

Married as a child, Chandana Bala did not have agency over when she got pregnant. But today, as the mother of four children, Chandana has taken ownership over her reproductive future, using a contraceptive method she learned about from Pathfinder's Shukhi Jibon project.

But what if we had reached Chandana earlier? That's what Pathfinder's latest intervention aims to do—reach newlyweds on the day of their wedding, aiming to help young brides like Chandana plan for families when they are ready.

*Chandana Bala and her four children today. Photo: Ridwanul Mosrur*

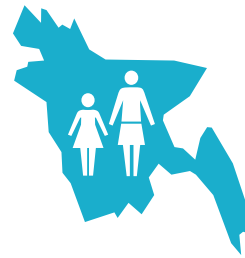




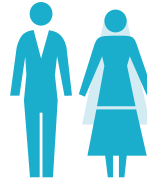
Despite improvements in reproductive health over the last three decades, Bangladesh still suffers from high rates of unintended and early pregnancies, and more than half of Bangladeshi girls are married before their 18th birthday. Seeing this ongoing challenge, four years ago, in 2017, the Directorate General of Family Planning in Bangladesh (DGFP) piloted a small program in the Brahmanbaria district, where information boxes on contraception and family planning methods were given to newlywed couples. The pilot was a real success—73% of the young couples who received the information chose to delay their first pregnancy as a result.

Today, Pathfinder is ramping up the intervention, in collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh, to reach newlywed couples in 10 different upazilas (regions) with diverse demographics. And the intervention has made a huge buzz in those communities.

On the day of their wedding, newlywed couples receive a surprise box from a local representative, in the presence of a community health worker known to the couple, or at other times, a local religious leader or government official. The box is filled with information for the newlyweds. It comes with a congratulatory letter from the DGFP,



• Bangladesh is home to **38 million child brides**, including currently married girls along with women who were first married in childhood. Of these, **13 million married before age 15**.



• **51% of young women in Bangladesh were married before their 18th birthday.**



• **Nearly 5 in 10 child brides gave birth before age 18, and 8 in 10 gave birth before age 20.**

SOURCE: [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Bangladesh-Child-Marriage-Final-LR-spreads-10\\_1.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Bangladesh-Child-Marriage-Final-LR-spreads-10_1.pdf)



PHOTOS: Pathfinder Bangladesh.

The Family Planning Information Box comes with a suite of information on family planning, including how to access it, how to use it, and more detailed information on how to connect with local providers.

a booklet on reproductive wellbeing, leaflets on oral contraception and condoms, samples for the couple to use, a wall clock with the national family planning call center number, and reminder stickers to promote the call center number so couples can seek information and guidance from local health workers.

But the box doesn't work on its own. It's part of a much larger effort from USAID's Shukhi Jibon Project to meet young people where they are, collaborating with local leaders, trusted community members, family members, and religious leaders, all who are involved to ensure the message is taken seriously.

The work takes time and effort to create buy-in. But Pathfinder has a 360 degree approach to getting it. "When we looked at

## FIRST SIX MONTHS:



• **500 newlywed information boxes** distributed in 9 upazilas, **367 frontline health workers** and **600 community leaders** received orientation in 10 upazilas.



• **240 frontline service providers** received a four-day training on adolescent and youth-friendly health services.



• **640 former trainees** had follow-up sessions on adolescent and youth-friendly services.

the data from the pilot program," says Tania Jahan, Shukhi Jibon's Community Engagement & Social and Behavior Change Manager, "we found that there was some resistance from local imams and marriage registrars. We saw this, so immediately started our coordination efforts with local Islamic foundations with permission from the National Level Authority of the Islamic Foundation, under the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Bangladesh. Pathfinder worked with the local imams, community decision makers, and health workers, creating communications channels between the service providers and the local community leaders, to create more knowledge around sexual and reproductive health. The more these two



PHOTO: RIDWANUL MOSRUR

**A couple from Jalalabad, Sylhet received counseling on family planning from a Family Welfare Assistant (FWA) trained by USAID's Shukhi Jibon project, who work closely with the families to provide services and to foster a supportive environment for delaying pregnancy.**

groups coordinate, the easier our work is. Our work is to develop an environment that enables this discussion, so community members are more likely to participate actively in the intervention."

And, for imams like Mohammad Abul Bashar, it seems to be working. "It is a tremendous initiative to provide an information box to our newlywed couples," says Abul, an imam at the Lunapara Jame Mosque, in Gouripur, Mymensing. "I advised the new couple to read the information booklet, as well as to communicate with the local Family Welfare Assistant (FWA) to develop a better understanding of family planning methods. I am committed to discussing sexual and reproductive health at my mosque, and the importance of family planning for adolescents to prevent early pregnancy, maternal death... and, to enrich happy families."

Today, Abul actively promotes family planning in his community—and he's one of more than six hundred community leaders that have already been reached and are participating in the intervention.

Pathfinder also works to cultivate acceptance from family members. "Sometimes family members aren't supportive, and the social pressure can be strong," says Jahan. "So, we incorporate this component, when we actually hand over the box. It's not just the couple that are present—it's the full family. Through the conversation we have, with local leaders and FWAs, we provide an opportunity for engagement and discussion."

Pathfinder also works to support FWAs directly, by providing them specific training on adolescent and youth sexual





*Bela Rani Talukder, an FWA with Pathfinder's Shukhi Jibon project, bikes to make visits with local women and adolescents in Mogaigaon, Bangladesh.*

## Shukhi Jibon's Approach to Adolescent and Youth Reproductive Health

### Increasing the accessibility of facility based services

Shukhi Jibon works to provide accurate and unbiased information and services to adolescents and youth by promoting adolescent-friendly health services at local facilities, strengthening school health services, and building the capacity of service providers.

### Involving the community

Shukhi Jibon works collaboratively with community leaders, including religious leaders, frontline health workers, and local radio stations in collaboration with USAID partners to strengthen community engagement around adolescent and youth reproductive health challenges.

### Strengthening knowledge among frontline workers

Shukhi Jibon supports the orientation of staff to give them a better understanding of the family planning needs of newlyweds, first-time parents, and teenage mothers. The program scales up evidence-based and innovative approaches to better serve adolescents and youth, while advocating on a national level for client centered services and skills development for service providers.

### Targeting underserved communities

Shukhi Jibon holds program activities in remote areas, including urban slums, and works to incorporate services for the transgender community, diverse ethnic communities, and ready-made garment workers.

and reproductive health. These trainings include the importance of reaching this key population, topics that are specific to adolescents and youth, as well as interpersonal communication and discrimination issues many adolescents face.

"This is the 10th year of my professional life," said a local Family Planning Inspector from Bharadhoba Union, who recently attended a Pathfinder training. "But it's the first time I've had an adolescent and youth focused orientation, and I believe this is true for most of the participants. Now, I will regularly follow up with the local FWAs I work with to ensure the discussion of sexual and reproductive health issues and information specific to adolescents."

This connection is critical, as adolescents in Bangladesh, regardless of marital status, do not regularly visit health facilities. So frontline health workers have the potential to play the "core contact" role to reach youth where they are.

Jahan adds, "The family welfare assistants are recruited by the community. They know the community, the local leaders, the imams. And, in many cases, these FWAs provide social, financial,



Photo: Ridwanul Mosrur

**Jayanti Roy, Family Welfare Assistant, provides family planning counseling to a family in Jalalabad, Sylhet, Bangladesh.**

and reproductive information. So the program meets community members—particularly newlyweds—where they are at."

**For the newlyweds we are reaching, it often means the difference between having little agency, and having real choice.**



Non-profit  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Boston, MA  
Permit No. 52614

# EMPOWERED CHOICES

## Pathfinder launches a new humanitarian program in Nigeria

The ongoing conflict in northeastern Nigeria caused by the Boko Haram insurgency has led to one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises—resulting in mass displacement, disruption of basic services, and increased protection risks.<sup>1</sup> Currently, there are more than 2 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) living in the northeastern states of Nigeria, and more than half are younger than 18.<sup>2</sup> UNFPA estimates that the conflict has affected 1.7 million women of reproductive age.<sup>3</sup>

For adolescents in IDP camps, access to sexual and reproductive health information and services is crucial, as they undergo developmental changes in an unstable environment. Displaced adolescents are particularly disadvantaged as they have limited opportunities to acquire skills to empower themselves within the camps.

Pathfinder's new **Empowered Choices** project seeks to improve the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of internally displaced adolescents, 10–19 years old, in the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria, where more than 20,000 IDPs live. The project will advance gender equality, empowering adolescent girls with skills and knowledge that will allow them to make healthy transitions to adulthood.

### Specifically, Pathfinder will:

- Undertake a peer mentorship program where peer educators engage adolescents to increase their knowledge about SRHR, thereby improving their health and well-being.
- Host skills-acquisition sessions to enhance the economic empowerment of adolescents.
- Engage community gatekeepers, caregivers, and family members to address norms and attitudes that propagate gender inequities faced by adolescent girls.
- Set up protection mechanisms and safe spaces for adolescents.
- Facilitate referral of adolescents to health facilities.

 Donate to Pathfinder's critical work to reach those who most need it: [www.pathfinder.org/fall](http://www.pathfinder.org/fall)

<sup>1</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/rapid-gender-analysis-affected-population-borno-adamawa-and-yobe-states-main-findings>  
<sup>2</sup> <https://dtm.iom.int/nigeria>  
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/18-291-DeliveringSuppliesCrisis-Nigeria-finalweb.pdf>

**PATHFINDER**

Nine Galen Street, Suite 217  
Watertown, MA 02472-4501

[pathfinder.org](http://pathfinder.org)

**President & CEO**  
Lois Quam

**Board Chair**  
Roslyn Watson

**Editor**  
Laurel Lundstrom

**Contributors**  
Priscilla Addison  
Tania Jahan  
Ridwanul Mosrur  
Sarah Peck

ON THE COVER: Sharmin received reproductive health information from Pathfinder's Shukhi Jibon program, as part of specific outreach to ready-made garment workers in the country. PHOTO: Ridwanul Mosrur