



# ANNUAL REPORT

Reproductive Health Services, Training and  
Education Program (RHSTEP)

# 2023





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Education Program (RHSTEP)

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**Published by**

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RHSTEP is a Non-Government Organization (NGO) in Bangladesh incepted on 1983, committed to improving Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) for the common people since four decades. RHSTEP is a pioneer organization, building capacity of Government, NGO and Private level health service providers including doctors, nurses, paramedics, FWVs and others. RHSTEP also provides sexual, reproductive health services to women, men, adolescent and youths thus contributing in reducing maternal mortality and morbidity across the country.

## VISION

A HEALTHY, WEALTHY, SELF-RELIANT BANGLADESH WHERE EVERY CITIZEN IS RESPECTFUL TO HUMAN RIGHTS AND PRACTICING THOSE RIGHTS IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR AGE, SEX, RACE OR SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL STRATA

## MISSION

EMPOWER THE PEOPLE ESPECIALLY POOR, VULNERABLE AND MARGINALIZED THROUGH DIFFERENT HEALTH AND SOCIAL INTERVENTIONS TO UPHOLD THEIR RIGHTS

## GOAL

RHSTEP GOAL IS TO CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS IMPROVING SRH OF WOMEN AND ADOLESCENTS AND THUS COMPLEMENT THE GOB'S NATIONAL HEALTH PROGRAM TARGETS OF REDUCING MMR AND OTHER SRH HAZARDS IN BANGLADESH.

## CORE VALUES

RIGHTS

JUSTICE

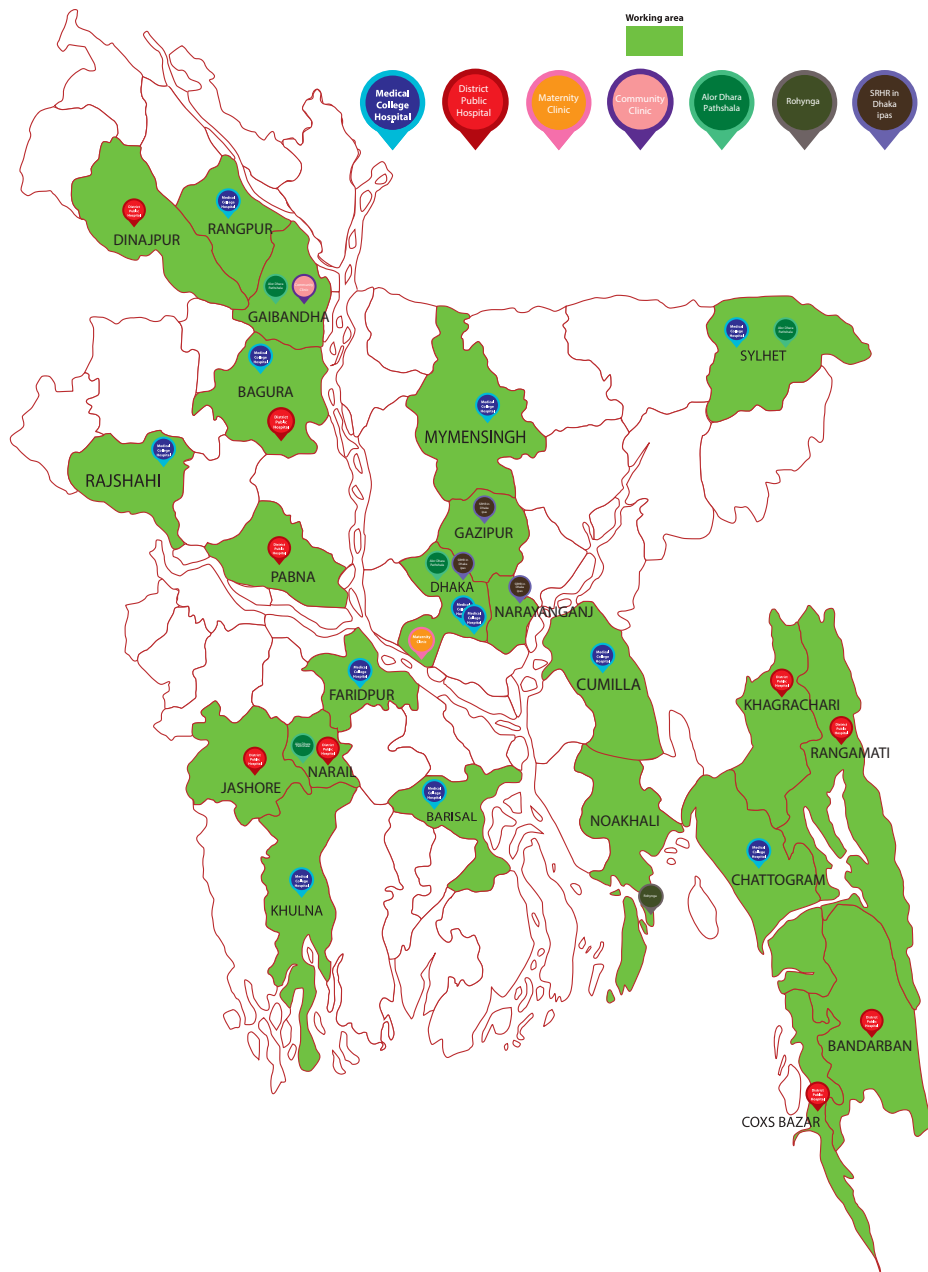
DIVERSITY

COMMUNITY  
PARTICIPATION

ACCOUNTABILITY

## Operational Area

Today after 40 years, RHSTEP has been sincerely serving the communities with utmost commitment and has been paving the way for obtaining their social justice, equality, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). The impacts and outcomes of RHSTEP program interventions implemented through 29 centers in 23 districts and 10 partners organizations across the country, adding significant values to the national and international responses on SDG3 and SDG5 to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and Gender Equality of women, men, adolescent boys and girls and young population.



# Development Partners of RHSTEP



পরিবার পরিকল্পনা অধিদপ্তর



Kingdom of the Netherlands



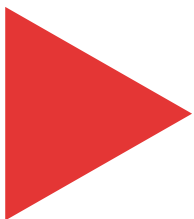
নারীপক্ষ



BRAC Institute of Educational Development  
BRAC University (BIED, BRACU)



Ford Foundation



## Table of Contents

Message from Executive Director	7
Executive Summary	8
Strengthening of safe MR and Family Planning services and reduction of unsafe abortions for improving SRHR situation in Bangladesh (Safe MR Project)	10
Right Here Right Now 2 (RHRN2)	28
Improving SRHR in Dhaka	32
Strategic Investment for Sustainable Abortion Ecosystem in Bangladesh	36
Sexual and Reproductive Health Program for Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh	40
Researching Youth Leadership towards Gender Justice in Bangladesh: Building a Learning Agenda	44
Financial Statement	51
List of Acronyms	52





# Message from Executive Director

I am delighted to present the Annual Report for RHSTEP for the period of January to December 2023. This year has been one of remarkable progress and dedication, with significant advancements in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) across Bangladesh. The achievements highlighted in this report reflect an unwavering commitment to improving the lives of women, men, and adolescents through comprehensive SRHR services and advocacy.



RHSTEP, a non-governmental organization established in 1983, continues to expand its impact, reaching over 23 districts through 29 service centers and seven youth-friendly corners. The focus has been on providing safe menstrual regulation (MR) services, enhancing the skills of government, NGO, and private service providers, and fostering a positive change in knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding sexual and reproductive health.

Throughout 2023, RHSTEP has made significant strides in several key areas through several effectual projects.

These achievements would not have been possible without the unwavering support and collaboration of partners and stakeholders. Sincere gratitude is extended to the Government of Bangladesh, particularly the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the Directorate General of Health Services, the Directorate General of Family Planning, Directorate General of Midwives and Nursing, the NGO Affairs Bureau, local health administrations, and local governments. This support has been invaluable in advancing our mission.

Heartfelt appreciation is also extended to all implementing partners for their dedication and hard work. Special thanks go to donors, including Sida, Rutgers Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, The David & Lucile Packard Foundation, Global affairs Canada through HealthBridge Foundation of Canada, Ipas North Carolina and Ipas Bangladesh, whose generous support and guidance have been instrumental in our success.

Finally, the exceptional efforts of the entire RHSTEP team are acknowledged. Their passion, commitment, and tireless work have made these achievements possible. As we look forward to the future, the focus remains on building on these successes, enhancing our impact, and ensuring that everyone in Bangladesh has access to high-quality SRHR services.

Thank you for the continued support and trust in RHSTEP.

Quazi Suraiya Sultana  
Executive Director



# Executive Summary

The government of Bangladesh is committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The 'Safe MR Project' is dedicated to providing comprehensive support for individuals seeking safe menstrual regulation and family planning services while actively working to reduce the incidence of unsafe abortions. This initiative is closely aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 3, which focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages through universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services. Additionally, the project supports Goal 5, which addresses harmful practices against women, including child and forced marriages, thereby contributing to a broader agenda of gender equality and women's empowerment. In alignment with these goals, the Reproductive Health Services Training and Education Program (RHSTEP) is dedicated to improving sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) through various services and knowledge-sharing initiatives, contributing to Bangladesh's progress toward these global objectives.



In 2023, RHSTEP made significant progress in advancing SRHR across Bangladesh through several impactful projects. The 'Strengthening of Safe Menstrual Regulation (MR) and Family Planning Services and Reduction of Unsafe Abortions for Improving SRHR Situation in Bangladesh (Safe MR Project)' served 247,696 clients with 618,994 SRHR services, including menstrual regulation and broader reproductive health needs. The project also provided family planning services to 40,510 clients and enhanced the capacity of 150 service providers, ensuring high-quality care at the frontline.

The 'Improving SRHR in Dhaka' project further contributed by enhancing SRHR services for underserved women and adolescents in Dhaka, Gazipur, and Narayanganj. Comprehensive clinical training on MR, MRM, PAC, and other SRHR services significantly improved the skills of healthcare providers in both UPHCSDP and private sectors. Despite challenges like outdated practices and staff turnover, the project succeeded in increasing access to quality SRH services, strengthening public health emergency preparedness, and enhancing social support.

The 'Right Here Right Now 2 (RHRN2)' project made notable strides in advancing SRHR for young people through targeted advocacy, capacity-building, and community engagement. Key achievements included establishing adolescent-friendly health services and developing comprehensive sexuality education modules, empowering youth to claim their rights and fostering a supportive policy environment. The success of youth advocates in Savar Upazila highlighted the project's impact, driving sustainable change and promoting a healthier, more equitable future.

The 'Strategic Investment for Sustainable Abortion Ecosystem in Bangladesh' (RHSTEP-Ipas Partnership



Project) made significant progress in strengthening the abortion care ecosystem across Barishal and Khulna divisions. From August 2021 to June 2023, the project enhanced healthcare providers' capacity, fortified health systems, and created a supportive environment for delivering Comprehensive Abortion Care (CAC), including MR, PAC, and FP services. Despite challenges like limited awareness and logistical hurdles, the project demonstrated that effective coordination, continuous training, and adaptability can drive significant progress.

Finally, the 'Sexual and Reproductive Health Program for Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh' successfully enhanced service delivery across eight intervention sites from April 2020 to June 2023. The project achieved its primary goals, including consistent service provision, capacity building, and addressing gender-based violence (GBV), despite operating in a challenging refugee context. During the final reporting period, efforts focused on sustaining these achievements, with refresher training provided to paramedics on MR, PAC, and FP services. Lessons learned emphasized the importance of tailored training, community

engagement, adaptability, and strong partnerships. This project concluded in June 2023.

As RHSTEP reflects on these achievements, the focus will be on sustaining these gains through continuous skill development, quality improvement, and strategic advocacy, ensuring lasting impact on SRHR in Bangladesh.

**Strengthening of Safe Menstrual  
Regulation (MR) and Family  
Planning Services and Reduction  
of Unsafe Abortions for Improving  
SRHR Situation in Bangladesh  
(Safe MR Project)**

Supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), ‘Strengthening of Safe Menstrual Regulation (MR) and Family Planning Services and Reduction of Unsafe Abortions for Improving SRHR Situation in Bangladesh (Safe MR Project)’ represents a pivotal initiative in enhancing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) across Bangladesh. This project, implemented by Reproductive Health Services Training & Education Program (RHSTEP), focuses on improving SRHR outcomes for women, men, and adolescents of reproductive age.

## Project Overview

Strengthening of safe MR and Family Planning services and reduction of unsafe abortions for improving SRHR situation in Bangladesh (Safe MR Project) started its activities for the year 2023 following previous years activities towards achieving the goal to improve Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) and wellbeing of women and adolescents in Bangladesh.

The Purpose of the project is to contribute in the reduction of maternal mortality and morbidity from unsafe abortion and improve the SRHR situation of women and adolescents in the project areas.

## Objectives of the project

- improve access to MR and PAC services;
- improve availability of SRHR services to the youth and adolescents;
- generate increased demands for SRHR services among the catchment area population;
- strengthen advocacy and policy dialogue to sustain enabling environment for safe MR and SRHR services and SGBV;
- generate and disseminate evidence for improved SRHR services and Policy influence;
- strengthen ICT for transparency, accountability and better management of the project ; and
- achieve sustainability of the SRHR consortium partners.

## In the year of the project the following key performance has been achieved to attain the project goal and objectives-

RHSTEP provided 52 Government and private service providers received Training on MR/MRM, PAC & other SRHR issues and 98 RHSTEP staffs capacitated on SRHR, GBV, HRBA and related issues. The Safe MR Project made substantial progress, reaching approximately 247,696 clients with a total of 618,994 Menstrual Regulation, Family Planing and other SRHR services. The project also focused on demand creation, engaging 20,187 men, women, and adolescents across communities, schools, and garment factories and organized a number of advocacy events.

**The ‘Safe MR Project’, supported by Sida, stands as a transformative effort in improving SRHR outcomes across Bangladesh, significantly reducing unsafe abortions and enhancing access to essential services for women, men, and adolescents.**

## Capacity Development

### Summary of Events

#### Comprehensive MR Training for Service Providers

One of the primary objectives of this project was to ensure the provision of quality sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services to improve the overall sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) situation. A critical precondition for delivering such services was the development of skilled service providers. To safeguard the sexual and reproductive health of the population, RHSTEP continued to provide comprehensive menstrual regulation (MR) training to service providers in both the public and private sectors. The comprehensive training was designed around key SRHR components, including post-abortion care (PAC), family planning (FP)

**Developing skilled service providers was pivotal to ensuring quality SRHR services, with comprehensive training covering MR, PAC, FP, gender, and human rights approaches.**



counseling, and general counseling. Additionally, service providers received essential knowledge on gender and human rights-based approaches to integrate into their daily practices.

During the reporting period, RHSTEP trained 52 service providers. Among these, 27 service providers completed two-week MR, MRM, and PAC training from RHSTEP, while 20 service providers received a week-long refresher training from RHSTEP. Additionally, 5 MR-trained service providers underwent follow-up sessions.

#### Skill Development Training on Program and Financial Management

To equip RHSTEP staff with the skills needed to address emerging issues and enhance their focus on new directives, a Skill Development Training on Program and Financial Management was conducted at Dream Square Resort, Mawna, Gazipur, from June 13-15, 2023. A total of 38 participants, including 23 men and 15 women from various RHSTEP centers and the central office, attended the training.

Key discussion points included the new features of the MIS and Inventory Software, new reporting formats, the use of digital communication between the central office and centers, program challenges, gaps, and the way forward, program evaluation sharing by Sida, planning for Pathshala and outreach activities, web-based inventory and VAT management software, audit findings for 2022, the 2023 budget, FD-6 and procurement processes, fixed asset and inventory management, changes in VAT and tax laws, financial reporting, and updates to HR policies and office management.



### **Training on Gender-Based Violence, HRBA, Human Resource Management and Future Project Planning**

RHSTEP organized training to improve the skills and capacity of its staff in various organizational and project implementation areas. This training targeted employees at both the central and center levels across the project area. The training aimed to develop a comprehensive understanding of sex, gender, sexual orientation, and gender-based violence (GBV) among the workforce and to incorporate these issues into RHSTEP’s policies, strategies, and practices.

A total of 33 participants, including 18 men and 15 women, attended the training, which included doctors, counselors, and managers from RHSTEP’s central office and various centers. The training focused on sexual orientation, gender, and how to integrate this knowledge into organizational policies and practices. Participants also identified gaps in the existing gender policy and discussed the inclusion of more gender and human rights-based criteria within the organizational policy and strategy.

### **Refresher Training on Organization Policies (Preventing Sexual Harassment and Inappropriate Behavior/ Anti Money Laundering Policy)**

A total of 24 staff received online refresher training on ‘Organization Policies (Preventing Sexual Harassment and Inappropriate Behavior/ Anti Money Laundering Policy)’ from various centers.

### **Training on SRHR and GBV for Peer Educators and Community Volunteers**

To enhance participants’ knowledge of SRH concepts and relevant rights, and to strengthen Peer Educators’ capacity to advocate for youth SRHR needs, a training program was held on October 8, 2023, at the Multipurpose Hall, BCCP, Mirpur. A total of 33 participants, including 22 men and 11 women, attended the training.



**RHSTEP has been trying to obtain Gender Equality in SRHR**



The training covered topics such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, family planning, menstrual regulation, cervical and breast cancer, and safe motherhood. It also included discussions on advocacy, communication skills, the 12 rights of SRHR, components of SRHR, and the National Adolescent Health Strategy (2017-2030).

### **Orientation Sessions on SRHR and GBV for Young People**

A series of orientation programs were organized to sensitize young people and adolescents at RHSTEP's Alordhara Pathshala. These sessions took place in Sylhet, Savar, Narail, and Gaibandha on September 24, October 20, October 23, and November 23, 2023, respectively, reaching a total of 120 adolescents and youth.

The orientation programs focused on the basics of SRHR and GBV, exploring how GBV impacts the sexual and reproductive health of young people. The sessions utilized participatory and theoretical learning approaches, allowing participants to share their personal and local experiences with GBV. Key issues discussed included early marriage, rape, and eve-teasing, with participants highlighting the various social, political, and geographical factors that contribute to GBV. The discussions revealed that GBV often leads to isolation, physical harm, and psychological distress among victims, particularly adolescent girls, who are at increased risk of early marriage, early pregnancy, early motherhood, and related complications.

**RHSTEP's capacity development initiatives in 2023 effectively enhanced service provider skills, ensuring the delivery of high-quality SRHR services across Bangladesh.**

**Gender equality and empowerment of girls and women will not be possible without the realization of SRHR**

### Orientation with Gatekeepers on SRHR and GBV

Orientation sessions for local gatekeepers, including teachers and parents, were organized at Alordhara Pathshala in Narail, Sylhet, Savar, and Gaibandha on September 22, September 25, October 20, and November 30, 2023, respectively. A total of 108 gatekeepers participated in these sessions. The orientations explored the local GBV situation, identified the causes of violence, and discussed solutions to create an enabling environment for youth and adolescents.

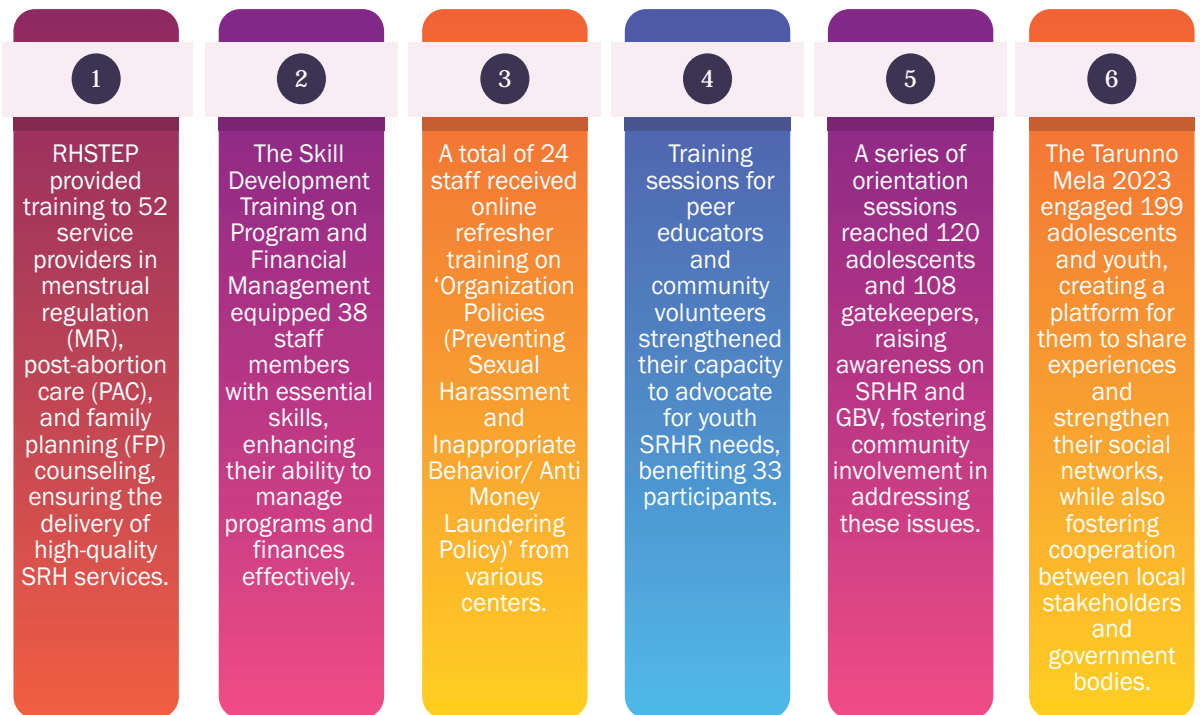
### Tarunno Mela (Adolescent and Youth Fair) 2023

The Tarunno Mela (Adolescent and Youth Fair) 2023 was organized by RHSTEP-Pathshala, Savar at YMCA, Savar, Dhaka, on December 23, 2023. The fair aimed to foster cooperation between government bodies and other organizations and to build a network among local adolescents and youth. A total of 199 adolescents and youth, including 118 boys and 81 girls, participated in the event.

During the fair, young people shared their experiences of how Alordhara Pathshala positively impacted their lives and helped them realize their importance in society. Local teachers and guardians also participated in the discussions, which were followed by various fun, educational games, and entertainment activities. The event was graced by the chief guest, Upazilla Health & Family Planning Officer of Savar, along with other distinguished guests.



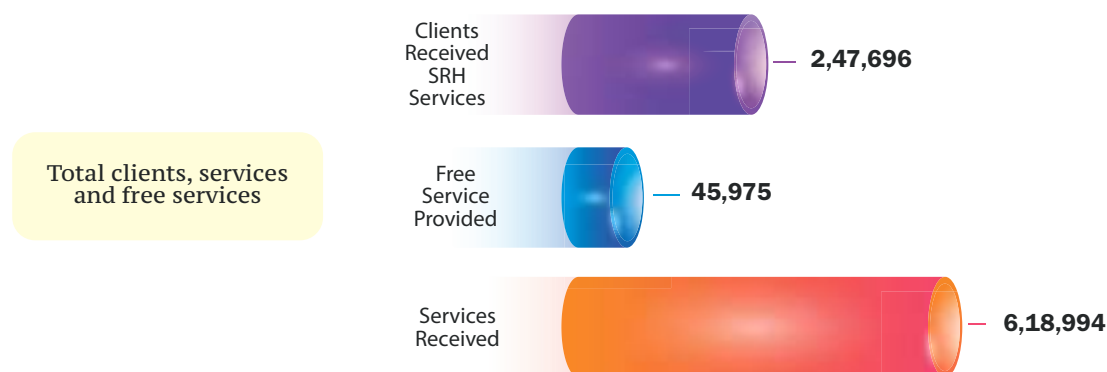
## Key Achievements of Capacity Building



## Services

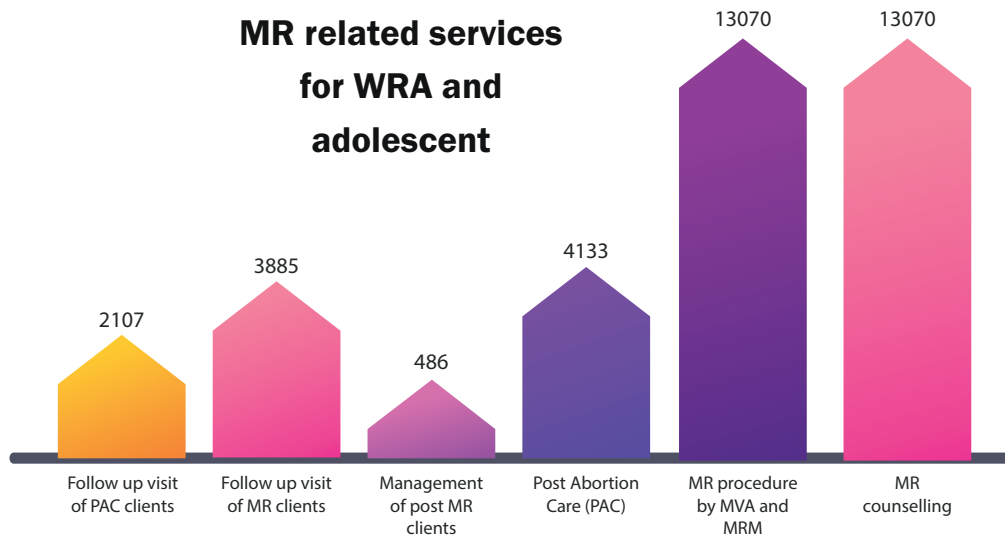
### Key Services Overview

During the reporting period, RHSTEP demonstrated a significant commitment to improving sexual and reproductive health by serving a total of 247,696 clients. These clients received a comprehensive array of 618,994 services, underscoring RHSTEP's extensive outreach and impact. Notably, RHSTEP also provided 45,975 free services to clients, ensuring that financial barriers did not hinder access to essential care. The organization continued its mission to support clients in need by offering services either free of charge or at subsidized rates, depending on the client's financial situation.



## Menstrual Regulation (MR) and Post-Abortion Care (PAC) Services

A cornerstone of RHSTEP’s services is its dedication to providing menstrual regulation (MR) and post-abortion care (PAC) to women of reproductive age. Over the course of the year, RHSTEP delivered a total of 36,985 services related to MR, menstrual regulation with medication (MRM), and PAC. These services play a crucial role in safeguarding women’s health by offering safe and accessible options for managing unintended pregnancies and post-abortion complications. The organization’s commitment to these services reflects its broader goal of ensuring that all women have access to necessary reproductive health services, particularly in a context where such care is often stigmatized or difficult to access.

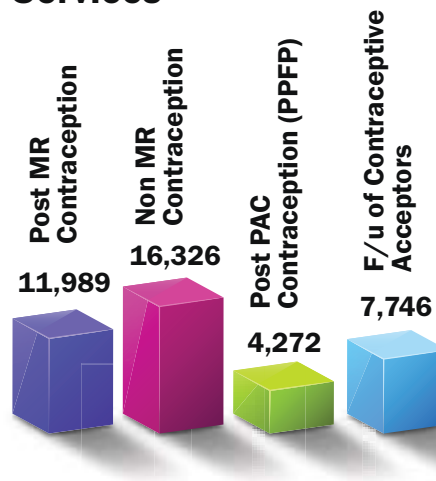


## Family Planning Services

In support of planned population growth and the well-being of families, RHSTEP provided comprehensive family planning services to 40,510 clients during this period. These services included a range of contraceptive options, from short-acting methods like pills and injectable to long-acting and permanent methods such as implants, intrauterine devices (IUDs), and sterilization. The organization observed a significant uptake of non-MR contraceptive methods, which highlights the effectiveness of RHSTEP’s counseling and educational initiatives in promoting informed contraceptive choices.

Additionally, the high number of post-MR contraceptive acceptors indicates that women are increasingly adopting family planning measures following MR procedures, which is essential for preventing future unintended pregnancies.

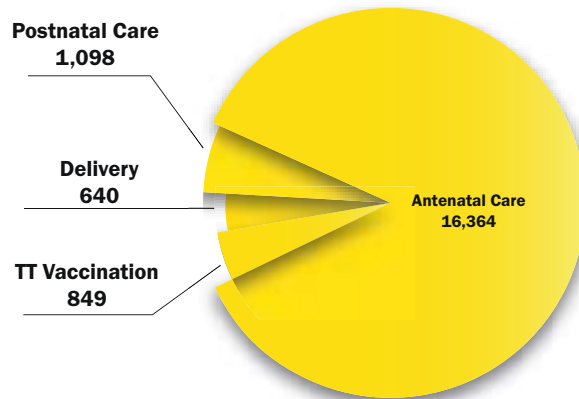
## Family Planning Services



### Safe Motherhood Services

Ensuring the safety and health of mothers during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postnatal period remains a top priority for RHSTEP. In the reporting year, the organization provided safe motherhood services to 18,951 women. These services encompassed antenatal care, TT, delivery assistance, and postnatal care, all of which are critical for reducing maternal mortality and morbidity. By offering these services, RHSTEP not only supports individual women but also contributes to broader public health goals, including the reduction of maternal and neonatal deaths.

**Distribution of Safe Motherhood Services (18,951)**



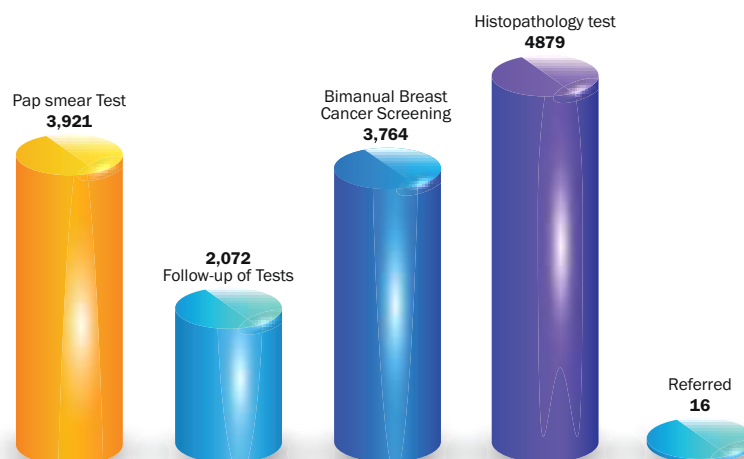
### RTI/STI and Obstetric/Gynecological Services

RHSTEP identified the high prevalence of reproductive tract infections (RTIs) and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the community, often exacerbated by poor hygiene practices, a lack of awareness, and societal stigma. In response, the organization prioritized the detection and treatment of these conditions, managing a total of 8,850 cases during the reporting period. Alongside RTI/STI services, RHSTEP also addressed a range of obstetric and gynecological (OB/GYN) issues with the highest level of care and dedication, ensuring that women receive comprehensive reproductive health services.

### Diagnostic support for (reproductive organ) Breast and Cervical Cancer

The burden of reproductive organ cancers, particularly in low-income countries, has been rising, largely due to a lack of awareness and poor socio-economic conditions. RHSTEP has responded to this growing challenge by promoting reproductive organ cancer screening through extensive counseling and diagnostic services. Over the past year, the organization provided 14,652 reproductive organ cancer-related services, which included 3,921 Pap smear, 2,072 follow-up tests, 3,764 bimanual breast cancer screening tests and a

**Reproductive Organ Cancer Screening (14,652)**



total of 4,879 Histopathology test. A total of 16 women detected with breast cancer were referred to tertiary level hospital for treatment. These efforts are crucial for the early detection and treatment of cervical and breast cancers, which can significantly improve outcomes for women.

### **Limited Curative Care (LCC) and Pathology Services**

In recognition of the ongoing need for curative care, RHSTEP also delivered a wide range of limited curative care (LCC) and pathology services. A total of 497,737 LCC, pathology, and diagnostic services were provided throughout the reporting period. In addition to clinic-based services, RHSTEP extended its reach by offering 2,347 services in schools, communities, and garment factories, thereby making healthcare more accessible to underserved populations.

### **Male Involvement in SRHR Services**

Recognizing the critical role that men play in decision-making within families and communities, RHSTEP actively involved men in its sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) initiatives. Through sensitization sessions and the use of Behavior Change Communication (BCC) materials, RHSTEP promoted awareness and engagement among men. During the reporting period, 1,294 men received services related to contraception and RTI/STI management, either as attendants of clients or as individual clients. This male involvement is essential for fostering supportive environments for women's health and for encouraging shared responsibility in reproductive health matters.

Through these extensive services, RHSTEP has made substantial strides in improving reproductive health outcomes for women, men, and communities at large. The organization's ongoing efforts reflect its commitment to providing accessible, high-quality healthcare to those most in need.



## Demand Creation

RHSTEP prioritized demand creation with a strong emphasis on behavioral change within the community. The organization implemented awareness sessions designed to provide the target audience with essential information, thereby fostering improved health-seeking behaviors and encouraging informed decision-making. To achieve this, RHSTEP's consortium developed an action plan focusing on three key areas: schools, communities, and garment factories.

During the reporting period, RHSTEP successfully organized awareness sessions, primarily within schools, as well as in community settings and garment factories. A total of 20,187 individuals were sensitized on various Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) issues through 79 visits and 293 sessions across the catchment areas. These efforts contributed significantly to raising awareness and promoting SRHR knowledge among diverse groups, including women, men, and adolescents.

### Alordhara Pathshala

Alordhara Pathshala, RHSTEP's youth hub, played a pivotal role in engaging local youth and adolescents during the project period. RHSTEP operated four Alordhara Pathshala centers across different regions, focusing on mobilizing young people through various initiatives that promoted SRHR knowledge and encouraged book reading.

The youth and adolescents, often facing psychological challenges due to limited communication with parents and guardians, benefited from the supportive environment provided by Alordhara Pathshala. The centers offered a safe space for youth to engage in educational and recreational activities, access books, and participate in fun events aimed at enhancing their well-being.

Throughout the reporting period, Alordhara Pathshala reached a total of 10,799 youth and adolescents through a variety of activities. These included awareness sessions aimed at reducing early marriage, door-to-door visits, national and international day observances, knowledge games, debates on SRHR issues, and SRHR sessions connected to gender-transformative approaches. The centers also held meetings with gatekeepers and teachers and organized an adolescent fair that awarded participants for their book-reading efforts.

**RHSTEP's demand creation efforts empowered 20,187 individuals with essential SRHR knowledge through targeted awareness sessions in schools, communities, and garment factories.**

**Alordhara Pathshala is dedicated to empowering youth and adolescents by providing safe spaces for learning, engaging activities, community involvement and fostering SRHR knowledge.**

### Pathshala Activities Overview

Activity Description	Number of Events	Number of Participants
Total number of visits	79	-
Total number of sessions	66	10,799
Awareness sessions to reduce early marriage in schools	24	720
Door-to-door visits	79	298
Observation of national/international days (e.g., World Population Day)	1	15
National/International Youth Day	2	185
Knowledge game practice	4	95
Debating on SRHR issues among young people	3	102
SRHR sessions for young people and adolescents	4	120
Meetings with gatekeepers, teachers, etc.	4	125
Adolescent fair and book reading awards	1	193

Participant Engagement	Number of Participants
Registered Participants	221
Book Reading Participants	8,201

### Monitoring, Research, Evaluation, and Documentation

To ensure the timely and effective implementation of project activities, RHSTEP conducted regular monitoring and supervision visits, programmatic and financial audits, and other oversight measures. The organization also conducted exit interviews at six-month intervals with clients and service providers to assess the quality of services. RHSTEP adapted to the changing environment by continuing these activities on both virtual and physical platforms as necessary.

During the reporting period, RHSTEP undertook 442 monitoring visits, organizational and partner meetings, and research activities. This included conducting 79 monitoring visits, 333 staff meetings, 7 policy meetings, 1 financial audit, 1 quality audit, and 2 research activities. These efforts were crucial for ensuring the continuous improvement and effectiveness of RHSTEP's programs.

Through these targeted initiatives, RHSTEP has effectively engaged its target populations, ensuring that vital SRHR information reaches those who need it most while maintaining a high standard of service delivery through rigorous monitoring and evaluation processes.

## Research Activities

In our ongoing commitment to improving service quality, RHSTEP regularly conducts exit interviews with clients to assess satisfaction and identify opportunities for enhancement. During the reporting period, exit interviews were carried out in July 2023 and November 2023. Below is a summary of the combined findings from these interviews.

**RHSTEP values regional partnership and collaboration for strengthening its capacity and expertise**

Background: Client satisfaction is crucial for maintaining and enhancing the quality of RHSTEP's services. Understanding client experiences through exit interviews helps us refine our offerings and align them with client needs and expectations.

### Objectives

- To evaluate the quality of services provided by RHSTEP.
- To identify potential areas for improvement.
- To analyze client satisfaction and experiences, and assess expectations for future services.

Methodology: The exit interviews were conducted as cross-sectional studies. In July 2023, 120 clients from 12 RHSTEP clinics participated, while in November 2023, 132 clients from 13 RHSTEP clinics under the Safe MR Project Phase-II were interviewed. Data was collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed with SPSS (version 25) software.

### Results

- **Demographics:** The majority of respondents were women, with ages ranging from 15-34 years being the most represented group. In July 2023, 37.5% of respondents were aged 15-29 years, and in November 2023, 34.1% were aged 15-34 years. Most respondents were married (95.8% in July and 97% in November).
- **Education and Occupation:** A significant portion of clients had at least primary education (80% in July and 86.4% in November). The majority were housewives (90.8% in July and 88% in November). The average monthly family income was BDT 17,733 in July with a standard deviation of BDT 7,382, and BDT 18,863.63 in November with a standard deviation of BDT 13,074.15.
- **Service Choice and Utilization:** A notable percentage of clients chose RHSTEP for its low-cost treatment (over 64% in July and more than 50% in November). Services received included family planning, diagnostics, and medical termination of pregnancy, cancer screening, antenatal care, and post-abortion care. In July, services utilized were: family planning (60%), diagnostics (44.2%), and medical termination of pregnancy (35.8%), cancer screening (10.8%), antenatal care (10.8%), and post-abortion care (10.8%). In November, services included: family planning (50%), diagnostics (46.2%), medical termination of pregnancy (37.9%), reproductive organ cancer screening (15.2%), and post-abortion care (7.6%).
- **Client Satisfaction:** Contraceptive acceptance rates were high, with 90% among post-MR clients and 100% among PAC clients in July, and 63% among post-MR clients and 100% among PAC clients in November. Most clients were satisfied with the behavior of service providers. In July, 90% of clients paid for services, with 98% finding the cost justified, while in November, 91% paid for services, with the majority finding the cost reasonable. In July, approximately 63% rated their service experience as excellent, with others rating it as good or satisfactory. In November, feedback included recommendations to increase the number of service providers, reduce service costs, and decrease waiting times.



## Advocacy

### Advocacy and Social Networking Initiatives

In 2023, RHSTEP reaffirmed its commitment to advancing reproductive health and rights through robust advocacy and social networking efforts. These initiatives are crucial in complementing RHSTEP's core service delivery and training programs, aiming to create an environment where individuals are well-informed about their reproductive rights and empowered to make educated decisions regarding their health.

### Advocacy Activities

During the reporting period, RHSTEP successfully organized 585 advocacy events across various platforms. These events were meticulously planned to engage diverse audiences and address a wide range of reproductive health and rights issues. The key elements of RHSTEP's advocacy activities included:

1. **Community Engagement:** RHSTEP conducted a series of workshops, seminars, and community meetings designed to engage directly with individuals and groups. These interactions focused on raising awareness about reproductive health services, rights, and available support systems. By collaborating with community leaders, local influencers, and stakeholders, RHSTEP effectively disseminated information and reached underserved populations.
2. **Educational Campaigns:** To broaden its impact, RHSTEP launched extensive educational campaigns utilizing multiple media channels, including social media platforms, radio broadcasts, and local newspapers. These campaigns addressed critical topics such as family planning, sexual health, and gender equality. By leveraging diverse communication mediums, RHSTEP aimed to enhance public understanding and promote proactive health behaviors.

**RHSTEP's advocacy and social networking efforts in 2023 were pivotal in empowering communities, influencing policies, and raising awareness to advance reproductive health and rights.**



3. **Policy Advocacy:** RHSTEP played an active role in shaping reproductive health policies by participating in policy dialogues and advocacy campaigns at local, regional, and national levels. Efforts included advocating for improved access to reproductive health services, stronger legal protections for women and adolescents, and increased investment in reproductive health programs. Through strategic lobbying and policy engagement, RHSTEP sought to influence legislative and regulatory frameworks to better support reproductive health.

4. **Capacity Building:** Recognizing the importance of local advocacy, RHSTEP invested in building the capacity of community-based organizations, local leaders, and health workers. Training sessions were conducted to enhance participants' skills in advocacy, increase their understanding of reproductive rights, and develop effective communication strategies. This approach aimed to empower local actors to advocate for reproductive health issues and drive positive change within their communities.

5. **Support Networks:** RHSTEP established and nurtured social networks to facilitate information sharing and support among individuals and organizations involved in reproductive health. These networks provided a collaborative platform for discussing best practices, addressing challenges, and coordinating joint efforts to improve reproductive health outcomes. By fostering these connections, RHSTEP aimed to strengthen collective efforts and amplify its impact. In 2-23, RHSTEP actively participated in national forum like SRH Consortium, MR and MRM Alliance, NEARS (Network for Ensuring Adolescents Reproductive Health, Rights and Services), CSO forum for Strengthening Sustainable SRHR Ecosystem in Bangladesh, Share-Net Bangladesh, MHM Platform, SRH Forum for RMGs, Policy meeting on inclusion of HRBA in FP Services under HNPSP -5 by DGFP and Pathfinder and other meetings.

## Outcomes

The advocacy and social networking initiatives of RHSTEP led to significant positive outcomes during 2023:

- **Increased Awareness:** The advocacy events and educational campaigns effectively heightened awareness about reproductive health rights and services among various populations. This enhanced understanding empowers individuals to make informed decisions regarding their reproductive health and seek appropriate services.
- **Enhanced Community Support:** Engaging with communities and local leaders fostered a supportive environment for addressing reproductive health issues. Increased community support is vital for overcoming cultural and social barriers, ensuring greater access to and acceptance of reproductive health services.
- **Policy Influence:** RHSTEP's active participation in policy advocacy contributed to the development and implementation of supportive reproductive health policies. By influencing policy changes, RHSTEP worked towards creating a more favorable environment for the delivery of reproductive health services and the protection of reproductive rights.

In summary, RHSTEP's advocacy and social networking initiatives in 2023 were instrumental in advancing reproductive health and rights. Through targeted advocacy activities, educational campaigns, capacity building, and support networks, RHSTEP strived to empower individuals, enhance community support, and influence policies to improve reproductive health outcomes. These efforts underscore RHSTEP's dedication to creating a well-informed, supportive environment for reproductive health.

## IEC/BCC Materials

In 2023, RHSTEP continued to advance its commitment to sexual and reproductive health through innovative approaches in Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) and Behavior Change Communication (BCC) materials. Recognizing the evolving needs of communities and the importance of effective communication in promoting health, RHSTEP introduced several new and enhanced materials throughout the year.

**In 2023, RHSTEP advanced sexual and reproductive health education by leveraging innovative digital tools, engaging print materials, and tailored campaigns to effectively reach and educate diverse communities.**

## Innovative Materials and Approaches

RHSTEP has always prioritized the creation of engaging and informative IEC/BCC materials to effectively convey crucial information about sexual and reproductive health. This year was no exception, as RHSTEP embraced new technologies and creative strategies to address emerging health challenges and reach a wider audience.

- 1. Digital and Multimedia Campaigns:** Building on the success of previous years, RHSTEP expanded its use of digital platforms like to create multimedia content that resonates with diverse audiences. This included interactive info graphics, educational videos, and animated graphics that were shared across social media platforms, YouTube, and facebook. These digital materials were designed to be visually appealing and easily accessible, catering to the preferences of younger audiences and tech-savvy individuals.
- 2. Community-Focused Print Materials:** Understanding that not all communities have equal access to digital resources, RHSTEP developed a range of print materials tailored to local contexts. This included colorful pamphlets, informative brochures, and posters featuring culturally relevant illustrations and messages. These materials were distributed in community centers, clinics, schools, and other public spaces to ensure widespread reach and accessibility.
- 3. Interactive Educational Tools:** To enhance engagement and understanding, RHSTEP introduced interactive educational tools such as flip charts and educational games. These tools were designed to facilitate group discussions and interactive learning sessions in communities, schools, and health facilities. By making learning about sexual and reproductive health engaging and participatory, RHSTEP aimed to foster better retention of information and encourage proactive health behaviors.
- 4. Customized Campaigns for Special Groups:** Recognizing the unique needs of different demographic groups, RHSTEP created targeted IEC/BCC materials for adolescents, women, men, and marginalized communities. These materials addressed specific issues relevant to each group, such as adolescent sexual health, family planning, gender-based violence, and reproductive rights. By tailoring the content to address the specific concerns and barriers faced by each group, RHSTEP ensured that the messages were both relevant and impactful.
- 5. Partnership and Collaboration:** RHSTEP also collaborated with other organizations and stakeholders through collaborated project like RHRN 2 to co-create and disseminate IEC/BCC materials. These partnerships allowed for the sharing of resources, expertise, and networks, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the communication efforts. Joint campaigns and shared resources helped amplify the reach and impact of the materials, ensuring a broader audience engagement.



## Project Planning Meeting

A project planning meeting was held at Dream Square Resort, Mawna, Gazipur, from October 28-29, 2023, to plan for the upcoming years 2024-2025. Eleven staff members from RHSTEP's central office participated in the meeting. The project plan was developed based on program needs and incorporated recommendations from the last evaluation.



**Right Here**  
**Right Now 2**  
**(RHRN2)**

The Right Here Right Now (RHRN) initiative is a multi-country coalition project, active in 10 countries including Bangladesh, aimed at ensuring that young people in all their diversity enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in gender-just societies. The project is funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and executed by Rutgers, with BRAC leading the Bangladesh coalition. RHSTEP is a key partner, contributing to the project since March 2023.

## RHRN2 Overview

RHRN2, which started in Bangladesh in 2021 and runs until 2025, aims to create a conducive policy environment for SRHR by advocating for improved access to youth-friendly services in public health facilities. The project also emphasizes meaningful youth participation in SRHR interventions, addressing knowledge gaps through various initiatives. The core values of RHRN2 include inclusivity, gender transformative approaches, human rights-based approaches, and ensuring safety and security for all.

## Strategic Objectives

The strategic objective of RHRN2 is to ensure that young people in all their diversity can enjoy their sexual and reproductive health and rights in gender-just societies. This objective is pursued through four long-term outcomes (LTOs):

1. Empowered youth who can make decisions about their sexuality, voice their needs, and claim their rights.
2. A critical mass of individuals and organizations reinforcing positive norms around SRHR and gender justice.
3. Government adoption and implementation of human rights-based policies supporting SRHR and gender justice.
4. Strengthened civil society advocacy for SRHR and gender justice.

## Key Activities in 2023

### Study Circles

RHSTEP organized Study Circles in four districts (Savar, Narail, Sylhet, Gaibandha Sadar) to educate 300 adolescents and youth (aged 10-30) on SRHR and Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE). These daylong sessions were led by youth officers and supported by master trainers, engaging marginalized groups and people with disabilities. The sessions empowered participants to make informed decisions and advocate for their rights.

### School and Community Sessions

In 2023, RHSTEP facilitated SRHR and CSE sessions in schools and communities across four districts, reaching 1,800 participants. These sessions, led by Youth Advocates, provided clear information on adolescent-friendly health services and empowered youth to advocate for their rights. This effort aimed to ensure better access to SRHR information and services for both in-school and out-of-school adolescents.

### Capacity Development for Youth Advocates

A two-day advocacy training was conducted at the central level for youth advocates from four districts. The training focused on building knowledge

**The RHRN Phase 2 project in Bangladesh has enhanced youth access to Sexual and Reproductive Health services through advocacy, youth empowerment, and improved adolescent-friendly facilities.**

and skills around SRHR advocacy and leadership. Participants learned to plan and implement advocacy efforts effectively, equipping them to drive change in their communities.

### Review and Development of CSE Modules

RHSTEP reviewed existing CSE modules and developed a standard module for out-of-school youth. Consultants reviewed both RHSTEP and government modules, incorporating expert feedback. The finalized module will be used in future school and community sessions, ensuring a consistent approach to CSE education.

### National-Level Meetings and Dialogues

Throughout the year, RHSTEP hosted multiple national-level meetings, including a session at Golden Tulip Hotel to share CSE module findings and a roundtable consultation at Prothom Alo on the National Adolescent Health Strategy (2017-2030). These events fostered collaboration between NGOs, government stakeholders, and other key partners, helping to address gaps in SRHR strategies and ensure better support for adolescent health services.



### Joint Events and National Campaigns

RHSTEP organized joint events with youth-led organizations and national partners on significant dates such as International Youth Day and the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (GBV). These events engaged over 1,800 participants across four districts, promoting SRHR and addressing GBV through rallies, debates, and cultural programs. IEC/BCC materials were distributed, enhancing community awareness on SRHR and GBV issues.

### Capacity Building of Healthcare Providers

To improve the quality of adolescent-friendly health services, RHSTEP conducted training for 80 government healthcare providers in four districts. The training focused on SRHR and adolescent-friendly service delivery, equipping providers with the necessary skills to offer better care to young people.

### Engagement with Media and Journalists

RHSTEP held a one-day orientation session for journalists to enhance media coverage of SRHR and CSE issues. Following the event, 9 reports on young people's SRHR were published by 7 different media outlets. The orientation helped build a stronger media focus on SRHR, contributing to greater public awareness.



### Networking and Collaboration

RHSTEP organized network meetings with like-minded organizations and youth-focused groups, fostering collaboration for sustainable CSE implementation. These meetings provided opportunities for experience-sharing and relationship-building, helping to advance SRHR initiatives locally and nationally.

### Success Story: Youth Advocacy for AFHC in Savar

One of the standout achievements of the year was the successful advocacy led by RHSTEP youth advocates in Savar. They advocated for improvements to the Adolescent Friendly Health Corner (AFHC) at the Upazila Health Complex, resulting in the allocation of a new, separate room for adolescent-friendly services. Two Senior Staff Nurses cum Counselors were appointed, and the facility is being organized and decorated by the RHSTEP team. This successful effort has empowered the youth advocates and demonstrated the impact of youth-led advocacy.

### Conclusion

In 2023, RHSTEP made significant strides in advancing SRHR education, advocacy, and service delivery through its work on the RHRN2 project. The year’s activities empowered youth to advocate for their rights, improved healthcare provider capacity, and strengthened collaboration with government entities and civil society. RHSTEP’s efforts have contributed to creating a more conducive environment for young people to enjoy their sexual and reproductive health rights, laying the foundation for continued progress in the coming years.

### IEC/BCC Materials



# **Improving SRHR in Dhaka**

## Project Overview

### Goal

To improved sexual and reproductive health and rights of underserved and vulnerable women and adolescents in Dhaka.

### Outcomes:

1. Improved Access to Quality SRH Services
2. Improved availability and accessibility to quality SRH services for poor and ultra-poor women and adolescents living in urban areas
3. Increased Social Support and SRHR Knowledge
4. Increased social support, knowledge, self-efficacy related to SRHR, including SGBV resources for women and adolescents of low socio-economic groups in urban areas.
5. Enhanced Public Health Emergency Preparedness
6. Improved public health emergency preparedness and response to ensure access to and uninterrupted delivery of essential SRH services & supplies during PH emergencies.

## RHSTEP puts its efforts to achieve outcome 1 of ‘Improving SRHR in Dhaka’ project.

### Project Areas

- Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC)
- Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC)
- Urban areas of Gazipur and Narayanganj specifically the Garments areas.

### Target population

- Urban underserved populations
- Individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds
- Women, particularly adolescents and youth
- Female garment factory workers

**Funded by: Global affairs Canada through HealthBridge Foundation of Canada**

### Project Partners

- Technical partner: Ipas Bangladesh
- Implementation Partners:
  1. RHSTEP
  2. BAPSA
  3. OGSB
  4. Serac Bangladesh

**The ‘Improving SRHR in Dhaka’ project significantly enhanced access to quality sexual and reproductive health services and strengthened public health emergency preparedness for underserved women and adolescents in urban areas.**

## Project Accomplishment (2023)

Training Information from January 2023 to December 2023

Name of Activity	Target	Achievement
1. Clinical training on comprehensive MR, PAC & FP for Doctors of selected UPHCSDP clinics	32 in 4 batches	32
2. Clinical training on comprehensive MR, PAC & FP for MLPs (Mid-Level Providers- Nurses, paramedics, midwives) of selected UPHCSDP clinics (14 days)	48 MLPs in 6 batches	48
3. Clinical training on comprehensive MR, PAC & FP for Doctors of selected Referral facilities (6 days)	32 in 4 batches	32
4. Clinical training on comprehensive MR, PAC & FP for Doctors of selected Referral facilities (tertiary facilities - govt. hospitals) (14 days)	24 in 3 batches	24
5. Training of doctors from referral facilities on Short and long acting and LARC methods (4 Days)	24 in 3 batches	23

### Other Achievements

- Skill update on FP and MR for doctors (UPHCSDP): 28 participants
- Workshop on Quality of Care with DPD, AHO, CHO, and PMs of UPHCSDP-II centers: 32 participants
- Orientation on Quality of Care and Infection Prevention for UPHCSDP-II service providers: 58 participants
- Joint Monitoring Visits (UPHCSDP-II): 96 visits
- Joint Monitoring Visits of referral centers: 28 visits

### Challenges Faced

- Traditional Practices: Some facilities continue to use outdated D&C procedures.
- Infection Prevention: Inadequate adherence to WHO-recommended infection prevention protocols in some centers.
- Staff Turnover: High turnover rates among staff at both referral and UPHCSDP-II facilities.
- Myths and Misconceptions: Persistent myths and misconceptions surrounding family planning (FP) and menstrual regulation (MR) services.
- Accountability Issues: Gaps in reporting and documentation by UPHCSDP-II staff.

### Way Forward

- Workshops and Orientations: Conduct regular workshops and orientations on quality of care and infection prevention.
- Record Keeping and Documentation: Implement orientation sessions focused on accurate record-keeping and documentation.

- Skill Update Sessions: Facilitate in-facility skill update sessions for doctors and MLPs.
- Monitoring and On-the-Job Training: Increase the frequency of monitoring visits and provide on-the-job orientation.
- Advocacy and Coordination: Strengthen advocacy efforts and coordination among partners.
- Focus on Quality of Care: Place greater emphasis on improving quality of care and infection prevention across all facilities.

## Conclusion

The 'Improving SRHR in Dhaka' project has significantly enhanced sexual and reproductive health services for underserved women and adolescents in Dhaka, Gazipur, and Narayanganj. Through comprehensive clinical training on MR, MRM, PAC, and other SRHR services, the project improved the skills of doctors and mid-level providers in UPHCSDP and private clinics. Despite challenges like outdated practices and staff turnover, the project achieved notable outcomes, including increased access to quality SRH services, strengthened public health emergency preparedness, and enhanced social support. Moving forward, the focus will be on continuous skill development, quality of care, and advocacy to sustain these gains.



**Strategic Investment for  
Sustainable Abortion  
Ecosystem in Bangladesh  
(RHSTEP-Ipas Partnership  
Project)**

## Project Period

01 August 2021 – 30 June 2023

## Reporting Period

January – June 2023

## Funded by

Ipas North Carolina

**The Strategic Investment for Sustainable Abortion Ecosystem in Bangladesh project commenced in August 2021 and concluded in June 2023.**

## Goal of this project

To support to mitigate the gap in the abortion ecosystem by:

- Enhancing access to and availability of Comprehensive Abortion Care (CAC), including Menstrual Regulation (MR) and Post-Abortion Care (PAC), starting from doorstep health facilities by piloting a model to strengthen health systems for abortion care services.
- Creating a platform for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to engage in collective and informed advocacy for a sustainable abortion ecosystem.
- Sustaining telemedicine services for MR, PAC, and Family Planning (FP) through the “Sastha Batayan” initiative.

## Main Activities

Throughout the project, several key activities were undertaken to build the capacity of healthcare providers and strengthen facility readiness:

- **Comprehensive Training:** Provided on MR, PAC, and FP for Doctors (Medical Officers) and Nurses/Midwives across selected Government Health and FP facilities at the union, upazila, and district levels in the Barishal and Khulna divisions.
- **On-site Orientation:** Conducted on MR, PAC & FP Counselling, and Infection Prevention to ensure that service providers are equipped with the necessary skills to offer quality care.
- **Capacity Building for CHCPs:** Focused on Values Clarification and Attitude Transformation (VCAT) and the referral process for MR services.
- **Comprehensive Training for FWVs:** Included MR (with Menstrual Regulation with Medication), PAC, and FP, ensuring frontline workers are well-prepared to deliver these essential services.

By the time the reporting period (January-June 2023) arrived, these

**The Strategic Investment for Sustainable Abortion Ecosystem in Bangladesh significantly enhanced healthcare provider capacity and strengthened health systems to improve access to Comprehensive Abortion Care and reproductive health services in Barishal and Khulna divisions.**

major activities had already been successfully accomplished in previous years. The final six months focused on consolidating the project's achievements and ensuring the sustainability of the outcomes.

## Key Achievements (January-June 2023)

In the final phase, RHSTEP concentrated on strengthening facility readiness and ensuring the quality of SRH services. Key achievements include:

**Whole Site Orientations (WSOs):** Conducted across UHC-FP units and UFPO offices in Barishal and Khulna divisions, targeting service providers including facility managers, ward boys, storekeepers, and statisticians. These orientations were crucial in identifying eligible providers and fostering a supportive environment for SRH services.

**Management Meetings:** Held at District Hospitals (DH), Upazila Health Complexes (UHC), and Maternal and Child Welfare Centers (MCWC). These meetings introduced the project and helped in identifying providers for MR and PAC services, further strengthening facility capacities.

**Monthly Support Visits:** Carried out by RHSTEP's Project Facilitators (PFs) and Clinical Trainers to DHs, MCWCs, UHCs, and Union Health & Family Welfare Centers (UH&FWCs). The visits focused on monitoring, supervision, logistics support, and ensuring high standards of care. Coordination extended to UFPO, Civil Surgeon, and UNO offices for data collection, facility monitoring, and program coordination.

### Achievements by Targeted Activities

- Meetings with CHCPs at the Upazila level to strengthen the referral mechanism: Target of 8 meetings; achieved 15.
- Meetings with FWAs to strengthen the referral mechanism: Target of 8 meetings; achieved 18.
- Meetings with FWC management committees for local resource mobilization: Target of 22 meetings; achieved 26.
- Meetings with FWVs for clinical updates: Target of 2 meetings; achieved 4.
- Meetings with HAs at the Upazila level to strengthen the referral mechanism: Target of 8 meetings; achieved 12.
- Local Level Coordination meetings with the DC and UNO: Target of 9 meetings; achieved 26.
- Supervision and Monitoring Visits by Clinical Trainers: Target of 24 visits; achieved 17.
- Unplanned achievements: 3 joint monitoring visits and 3 divisional-level staff coordination meetings, exceeding the initial target.

These activities and achievements reflect RHSTEP's commitment to enhancing SRH service delivery and ensuring facilities are equipped to meet community needs. The proactive engagement and surpassing of targets underscore the project's effectiveness and impact.

### Key Challenges

**Limited Awareness of LAPM:** A significant lack of knowledge about Long-Acting and Permanent Methods (LAPM) of family planning among women, which poses a challenge in delivering comprehensive FP services.

**Need for Community Outreach:** The absence of robust community outreach for MR and PAC services,

emphasizing the need for greater awareness and access to safe abortion services.

**Time-Consuming Stakeholder Communication:** Engaging with key stakeholders, particularly government officials, often requires more time than anticipated due to their busy schedules.

**Inconsistent Service Quality:** Variability in SRH service quality across different facilities, due to training and resource gaps.

**Logistical Challenges:** Ensuring timely availability and distribution of necessary supplies and equipment, especially in remote areas.

## **Learning**

**Effective Coordination is Essential:** Coordinating effectively with DGHS, DGFP, and partner organizations at national and local levels is crucial for successful field-level implementation.

**Continuous Training:** Ongoing training and capacity building for healthcare providers are vital to maintaining quality SRH, MR, and PAC services.

**Adaptability in Stakeholder Engagement:** Flexibility in managing time and expectations with stakeholders is key to overcoming communication delays.

**Community Involvement Enhances Impact:** Engaging community members and local leaders in outreach initiatives significantly boosts the uptake and effectiveness of SRH and FP services.

## **Conclusion**

The Strategic Investment for Sustainable Abortion Ecosystem in Bangladesh (RHSTEP-IPAS Partnership Project) has made significant strides in addressing the gaps within the abortion care ecosystem across Barishal and Khulna divisions. Over the course of its implementation from August 2021 to June 2023, the project has successfully enhanced the capacity of healthcare providers, strengthened health systems, and created a more supportive environment for delivering Comprehensive Abortion Care (CAC), including Menstrual Regulation (MR) and Post-Abortion Care (PAC), along with Family Planning (FP) services.

Key achievements during the final reporting period reflect the project's commitment to facility readiness and service quality, with numerous training sessions, orientations, and strategic meetings surpassing set targets. These efforts have laid a strong foundation for sustaining safe abortion services and advocating for a more robust and supportive abortion ecosystem.

Despite facing challenges such as limited awareness of family planning methods, the need for community outreach, and logistical hurdles, the project has demonstrated that with effective coordination, continuous training, and adaptability, significant progress can be made. The learnings derived from this project underscore the importance of community involvement and strategic partnerships at all levels.

As the project concludes, its impact on improving access to and the quality of SRH services in the target areas is evident. The efforts and outcomes of this project will continue to inform and inspire future initiatives aimed at creating a sustainable and supportive environment for safe abortion and reproductive health care in Bangladesh.

**Sexual and  
Reproductive  
Health Program for  
Rohingya Refugees in  
Bangladesh**

## Project Goal

The primary goal of this project was to enhance and ensure the delivery of high-quality sexual and reproductive health services at intervention sites, with a focus on the following objectives:

- Ensuring quality service delivery across intervention sites.
- Building capacity through structured training initiatives in line with Ipas protocols.
- Addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) by providing orientation for service providers, documenting cases, and offering comprehensive services.
- Facilitating value clarification and attitude transformation among service providers.

## Main Activities/Objectives of the Grant

The grant was utilized to achieve the following key activities:

- Ensure consistent service provision across 8 intervention sites.
- Conduct onsite orientations focused on Quality Assurance (QA), including Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) at the facility level.
- Facilitate refresher training for 8 project providers on Intrauterine Device (IUD) services.
- Build the capacity of 9 doctors to provide Implant services.
- Provide refresher training for 8 project providers on Menstrual Regulation (MR), Post-Abortion Care (PAC), and Family Planning (FP) services.
- Offer need-based follow-up and site support for service providers.
- Ensure that the 8 facilities were equipped with the necessary tools, supplies, and staff support to offer FP, MR, and PAC services.

## Achievements during the Reporting Period

By January 2023, the project had already achieved its primary objectives, with all major activities successfully completed in previous years. The focus during the final reporting period was on consolidating these achievements and ensuring the sustainability of the outcomes.

During this period, RHSTEP conducted refresher training on MR, PAC, and FP services for 6 paramedics, ensuring the continued provision of high-quality services at the intervention sites.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

### Challenges

#### 1. Resource Constraints in a Refugee Context

- Limited resources, both financial and material, posed significant challenges in maintaining consistent service quality across all intervention sites. The high demand for services often outpaced the available resources, leading to potential service gaps.

**The Sexual and Reproductive Health Program for Rohingya Refugees successfully enhanced service delivery and capacity building across eight intervention sites from April 2020 to June 2023, despite facing significant challenges in a refugee context.**

## 2. Cultural and Social Barriers

- Cultural sensitivities and social norms within the Rohingya community often hindered the acceptance and utilization of sexual and reproductive health services. This required continuous community engagement and culturally sensitive approaches to service delivery.

## 3. Staff Turnover and Capacity Retention:

- High turnover rates among healthcare providers, including paramedics and doctors, resulted in a continuous need for training and capacity-building efforts. Maintaining a skilled and motivated workforce in a challenging environment was a persistent issue.

## 4. Logistical and Operational Challenges:

- The remote and often inaccessible locations of the intervention sites made it difficult to deliver supplies, conduct onsite training, and provide timely follow-up support. These logistical hurdles sometimes delayed the implementation of planned activities.

## 5. Addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV):

- Despite efforts to address GBV through provider orientation and service provision, the stigma associated with reporting and seeking help for GBV remained a significant challenge. This limited the project's ability to fully meet the needs of survivors.

## Lessons Learned

### 1. Importance of Tailored Training Programs:

- Customized training programs that consider the unique needs and challenges of the refugee context were crucial in building the capacity of healthcare providers. Tailoring training to address specific gaps and cultural sensitivities enhanced service delivery effectiveness.

### 2. Community Engagement is Key:

- Engaging with the community, particularly through culturally sensitive outreach and education initiatives, proved essential in overcoming resistance and increasing the acceptance of sexual and reproductive health services. Building trust within the community is critical for the success of such interventions.

### 3. Sustainability Requires Continuous Support:

- The sustainability of project outcomes depends on continuous support, including follow-up training, provision of necessary supplies, and maintaining robust support systems for healthcare providers. Ongoing investment in these areas is necessary to ensure long-term impact.

### 4. Adaptability in Service Provision:

- Flexibility in service delivery, including the ability to adapt to changing circumstances and unexpected challenges, was vital. The project benefited from adopting a responsive approach that allowed for quick adjustments to meet emerging needs.

**RHSTEP  
also responds  
to humanitarian  
crises**

#### 5. Strengthening Partnerships:

- Strong partnerships with local organizations, government bodies, and international donors were instrumental in overcoming resource constraints and operational challenges. Collaborative efforts enabled the project to leverage additional resources and expertise, enhancing its overall effectiveness.

These challenges and lessons learned highlight the complexities of delivering sexual and reproductive health services in a refugee setting and underscore the importance of adaptability, community engagement, and sustained support for achieving lasting impact.

#### **Conclusion**

The 'Sexual and Reproductive Health Program for Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh' successfully enhanced service delivery across eight intervention sites from April 2020 to June 2023. The project achieved its primary goals, including consistent service provision, capacity building, and addressing gender-based violence (GBV), despite operating in a challenging refugee context.

During the final reporting period, efforts focused on sustaining these achievements, with refresher training provided to paramedics on Menstrual Regulation (MR), Post-Abortion Care (PAC), and Family Planning (FP) services.

Key challenges included resource constraints, cultural barriers, staff turnover, and logistical difficulties. Lessons learned highlighted the importance of tailored training, community engagement, adaptability, and strong partnerships. As the project concludes, ongoing support will be crucial to maintaining the progress made.

**Community  
Engagement  
is Key to the  
success of  
SRHR needs  
and concerns of  
FDMN**

**Researching Youth  
Leadership towards  
Gender Justice in  
Bangladesh: Building a  
Learning Agenda**

ARROW (Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women) and RHSTEP, with support from the Packard Foundation, conducted research titled Researching Youth Leadership towards Gender Justice in Bangladesh: Building a Learning Agenda. This tri-country research, covering Bangladesh, Nepal, and India, explores youth leadership in gender justice and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR).

Introduction Bangladesh has a significant youth population, comprising one-third of its total population (National Youth Policy 2017). This demographic presents an opportunity for youth participation in decision-making, vital for attaining gender equality. Despite ranking 71st out of 146 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index 2022, Bangladesh faces persistent gender inequality. Women and people with intersectional identities face discrimination, such as child marriage and high adolescent fertility rates. Empowering youth with opportunities can drive change towards gender justice. The study aims to understand the dynamics of youth leadership and their role in advancing gender justice in SRHR.

### **Research Questions The research focuses on the following key questions**

1. What is needed to create an enabling environment for youth leaders in SRHR advocacy?
2. What support and resources do young people in Bangladesh need to fully engage in SRHR justice advocacy?
3. What are the current leadership opportunities, and how do successful programs engage disadvantaged youth?
4. Where are the gaps, and how can funders address them?

**Objective** The objective is to understand the evolving landscape of youth leadership towards gender justice in Bangladesh.

**Methodology** The study uses qualitative methods, including desk reviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs) with policymakers, and in-depth interviews (IDIs) with youth leaders. The study targets youth aged 18-35.

**Findings** Youth defined leadership as the ability to organize groups, unify diverse opinions, lead based on experience, and empower others for social good. Entry points into leadership stemmed from personal experiences of injustice, motivation from ongoing initiatives, and the desire for self-development.

**Role of Youth in SRHRJ** Youth leaders play critical roles in preventing early marriage, managing menstrual hygiene, promoting maternal health, preventing HIV, addressing transgender rights, tackling gender-based violence, and more. They also address broader issues like climate change and education.

### **Enablers for Youth Leaders**

1. Access to skill development programs by the government
2. Participation in NGO-supported training and workshops
3. Use of technology and social media
4. Learning from experienced activists
5. Online learning platforms



**Barriers for Youth Leaders** Female youth leaders face family restrictions on mobility and participation. There is also societal resistance to gender equality, neglect of youth voices, and financial barriers. For youth with disabilities, barriers include a lack of learning opportunities, financial assistance, and the digital divide.

**Learning and Support Needs** Youth leaders require training in communication, advocacy, fundraising, technology, and leadership. There is a need for financial support and opportunities to apply their skills.

### **Key Recommendations**

- Strengthen youth knowledge transformation and create broader movements.
- Fund youth-led initiatives, especially for marginalized groups.
- Develop sustainable funding models and ensure youth participation in policy-making.
- Government should enhance learning opportunities for youth leaders at the grassroots and include intersectional identities in decision-making processes.

**Conclusions:** The high levels of contraceptive and service acceptance indicate effective counseling and client-friendly services. While overall satisfaction was high, continuous improvement is essential to address identified areas and enhance service quality further.

**RHSTEP  
harmonizes  
and guides its  
development  
efforts and obliged  
to “respect, protect  
and fulfill” human  
rights**

## Other Major Events

### Annual General Meeting

The 33rd Annual General Meeting (AGM) of RHSTEP took place on May 6, 2023, at Golden Tulip Hotel, Banani, Dhaka, with 13 members in attendance.

Dr. Kohinoor Begum, President of RHSTEP, welcomed the members.

The meeting began with a condolence session led by Dr. M. Shamsher Ali, paid tribute to Prof. Dr. Anwarul Azim, Dr. Ayesha Begum, and Brigadier General Ashraful Islam Khan who passed away during and after COVID-19.

Performance and Financial Reports were presented and approved. This meeting also appointed auditor for Sida supported project and service charge fund. Members also gave directions for the sustainability of RHSTEP. Following deaths of few members and continuous absence of few, members expressed inclusion of new members.



### Election of the New Executive Committee (2023-2024)

The election was conducted by Dr. Rafiqus Sultan (Chief Election Commissioner), Dr. Nayeemul Hasan, and Dr. Hasina Imrose Mollik (Election Commissioners). The new Executive Committee is as follows:

Dr. Sabera Rahman, the newly elected President, expressed gratitude and sought the support of all members for the upcoming term.



**Dr. Sabera Rahman**  
President



**Prof. Md. Mozammel  
Huq Azad Khan, PhD**  
Vice-President



**Mrs. A. S. Ferdous Ara**  
General Secretary



**Ms. Rawshan Ara Hafiz**  
Treasurer



**Prof. Hamida Akhtar, PhD**  
Member



**Ms. Nazma  
Ayesha Akther**  
Member



**Ms. Shireen Nazrul**  
Member



**Mr. Mijanur Rahman  
Bhuiyan, FCA**  
Member



**Prof. Dr. Kohinoor Begum**  
Immediate Past President



### Seminar/ Workshop/ Training Overseas

Mr Toushin Ahmed Sohel, PMEL of RHRN 2 project attended in a 4 days (16-19 October 2023) training on Training for Trainers (ToT) on Gender Transformative Approach in Kathmandu, Nepal organized by Rutgers under RHRH 2 Project

### Participation in Women Deliver Conference 2023

The Women Deliver 2023 (WD2023) conference, held in Kigali, Rwanda from July 17-20, 2023, served as a global platform to catalyze dialogue among stakeholders, break barriers, address challenges, and identify opportunities to advance gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and improve the well-being of girls and women. The conference attracted 6,000 in-person participants and over 200,000 virtual attendees. Dr. Elvina Mustary, Deputy Director (Program) of RHSTEP, represented the organization at the event under RHRH 2 Project

As a leading global advocacy forum, Women Deliver focuses on gender equality, health, and SRHR, aiming to improve the lives of girls and women worldwide. The conference objectives, determined by the advisory group, were to:

- Catalyze collective action to advance gender equality
- Hold leaders accountable
- Empower the feminist movement
- Reframe leadership narratives
- Create inclusive spaces

Throughout various sessions, the intersection of climate change with girls’ and women’s SRHR was highlighted as a potential future priority. The



conference also emphasized three strategic frameworks:

- Health and SRHR
- Women’s economic justice and rights
- Climate action

One notable discussion centered on the varied access to SRHR services and information for young people, influenced by factors such as age, sex, gender, and nationality. The unique SRHR needs of gender-diverse populations were also explored. An important study presented at the conference was a tri-country research project (Bangladesh, India, and Nepal), focusing on youth leadership in SRHRJ (sexual, reproductive health, rights, and justice). This research underscored the critical role of young people, who make up 16% of the global population and nearly 40% of the world’s youth, as future leaders in achieving gender equality.

To foster meaningful youth participation, a dedicated “Youth Zone” was created, featuring motivational speeches, interactive sessions, and discussions led by young leaders, youth advocates, and professionals working with adolescents. This space was an integral part of the conference’s focus on youth engagement.

Additionally, the conference showcased two exhibition booths displaying SRHR-related materials. These booths, filled with colorful IEC (Information, Education, and Communication) and BCC (Behavior Change Communication) materials, attracted a wide audience with their engaging content and innovative approaches to sharing critical information.



# Financial Statement

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES TRAINING & EDUCATION PROGRAM (RHSTEP)  
BALANCE SHEET  
AS AT 30 JUNE 2023

		Amount in BDT.	
		30 June 2023	30 June 2022
<b>PROPERTY AND ASSETS</b>			
Fixed Assets	3.00	12,586,834	10,777,986
Investment in FDR	4.00	172,492,736	186,528,182
Advance, Deposit & Prepayments	5.00	1,134,260	1,237,144
Cash & Bank Balances	6.00	117,155,450	167,033,527
Assets for Current Tax	7.00	-	-
Loan	8.00	-	-
<b>Total Property and Assets</b>		<b>303,369,280</b>	<b>365,576,839</b>
<b>FUND AND LIABILITIES</b>			
Fund	9.00	297,814,847	357,445,481
Accrued Expenses	10.00	4,119,850	6,945,926
Bank Interest	11.00	59,121	141,629
Liabilities for Current Tax	12.00	1,375,461	1,043,803
<b>Total Fund &amp; Liabilities</b>		<b>303,369,280</b>	<b>365,576,839</b>

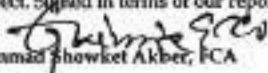
Note: The annexed notes form an integral part of these accounts

  
Executive Director

  
Treasurer

  
Deputy Executive Director

Examined and found correct. Signed in terms of our report of even date.

  
Mohammad Showket Akber, FCA  
Partner  
FRC Enrol.no.CA-001-154  
ICAB Enrol.no.970  
G.KIBRIA & CO.  
Chartered Accountants

Place : Dhaka, Bangladesh  
Dated: 08 .11.2023  
Ref.:GKC/23-24/A/209



## List of Acronyms

AFS	:	Adolescent Friendly Services
AFHC	:	Adolescent Friendly Health Corner
ANC	:	Antenatal Care
ARROW	:	Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Center for Women
BAPSA	:	Association for Prevention of Septic Abortion, Bangladesh
BCC	:	Behavior Change Communication
CAC	:	Comprehensive Abortion Care
CSE	:	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
CSO	:	Civil Society Organization
DGFP	:	Directorate General of Family Planning
DGHS	:	Directorate General of Health Services
EC	:	Executive Council
FDMN	:	Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals
FGD	:	Focus Group Discussion
FP	:	Family Planning
FWV	:	Family Welfare Visitor
GBV	:	Gender Based Violence
HNPSP	:	Health Nutrition Population Sector Program
HRBA	:	Human Right Based Approach
IEC	:	Information Education and Communication
IUD	:	Intrauterine Devices
LCC	:	Limited Curative Care
MHM	:	Menstrual Hygiene Management
MLP	:	Mid-Level Provider
MR	:	Menstrual Regulation
MRM	:	Menstrual Regulation with Medication
MoHFW	:	Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
MVA	:	Manual Vacuum Aspiration
NEARS	:	Network for Ensuring Adolescents Reproductive Health, Rights and Services
NGO	:	Non-Government Organization
GYANE /OBS	:	Obstetrics and Gynaecology
PAC	:	Post Abortion Care
PNC	:	Post Natal Care
RH	:	Reproductive Health
RMG	:	Read Made Garment
RHRN	:	Right Here Right Now
RTI	:	Reproductive Track Infection
SDGs	:	Sustainable Development Goals
Sida	:	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
STI	:	Sexual Transmitted Infection
SRHR	:	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
TFR	:	Total Fertility Rate
TT	:	Tetanus Toxoid
UH&FWC	:	Union Health and Family Welfare Center
UPHCSDP	:	Urban Primary Health Care Service Delivery Project
WRA	:	Women of Reproductive Age





## **RHSTEP**

Reproductive Health Services  
Training and Education Program

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