



# OKUP Child Club

A safe space for migrants' children left behind

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## Introduction

Thousands of women, mostly from rural Bangladesh, migrate for overseas jobs every year to support their families and children. OKUP's 2018 study "the impact of women migration on the children left behind in rural Bangladesh" exposed that the children left behind faced severe damage to psychosocial well-being due to a lack of motherly care and protection. The research highlighted that 90% of these children suffered from loneliness and mental stress, 70% of children frequently fell ill, 50% dropped out of school and 73% of the children were compelled to engage in economic activities at home or outside against their will.

“

I felt so lonely when my mother went abroad. I could not eat; I could not sleep well. I lost my interest in going to school. I cried every time and lost my mind.

*A 10-year-old girl at Charsalepur*

”

Considering the context, OKUP established a “Child Club” in 2019 in the study area – a far remote river island under Charbhadrasan Upazila of Faridpur district in Bangladesh. This initiative was supported jointly by Caritas Luxembourg and Secours Catholique Caritas France under a project focused on safe migration. The COVID-19 outbreak seriously hampered the “Child Club” activities for a long leading to a high dropout of children. Later OKUP resumed activities in 2022 with the support of Caritas France, and recently under a project supported by the Dutch Lenten Campaign (Stichting Bisschoppelijke Vastenactie Nederland) co-funded by the UK-based Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD).

The “Child Club” was established in 2019 in a room in the local government complex at Charsalepur Union. OKUP has shifted the “Child Club” into a new set-up built on its own land with more facilities in early 2024.

## Goal and Mission

The goal of establishing the “Child Club” is to help children left behind by the migrants’ mothers improve their psychosocial well-being by creating a safe space for them to spend quality time and learn essential life skills to enhance self-care, protection, and a healthy life.

The mission is to transform the ‘Child Club’ into a center of excellence for the sustainable development of all disadvantaged and unprivileged children in the area. The specific objectives are: (i) enhance the personal development of the children by increasing knowledge, attitude and practice; (ii) promote healthy lives; (iii) enhance protection of children from abuse and exploitation.



## Key Interventions and Impacts so far



Credit: Riaz Uddin, OKUP

*Child Club members ride a horse van provided by OKUP to reach the OKUP Centre*

OKUP started “Child Club” activities with life skill orientation. A total of 133 (girls 78; boys 55) children were identified and enrolled in the Child Club in 2019. They participated in the ‘child club’ events on every alternative day being divided into four groups.

The COVID-19 outbreak stopped the Child Club activities for around 20 months. During the period, nearly 45 children dropped out. The activities resumed in 2022 under another safe migration project supported by Secours Catholique Caritas France. Later, OKUP’s project ‘Ending Child Labour/Migration’ was awarded by the Dutch Lenten Campaign (Stichting Bisschoppelijke Vastenactie Nederland) and co-funded by the UK-based Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), which contributes a lot to expand activities.



Credit: Riaz Uddin, OKUP



## Life Skills Orientation



Credit: Riaz Uddin, OKUP

*OKUP Child Club members participate in a multimedia class with their mentor, watching educational content and learning through cartoons and tutorials.*

From the beginning to December 2023, a total of 300 children, primarily girls, have benefited from the 'life skills' orientation. Initially, the life skills sessions were focused on issues to improve the physical and mental health of the children. They were taught how to prevent common illnesses by following good hygiene and nutritious food practices. They were engaged in music class, art class, and indoor and outdoor games, so that these activities helped remove loneliness and improve their mental health..

“

My mother lived abroad and father works in the field. I felt very sad every time. Now I come to the Child Club every day. I play here, I sing here with other children. I have learnt many good things from here. Now I go to school regularly ”

*A 12-year-old boy.*





Credit: Riaz Uddin, OKUP

*Getting ready for a day of learning and fun, OKUP Child Club members participate in a warmup session.*

Over the period, OKUP has developed a module to conduct the 'life skills' orientation more structured and comprehensive. OKUP has been working to make the sessions more child-friendly. The assessment of the child club activities highlighted that the 'life skills' orientation has a good impact on the lives of the children. This helped the children to improve their self-confidence and practice selfcare. The significant impact is to stop school dropouts.



Credit: Riaz Uddin, OKUP

“

Some of my friends got married during the COVID. My parents were planning to get me married. But I told them that I wanted to continue my education because I wanted to be a doctor. I told them about child club activities and convinced them. I'm so lucky to be a member of the child club. ”

*A 14-year-old girl.*



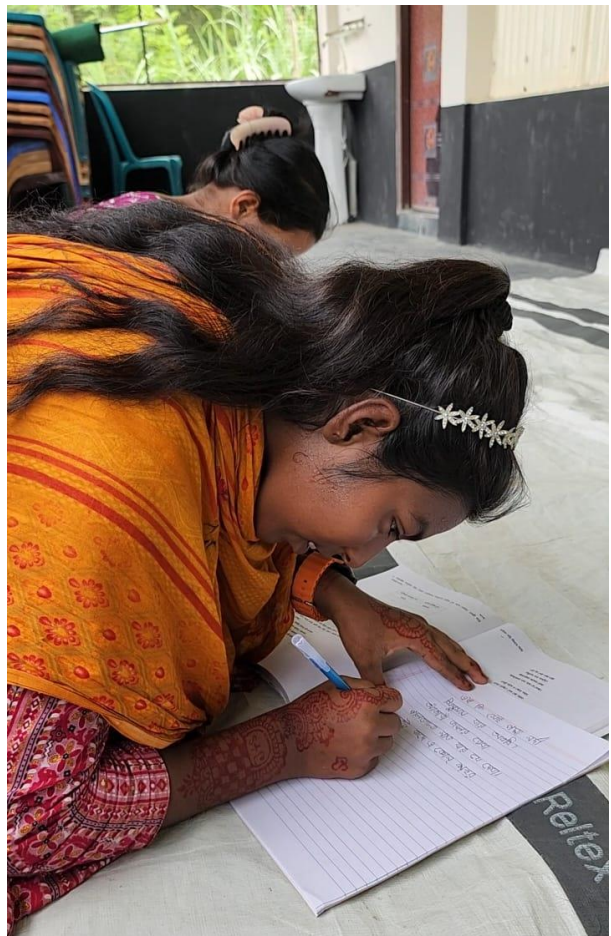
## SRHR Sessions for Adolescent Girls

The discussion on the issues of sexual and reproductive health issues is considered taboo in the Bangladesh social context. Adolescent children mainly girls face huge challenges especially when their menstruation starts. Many of them become frightened when they face physical complications. Due to a lack of proper knowledge and information, they faced struggle to share it with their families, and maintain proper hygiene, especially those were left behind due to their mother's migration abroad. Considering this fact, OKUP introduced sessions on Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) orientation in 2023 under the "Ending Child Labor/migration" project. A total of 100 adolescent girls divided into four groups were provided a comprehensive orientation on the issues through 10 sessions. The sessions have made a positive impact on adolescent girls and their families to remove all taboos and superstitions around menstruation. They now use readymade 'sanitary napkins available locally or use 'clean cloths. They know that menstruation is a very normal physical change and there is no reason to be shy and hide this. They now clean the clothes and dry them properly. The participants of the SRHR have also covered other issues to prevent common reproductive health complications including discharge, prolapse as well as breast cancer.

“

I had no idea about the female body or the science behind menstruation. Like many other girls, I held misconceptions and superstitions. Now, I understand these things and feel confident. I've shared everything I've learned with my classmates. You see, I'm even willing to discuss this topic with you, a man, without any hesitation. I must thank OKUP for organizing these sessions for us. ”

A 16-year-old Adolescent girl.



Credit: Shakirul Islam, OKUP

## Health Camps: Creating Access to Healthcare



*Children, women, and elderly men receive prescriptions and basic medicines from an expert doctor at the OKUP health camp*

Being located on a riverbed island, and having no public or private healthcare facility in the Charsalepur Union, the people need to go to the district/sub-district Headquarters for healthcare services. A number of children reported that they were not brought to the doctors even when they were suffering from critical illness. Rather, they were given treatment by the quack doctor in the village. In this context, OKUP introduced organizing a 'Health Camp' in 2023 to create opportunity for the poor people and the children to visit doctors. Some 10 health camps were organized during the time period by doctors specialized on child health, women health and general medicine. 430 patients including children, women and elderly man received 'treatment advice' with prescriptions for medicine by the visiting doctors.



*Credit: Riaz Uddin, OKUP*

“

We thank OKUP for their efforts to provide us with healthcare facilities to some extent. We hope they will set up a Healthcare Centre one day for us.

”

*A 50-year-old man*



## Orientation for Guardians and Families



With the understanding that the guardians and families need to be oriented on the same issues that the children are taught in the child club for better impact, OKUP organizes orientation for them through group meetings and door-to-door orientation. In addition, OKUP organized several socialization and cultural events to engage the guardians, families, and communities with the child club activities aimed to creating a child friendly environment. The activities have a positive impact. The guardians are very careful and supportive of the children. They provide time to time feedback and their suggestions to OKUP for further betterment of their children.

“

We are so happy to participate in the Pitha Festival with our children. At OKUP Child Club, they are learning so many valuable life skills and sharing them with us. We also love sharing our cookie-making skills with them. This festival brings our families closer, and we are grateful for these special moments.

”

*Guardian of a Child Club Member*



Credit: Omar Faruque, OKUP



## Sports and Cultural Events



*A Cricket Competition for the girl group of the child club.*

Credit: Riaz Uddin, OKUP

Under the project, three sports competition events have been organized during this time. Apart from organizing local games for all children of the child club, OKUP organized 'football' and 'cricket' matches for boys and girls in separate groups. Following the sports event, a cultural performance was presented by the children either solo or group. The a 5-minute presentation of a group children on the issues of negative impacts of child marriage, child labour and the protection of child rights was mind-blowing.

The local actors and stakeholders were engaged in the events to watch the competition and distribute prizes to the children. It was interesting to see the potential of the children in sports which remain dormant most of the time due to lack of scope and opportunities.

The activities both sports and cultural events created opportunities to expose dormant potential of the children, their creativity and skills. The activity has created a positive image of the children club activity among the local guardians, mass people and the key stakeholders in the community.



Credit: Riaz Uddin, OKUP

“

I enjoyed the sports match and tried my best to lead my team to victory. I hope we can have more sports events like this in the future. I dream of becoming a great player one day, like Mbappé or Ronaldo, but I'm not sure how to achieve it. ”

*A 10-year-old boy*

## Child Protection Committee:

Under the 'Ending Child Labour/migration' project, a 'Child Protection Committee (CPC)' has been formed at the Union comprising of 31 members (27 male, 4 female) as instructed by the authorities. OKUP has been actively supporting the committee to be active to play their roles duly through helping them conduct quarterly coordination meeting. By this time, the CPC has already taken actions to stop the incidents of 'child marriage'. They have dismissed three child marriage during this time.

## Infrastructure and Facility Development Initiatives

OKUP has taken initiatives to build better infrastructure for the child club in a spacious area in that riverbed Island. It has now a tin-shed house along with enough spaces and open field for sports and outdoor activities. OKUP has also started building a two-storied house with own fund to increase facilities. Under the project co-funded by Dutch Lenten Campaign and CAFOD, 62 children (girls 42, boys 20) were provided bi-cycles so they can come to the child club and go to school with that. On the other hand, a 'Computer Lab' with 10 sets of desktop computers has been setup in the child club.



Credit: Riaz Uddin, OKUP

*A lively competition at the OKUP event includes singing, poetry recitation, drama, and speech delivery, highlighting participants' diverse skills.*



## Conclusion

Being a remote location with difficult transportation and infrastructural facilities there are many challenges to implement the project activities smoothly. The government has taken several development initiatives by this time, i.e., the electricity connections and the mobile network has been set up in the union. The road connections are being improved gradually. In this context, new opportunities are created to integrate in the child club activities. OKUP has taken several initiatives and a continuous funding is a challenge. However, OKUP is determined to make the child club a center for excellence for the unprivileged children in the area to help them building sustainable development. OKUP welcomes any support, donations in this regard.



Credit: Riaz Uddin, OKUP





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Ovibashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP)  
466, Sawdagar Garden (4th Floor)  
Dania Post Office Road, Jatrabari, Dhaka



Tel: 018142773300; 01819224308



Email: [okup.ent@gmail.com](mailto:okup.ent@gmail.com)