



LEARNING BRIEF:
THE BANGLADESH DROWNING PREVENTION PARTNERSHIP



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WHY WE DEVELOPED THIS LEARNING BRIEF: THE IMPORTANCE OF A SYSTEMS APPROACH TO PREVENTING CHILDHOOD DROWNING...

Research¹ conducted in Bangladesh into the scourge of childhood drowning showed that daycare centers (Anchals), which offered adult supervision to children in a learning environment, during the time of day when they were most vulnerable to drowning, had a major impact on reducing the numbers of children who drowned in the pilot areas, reducing deaths by up to 88% in some areas. The research further showed that, through community participation and community awareness about drowning, the Anchals not only decreased drowning, but also provided opportunity for childhood learning and opportunities for caregivers to supplement their income².

Excited at the possibilities of expanding on this learning, Synergos worked with key stakeholders to introduce a systems perspective as part of their Bridging Leadership approach. This approach built capacity to address the complex problem of drowning prevention, engendered trust and enabled collective action. Through understanding drowning prevention within the wider frame of early childhood care and development (ECCD³) it was possible to draw a range of government and non-government partners into an effective alliance. This alliance of NGOs, businesses, Government actors, academics, and other civil society networks, such as the Bangladesh ECD Network (BEN)⁴, provided the Bridging Leadership necessary to take effective and collective action to prevent drowning among children under five years of age through the adoption of a center-based approach.



Tackling a problem that involves many actors and is intertwined with a range of social issues requires flexibility, creativity and a strong emphasis on collaboration. This learning brief offers insights into the success that is possible, through reflecting on the work and achievements of an alliance of partners from across the early child development and injury prevention sectors in Bangladesh, who came together to address childhood drowning in that country through developing an integrated approach to childcare and safety that is widely recognized and has been integrated into Government policy.

¹The SoLiD project was conducted by the Centre for Injury Prevention and Research, Bangladesh (CIPRB), the International Centre for Diarrheal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr), Johns Hopkins University, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Bloomberg Philanthropies

² Johns Hopkins International Injury Research Unit (2016). Saving of Lives from Drowning (SoLiD) project findings

³ This approach to ECCD was initially rooted in the concept of 'nurturing care,' which refers to conditions created by public policies, programmes and services. These conditions enable communities and caregivers to ensure children's good health and nutrition, and protect them from threats. Nurturing care also means giving young children opportunities for early learning, through interactions that are responsive and emotionally supportive (UNICEF, WHO)

⁴ Bangladesh ECD Network (BEN) is a forum of stakeholders including government, non-government and international organizations working in early childhood development (ECD). BEN aims to support and encourage organizations, agencies and institutions partners to generate their commitment to and investment in children's optimal and holistic development in Bangladesh. BEN was formally launched on 7 September 2005 in a national conference of the community.



KEY LEARNING FROM PHASE 1 – DESIGNING FOR SUCCESS, MAKING IT HAPPEN AND MANAGING RISKS AND CHALLENGES



In the design phase of the project, design for success.

- 1. Build on a base of research and learning:** The alliance used available research and generated new learning from additional studies to provide credible evidence for advocating their approach to drowning prevention. A feasibility study provided proof of concept.
- 2. Adopt a systems approach and avoid silos.** A systems approach took the different dimensions of the problem into account. Instead of only addressing one piece of the problem, the approach brought multiple stakeholders together to work on the problem holistically. Injury prevention, early childhood development, nutrition and others all played a role in addressing the problem.
- 3. Put energy and resources into the program's sustainability.** From the design phase, Government and other stakeholders were involved in developing an integrated solution. The entire project was built around regular meetings and updates, so that joint responsibility was taken and laid the foundations for sustainability.

In the implementation phase, make it happen.

- 4. Activate champions.** Within the alliance were people who understood Government and were able to engage effectively with the systems and priorities of Government. Champions within Government and other institutions were identified to assist with building solid working relationships. This was a collaborative approach, never top-down.
- 5. Build Bridging Leadership.** Bridging leadership shifts away from the traditional idea of leaders as 'experts' and rather emphasizes their role in facilitating and creating conditions where organisations can be linked to co-create solutions to problems.
- 6. Build effective partnerships.** The alliance created the space for effective partnership by ensuring that all role-players could add value to their existing work by participating in the programme. The convenors of the alliance ensured that they engaged with all partners and encouraged partners to engage with each other, in a manner which built trust.
- 7. Create a common purpose across sectors.** Considerable work was required to create awareness of the importance of addressing drowning prevention, and to generate solutions that opened the possibilities of integrating drowning prevention efforts into early childhood development interventions. A range of stakeholders including different Government departments, different sectors such as injury prevention and early childhood learning, media and community members were brought together to address the issue.

And throughout, manage risks and challenges

- 8. Adapt to transition.** As key people in the partnership moved on, the project needed to be re-introduced to new members. The alliance managed staff turnover in Government by creating institutional resources that could be used to orientate new members. Transitions were further managed by ensuring that the program was institutionalized within Government, thus even when there was staff turnover, strategy, plans, and budget were still in place for implementation.
- 9. Accept that advocacy takes time.** While the overall advocacy goal was embedding the Project within Government, the alliance was also building awareness around drowning prevention generally. This has resulted in Government disseminating communications materials around drowning, with development partners' materials being taken through an extensive Government approval process to ensure that the materials were distributed through Government channels. The media has played an important role in focusing attention on the problem of drowning and what can be done collectively at community level to address this issue.
- 10. Ensure the ability to adapt.** When Covid-19 regulations closed education centers, including Anchals, members were able to shift their programming, including by sharing Covid-19 information together with creating awareness around the value of day care, the prevention of drowning and childhood development. Led by Synergos, the alliance also undertook a pandemic study.

WHERE WE ARE NOW: COLLABORATION, FLEXIBILITY AND INNOVATION TO REDUCE CHILDHOOD DROWNING IN BANGLADESH



The Integrated Community Based Center for Child Care, Protection & Swim-Safe Facilities Project (referred to as the Project throughout this Learning Brief) was approved by the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council of Bangladesh, which is chaired by the Prime Minister. This has been translated into concrete action, with the Government of Bangladesh contributing 80% of the BDT ৳3,040,000,000 (US \$32 million), and development partners, including Bloomberg Philanthropies and the Royal National Lifeboat Institute, providing technical assistance for the remaining 20%.

The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs is the lead agency, and the Bangladesh Shishu Academy is the implementing agency in the roll out of the Project, which is the first government project to be implemented in support of the Government of Bangladesh's Comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Development Policy 2013.

In its first phase, the Project will be implemented in 16 prioritized districts where it will:

- set up 8,000 integrated childcare centres for children under the age of 5;
- introduce 1,600 swimming training facilities for children ages 6-10, in partnership with a high-quality instructional program called SwimSafe; and,
- will initiate parenting sessions hosted by childcare centres, to inform parents on parenting and child safety best practices and create a space for peer support.

How did we get here?

The Project's genesis was the findings from the Saving of Lives from Drowning (Solid) project, a multi-institutional action research project aimed at better understanding the problem of childhood drowning in Bangladesh, implemented from 2013 to 2015. The learnings from this research were instrumental in shaping the approach adopted in the Project.



The Project was also able to realise these significant achievements through adopting a collaborative practice, which took a systems approach and brought together partners from different Government departments, ministries, and community sectors, to address early childhood care and development and protection.

This collaboration was strengthened by the Bridging Leadership approach, which enables partners to reflect on the overall situation (including the underlying causes of the problem) to find a system solution, and then to locate their own work in this process whilst building towards a common goal and purpose. This has required a sustained approach to fostering collaboration within the Alliance. As a result, partners have been able to move with the adaptive capacity vital to steering the Project through to approval, even amid the challenges of a global pandemic. Throughout the process, evidence was gathered to build awareness and ownership. Partners have been responsive to interventions, and spaces have been created for civil society to engage with Government. Government's investment in children, through its approval of the Project, has been a testament to the partners' deep commitment and expansive vision to work beyond silos. And this work has been shared in global forums, where the Bangladesh Government has played a significant role with the United Nations and World Health Organization in increasing awareness around the approaches to prevent drowning developed in Bangladesh.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE FUTURE?

Drawing on the learning outlined in this learning brief and the factors that have emerged as important, the following areas are outlined as important to embed in the on-going implementation of the program, in order to contribute to its sustainability and ability to move towards its vision.



A more full description of the process described in this learning brief can be found in the report available from Synergos - KEY LEARNINGS FROM THE FIRST PHASE OF THE BANGLADESH DROWNING PREVENTION PARTNERSHIP PROJECT, DECEMBER 2021.