

BUILDING RESILIENCE OF BANGLADESHI ADOLESCENT GIRLS:

PRIORITISING MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND
SAFEGUARDING DIGNITY IN EMERGENCIES



NATURAL DISASTERS LEFT MILLIONS IN NEED OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE IN 2023, INCLUDING ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Cyclone Mocha struck the coast near the Bangladesh-Myanmar border on 14 May 2023. Heavy rains and strong winds caused damage and destruction to shelters and public facilities, which are primarily constructed of bamboo and tarpaulin, across 33 Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. This impacted over 40,000 Rohingya refugees and neighbouring Bangladeshi communities. In Teknaf upazila approximately 11,000 houses were damaged and over 50,500 individuals were affected. A Joint Needs Assessment identified food, shelter, and water as the most immediate priorities, with a particular focus on ensuring access to these services for the most vulnerable women, girls, and persons with disabilities. The assessment also revealed significant damage to public facilities related to education, nutrition, and protection.

2.3 MILLION

Total population in the affected area (Bangladeshi and Rohingya refugees)

1.3 MILLION

Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar and Bashan Char

1 MILLION

Bangladeshi nationals in Cox's bazar, Bandarban and Rangamati

Source: Needs Assessment Working Group

On August 6, 2023, a flash flood struck Chattogram Division aggravated by heavy downpours in upstream areas. The flood affected over one million people. 39 out of the division's 51 upazilas were wholly or partially inundated, causing substantial damage in Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, Ragamati, and Bandarban districts. The region's major rivers overflowed and damaged over 410 kilometres of roads, resulting in major infrastructure and transportation disruption. The immediate response effort focused on rescue and relief operations, and addressing the basic needs of those affected.

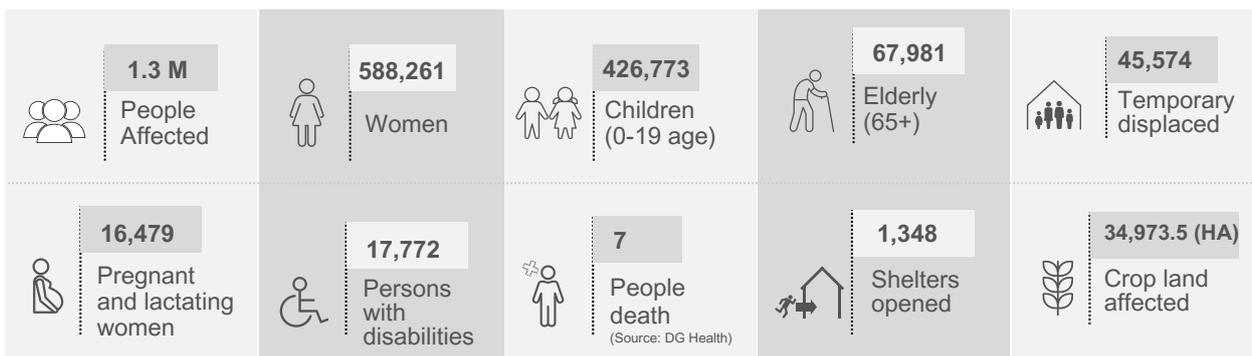
Affected districts, sub-districts and unions

**4
DISTRICTS**

**36
UPAZILAS**

**246
UNIONS**

Source: National disaster response coordination center report



Source: Needs assessment working group

ADOLESCENT GIRLS ARE AT THE CENTRE OF OUR RESPONSE

The Adolescents and Youth programme of UNFPA in Bangladesh in partnership with a national NGO, Concerned Women for Family Development (CWFD), has prioritised the sensitive and frequently overlooked needs of adolescent girls during disasters. The programme's focused response to adolescent girls during natural disasters across the country has led to a significant increase in the number of girls reached. In 2023, the number of girls benefitting from UNFPA humanitarian support increased to 15,576 from 7,474 in the previous year's response.



9,050

Girls received **menstrual health management (MHM) kits** in flash flood and cyclone MOCHA affected areas



3,000

Adolescent girls and boys benefited from the sessions on adolescent sexual and reproductive health priorities for **disaster risk reduction**



2,800

Girls received **menstrual pads** and engaged in social and behaviour change sessions in urban slums



726

Girls that engaged in **life skills and lifesaving information** sessions in the north-eastern flash flood-affected districts

Source: Implementing Partner Monitoring Tracking Report, 2023, UNFPA

Sayedra Sultana, Age: 17
Lama, Bandarban



Picture: Chattogram flash flood affected adolescent girls in Bandarban

We have not been able to return to our home for three months, since the flash flood washed it away. My family has not been able to afford building a new home yet. Currently, we are renting a very small room up on the hill where we sought shelter during the flood. Right now, I don't have any books and we are struggling to get through each day and night.

During these devastating times, I had nothing to use during my menstruation. UNFPA's MHM kit has been incredibly helpful, not only for my menstrual health but also I feel like I have something of my own and someone caring for me.

3 NO ONE SIZE FITS ALL

CUSTOMISED, CONTEXTUALISED, AND SUSTAINABLE MENSTRUAL HEALTH MANAGEMENT KITS

Ensuring access to menstrual health supplies in humanitarian emergencies is vital for upholding the dignity and health of adolescent girls, who are often marginalised in disaster response and have limited decision-making power in Bangladesh. Leveraging the menstrual health management (MHM) kit developed jointly by UNHCR and UNFPA at the global level, UNFPA Bangladesh rolled out the kit to address the specific needs of Bangladeshi adolescent girls during emergencies.

	3		1		1
	Female underwear (s/m/l)		Set of information education and communication (IEC) materials		Soap case (covered)
	1		1		2
	Kit bag		Cloth pegs and string		Bathing soap
	1 (500gram)		8 packets (64 pcs)	OR	1 packet (5 pcs)
	Detergent		Disposable pads	/	Reusable pads

Infographic: Composition of menstrual health management kits



These contextualised MHM kits offer tailored solutions to meet the needs and challenges of adolescent girls for a three month-timeframes. Each kit includes disposable or reusable menstrual pads, underwear, soap, soap case, cloth pegs and string, and information. The disposable pads come in three types including large, extra-large, and belt system pads for girls and women who are not accustomed to wearing underwear. The MHM kit bags are designed with jute materials, which is a renewable and biodegradable resource that is available locally. The adolescent girls are also engaged in orientation on disposal of the pads, and menstruation health management. Choices, preferences, and comfort were considered in the design of the items, which were developed with the active and engaged participation of adolescent Bangladeshi girls.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Bangladeshi adolescents and youth have actively participated in all phases of UNFPA's humanitarian response, from preparedness to response to recovery. A group of 30 core volunteers and 300 district volunteers in three north-eastern flash flood-prone districts, 520 volunteers in two flash flood- and cyclone-prone districts in Chattogram division, and 220 volunteers in four monsoon flood-prone districts have been trained on disaster response, risk reduction, and their particular role in an emergency. They have all received training on adolescent sexual and reproductive health in emergencies, gender-based violence (GBV) core concepts and principles, sexually transmitted infections, child marriage, disaster risk mitigation, and disaster risk management. A total of 1,070 youths are ready to respond in case of a natural disaster in their districts.

YOUTH VOLUNTEERS	330	Disaster Risk Reduction
	520	Flash Flood and Cyclone Response
	220	Monsoon Flood Response

Infographic: Number of youth volunteers participated in 2023 response

This dedicated group of youth volunteers has supported preparedness and response activities in their districts and has conducted sessions on these topics for 12,050 adolescents. By training a group of volunteers in disaster response and risk reduction, UNFPA has both empowered local youth and improved its own response, particularly in serving the needs of adolescent girls. Moreover, this approach has fostered a culture of community engagement and cultivated youth leadership.

CHALLENGING SOCIAL STIGMA SURROUNDING MENSTRUATION AND CULTIVATING NORM CHANGE



The initiative to empower adolescent girls through Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) materials aimed at catalysing norm change has yielded significant results. Adolescent girls were equipped with life-saving information about their rights and where to access gender-based violence and child marriage referral services and support. Additionally, they received comprehensive guidance on menstruation health management, especially in a disaster context. In an effort to address deep-seated cultural beliefs and harmful practices, UNFPA has organised sessions, in-depth discussions, one-to-one discussions, household visits, campaigns, and others to provide fact-based information to all.



After receiving MHM kits, 9,050 adolescent girls participated in sessions focused on life-saving information about protection, rights, and services both within the Women and Girl Friendly Spaces and in the communities. In areas where UNFPA-supported safe spaces are unavailable, youth volunteers mobilised and utilised existing government facilities to conduct sessions. Adolescent girls also participated in post-distribution information sessions where they had the opportunity to share their experiences, ask questions, and provide feedback. This concerted effort aims to change social norms to cultivate a culture of inclusivity and dignity, where menstruation is prioritised rather than stigmatised, ultimately advancing gender equality and social justice.

Neela Akater, Age: 12
Herbang, Chakaria

My mother never allowed me to go to school during menstruation as she thought it was harmful to my health to go outside. When the UNFPA-supported volunteers came to our home, we got the opportunity to discuss menstruation and learned what I knew about menstruation was not correct, and my mother realised that there was nothing harmful to going outside during that time. Now I never miss school during my menstruation.

ARE MHM KITS ONLY OPTION FOR GIRLS?

Building on UNFPA's pilot on voucher assistance for reproductive health in urban slums and recognising menstrual health needs at the onset of emergencies, UNFPA will offer menstrual health management support to adolescent girls leveraging voucher assistance. This initiative aims to use the local market and its supply chains to distribute menstrual kits to adolescent girls, in the most time and cost-effective way. Instead of requiring girls to visit the distribution point, an adolescent girl can redeem the menstrual supplies at nearby selected shops using a card with a QR code when an early warning is issued or prior to the onset of a crisis. This innovative solution ensures that all transactions are recorded through a mobile app, thereby guaranteeing transparency and real-time monitoring of the distribution. This first of its kind-initiative will be rolled out in 2024 as part of UNFPA's anticipatory action activities.

6,000 households have been profiled in the flood-prone areas within Jamalpur district with 2,100 vulnerable adolescent girls identified

UNFPA's implementing partner, CWFD, has developed a mobile based application to track transactions of menstrual supplies

16 shops have been selected, and provided with training on the application

49 volunteers and 5 volunteer coordinators have been equipped with the knowledge about Anticipatory Action framework and voucher assistance interventions

CWFD staff members both in national and field levels have been trained on implementing voucher assistance programme

Sohel Rana
Shop owner, Jamalpur

Not only about the digital system, had we learned about adolescence and the changes during puberty which we never talked about. With this knowledge, I will be able to support adolescent girls who will visit my store to get menstrual pads and other items. I will ensure the availability of these supplies in my shop.



Special thanks to Concerned Women for Family Development (CWFD), the strategic partner of UNFPA's Adolescents and Youth interventions in response to natural disasters for their continuous and substantial role in serving thousands of adolescent girls during disaster, as well as in implementing preparedness and recovery activities.

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