



CONCEPT NOTE

INTRODUCTION

Share-Net Bangladesh (SNBD) is back again with its yearly signature event the **8th Knowledge Fair 2023**, the largest annual conference of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in Bangladesh, which is organised by Share-Net Bangladesh and **Aspire to Innovate (a2i)** of the ICT Division and the Cabinet Division, supported by UNDP, as a strategic partner. This day-long event will be held on **September 7, 2023 (Thursday)** at the **Bangabandhu International Conference Center (BICC), Celebrity Hall** and the thematic topic selected for this year's Knowledge Fair is **'SRHR and Education'**.

SNBD is one of the seven international hubs of **Share-Net International (SNI)** and the biggest in term of membership, funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Other country hubs are in Burkina Faso, Burundi, Colombia, Ethiopia, Jordan and the Netherlands. Share-Net Bangladesh now has more than 2000 members (including 166 organisational members, including GOs, NGOs, and INGOs, and 1800 individual members).

While talking about SRHR and Education, the **Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE)** plays a crucial role in SRHR education through its curriculum and educational initiatives. So for this event, we want to closely work with **DSHE** for their guidance.

The event will be attended by more than 300 participants from the SRHR and Education fields and from various national and international organisations, including government officials,

veteran SRHR and education experts, professors from numerous public and private universities, media professionals, university students, and foreign delegates.

SRHR AND EDUCATION

The transition from childhood to adulthood and the primary development of intellect are manifested throughout our lives in schools. Recently, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has brought revolutionary changes to the textbook by including Comprehensive Sexuality Education and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Issues in the Science Investigative Reading for the students of class 6. In this way, the Bangladesh government has made tremendous progress in teaching about puberty and adolescence-related issues. However, The NCTB curriculum only covers SRHR content from classes 6 to 10, and there is no mention of it before that. Another problem is the shame and discomfort among teachers and students about discussing SRHR issues, which points towards teacher training programmes.

After independence, family planning was for a long time a critical focus area of the government, related to the eradication of poverty and the improvement of women's and children's health. The focus was on ensuring married women's rights over their bodies by providing them contraceptives and family-planning information, as well as ante- and post-natal care and menstrual regulation services. Unmarried adolescents are neglected in SRHR services and have no access to contraceptives. The direct risks like pregnancy, Sexual Transmitted Diseases and HIV/AIDS are a threat to adolescents' health and future. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare established youth-friendly services but the help-seeking behavior by young people seems limited.

Education and Health are interlinked. Studies show a huge yearly dropout rate among girls due to child marriage and early pregnancy. According to a survey in 2013, 41% of girls reported missing school during their menstruation due to menstrual pain because they were unaware of its management. The lack of proper formative education on SRHR for all students of all ages is a huge drawback. Still, 61% of adolescents in Bangladesh are getting their first sex education through pornography, causing students to receive misinformation from their friends and peers, from the internet, from cheap roadside books, and from local quacks. This causes irresponsible sexual behaviour and unwanted life-changing consequences.

It eventually affects girls' and boys' education rates. Less educated students mean less development of their potential, fewer opportunities in the labour market, and less financial contribution to their families, and to the economic development of their communities and country. It also means less knowledge about a healthy and happy life, and even less knowledge about the proper use of social media, and where to find needed information.

OUTCOME

There should be a mechanism to talk about SRHR issues any time adolescents ask for it. When SRHR is one of the elements of education, adolescents will have constructive knowledge of SRHR including the curse of child marriage, side-effects of early pregnancy, menstrual hygiene management, consequences of gender-based violence, reproductive health rights, sexual health, sexuality, and other components. If teachers consider SRHR as an indiscrete element of education and approach it pragmatically, their reluctance towards teaching it will be minimised. If students understand their SRHR they will become confident about making

their own life-changing decisions. Knowing about the negative impact of unprotected sex, for instance, will make them more careful. It will improve their physical and mental health, dispel their confusion and hesitation, increase their self-esteem and contribute to making them more responsible citizens. As a result, they will prevent their unwanted marriages and pregnancies, which again would not make them dropouts and ensure their education. SRHR education will let adolescents have uninterrupted classes and be attentive to their studies and desired future. It will reduce gender-based violence and create more respectful behaviour and gender equality.

“SRHR and Education” is a cornerstone of the Bangladesh government's commitment to empowering its citizens with essential knowledge about SRHR. The recent NCTB curriculum demonstrates the government's dedication to providing comprehensive education. It is crucial to inform the SRHR community about these advancements, fostering a network of informed advocates who can amplify the importance of SRHR and related Education, challenge societal norms, and drive positive change in Bangladesh's reproductive health landscape. As **Share-Net Bangladesh is the biggest membership platform on SRHR in Bangladesh, we would like to take this opportunity to bring everyone together and have a discussion and open dialogue to take forward this government agenda. As a Knowledge Facilitator, Share-Net Bangladesh finds that it is crucial to inform the SRHR community about these advancements and also to learn from them. In this Knowledge Fair, we envision aligning the tremendous work that has been done in the SRHR and Education sectors, the learnings, and the way forward so we are not working in silos but rather everyone joins hands to fill the gaps and maximise the impact.**