

Mobile Based Age Verification before Marriage Registration to Stop Child Marriage

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Background:

Bangladesh has the fourth-highest rate of child marriage in the world. According to a UNICEF study 29 percent of girls in Bangladesh married before age 15, 2 percent of girls in Bangladesh are married before age 11 and 66 percent of girls are married before the age of 18. Only 45 per cent of adolescent girls are enrolled in secondary school and fewer attend regularly. One third of teenage girls aged 15 to 19 are mothers or are already pregnant. However, child marriage has been illegal in Bangladesh since 1929, and the minimum age of marriage has been set at 18 for women and 21 for men since the 1980s.

In Bangladesh the factors driving child marriage are poverty, natural disasters, inaccessibility to education, social pressure, harassment, and dowry. Child marriage is an adjustment mechanism for poor families. The major causes of child marriages are as follows:

- Poverty is a major underpinning factor encouraging early marriage. Young girls are often considered as an economic burden by their families and their marriage to an older man and into another family is often a family survival strategy in order to obtain financial security.
- Parents who are unable to feed their children, or pay for their education costs, may seek a husband for their daughters simply so that the girls can depend;
- Poor girls lack access to education because their families cannot afford fees for exams, uniforms, stationery, and other associated costs even when education is “free”;
- Social pressures and traditions, including the widespread practice of paying dowry, and lower dowries for younger girls, make child marriage accepted and expected in some communities.
- The practice of dowry requiring a bride’s family to pay significant sums to the groom – encourages the marriage of the youngest adolescent girls because younger brides typically require smaller dowries. Dowry demands can continue after the wedding and sometimes result in violence against the bride when families are unable to pay.
- Fear of Sexual Harassment of young daughters and failure by police to stem this harassment is another cause. Early marriage is seen as a way to “protect” a girl’s sexuality in an unsafe environment.

Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) of Bangladesh is expected to create a unique ID for every citizen in the country so that their important incidents of life (birth, marriage, death etc.) can be registered and later used for various statistical use. However, lack of digital marriage system is hindering the growth of CRVS process as well.

Kurigram Scenario:

In case of Child Marriage in Bangladesh, fake/manipulated birth registration certificate is submitted to the Marriage Registrar during the Marriage Registration (M.R.). Generally M.R. is done after Marriage events/rituals conducted by the Kazi/Imam. Marriage Registrars also

conduct the marriage rituals depending on the Guardian's wish. In both cases, there were no system for the Marriage ritual conductor or Marriage Registrar to examine the Age or verify the age by related certificates.

Methodical errors in traditional Marriage Registration system and weak monitoring on Marriage Registrars and Marriage Event conductors made Kurigram district have the highest rate of Child Marriage, 78.2% in Bangladesh. Administrative measures to stop such marriage are prevailed but the victim rates could not be suppressed significantly.

Some unauthorized person who are illegally appointed by Marriage Registers to act as Marriage Registrars or on behalf and conduct the marriage rituals unethically. It's very difficult to trace these unauthorized marriage registrars as well and majority of the Early Marriages are conducted by them and are registered in illegal registration books. General people know nothing about this and their girl children's social security are in stake.

Innovation:

To address the issue, an integrated ICT solution is offered through "Mobile Based Age Verification before Marriage Registration to Stop Child Marriage" by the Office of the Deputy Commissioner, Kurigram. A mobile phone based M.R. system & a helpline (Dial to a short code 16100 from any MSISDN) is developed to receive any complaint against child Marriage.

Birth Related Information can be collected from the National Server by Using Mobile Phone Network through Push/pull SMS service or through USSD Application. Bangladesh has different types of huge online data center which contains Stakeholder's Birth related Information. But the Access to these data center is restricted for general people. Our System developed the platform to get those data through API Link of specified data Center.

The USSD Application (Dialing *16100# from any mobile phone) will help the Marriage Registrars and the mass people to verify the Birth Registration Certificate which is generally introduced at the time of Marriage Registration. The Mobile phone based Marriage Registration system by using dedicated MSISDN will develop a Marriage Registration/Events Data base which can stop polygamy also.

Age Verification Through SMS

Age Verification By BRN :

By BRN: BIV <space>BRN code<space>BRN<space> date of birth

Example : BIV 2 19984915285103796 19/08/1998

or

Example : BIV brn 19984915285103796 19/08/1998

Send To 16100

Age Verification By EDU :

By Education Certificate: BIV<space>SC code<space>SC board<space> SC Exam

Type<space> roll<space> exam registration number<space> exam year

Example : BIV 3 4 2 107510 408001 2005

or

Example : BIV educ Dhaka ssc 107510 408001 2005

Send To 16100

Marriage Registration Through SMS

Step 1 :
Mstep1<space> Kazi pin Code
Example : mstep1 555
Send To : 16100



Step 2:
For Bride :
By BRN : mstep2<space>BRN Code<space>BRN<space>DOB
Example : mstep2 2 19984915285103796 19/08/1998
By NID: mstep2 <space>NID code<space>NID<space> DOB
Example : mstep2 1 19838818952951071 18/01/1983
By EDU: mstep2<space>SC code<space>SC board<space>Exam
Type<space> roll<space>reg no<space> exam year
Example : mstep2 3 4 2 107510 408001 2005
Send To : 16100



Step 3 :
For Bridegroom :
By BRN : mstep3<space>BRN Code<space>BRN<space>DOB
Example : mstep3 2 19954923302004470 19/07/1995
By NID: mstep3 <space>NID code<space>NID<space> DOB
Example : mstep3 1 19838818952951071 18/01/1983
By EDU: mstep3<space>SC code<space>SC board<space>Exam
Type<space> roll<space>reg no<space> exam year
Example : mstep3 3 4 2 107510 408001 2005
Send To : 16100

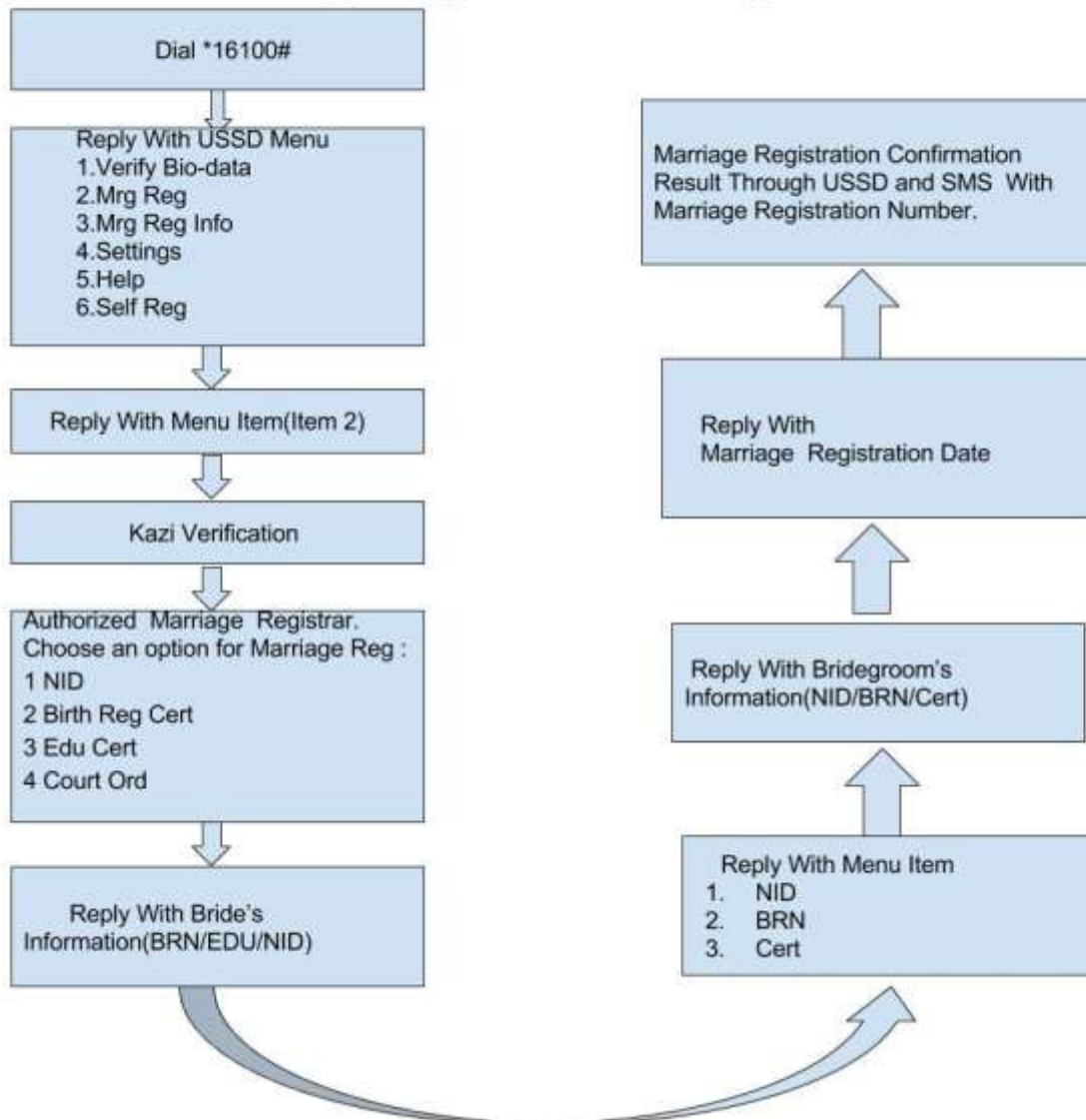


Step 4 :
mstep4<space>Time Of Marriage
Example : mstep4 13/07/2017
Send To : 16100



Step 5 :
mstep5<space>Marriage Registration Number<space>Bride
Relative Contact<comma>Bridegroom Relative Contact
Example : mstep5 554919111015 01712056555,01713143555
Send To : 16100

Marriage Registration Through USSD



A2i's role and involvement:

The Mobile Based Age Verification before Marriage Registration to Stop Child Marriage was jointly run by the Service Innovation Fund, under the Access to Information Program (a2i) of Prime Minister's office and Local resources mobilized by the Office of the Deputy Commissioner, Kurigram. The a2i project asks for innovative project proposal from the GO/NGO/individuals which can address socio-economic or any other problems of the respective community. As Kurigram District was leading the highest rate of early marriage in the country, The District Administration (Office of the Deputy Commissioner is said as such) after a need based analysis took measures to address this social problem and developed a project proposal. The Prime Minister's office accepted it and awarded the District Administration Kurigram Twenty four lac and forty eight thousand BD taka (about 30,220 USD) to implement their project proposal as an aid.

The District Administration is implementing the project in three of its nine Upazillas (Sub District) as pilot basis . Besides the under 18 girls of 2,22,000 families the other stakeholders

of this project are, the 28 Union Councils, 2 Municipalities, Marriage Registrars, District Registrars, Religious leaders (who generally conduct the marriage ceremonies) and Different Secondary and Higher secondary level schools of the project area.

Plan International Bangladesh has successfully implemented a number of projects to stop child marriage. Their interventions were centered around empowering girl children with supplementary actions by duty bearers. One learning is that NGO impact remains localized because of the scope of interventions (targetting, geographical limitations, choice of duty bearers, messaging, etc). They are able to attain great success in their intervention areas but not necessarily bring about the systemic changes needed to influence child marriage prevention policies. Access to Information (a2i) programme of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) therefore provided Plan International an opportunity to work together to challenging social issues, especially child marriage.

To strengthen this campaign two more child marriage preventing projects were awarded under the Challenge Fund 2016. Challenge fund 2016 is a collaborative initiative of Access to Information (a2i) Programme, Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and Plan International Bangladesh. In this competition, an innovative idea or project proposal was expected that will facilitate the attempts to stop child marriage and it will focus all the vulnerable girls and girl children of the cities and villages in bringing a solution, overcoming all the social and regressive barriers. A solution was expected that will create a social safety for every girl so that they can go to school, complete education and then get married after the age of 18. The Challenge Fund seek significant breakthroughs in innovation, radical solutions that will minimize local problems associated with child marriage. New ideas, technologies or approaches are welcomed that will support a girl child to overcome economic, social issues and hence prevent child marriage and continue her studies.

The updated and scaled up project is an integrated technology based Marriage Registration system that will verify the bride and bridegroom's age before registering and monitor school attendance rate of vulnerable female students to resolve the issue of early school drop-out and child marriage as well.

Features of the system:

- Age can be verified offline from any kind of mobile handset
- Digital age verification through Birth Certificates, Educational Certificates or National ID
- Tracking data of previous registered marriages
- Student Attendance tracking to reduce female student drop-out
- The system will have registered list of Marriage Registrars
- The system will be monitored by Local Administration
- Strengthened monitoring on unethical practices
- Scope of collaboration among matchmakers, Marriage Registrars, Teachers, Local Administrators & Leaders, Imam/Purohit etc.
- Tracking social and financial vulnerable families

- Messaging system to the relevant recipients
- Registration can be done through portal, SMS and USSD

GO-NGO Partnership:

In early 2016 two disparate developments created an opportunity to combine the two to further innovate on child marriage prevention strategies. One was findings from a Plan International girls' empowerment project (IMPOWER) in two sub-districts of Nilphamari District. The other was an ICT innovation by the administration of neighbouring Kurigram District supported by the a2i project. The ICT intervention piloted the use of the short messaging system (SMS) to verify ages of prospective brides and grooms and to register marriages online in Kurigram District. Plan International designed a capacity building intervention that included guidance provided by the Governance Innovation Unit (GIU) of the PMO for formal (kazi) and informal marriage performers on legal requirements that must be met for performing a marriage.

The new intervention was training on the Mobile-based system as well as the legal requirements for marriages to *all* licensed marriage performers as well as informal agents (as the latter contribute the most to child marriages) within a District. What began as a project intervention in one district (Nilphamari) was quickly extended to other districts beyond the project (Dinajpur, Lalmonirhat, Rangpur) with a2i's technical support. The objective of the GO-NGO partnership was to scale up the intervention to a point from which the government would adopt online age verification and marriage registration as the national standard.

The strategy that was employed by a2i and Plan International was to secure the buy-in of the regional and local administrations. On Plan International's part, we were able to support the SMS-based intervention based on two key points. One, it was aligned to the concept of 'Digital Bangladesh' – identifying ICT-based solutions to problems to raise efficacy and lower costs – the focus for the a2i project. Two, it would directly contribute to the achieving the targets of the district child marriage action plans mandated by the PMO. The GIU had concluded that it would be more strategic to bring the 5000 or so marriage registrars (licensed by the government) and the odd 100,000+ informal agents (such as matchmakers and religious leaders) within the circle of legal accountability rather than messaging the 160 million citizens of the country. GIU's goal was to ensure that registrars and informal agents understood and complied with the 2017 child marriage law. Therefore, Plan International's intervention was designed to reach the exact same target groups and to ensure that they received training on their roles and responsibilities under the new law as well as complied with its age verification and marriage registration requirements.

On its own, an NGO would be seriously challenged to implement the intervention or to go to scale. Therefore, the partnership with and the support provided by the two units of the PMO spearheading efforts to end child marriage - a2i project and the GIU – were critical.

Insights:

The age verification system is eligible for everyone in Bangladesh as long as they have National ID, Birth Certificate or Educational Qualification Certificate.

Here are few insights of the system till December 2017:

- Age Verification Through NID: 50516
- Age Verification Through Birth Registration Number: 48709
- Age Verification Through School Certificate: 10747
- Number of under-aged verified : 3750
- Total Successful Marriage Registration : 1871

Scale up and Way Forward:

The initial project funded under Service Innovation Fund was piloted in Kurigram District for more than a year. Upon collaboration with Plan International Bangladesh, the piloted projects were replicated in three more districts of Rangpur division: Dinajpur, Lalmonirhat and Rangpur.

However, more integrated versions of the project along with student attendance tracking facilities are being piloted under a2i's Challenge Fund 2016 in Baliadangi and Dumuria Upazilla. After successful completion of the piloting period, the entire system will be merged and updated as per the law and constitution of Bangladesh. A2i is willing to replicate this project all over Bangladesh and digitize the entire marriage registration system besides verifying age.

A2i has also initiated a project to integrate marriage registrars all over Bangladesh through Imam portal, this would ensure better coordination among the relevant stakeholders.

A2i is also ensuring sustainability of the project by aligning it well with all the legal aspects upon the instructions provided by the Law and Justice Division.

However, once the full system is rolled out all over Bangladesh, it will ease the unique ID development process of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) of Bangladesh. In addition, more validated database of civil registrations will be created which would help in several service delivery processes. A completely digitalized marriage registration under the unique ID will ensure eradication of child marriage and reduce the rate of girl child school dropout.