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CULTIVATING SUCCESS



JANCO **JOINT ACTION
FOR NUTRITION
OUTCOME**



RAM DAS

Country Director
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FOREWORD

In the annals of progress and development, some stories stand as luminous beacons, guiding us towards a future where every individual is nourished, empowered and resilient. The JANO project, a testament to the deep commitment of CARE Bangladesh, is one such narrative – a chronicle of triumph over adversity, of empowerment, and of sustainable change.

Nourishment, in its broadest sense, is not merely about filling bellies but involves fostering the right conditions for growth, opportunity and dignity. CARE Bangladesh understood this fundamental truth and embarked on a journey to address the multifaceted challenges that impede access to nourishing food. Rooted in the ethos of justice and collaboration, CARE Bangladesh's initiatives have uplifted communities, transformed landscapes, and offered hope where there was once despair.

The pages of this book of success stories bear witness to the remarkable journey of the JANO project – a journey marked by resilience, innovation, and above all the indomitable spirit of the communities it serves. Through inclusive agricultural value chains, JANO has not only lifted millions out of food insecurity but has also fortified the very foundations of agriculture, making it more resilient, productive, and sustainable.

At the heart of JANO's success lies a commitment to empowerment, particularly of women. Recognising the pivotal role women play in shaping nutrition outcomes, JANO has championed initiatives which amplify their voices, enhance their skills, and catalyse their leadership within the agricultural sector. From nurturing homestead nutrition gardens to fostering female entrepreneurs, JANO has empowered women to become agents of change, driving progress at the grassroots level.

But JANO's impact transcends the boundaries of agriculture – it extends to maternal and child health, community resilience, and systemic strengthening. By forging partnerships with the private sector and local government, JANO has laid the groundwork for sustainable change, ensuring that the benefits of its interventions endure long after its conclusion.

In the following pages, you will encounter stories of resilience and transformation – tales of individuals and communities who, armed with resources, knowledge, and compassion, have defied the odds, and reshaped their destinies. These stories, born from the lived experiences of JANO participants, offer a glimpse into the profound impact of CARE Bangladesh's initiatives and underscore the importance of multi-sectoral partnerships in achieving sustainable development.

As we embark on this journey through the corridors of success, let us not forget that the true measure of progress lies not in numbers but in the lives touched, communities empowered, and futures transformed. May the stories contained herein inspire us to redouble our efforts, to forge ever-stronger partnerships, and to march steadfastly towards a future where nourishment, in all its dimensions, is a reality for Bangladesh.

Happy reading!

Ram Das

Country Director, CARE Bangladesh

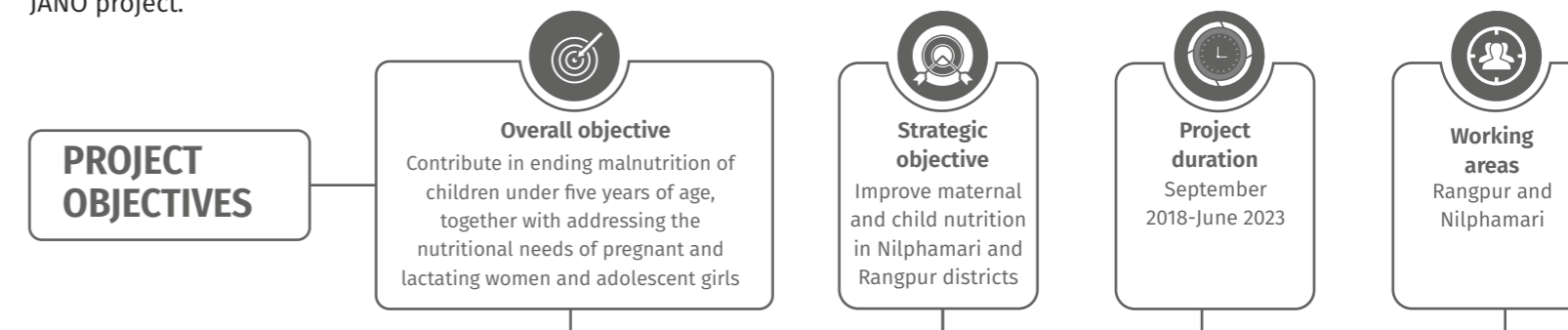
ABOUT JANO

Joint Action for Nutrition Outcome (JANO) works to improve maternal and child nutrition by working with difference stakeholders to strengthen nutritional governance in Nilphamari and Rangpur districts in north-western Bangladesh. Placing women at the forefront of efforts to achieve nutrition outcomes, the project works with nutrition-sensitive government departments and the private sector to ensure their services reach the community level, especially those at bottom of the pyramid. It also works with the community directly, to raise awareness about nutrition, the services available to them at local and national levels, and their welfare rights.

JANO's primary objective and expected result is to enhance the production and accessibility of high-value nutritious commodities and services. To accomplish this, JANO has developed and implemented a range of activities specifically tailored to empower women in various facets of agriculture. These initiatives have bolstered women's capacity in household agricultural production, from growing vegetables and crops to raising livestock, while simultaneously equipping them with enhanced knowledge of issues of health and nutrition, connecting them with different platforms to secure their participation and engagement. In this way, JANO took proactive steps to foster women entrepreneurs within the agricultural sector, establishing them as exemplars of empowerment and leadership. Through these targeted efforts, JANO endeavors to uplift women, amplify their voices, and catalyse their contributions to advancing nutrition and sustainable development initiatives.

Through multi-sectoral, nutrition-specific, and nutrition-sensitive interventions, JANO has increased people's access to maternal and child health services by promoting knowledge, attitudes and practices related to sufficient nutrition among targeted women of reproductive age, adolescents, and adult males. To guarantee long-lasting effects from the local to national levels, JANO is also focusing on "system strengthening" with the participation of the private and local government sectors. As a result of best practices being widely disseminated, JANO's initiative has been able to guarantee year-round availability of a variety of food in areas where it is effective, more functional community support groups with an increased capacity to resolve the issues impacting them, and the availability and accessibility of the services the community needs.

Funded by the European Union with co-funding from the Austrian Development Cooperation, JANO is replicating proven best practices, and take to scale innovative local governance models for better nutrition. The project is working with the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) and private sector at the national, regional and local levels, to support the effective implementation of the Second National Plan of Action for Nutrition (NPAN 2). The NPAN 2 provides the strategic vision for Bangladesh to achieve nutritional security, where all relevant ministries are compelled to support the initiative, which reports directly to the Prime Minister's office. JANO is working at multiple levels of government, specifically with the Nutrition Committees at the district and upazila (sub-district) levels and Union Development Coordination Committees at union levels – building their capacity for them to better develop nutritional programmes, implement and budget for these programmes, and to provide effective oversight in its implementation. Through the commitment and hard work of the JANO partners, volunteers – and the participants themselves - these initiatives are taking on a life of their own, with their impact being felt among those who are not their direct recipients. **Over the six years of the project, CARE strove to reach 4.3 million members of the population.** The relationship between CARE and local and national government has been central to the success of the JANO project.



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STORIES FROM NILPHAMARI



Nurufa

A more managed approach increases success

NURUFA (40) is one of the few women with apparently more resources than others in terms of availability of land, and although not a member of the Community Support Group, she was still able to access JANO services and benefit from them. Her story is no different when it comes to personal growth. Although she kept a few ducks and chickens, Nurufa was unaware of the importance of using the proper vaccines and looking after her birds' health in general. Vegetables were another source of income for her, having grown many different types over the previous two years, from kohlrabi to garlic. But she was surprised to hear from a JANO volunteer how to make nursery beds, and rear chickens with the right care. Nurufa had been on JANO's radar for some time before she finally accessed the services available. The local livestock office was offering subsidised vaccines and Nurufa was able to get them for her chickens, while a

veterinarian offered to help without charge. **"Each vegetable needs watering differently,"** she said, **"and the beds help us keep them separate and give them the right amount of water, as well as the chance to tend them better. This was all new to me – I learned it from the JANO volunteer. Now my garden looks so pretty, and my chickens and ducks are healthier,"** said a beaming Nurufa. **"To be honest, it's been a huge help – it means I can manage my finances better, because I'm tending my livestock and plants in a better way,"** explains Nurufa. She has more than forty chickens and about twenty ducks, and sells their eggs, which about a month ago allowed her to buy a sewing machine. **"It's not like I didn't know about livestock rearing or that vaccines were available – I just hadn't considered these things important. But I now know their value – which is a huge contribution JANO has made to my life,"** said Nurufa.

I had a successful business to begin with, but JANO helped me realise how much scope there was for improvement and to manage it in a better, more organised way.



Bilkis
A successful start-up selling cattle feed

BILKIS (55) has always been an enterprising woman. Involved with several organisations, she learned how to sew and did some tailoring, along with a running a fabric shop. Then she met the JANO volunteer, who invited her to a Community Support group meeting. Bilkis was already on a couple of committees, and as a member of a women’s initiative group, visited the local government office where she accessed training in short-cycle crops including red spinach and other greens, as well as how to rear cows. When JANO asked her if she was interested in increasing her income, she said yes with alacrity. The Community Support Group suggested she sell cattle feed, and set her up with a local supplier, where she bought the feed at a subsidised rate and sold on to people in her locality. Bilkis said, “I bring home about four to five sacks every month. Each sack is 25 kg and costs BDT 1180. I follow JANO’s advice and sell the feed for around BDT 50 per kg, to customers who come to my house to buy it. This is a great opportunity for me – because I don’t need a shop. Customers also get a glimpse of my wonderful cows, and can ask me questions about the quality of the feed. I love being a home-based seller and my cows set the perfect example.” Bilkis observed how the feed has increased milk production and impacted on her livelihood. “I used to feed them molasses but I’m really very happy with the results of using the feed,” she said. Bilkis is now known in the locality as the lady that sells feed – an identity she is honored to embrace. She has a sense of making a

contribution to the community and to her family’s upkeep, and that she achieved this with JANO’s support. The training from JANO also encouraged Bilkis to grows vegetables as a means to generating extra income, including gourd which she sells for a substantial profit. Here too, the improved cattle feed has had an impact:

“Because my vegetables are grown using organic fertiliser - the dung from my cows - they taste better than those available at the market.”



Jobeda

Inspiring women to access medical care

When **JOBEDA** (38)'s third baby was due, she went to the community clinic to access the medical services that the JANO project was publicising. She already had two children, aged about 12 and 13, but she was a little apprehensive. She was older now, and not as physically strong as she used to be. However, her family encouraged her to attend and the JANO volunteer was a great source of help, signposting Jobeda to the services she needed. At community clinics, women get the medical attention they need, and if necessary are referred on to doctors in urban areas. Often, this referral means a slightly lower doctor's fee. However, as Jobeda laughingly said, **"We're more concerned about getting the right kind of medical help than a reduced fee – although that would be an extra benefit for sure."**

The other women in Jobeda's neighborhood are also looking to access the services offered by the community clinic, in the expectation of getting the care they need and giving birth to healthy babies. These women have benefited from the intervention of the JANO volunteer, who encouraged them take up the medical services available to them. The community clinic is about three kilometres away, but, said Jobeda, **"the distance meant nothing to me – I'd have gone to any lengths to make sure I had a healthy birth."**

The women in her neighbourhood have been inspired by Jobeda's determination, which has had a significant role in their decision to use the medical services that JANO made them aware of. These

pregnant and lactating mothers are part of an informal group of women who are now very aware of the benefits of eating nutritious food and getting timely medical help during pregnancy. They are also well-informed about the essential post-natal procedures that the clinic offers, such as vaccinations and regular health checkups for both mother and baby.

The community clinic also advises adolescent girls about using menstrual pads and getting tetanus injections, with talking books providing information on various health topics in an easily accessible format. The medical service providers at the clinic discuss iron deficiency and provide appropriate advice on how to combat it. Tetanus injections are given to avoid the complications that can occur during a Caesarian section. Women are called for four checkups during pregnancy and another four after the birth. The clinics also have a designated corner for breast-feeding demonstrations and where mothers can feed their babies. There is also a suggestions and complaints box, although, as the women explained, **"We've never needed to complain about anything – everyone's very cooperative and helpful."** Jobeda and the other women in her community have benefited greatly from the community clinic, and believe this to be the beginning of a healthier and more aware journey, for a group of women who take their health seriously and know how to access the right information and services when they need them.



Mukta
A moringa miracle

Some of the most common topics of conversation where **MUKTA** (35) lives were child marriage, the lack of nutritional food and vaccinations, and other health issues including the need for regular checkups for pregnant and lactating mothers. As part of an initiative by JANO volunteers to bring together interested women to share messages around these topics, a play was organised to stimulate discussion about child marriage. On performance day, the audience was given the number of a telephone information line, with a recorded message informing them of the process to follow if they heard of a child marriage being planned. Mukta wanted to get involved and joined a Community Support Group (CSG), where members were given information about how to prevent child marriage. The group was also made aware of the benefits of moringa leaves, learning how to grind the leaves into a paste, and how this and even the oil extract is good for reducing pain and other ailments. Prior to this they had only ever eaten moringa leaves mixed in with other greens, in a local delicacy called pelka. The group now learned that this which involves adding soda, kills off moringa's beneficial properties and ruins its health benefits. Mukta grew moringa trees but was unaware of their many properties. She took the information about the best way to prepare moringa very seriously and has been telling her neighbours about it ever since – from its help in controlling high blood pressure to its iron, magnesium and other mineral and vitamin content, to alleviating heart ailments.

Mukta is now well-versed in the superfood qualities of moringa.

“I’ve learned to respect this tree more, ever since getting to know of its multiple benefits – and I’m so glad I grow it and can eat it in abundance!”

Mukta also explained the various checkups and follow-up that a pregnant mother requires, and how to get these medical services through JANO and the community clinic.

“We discuss these issues in meetings, then spread the information by word-of-mouth – whenever I have free time, I go out and speak with the women in my area.”

Mukta is an active part of the CSG and uses the knowledge she gets from JANO in as many ways as possible. The JANO volunteer went looking for likely women to be active participants of a group, and identified at least one woman in each neighborhood who showed the right kind of initiative. In this case it was Mukta.

“
The fact that women talk freely to each other about their personal problems makes it easier to successfully involve them in our endeavours, the JANO volunteer said.
”

“This type of interaction has enabled women to gain confidence and enhanced their presentation and public-speaking skills, said the Jano volunteer.

Mukta is committed to her role contributing to the health and nutritional needs of her community, and to taking a lead in disseminating information about harmful practices such as child marriage. And on this last issue her observation is positive:



“Child marriage seems to have decreased over the years – and some day, I hope everyone similarly will be more conscious of their nutritional needs and eat more healthily,” concluded Mukta.





Alifa
A confident entrepreneur achieving her vision

ALIFA (25) is a third-year university student, and is also bringing up a toddler and rearing cows. An active member of her community successfully juggling her education and responsibilities at home, Alifa was the JANO volunteer's obvious choice as an addition to the community clinic's Community Support Group (CSG). Soon after the CSG started up the COVID-19 pandemic began, and the group kept Alifa and her fellow committee members informed about the hygiene guidelines and social distancing practices that should be followed to keep the pandemic at bay.

"We benefited by getting access to this information in the early days of the pandemic, and soon realised that a committee is a great way to get updates. Now we actively participate in whatever the volunteer suggests," explained Alifa.

Getting involved in the CSG also meant Alifa was able to access training in a nearby school, in how to establish a vegetable garden and rear cattle, with professional trainers from the government's agricultural and livestock departments. After participating in a one-day session on rearing cows Alifa took advice from the trainer and then started her business.

"I started with two cows – now I have four. I learned about cattle diseases, the benefits of rearing cows, and ways to increase their milk production. The trainer from the sub-district government office often gives us suggestions, or refers us to the vet if necessary," she explained.

"After we've taken the milk we need, we sell what's left – about 1.5 kg

a day – for BDT 50 per kg. If I needed to, I'll sell my cows – but for now, we're happy with what we earn from the milk," she said.

Investing in the cows was a bold step, but Alifa always was an enterprising woman and with the extra confidence gained through her collaboration with JANO, got together the funds she needed. She also planted papaya and moringa trees after learning from JANO about their health and nutritional benefits.

"I know now that papaya has vitamins, and moringa is also great, for lots of reasons. There's ten people in my household, and we've all been eating the fruit and vegetables for more than a year now. Although everyone in the neighbourhood keeps ducks and chickens, the training really helped us, because we learned things about animal health we didn't know before," said Alifa.





Social audit
An accountability tool, changing the community nutrition landscape

The JANO project was started by CARE to work with government and communities, and to support government to implement its forward-thinking plans for local development. It did this by ensuring that communities were informed about the support and services that government provides, and can access them. As part of this joint commitment to improving the health and nutrition of the country's citizens, JANO holds regular social audits of its work. One such exercise took place in an area where thirty households depend for their water on the local deep tubewell. This needed a concrete base to stop bacteria from accumulating and contaminating the water, an issue addressed by the Community Support Group (CSG) during regular meetings facilitated by the JANO team. There are six CSGs in the union under two community clinics, each with 17 members. Out of the total of 102, JANO supported the formation of a 12-member social audit team, comprising two members from each group. A social audit is a social accountability tool, highly innovative in the context of union-level community participation, which representatives of the community – the social audit team – use to assess whether activities have happened according to plan. JANO provided the social audit team with training and it began work at the field level. Through its discussions with community members, the team identified issues of importance and recorded their findings.

Public hearing

A public hearing session was then organised by the local government Union Development Coordination Committee with JANO's support. Those invited came from many different levels of the community: civil society representatives and dignitaries, the chairman, secretary and reserved women members of the union council, health and family planning inspectors, users of the tubewell, journalists, contractors, neighbourhood development committee representatives, and members of the citizen forum. The audit team presented its findings and recommendations:

Findings	Recommendations	Person/body responsible	Timeline
Tubewell has no cover and needs one	install a cover over the tubewell	community members	July 2021
Water hasn't been tested for arsenic	test for arsenic	Department of Public Health; community members	Sept 2021
Issue of water drainage was not considered during tubewell installation	consider the water drainage system while installing the next tubewell	project implementation organisation; community members	

To resolve the issue of water drainage, the Union Parishad (local council) was allocated funds to improve the drainage system. According to a member of the social audit team, the audit's success was due to the team acting as a pressure group, securing a commitment from the Union Parishad to resolve the problem during a public hearing. "The tubewell now has a proper concrete base, meaning the community can get water easily during the rainy season, while substantially reducing the health risk."



Urmi
Cycling towards her goals

Until recently, an adolescent girl riding a bicycle would have been an anomaly in rural and urban Bangladesh. Yet many girls like 14-year-old **URMI** have been inspired by JANO's initiative to challenge this stereotype, choosing a bicycle as their regular mode of transport for getting to school, running errands, or visiting friends and relatives.

“When I first expressed the desire to ride a bicycle my mother was very apprehensive and opposed to it. I told her it's certainly not a crime to ride a bicycle.”

Since 2008, the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) has been promoting gender equality through its two-year program for adolescent girls aged 12–14, Gender Equity Movement in Schools (GEMS).

JANO has been at the forefront of encouraging girls to participate in male-dominated activities and question social norms, with simple actions like riding a bicycle. Introducing bike rides at annual sports day activities was part of the plan, as was staging Bokul Phul, a theatrical performance about the many ways girls benefit from riding a bike. A cycle rally was also held to showcase the girls' increased confidence. With some locals left amazed, many parents were still highly sceptical of how their girls would be perceived.

“My father was easier to convince – he even bought me my first bicycle,” said a smiling Urmi.

Bokul Phul is part of JANO's Theatre for Development activity and has been a great way to attract more support for girls riding bicycles. Urmi played the lead character Bokul, who persists in riding a bike in the face of ridicule from the local chairman, her family, and others. However, when she saves the chairman's life by taking him to the hospital on her bike, she wins his appreciation and his blessing. Urmi is just one example of how getting access to a reliable mode of transport impacts girls, allowing them greater autonomy in their personal space.

“I often used to be late for school, and had trouble getting to my tuition and back – and I wasn't allowed to visit friends because of needing someone to pick me up and drop me off. I'd often go to a cousin's wedding and had to either stay over or come back early because I had no way of getting home independently,” she explained.

Now Urmi has earned her parents' trust and moves around the locality freely, going to classes, over to friends' houses and visiting relatives.

“I even run errands for my mother – she really depends on me to do her odd jobs,” said Urmi confidently, with the increased level of self-reliance and assurance that being a bicycle owner has brought.



STORIES FROM RANGPUR



Johura

**Encouraging
the
community
to access
health
services**

When she first heard about JANO, **JOHURA** (45) had already worked with several organisations including as a computer operator for a local NGO. This had given her the chance to visit places outside her locality and developed in her a certain sense of independence, which she used to motivate those around her. Johura learned that JANO was encouraging local people to access government support, and that plenty was available, but that no one was making use of it. Her frustration at hearing this encouraged her to go around the community herself, urging them to stand up and get the services they were entitled to.

Now, as member of the Union Parishad (local council) for a year, Johura attracts significant attention. Community members come to her for assistance or to be signposted to the right place to get it. Their general awareness about accessing services has increased. Even a simple matter of taking vitamin supplements was not regular practice, or even common knowledge, and this too has changed.

Johura has been encouraging people in her locality to use the community clinic and urging women to collect their maternity allowance. She has also made them aware of government allowances, available to seniors and people with disabilities and which can easily be accessed by showing an ID card. Currently, four women have been guided by Johura to get maternity allowance and it is hoped that many others will soon become

aware of the four checkups available to them during pregnancy, as well as the post-natal follow-ups. Johura's tenacity has also led to links being forged between farmers and officers from the government's Department of Agriculture Extension resulting in the establishment of demonstration nurseries. Through this relationship, farmers get seeds to plant using organic fertiliser, and the agricultural office sends officers to monitor the vegetable plots. Linking farmers with agricultural extension officers to improved vegetable production has been a major contribution on Johura's part, as until she came on the scene, most people were unaware that this opportunity existed.

Johura confidence to do this has been boosted by the valuable support offered by her mother-in-law and her husband, who both believe she is doing the right thing. With information spread by word of mouth, and with inspirational efforts from women like Johura, this new awareness among local communities means JANO's initiatives are being taken forward, leading to systemic change and the likelihood of a sustainable future after the project ends.



Shefali

Embodying the entrepreneurial spirit

When **SHEFALI** (40) first went to the clinic to get medicines, it was because she had heard it was the best place to access medical care. She was also curious to know what kind of activities happened through JANO, and her evident keen interest encouraged the JANO volunteer to invite her to join a group, whose members represented government and non-government organisations. Shefali started to attend regular sessions, learning how to contribute to preventing early and forced child marriage, and JANO soon selected her to nurture as a woman entrepreneur. Although at first her husband was reluctant at the thought of her venturing out alone and apprehensive of her gaining too much independence, the JANO volunteer gradually persuaded him that Shefali gaining credibility in the community was a good thing. Next, Shefali went to the local health centre, where JANO had suggested she could access training in how to sell seeds. This covered what types of seed would do well in certain weather conditions, how to sell them for a profit (including convincing customers to buy high-quality seeds), the benefits of the seeds and where to get them. She also learned about the advantages of using menstrual pads, how to speak about them with adolescent girls, and how to sell the pads to start the process of girls using them. Shefali told us,

“After the training I started my business, initially selling vegetable seeds like red spinach, pumpkin and gourd, and menstrual pads at the same time. I found it hard to talk to

people at first: I wasn’t that confident and no one knew who I was. The JANO volunteer really helped me to approach people and started taking me to Uthaan Boithok meetings (in the homestead yard) and introducing me as a volunteer. This developed my confidence, which I used to reach out to more people in my area. Soon, I’d got together a small group of women and adolescent girls who came to me to get the pads. At the same time, I planted some of the seeds, and the results made a good impression on my neighbours. Through word of mouth and my increased self-confidence, I started selling more, then slowly started saving to buy more seeds. So I was selling more seeds and also talking to a larger number of people to sell the seeds or menstrual pads.”

Shefali gets the red spinach seeds from a shop specially assigned by JANO, buying them for BDT 36 and selling them for BDT 80. Pumpkin seeds cost BDT 23 and she sells them for BDT 40.

“I don’t even need introductions anymore – I’m a known face in the locality and have carved out a reputation for myself. Adolescent girls are coming to me for menstrual pads, so that’s always going to be a regular source of income. The best thing is, these girls can come to me at any time of the day. They’re embarrassed buying them in the shop, and I’m selling a reliable product. I buy the pads for BDT 30 and sell them for BDT 35.”

“

We were trained by JANO in hygiene matters related to using menstrual pads and how to avoid infection. First I got my daughter to use them, so now when I sell them, I can talk convincingly about their benefits. And when I'm selling vegetable seeds I specify the nutritional qualities of iron and zinc. Before the JANO training, I myself didn't know this, so in a way it's easier to share it with others like me – I think they can relate to me better.

”



Shefali began by making a profit of BDT 500, which increased to BDT 700 and then BDT 1800. As her income steadily increases, she invests it in seasonal seeds and buys things for her children. **“Earlier, I couldn't give my daughter a single penny when she went to school, but now she gets money for a snack and I can even buy her new school shoes and books. It gives me so much pleasure to do this,”** said a delighted Shefali. Shefali has now enrolled her daughter in college. This came about because of the JANO session she attended on preventing child marriage, which gave her the confidence to convince her husband that their daughter should equip herself with a proper education and the knowledge to navigate adult life.

“

I never knew much about the world outside my home,” said Shefali, “and this opportunity gave me the chance to explore my surroundings. I now have the credibility as well as the skills to convince people to buy my products. I never thought that one day I'd become this confident woman. This change in me has also been appreciated by my husband – especially since he saw me actually making money, she laughingly added.

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“

Above all, I'm eternally grateful to JANO for helping me to lead a life where I can see a bright future, instead of the mundane life I led before.

”



Model Para

A community united to improve its health and well-being

JANO has been working with communities through the government-formed system of community clinics and the members they attract. This concept of bringing a community together to embrace a lifestyle where nutrition and health play a major role required setting a true example – and thus the idea of a **“Model Para”** (or "community") was formulated. A JANO volunteer shared the idea with her group at the community clinic, who took it up enthusiastically. In particular, the group's convenor Mr. Amjad Ali took the initiative to bring together community members and make it happen.

The Model Para had to have the following qualities to make it a successful example for others to emulate:

- pre- and post-natal mother care
- every newborn child or infant to be given their vaccines
- each household to have at least three nutritional trees within their compound

Initially, everyone who learned about the guava's nutritional benefits were more than willing to plant a tree in their compound, especially as the seeds were supplied by the CSG for just a small charge. Nevertheless, some households could not afford it – at which point, Mr. Ali stepped in to help out.

“I felt that out of all the 98 households in the community, why should a few be deprived of eating nutritious fruit, just because

they couldn't afford it?” explained Mr. Ali. His donation of BDT 500 (about USD 4) meant that every household was able to plant at least three guava trees. And the community has been active in disseminating other messages as well – especially that of preventing child marriage, which is now practically unheard of. **“In fact,”** explained another member, Mr. Bikas Chandra,

“People now realise child marriage is a punishable crime, and don't want to get into trouble. They used to be unaware of the law, but now they're scared of it – which helps us further our cause.”

The real motivation to form a Model Para had its foundation in the general composition of its inhabitants. As a mixed community where different faiths reside in harmony, the concept played well with their existing framework: that of peaceful coexistence.

“Although we never identified it as such, I suppose each of us makes an effort to maintain a peaceful atmosphere – which is possibly why this concept appealed to us,” Mr. Ali said.

“The community members unanimously agree that this initiative has not only brought us closer, to strive towards a goal, but also shown us how to support each other when the need arises.” Mr. Ali added:

“The Model Para not only demonstrates our unity but also how to utilise our resources to live a healthier and more aware life.”



Rupali
An enterprising farmer sharing new knowledge

RUPALI (50) had taken part in training offered by the local agriculture and livestock departments in the past, but was still not sure where to get seeds or how to set up her own small business. She was approached by a Community Support Group member in her area who put her in touch with a JANO volunteer. It was only then that she worked out how to go about starting up her nursery and, through the connections made through JANO, got the seeds, set up her land in five separate beds, and started to use organic fertiliser, inserting dung from her own cows between the beds. She has now sold trees and vegetables in the locality, while her son goes further afield and sells them at the local bazar. However, Rupali's greatest contribution to the community has been the knowledge she shares with neighbours. Her most popular suggestions are about her vegetable beds, the setting up of which she explains to her neighbours using local terms. The JANO training also discusses the benefits of using vermicompost, and Rupali

“
 I tell them to build a bed three hands wide and to leave space between each bed of up to two hands.
”

is eager to learn new concepts and hone her farming skills still further. She also assists the JANO volunteers to disseminate messages for pregnant and lactating women. **“I went to the community clinic myself when I was pregnant and got the four mandatory checkups,”** explained Rupali.





Union Parishad Secretary

A strong advocate for nutrition initiatives

The Secretary of the Union Parishad (local council) office, Md. Ershad Uddin (47), has been a strong advocate of JANO's efforts to bring local communities and government bodies closer together.

"I actually think we would have had a very hard time to accomplish all our plans for health and nutrition facilities and services had it not been for JANO's support. JANO volunteers made it easier to spread information within a wide radius and to support local communities to access our services effectively. Government-led bodies, like members of the agriculture and livestock departments, can get closer to communities now, which also makes it easier for local people to access services. This two-way communication has been JANO's biggest contribution to taking the government's health and nutrition plans forward. Furthermore, the willingness displayed by the locals in initiatives like caring for a homestead garden has been encouraging, and evidence that JANO's bottom-up approach, via its volunteers who are members of the local community, has really worked well," said Mr. Uddin.

Mr. Uddin is a firm advocate of JANO's efforts, often attending sessions which offer the community the opportunity to raise livestock and agriculture issues. These frequently attract a large crowds, whose confidence to ask questions of government officials has grown over the lifetime of the project. They return home with increased awareness of their rights and responsibilities.



"I've been posted to other parts of North Bangladesh and haven't found any other organisation taking such a positive lead.
"



JANO's support has been of immense help in making sure the Union Parishad implements its annual plans.

“

We've been able to provide 45 tubewells and will soon supply 127 latrines. Employees have taken up the part-time salaries available to them on the birth of a child and while on maternity leave. JANO also provided support with the issue of the educated unemployed, and from next week we'll be starting 20 days of training, teaching freelancing skills to anyone good with computers.

”

The Secretary suggested projects like JANO continue for longer and highlighted the positive results of yard meetings in reaching out to communities, evident in the popular increase in homestead gardens and nurseries. Mr. Uddin also expressed appreciation for how JANO encouraged self-sufficiency, and explained how a platform now exists for improved communication between local government and communities.



Climate-resilient gardens

Towards a model union

Bangladesh is a deltaic country, with a shortage of land per capita. The overuse of land for agriculture has also reduced soil quality, making food less nutritious. This is exacerbated by the climate emergency, which in turn compromises the ability of communities to access their rights. Add to this the inappropriate use of pesticides, and vegetables and fruit sold at the market rarely possess the nutritional value needed to keep a family healthy. A climate-resilient or climate-smart garden was JANO's way of introducing a practical way of informing communities about the nutritional value of the things they grow. These climate-smart gardens are planted in the empty spaces in front of each Union Parishad (local council) office, with the characteristics or nutritional factors of each vegetable or fruit displayed on a board next to them. This has inspired chairmen of other unions to take up the activity and motivate their constituents to join the movement to eat nutritious food. The climate-smart garden suits all seasonal plants, with some distinct characteristics. Firstly, it

uses climate-smart techniques (raised beds, organic farming methods, crop diversification, intercropping and mulching). The beds should be of a certain height, with a drainage system by their side to carry away rainwater. A diversified range of vegetables can be cultivated, including saleable crops. They are grown without the use of pesticide and using organic fertiliser, making the garden eco-friendly. It also enables community members to understand the possibility of growing more than one variety in a limited space, something they rarely explore. Visitors to the Union Parishad office see the garden and are inspired to go home and create their own, contributing to their family's nutrition. Many government and non-government officials come to see the garden, take a cue from its unique characteristics, and replicate them in front of their own offices. They use the support of training projects to spread the word about climate-smart gardens and to inspire community members to take up the model at home.

“ I'm really very happy that JANO took this initiative, and that it chose my union to create a climate-resilient model garden. I and my fellow Union Parishad members look after the garden, and see a lot of interest among union residents who want to build something similar at home. We often link up officers from the different agricultural departments to advise us or our residents about how to take best care of the gardens. ”



Taslima

A young woman's awareness awaking her peers

TASLIMA (17) has always attended school regularly and has grown up in a loving environment surrounded by friends and family. However, in some rural communities, traditional beliefs persist, with menstruating girls and women having to adhere to archaic practices devoid of scientific fact. When the JANO volunteer asked her if she'd like to help share the healthy eating message among her peers Taslima agreed, and began to learn about nutritious foods like guava and unripe banana, that help mitigate decreased iron levels which occur as a natural part of the monthly cycle. Taslima said, **"I try to maintain healthy food habits during these special days of the month. At school, I talk about my role in the Community Support Group and tell other girls about taking iron tablets and the benefits of it all. Girls actually come up to me and tell me how the tablets help them by improving their iron levels."** JANO's approach – involving community members to spread a healthy eating message – is a process that needs time. Girls like Taslima are ideal advocates of a healthy diet during the menstrual cycle. Even before she began her role with JANO, Taslima knew something about the possible fluctuations in health during menstruation, and her parents were also supportive of her exploring the opportunity to get involved. According to Taslima, her path to convincing others has been relatively simple. **"The best way is to present yourself as an example. I benefit from taking iron tablets – so I simply share my experience with others."** Taslima plans to take her advocacy as far as possible, to inform and educate more adolescent girls about health risks during the menstrual cycle, and to encourage them to eat nutritious foods and take vitamin supplements. She feels

that with JANO's support she has earned the credibility and trust of her peers. Many are not allowed to eat eggs on particular days of the month – but beliefs like this can mean that women and girls are further deprived of the protein and minerals that they actually need more of. Although it wasn't news to Taslima and her friends that certain times of the month are especially sensitive for adolescent girls, learning that instead of cutting things out of their diet they need to eat even more nutritious foods has supported them to feel more in control of their bodies and their health. Taslima often saw the JANO volunteer in the area, attending Community Support Group meetings, and so didn't feel awkward when she was approached to talk about various health issues. **"She told us about changes to an adolescent girl's body and possible vitamin deficiencies during our menstrual cycle. I knew nothing about iron levels or that we needed a supplement. JANO asked me to get the other girls together and now we take the tablets once a week. We're in a group with other girls, and pregnant and lactating mothers,"** explained Taslima. **"The volunteer checks in with us regularly, to see that we're taking our tablets properly, and then we ask around ourselves, to make sure everyone is following the same advice,"** she said.



Antora & Palki

Building strength in body and mind

In their free time, **ANTORA** and her friend **PALKI** both (13) can be found teaching 15 other girls karate at school. Adolescent health isn't complete without physical activity, and Antora and Palki were keen participants in 32 days of karate training organised by JANO. Palki's mother explained that her daughter always liked being active, and that she and her husband encouraged Palki to take up this opportunity. She said, **"I knew self-defence to be a very important life skill and was happy when my daughter told me about this chance of training."** In addition to an adolescent corner – a safe space providing young people with a learning environment for gender, nutrition, hygiene, and reproductive health and rights – a sample climate-smart garden growing nutritious fruit and vegetables, and regular sessions on a healthy diet, JANO introduced karate as a part of the school's physical exercise curriculum. This served a dual purpose: it provided young women with physical activity, hand-in-hand with the chance to learn a valuable skill. When Antora and Palki proved to be two of the best students, JANO asked them to teach 15 other girls what they had learned. Antora explained, **"We love our studies - but we also knew about the importance of physical**

exercise for adolescents, alongside mental exercise," and Palki added, **"There were only a few of us at first – and the boys made fun of us and thought no good would come of it. We took no notice – we knew it'd benefit us."**

In order to take part in the training, girls like Antora and Palki had to make some sacrifices. They were required to take time off during school hours, which meant missing lessons. School supported them by allowing this, and teachers and fellow students helped them make up the work they had missed. **"We would come home, relax for a while, then get the lessons we'd missed from our friends or clarify with our teachers the next day – and we managed to keep up with the syllabus,"** Palki said.

Antora explained how karate has changed their lifestyle: **"We had the energy to do all that physical exercise – then come home and carry on with our usual activities. And now we have more concentration and stamina for everything!"**

" We didn't understand what a JANO volunteer did until we actually experienced it. Now we tell all our friends and neighbours about this change in lifestyle, which makes it easier to convince our peers to join us. **"**