

## **In Noor's village girls are no longer forced to marry**

In Noor Jahan village in Bangladesh, residents of the community have agreed that girls are not to get married before the age of 18. In Bangladesh, poor women are especially vulnerable. Young girls are at great risk during pregnancy and childbirth, and many die or have lifelong implications due to being forced to marry and become pregnant too early in life.

“Your support is important for us to help women organize themselves locally and provide training on their rights. Through education and advocacy, we work together to reduce the number of early marriages.”

### **The village working for women's rights**

- My oldest daughter is 15 and has already received two requests for marriage, but my husband and I have said no both times. We want her to be at least 18, but preferably 20 years before she marries. The words come from Noor Jahan whom lives in the village. Noor has three daughters and was herself 14-15 years old when she was married. Within five months of marriage, she was pregnant. Noor says that it was not a good experience and had serious complications because she was so young, and she is clear that her three daughters should not have to go share the same fate.

### **Usually young girls are married**

Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service, RDRS, has been the Church of Sweden's partner for more than 35 years. RDRS is part of ACT Alliance. Through working for local governance, agriculture, the environment and climate adaptation, health, women's empowerment groups and education they want to give those living in poverty in rural Bangladesh the opportunity to create a better life. In Bangladesh, it is not uncommon that girls are married at a young age. Consequences are they will lose opportunities for education because they are expected to leave school to live and work in their in-laws' homes. For a girl in her early teens a pregnancy is associated with high risks. Many die or suffer serious health consequences in connection with these early pregnancies.

### **Women's and girl's rights**

Addressing sexual violence is much at the core of the RDRS work with women and girls. RDRS work through enabling women to organize locally and offer them skills training on their rights. Through education and advocacy work RDRS aim to reduce the number of early marriages. In Noor's home village there is now a minimum age for marriage at 18 for girls and 21 for boys.



Picture:

Noor Jahan and her husband in Bangladesh will not let their daughters marry until they are adults. **Photo:** Ingrid Bergenholm-England/IKON