

Transforming the care economy through impact investing case study:

# Phulki



The Care Economy  
Knowledge Hub

[the-care-economy-knowledge-hub.org](https://the-care-economy-knowledge-hub.org)



## CONTENTS

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| FOREWORD   | 2         |
| INTRODUCTION   | 4         |
| <b>1 - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>                                       | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>2 - ECOSYSTEM</b>   | <b>7</b>  |
| 2.1 Bangladesh: statistical snapshot                               | 7         |
| 2.2 Context analysis   | 9         |
| <b>3 - BUSINESS DEEP DIVE</b>                                      | <b>12</b> |
| 3.1 Business headline  | 12        |
| 3.2 Founder story  | 16        |
| 3.3 Business model   | 19        |
| 3.4 Phulki's growth story  | 20        |
| 3.5 People and governance  | 23        |
| 3.6 Support received to date                                       | 24        |
| 3.7 Key business drivers and challenges to growth                  | 25        |
| <b>4 - IMPACT DEEP DIVE</b>  | <b>29</b> |
| 4.1 The impact theory of change of the enterprise                  | 29        |
| 4.2 Current impact and measurement practices                       | 31        |
| 4.3 Customer's own experiences of the solution                     | 32        |
| <b>5 - LOOK FORWARD</b>  | <b>47</b> |
| 5.1 Growth and sustainability plans                                | 47        |
| 5.2 Ask of investors and stakeholders                              | 48        |
| 5.3 Lessons learned  | 49        |
| 5.4 Recommendations for policymakers, investors, and entrepreneurs | 50        |
| ENDNOTES   | 52        |



## FOREWORD

Vital for our society to function, the care economy – domestic work and caring for children, elderly people, and people with disabilities – as it is now, operates as one of the most pervasive structural barriers to women’s economic autonomy and gender equality.

Across the world care work is mostly done by women and girls, who perform three-quarters of unpaid care work. Representing more than 11 percent of total global employment, paid care work is also a significant source of employment, particularly for women. However, these jobs are poorly paid, in positions that fall outside of formal employment structures, and insecure due to ingrained gender and racial biases and the work’s perceived value. The precariousness of paid care work and the unequal distribution of unpaid care work restricts women’s time and mobility, as well as their equal participation in social, economic, and political life. And this dynamic is unlikely to change without collective action. The climate crisis is increasing the demand for care and domestic work globally, while the COVID-19 pandemic generated a [care crisis](#) that exacerbated pre-existing gender inequalities.

Both formal structures and informal structures (norms) hold care economy inequalities in place. Gendered norms also shape national policies on how care work is recognized and valued, and how the responsibilities between families, governments, and the private sector are distributed.

While public investment and policies must be at the core of the solution, a renewed role for the private sector is crucial. Announced as a [commitment at the Generation Equality Forum](#), in 2021 Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Open Society Foundation’s impact investment arm, the Soros Economic Development Fund (SEDF), launched an [action-oriented research initiative to help Transform the Care Economy through Impact Investing](#) (TCEII). Through this partnership, IDRC continues to build on its commitment to transform the care economy and mobilize finance for gender equality.



Erin Tansey



Catherine Cax



Since its launch, a global consortium of partners has built an [extensive knowledge and evidence base](#) to mobilize capital and impact investment to address the care economy's challenges in emerging markets. The program is now launching a collection of 20 case studies on care economy social innovations and impactful businesses, which complements 59 business profiles and mapping of 165 market-based solutions operating in emerging markets in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. The [TCEI program](#) also involves care-economy businesses incubation and acceleration, research on regulatory frameworks and policies, awareness raising, and industry policy dialogues.

As we witness growing momentum and understanding of the urgency of addressing the care crisis, we hope these case studies on pioneering companies will help advance concrete strategies to move from awareness to action. These case studies help to demonstrate viable and impactful business models, ranging from building social security infrastructure to labor-saving products and services. They offer a unique and nuanced understanding of the businesses' theories of change and impact journeys. The case studies also help to share the lessons these innovators have learned on their pathways to scale, and it is our hope that they will attract more capital into the care economy for deepened impact.

We invite you to read this collection of case studies and engage with them, and the other resources and tools developed by the TCEI program, to mobilize investment into the care economy.

Together we can advance [towards a care society](#) where social innovation, entrepreneurship, and investment can be part of the solution for economic justice globally.

**Erin Tansey**

Sustainable and Inclusive Economies  
Director  
International Development Research  
Council

**Catherine Cax**

Managing Director, Investments  
Soros Economic Development Fund

## INTRODUCTION

The care economy consists of paid and unpaid labor and services that support caregiving in all its forms. In Africa, Asia, and Latin America, women spend between 3 to 5 times as many hours on unpaid care and domestic work as men. This represents 80% of a household's total hours devoted to unpaid care work.

Care economy enterprises can help recognize, redistribute, reduce, and reward - also known as the 4 Rs - unpaid and paid care and domestic work in the following ways:



**Recognize:** Initiatives that increase visibility and recognition of paid and unpaid care and domestic activity as "productive" work that creates real value and contributes to economies and societies.



**Redistribute:** Services and initiatives that redistribute care work from individuals to public and private sector entities, and redistribute care and domestic work within the household.



**Reduce:** Products and initiatives that reduce the time spent on and burden of unpaid care and domestic work.



**Reward:** Products, services, and initiatives that ensure that care and domestic workers are paid fairly and have professional growth potential. This provides them with financial reward and security.

The Care Economy Knowledge Hub - the research pillar of the Transforming the Care Economy Through Impact Investing Program - aims to address the knowledge gap around care businesses by showcasing various business models and creating a resource base for relevant stakeholders. It also aims to raise awareness and increase knowledge of the state of impact-driven care economy business models and attract a broad range of funders to invest in care economy solutions by showcasing opportunities.

A curated set of 20 business case studies, of which this case study is one, has been researched and written between October 2021 and January 2024. The case study businesses were selected out of a set of 165 businesses that were mapped between October 2021 and August 2022, and then a further 59 that were profiled between September 2022 and May 2023. They present a wide variety of different ways in which care work can be recognized, rewarded, reduced, and redistributed, from different sectors and different geographies, from different stages of the growth journey and different business models, from different products and services and different impact pathways. Each case study was

written based on extensive desk-based research, including a literature review; a review of key business documents; a series of deep conversations with founders, CEOs, and key staff; and impact-focused qualitative research with 8 - 15 consumers of business products and services.

Each case study starts with a 1-page executive summary that provides “at a glance” information on the business and Section 1 provides an introduction. Section 2 describes the ecosystem within which the business operates. The business deep dive can be found in Section 3. Section 4 presents an impact deep-dive, including customers’ own experiences of the care economy solution, and a unique set of qualitative impact data. Section 5 outlines the business’s future plans in their look forward.

Shifting attention towards and investment in the care economy is one of the single most important actions that policy makers, investors, and community leaders can take to achieve gender, racial, and climate justice. We hope that these case studies contribute to the much-needed transformation in our economic and social systems.

**Rebecca Calder**

Principal Investigator, Transforming the Care Economy Through Impact Investing  
Co-Founder and Co-CEO, Kore Global

---

*This project is supported by Canada's International Development Research Center, in partnership with the Soros Economic Development Fund at the Open Society Foundations. Building on their track record and commitment to transforming the care economy and mobilizing finance for gender equality, they are jointly supporting this action research program to help transform the care economy through impact focused business and investment. This case study is a joint research product, developed by a consortium led by Kore Global, including Intellectap, Core Woman, Busara, Sagana, and Volta Capital. Copy editing and graphic design were done by Big Blue Communications.*

**This particular case study should be cited as follows:**

Intellectap, Busara Center for Behavioral Economics, Kore Global. (2024). *Transforming the care economy through impact investing: Phulki. case study*. Kore Global, International Development Research Centre, and Soros Economic Development Fund

## 1 - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Phulki is a non-profit enterprise that provides affordable daycare facilities for children of low-income households in urban areas of Bangladesh. It has set up childcare facilities in low-income communities and in garment factories (which employ a large number of women), as well as for several other corporations. The enterprise conducts training sessions for care workers and awareness sessions on health issues and women's rights for its various beneficiaries (adolescent girls, community members, and female employees). Phulki also upskills domestic workers through its training programs. The enterprise earned revenue of US\$724,542 in 2022 and has over 170 employees.






### Phulki at a glance

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Established              | 1991  |
| Country of operations    | Bangladesh  |
| Offerings                | Provides affordable daycare facilities for children from low-income households. Conducts training and awareness sessions for women on their rights and health as well as skill advancement training sessions for care workers and domestic workers. |
| Reach                    | 8 community childcare centers and 15 factory-based childcare centers  |
| Staff                    | 170 full-time employees   |
| Revenue                  | US\$724,542 (2022)  |
| Investment to date       | US\$250,000 in equity from the founders   |
| Leadership               | Suraiya Haque, Founder and Executive Director   |
| Contact for partnerships | <a href="mailto:phulki_adm@hotmail.com">phulki_adm@hotmail.com</a>  |
| Website                  | <a href="http://www.phulkibd.org">www.phulkibd.org</a>  |

## 2 - ECOSYSTEM

### 2.1 Bangladesh: statistical snapshot

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  <p>Demographic information</p> | <p><b>Total population</b> (<a href="#">World Bank</a>, 2022): 171 million</p> <p><b>Female population</b> (<a href="#">World Bank</a>, 2022): 50% of the total female population of 86 million</p> <p><b>Urban &amp; rural population</b> (<a href="#">World Bank</a>, 2022): Urban (40%)   Rural (60%)</p> <p><b>Population in different age segments</b> (<a href="#">World Bank</a>, 2022)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 0-14 years: (26%)</li> <li>• 15-64 years: (68%)</li> <li>• 65 and above: (6%)</li> </ul>   |
|  <p>Unpaid care work</p>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women and girls on average spend 5.9 hours a day on unpaid domestic and care activities, compared to 0.8 hours for men. (<a href="#">UN Women</a>, 2021)</li> </ul>   |
|  <p>Social &amp; economic</p> | <p><b>Literacy level</b> (<a href="#">Global Gender Gap Report</a>, 2021):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Females (71.2%)   Males (76.7%)</li> </ul> <p><b>Poverty</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 12.9% of the total population lives in extreme poverty (less than US\$1.9/day) as against the global poverty rate of 8.9%. (<a href="#">World Bank</a>, 2023)</li> <li>• Urban poverty rate stands at 18%, while rural poverty is at 26.4%. (<a href="#">World Bank</a>, 2017)</li> </ul> <p><b>Formal &amp; informal employment:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 60.8 million people were employed in the country. (<a href="#">Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics</a>, 2017)</li> <li>• 87% worked in the informal sector and 13% in the formal sector. (<a href="#">ILO</a>, 2010)</li> </ul> <p><b>Gender-based violence</b> (<a href="#">UNDP</a>, 2022):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For the period 2018-2021, women and girls were reported as survivors of 80.5% of all GBV in Bangladesh. Sexual assault is the most reported violence type, accounting for at least 3 in 5 reported incidents.</li> </ul> |





Women's work,  
labor, and  
entrepreneurship

**Labor force participation** (*% of the total labor force*) ([The Global Economy](#), 2022):

- Female: 37.7 % | Male: 80.6%

**Unemployment** ([World Bank](#), 2022):

- Total: 4.7%
- Male: 3.5% | Female: 7.1%

**Women-owned businesses**

- Women-owned businesses account for 7.2 % of all MSMEs. ([UN Women](#), 2020)
- Firms with female top managers (% of total firms) are 4.8%. ([Global Gender Gap Report](#), 2022)

**Gender gap index score** ([Global Gender Gap Report](#), 2022):

- Total: 0.714 (0=unequal, 1=equal)

**Financial inclusion**

- 36% of women have bank accounts. ([World Bank](#), 2018)
- 43.4% of women aged 15+ had bank accounts or a mobile-money-service provider. ([World Bank](#), 2021)

## 2.2 Context analysis

### Macro context in Kenya

The current population of Bangladesh is 171 million,<sup>1</sup> of which 60% live in rural areas and 40% live in urban areas.<sup>2</sup> The share of the urban population is increasing. This is evident from Bangladesh's annual urban population growth rate of 3% compared to its annual total population growth rate of 1.1%.<sup>3</sup> Approximately 52% of Bangladesh's urban population lives in informal settlements<sup>4</sup> and often lacks access to clean water, safe sanitation, and waste management. Informal settlement dwellers also face threats of eviction and are susceptible to natural disasters as a result of living in low-lying areas.<sup>5</sup>

Children aged 0–14 account for 26% of Bangladesh's population, of which 46% experience multidimensional poverty.<sup>6</sup> Almost 98.5% of babies are breastfed (but only 62.6% exclusively). Among infants aged 6–23 months, 66% obtain minimum meal frequency, although only 27% receive minimum acceptable nutrition.<sup>7</sup> Children under age 5 experience various challenges that disrupt their early childhood development (ECD). For instance, 28% of children under age 5 experience malnutrition.<sup>8</sup> This affects their overall health by increasing their risk of disease, stunted growth, and mortality.<sup>9</sup> Harmful practices against children remain a common feature. Evidence shows that 9 out of 10 children aged 1–14 have been violently disciplined by a caregiver.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, over 14,000 children under age 5 die each year as a result of drowning.<sup>11</sup>

The childcare sector in Bangladesh is characterized by limited availability, access, affordability, and poor quality of childcare. There is a lack of skilled professional caregivers, and demand far outstrips supply. A key reason for this growing demand for childcare is the increasing number of low-income households migrating to urban areas for work.<sup>12</sup>

## Care economy context

Women primarily bear the burden of unpaid domestic work and childcare in Bangladesh. In low-income areas, women spend an average of 5.16 hours on childcare and domestic work each day, whereas men spend only 0.34 hours.<sup>13</sup> The lack of affordable childcare facilities is a key factor that impedes women from effectively participating in the workforce. Meanwhile, social norms make childcare the sole responsibility of women.<sup>14</sup> Bangladesh has witnessed a decline in urban women's labor force participation from 34.5% in 2010 to 31% in 2017.<sup>15</sup> The lack of childcare facilities has also led to women taking up low-quality jobs that afford more flexibility around caregiving but that provide poor wages and little protection.

Women already in the workforce may also leave employment or turn down work opportunities due to a lack of quality and affordable childcare.<sup>16</sup> Over 77% of companies in Bangladesh do not offer childcare options to their employees, and even when such a service is provided, uptake is low.<sup>17</sup> Close to 97% of women who have access to daycare facilities at their workplaces do not use them. Key reasons for women's reluctance to utilize these services include a lack of good-quality services, a preference for leaving children in the care of their grandparents, and the challenge of taking children to work on foot or on public transport, which is often extremely crowded.<sup>18</sup> Women are often uncertain of the quality of nutrition, health, education, environment, safety, and security provided to their children,

especially in low-quality childcare facilities.<sup>19</sup> For instance, 68% of women working in the garment industry, which is the major employer of women in Bangladesh (over 3.2 million women),<sup>20</sup> prefer leaving their children with grandparents while at work. Garment factories face several challenges in establishing daycare centers, such as a lack of adequate space and an insufficient number of trained caregivers, which also leads to highly variable quality of services.<sup>21</sup>

The domestic work sector is also a major employer of women in the country. It is estimated that there are 10.5 million domestic workers in Bangladesh, of which 90% are women. These domestic workers face challenges related to the availability of quality and affordable childcare services for their children. A recent survey found that, due to their low wages, 50% of surveyed domestic workers with children are forced to leave their children with a family member. Nearly 25% take their children to their workplaces in the absence of an alternative care option. Many women working as domestic workers also have to leave employment until one child, usually a daughter, is old enough to take care of her younger siblings.<sup>22</sup>

## Market opportunity

The need for accessible, affordable, and quality childcare is a pressing concern in Bangladesh. The lack of quality childcare has contributed to limited female labor force participation in the country. The growing gap between the demand and

supply of childcare solutions is partly attributed to the increasing demand from low-income households migrating to urban areas for work.<sup>23</sup> This is especially concerning for women already in the workforce, 32% of whom have a young child, as the burden of childcare falls disproportionately on women. Estimates indicate that while 63% of men can rely on their partners for childcare, only 13% of women can do the same. Due to the lack of reliable childcare facilities, working women are often forced to leave their children with a member of the household, a relative outside the household, or in many cases, even leave the child unattended.<sup>24</sup>

In Bangladesh, there are 3 major types of entities that offer childcare services: government-sponsored programs and institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector. NGOs serve low-income households as well as factories that provide childcare support to their workers. Typically, government programs or institutions offer services to households in low and middle-income clusters as well as to households where members work in factories located in urban areas. Finally, the private sector targets middle- to upper-income households in urban areas, and private offices that provide childcare services to their employees.<sup>25</sup>

Until recently, there was limited effort by the government of Bangladesh to widen the network and quality of childcare centers in the country. However, recent advocacy efforts have led to positive developments in regulating the childcare sector. The Child Daycare Centre Act 2021 was passed with the aim of regulating the quality of childcare services and assisting women in the workforce. The Act outlines 4 major categories of childcare centers that can exist in the country. These include the following:

- Childcare centers set up with subsidies from the government.
- Childcare centers sponsored by the government to provide free services.
- Childcare centers run by individuals or organizations for commercial purposes.
- Non-profit childcare centers operated by any individuals, organizations, NGOs, clubs, associations, corporate, or industrial sector.

All facilities must be registered with a government authority, maintain set standards, and adhere to regulations set by the relevant authority. Moreover, the Act provides for regular inspections by the government to monitor compliance.<sup>26</sup>

## 3 - BUSINESS DEEP DIVE

### 3.1 Business headline

Phulki addresses challenges faced by women with young children in accessing affordable daycare facilities in urban areas of Bangladesh. The enterprise provides childcare facilities for low-income women by establishing daycare centers in low-income communities. The establishment costs for such centers are borne by Phulki, while Phulki and the community together bear operating costs. Mothers pay a nominal fee based on their capacity, which goes towards meeting operational costs. The enterprise also establishes daycare centers that provide childcare services at the workplace for factories, corporations, and organizations such as BRAC Bank and Care International. The space for the facility is provided by the factory, corporation, or organization, which also bears the establishment cost and pays care workers' wages. Phulki receives a fee from the respective factory, corporation, or organization for setting up and managing such childcare centers. Employees sometimes pay a very small user fee (less than US\$1 per month) which is split between the factory and Phulki. Employees are responsible for providing food for their children. After 6 months, the factory, corporation, or organization has the option to take over the management of the established facility, or it can retain Phulki to continue providing these services for a fee.

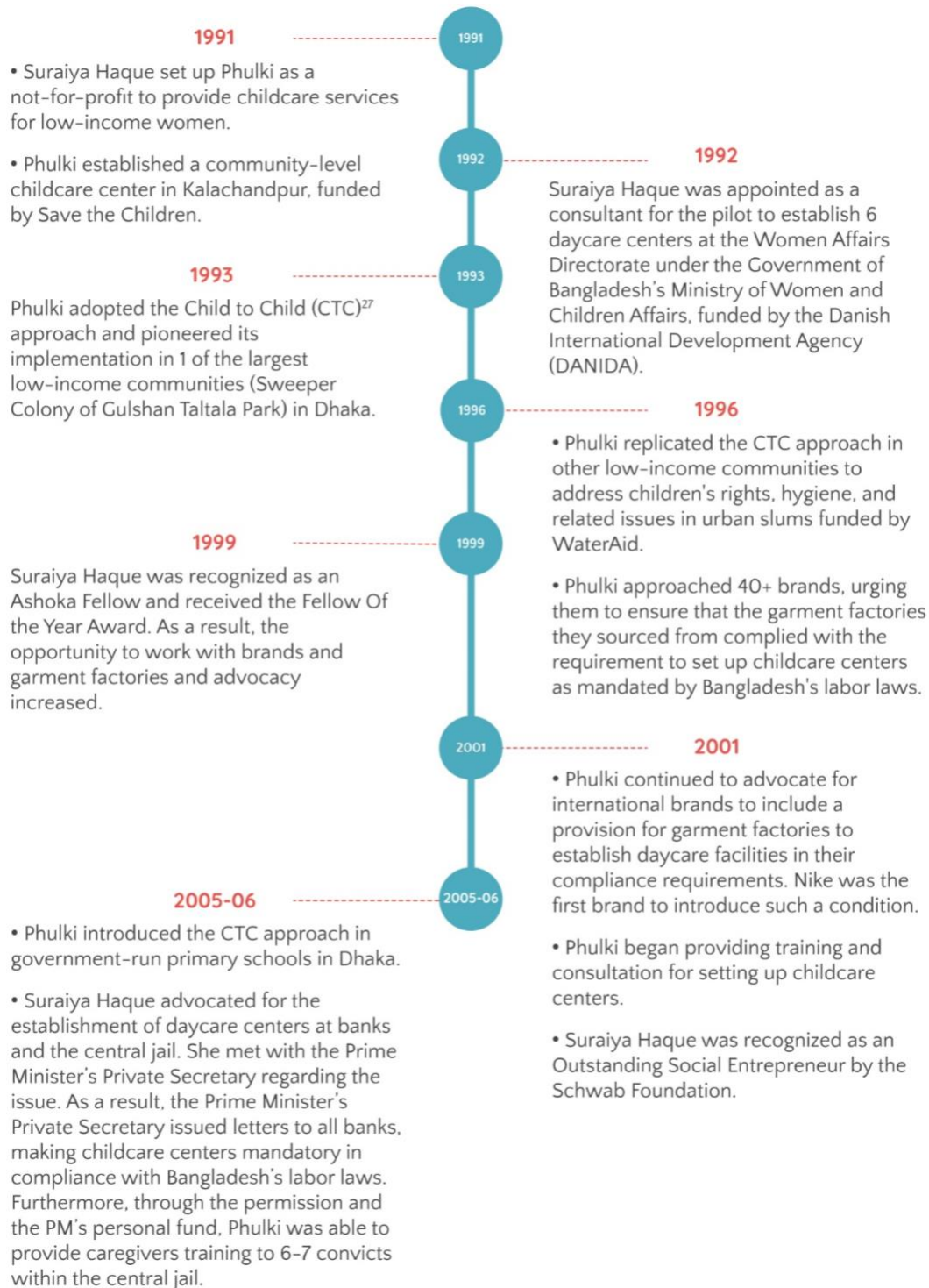
To further address supply side issues, Phulki provides caregiver training on ECD to individual care workers, as well as those employed by companies in their in-house childcare facilities. This service aims to enhance onsite daycare operations with certified caregiver training on ECD. These training programs typically last for 5-8 days. The enterprise also conducts entrepreneurship training for care workers, teaching them the fundamentals of running a daycare business. This has enabled Phulki to hand over the day-to-day operations of some of its community childcare centers to community members, which plays a significant role in allowing the enterprise to create sustainable impact at scale. Phulki also conducts training programs on domestic work for women and older adolescent girls who reside in informal settlements, thus enabling them to enhance their skills. Interested women and girls are also provided with vocational training in areas such as beauty services and handicrafts.

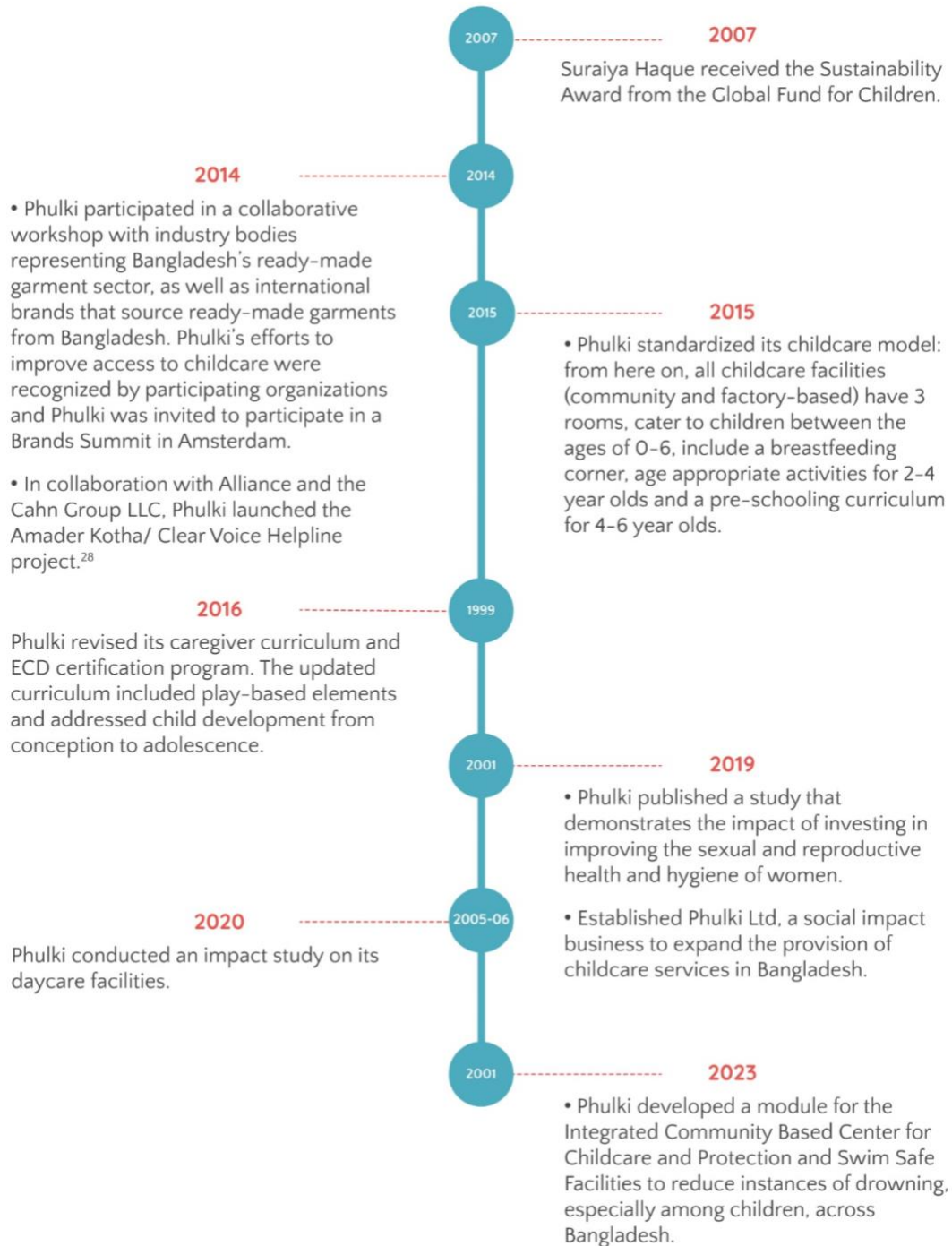
The enterprise believes that to empower women and enable them to join the workforce, it must address not just access to childcare services but other related issues. Thus, the enterprise conducts awareness sessions for garment factory workers, domestic workers, and people living in informal urban settlements. These sessions provide women with information on their rights at work and at home. It also conducts awareness sessions for women and girls on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and menstrual health management (MHM). These sessions are possible because Phulki creates a sense of trust

among the women and girls it supports. Lastly, the enterprise provides women and girls with access to products such as affordable menstrual products through childcare facilities in factories and communities.

Phulki's holistic approach to women's empowerment sets it apart from other organizations that typically focus on addressing only 1 or 2 challenges faced by women. The enterprise believes that childcare is not just about the child, but about parents, communities, and society. For instance, through its childcare centers, Phulki observed that women often skipped work when menstruating, especially due to health challenges arising from the use of unhygienic and unsafe products. It therefore began providing menstrual pads at a subsidized rate. The enterprise has also set up a women's cafe, a community-based space where women and adolescent girls from partner factories and nearby communities can receive training on social issues such as menstrual health and gender-based violence. The cafe also provides vocational and skills training, access to counselors and financial inclusion programs and serves as a space for women to gather and interact with each other. Phulki's staff are trained to ensure that participants are made aware of their rights, and the enterprise provides a safe space for them to discuss concerns regarding their health and mental well-being in these cafes. This ability to address the different challenges faced by women has allowed the enterprise to deepen its impact.

## Phulki's journey<sup>27 28</sup>







## 3.2 Founder story

### Founder of Phulki



Suraiya Haque

Phulki was founded by Suraiya Haque in 1991. Suraiya married early and took a break from her education after finishing her schooling. However, she never gave up on the idea of continuing her studies and despite opposition from her family, resumed her education after a gap of 8 years, eventually going on to obtain her Master's in Economics and Psychology from Chittagong University in Bangladesh in 1986. In the early 1980s, Suraiya took on the responsibility of managing the operations of a garment factory in Chittagong. During her tenure, the efficiency and productivity of the factory increased significantly. After a few years, Suraiya moved to Dhaka city with her family. At this time, she was looking to hire a house help and interviewed several women. One interested candidate had brought her 8-9-month old child with her. When asked where she would leave the child if she decided to work for Suraiya, the candidate explained that she did not have anyone to leave her child with and would bring the child to work. Suraiya was reluctant to hire someone with a small child and therefore decided not to hire her. However, she realized that other potential employers may have similar concerns about hiring domestic workers who have young children. This could result in the domestic worker having to work in unfair or exploitative conditions. This experience inspired Suraiya to set up a childcare center for informal workers in her garage. During this period, more women had started entering the workforce. However, the lack of a safe option for childcare was a significant challenge, especially for women from low-income communities. Suraiya realized that it was not just domestic workers who lacked access to childcare. Women who worked in garment factories, which are one of the largest employers of women, also faced this challenge. Many women were likely dropping out of the workforce or leaving their children in unsafe environments to continue working.

Despite her lack of experience in the sector, Suraiya's determination to improve and extend childcare services in the workplace, especially for low-income women, led her to set up

Phulki. She faced skepticism, as many believed that establishing childcare facilities for low-income and underprivileged women was an impractical endeavor. Suraiya collaborated with advocates from the public and private sectors to reform policies for childcare. A grant from Save the Children enabled her to implement childcare facilities at the community level, and Phulki was able to expand its efforts to several low-income communities in Dhaka. Suraiya appealed to the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOCWA) of the Government of Bangladesh to set up childcare centers across the Ministry's offices as well as make it mandatory for large companies to establish daycare centers on their premises. Although her efforts were initially met with resistance, eventually MOWCA set up daycare centers across its various divisional offices. Thereafter in the late 1990s, Phulki began lobbying the government to implement the Factory Act of 1965 that required factories with 50 or more workers to provide childcare facilities in their premises. Most factories were reluctant to implement the provision, especially since all of the floor space was devoted to production, and none of the factories were designed to accommodate childcare facilities.

In 1999, Suraiya Haque was recognized as an Ashoka Fellow.<sup>29</sup> The fellowship provided her with access to global brands such as Nike and Reebok that sourced goods from the ready-made garment manufacturing sector in Bangladesh. She approached these international retail brands so they could influence the factories they sourced from to set up childcare facilities for their workers. Inspired by her vision, Nike became one of the first organizations to incorporate the provision of a daycare facility into its compliance requirements. Over the years, Suraiya also continued to advocate for the government to require workplaces to provide childcare facilities on their premises. As a result of Phulki's continued advocacy efforts, Bangladesh Bank instructed its branches to establish childcare facilities for employees, and several other banks followed suit.

Following the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013,<sup>30</sup> Phulki collaborated with Alliance<sup>31</sup> and became the implementing partner of an emergency helpline initiative called "Amader Kotha." The helpline enabled whistleblower protection, aided the resolution of employee-management conflicts and increased awareness. The helpline saw workers calling in not just to report safety concerns but to also discuss other challenges. This contributed to Phulki's understanding of the challenges faced by women in the workplace, especially those employed in the ready-made garment sector. In 2018, Phulki and 2 local partners took over the operation of the helpline and expanded its scope of operations. The helpline number is available to women across all of Phulki's facilities and records concerns ranging from lack of childcare facilities to familial pressures to financial planning. This helpline is being replicated by Phulki and its partners Elevate and The Cahn Group in several countries including Pakistan and Malaysia for the ready-made garment manufacturing sector.

By 2018, Phulki succeeded in establishing comprehensive childcare centers in 22 factories and 147 community locations, effectively addressing childcare needs of working mothers. Over time, Phulki realized that to catalyze sustainable long-term change, it needed to continue supporting its interventions beyond a few years. However, most grants were time-

bound, and there was no guarantee that funds would be available beyond the initially stipulated period. Moreover, sometimes factories closed down childcare centers for reasons such as lack of funds or trained staff, insufficient interest from women employees to utilize the daycare facility, or lack of sufficient number of women employees with children to warrant the need for a childcare facility. Thus, Phulki set up an independent for-profit enterprise that would enable it to evolve from direct operations to monitoring and oversight. Initially, all services were provided free of cost at one of Phulki's community centers, as the center was set up under a grant. After the grant ended, Phulki encouraged the community to contribute to keep the center operational. A community member initially leased space to the center free of charge. However, within a few months of transitioning to a community-run model, the center generated sufficient revenue to pay the teachers as well as cover rent.

To further its plan of transitioning all its childcare facilities to similar self-sustaining models, Phulki set up a for-profit entity, Phulki Ltd., in 2019. Phulki Ltd. is a social impact business that provides consultancy and management services in the childcare space and will eventually take over the running of all the childcare facilities currently operated by Phulki, enabling their transition to a revenue generating model. Phulki Ltd. plans to generate sufficient revenue to create a surplus by 2026, which will then fund the initial capital costs for its future projects.







*...workers are forced to leave their children at home, either with a relative, a sibling or with a neighbor. Neighbors tend to have their own families and duties to take care of. Alternatively, workers will send their children to their home villages. With such insecurity and instability, worker parents are willing to pay for the opportunity of leaving their children in a community based childcare center – if it is run by a NGO. But such services are rare.*

**Suraiya Haque, Founder of Phulki<sup>32</sup>**



### 3.3 Business model

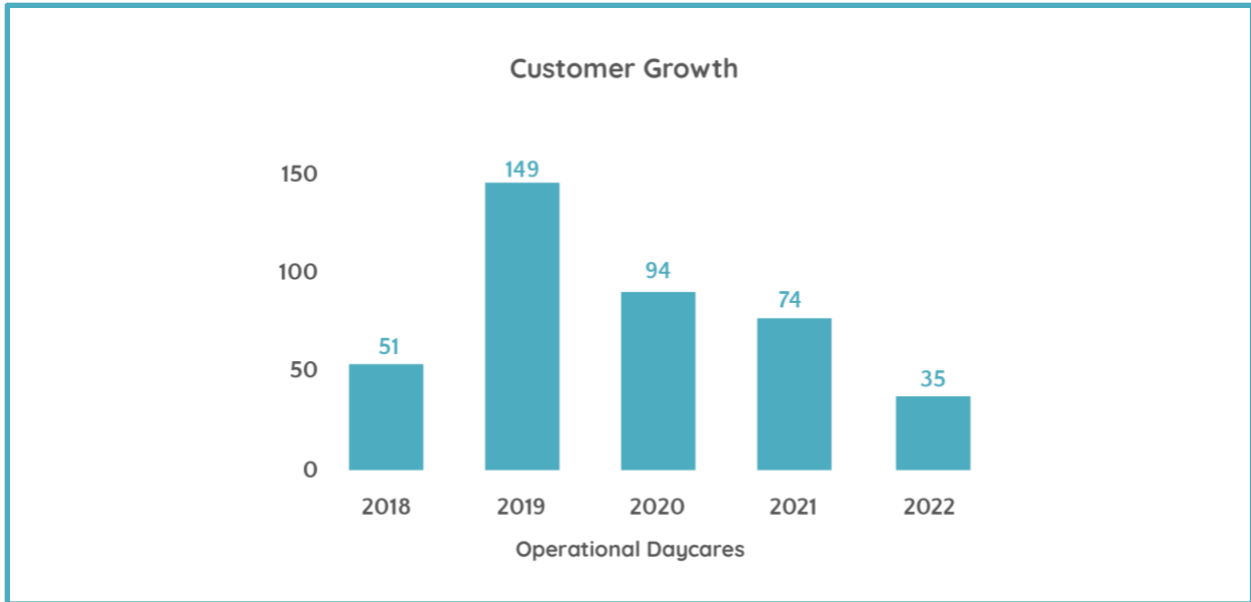
|  |   |
|--|---|
|  <p>Customer segment</p>        | <p>Phulki seeks to empower women and enable them to participate in the workforce by providing services to a variety of interlinked stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Low-income households:</b> The enterprise establishes and manages community-based daycare facilities that provide childcare and pre-school education. Households pay a subsidized fee for these services. Women can also purchase low-cost sanitary napkins at these facilities.</li> <li>• <b>Garment factories and corporations:</b> The enterprise establishes and manages daycare facilities that provide childcare and preschool education. Mothers pay a small fee for these services, and the factory pays set-up and operational costs. Women may also purchase low-cost sanitary napkins at these facilities.</li> <li>• <b>Corporations and daycare personnel:</b> The enterprise provides certified training on ECD. Companies pay for their daycare personnel to be trained, whereas individual care workers either pay for the training themselves or are sponsored by their employers. Typically, the training program lasts for 8 days and is priced at 15,000BDT (-US\$136).<sup>33</sup> The enterprise also provides entrepreneurship training to care workers and teachers, which covers basic fundamentals on how to run a business as well as how to establish and run a daycare center. This enables care workers to eventually take over the operations of established community centers from Phulki.</li> <li>• <b>Women and adolescent girls in low-income communities:</b> The enterprise provides upskilling sessions on domestic work and vocational training in skills such as handicrafts. It also conducts awareness sessions on women's rights at the workplace and at home, including sexual and reproductive health and rights and menstrual health management.</li> </ul> |
|  <p>Value proposition</p>     | <p>Phulki offers quality and affordable childcare services to low-income communities. It is the pioneer in advocating for childcare facilities in ready-made garment factories in Bangladesh. Not only does it establish and run childcare centers at these factories, it also enables factories to take on the management and operations of such facilities on their own, should they wish to do so. Moreover, it provides similar services to other corporations. By following a model that enables stakeholders to eventually take on the mantle of childcare, Phulki ensures that it can impact an increasing number of women in a sustained manner.</p>  |
|  <p>Competitive advantage</p> | <p>Phulki approaches childcare and women's empowerment holistically, realizing that it is not just a lack of childcare facilities that holds women back, but also social and cultural norms and a lack of access to information and support. It provides skill enhancement training and also holds awareness sessions on rights at home and in the workplace and sexual and menstrual health. Moreover, it recognizes that simply providing childcare facilities will not enable the organization to scale its solution or bridge the gap between demand and supply. Thus, it trains factories, corporations, and community members to take over the operations of childcare facilities over time. Together these factors have enabled Phulki to design interventions that have significant impact and expand the number of childcare facilities available across Dhaka.</p>  |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  <p>Channels &amp; key partnerships</p> | <p>Phulki has partnered with non-profit organizations such as Sajida Foundation Limited to provide childcare training to corporations. It also partners with garment manufacturing brands and government agencies to increase the provision and uptake of childcare services in the workplace.</p>  |
|  <p>Customer relationships</p>          | <p>Phulki has built trust with its beneficiaries by continuously seeking feedback and providing safe spaces such as the Amader Kotha helpline and its women's cafes. Several of Phulki's awareness programs are delivered after assessing the types of information that would be most useful to the cohort of women being trained.</p>  |
|  <p>Revenue streams</p>                 | <p>The business earns revenue from several streams:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phulki is paid to set up and manage childcare facilities in factories as well as in other corporate set-ups.</li> <li>• The enterprise earns revenue by providing training sessions to individual care workers (typically sponsored by their employers) and to companies for childcare professionals employed by them.</li> <li>• Phulki earns revenue through the sale of sanitary napkins at a subsidized rate through its childcare centers and women's cafes.</li> </ul> |
|  <p>Cost structure</p>                 | <p>The enterprise spends 54% of its total expenditure on personnel, 44% on miscellaneous items such as travel, operational expenditure, activity cost, general administrative and income tax expenses, and 2% on training.</p>  |

## 3.4 Phulki's growth story

### 3.4.1 Customer growth:

The number of childcare facilities run by Phulki has changed over time. Specifically, 2020-2022 saw a drastic decline in the number of operational centers. This was largely due to COVID-19-related shutdowns. Moreover, several childcare facilities that had been established as part of a project for a certain period were closed, as several projects ended in 2019.



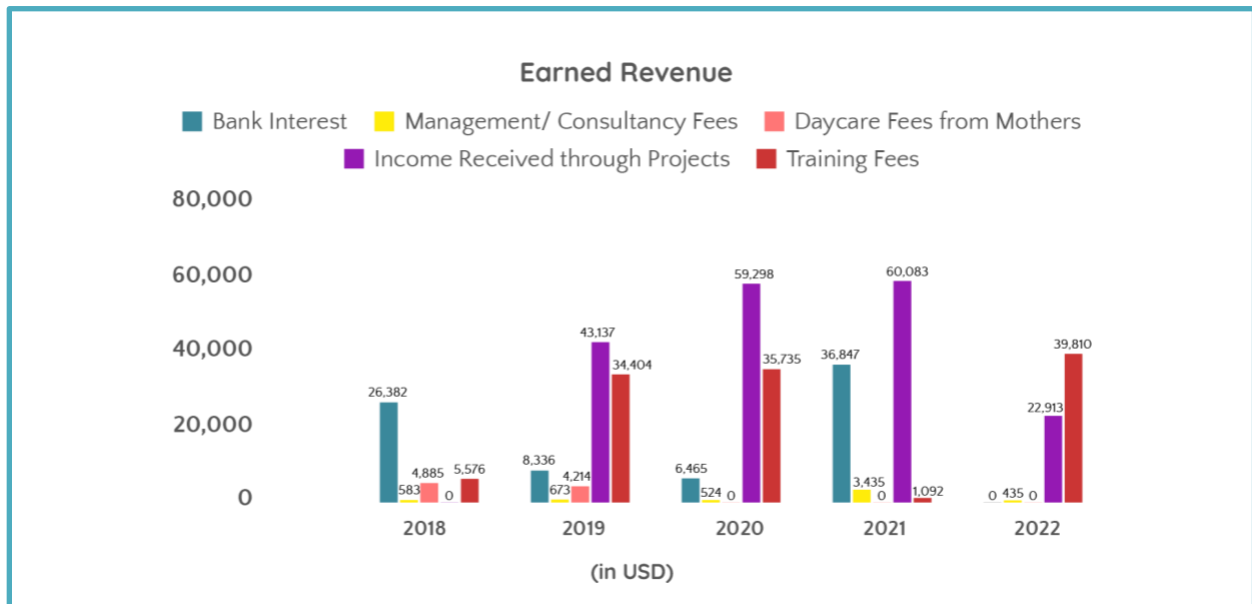
### 3.4.2 Revenues:

The key revenue streams for Phulki are grants and the sale of services. In 2021, 88% of its revenue was obtained from grants and 12% was from sale of services. During 2020–21, the enterprise’s revenue declined due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of mobility restrictions, the enterprise could not implement any new programs. A similar trend can be observed in 2022, where 94% of the enterprise’s revenue came from grants. This is a result of the overall slowdown in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as of Phulki’s current focus on building Phulki Ltd.



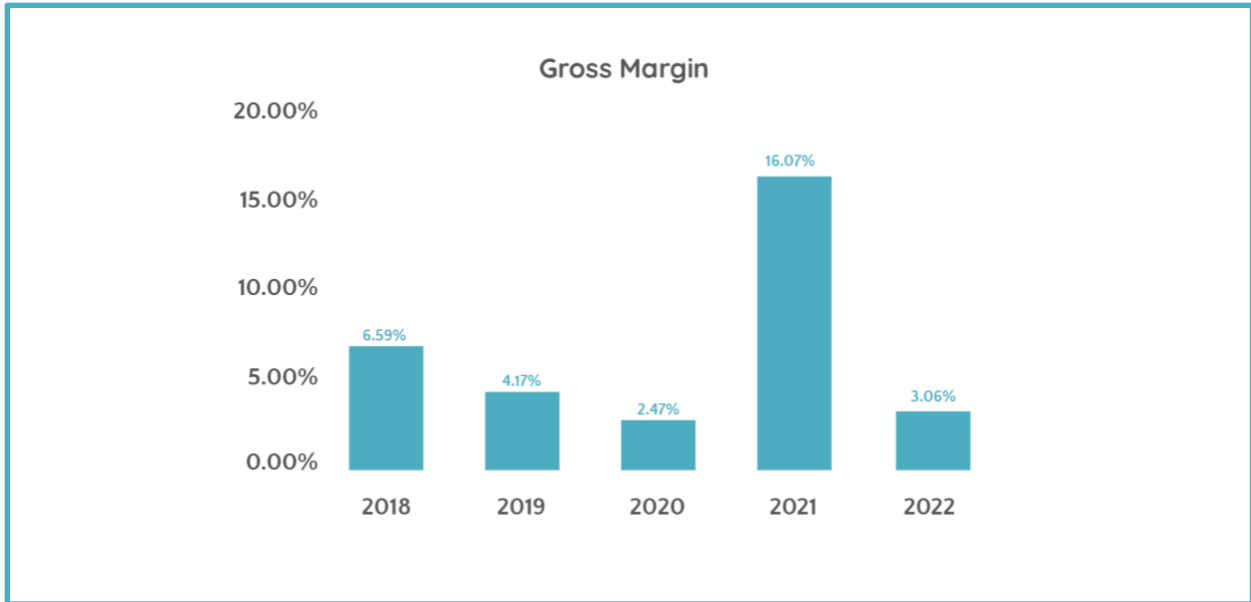
### 3.4.3 Earned revenue:

Earned revenues have fluctuated over the last 5 years based on both Phulki’s focus and external factors, such as COVID-19-related restrictions. Training fees were particularly affected by the economic slowdown caused by the pandemic. As a significant portion of Phulki’s revenue is linked to individual projects, completion of funded projects has also affected earned revenue. Thus, as the number of projects declined in 2022, there was a corresponding decrease in related income. Moreover, during the period 2020–22, there was no earned revenue from the daycare fees from mothers, as many daycare facilities that required mothers to contribute were not operational.



### 3.4.4 Gross margin:

Gross margins earned by the enterprise have fluctuated due to disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in the business model. As a result of COVID-19, the enterprise’s expenditures declined in 2021, and this resulted in a higher profit margin.



### 3.5 People and governance

#### 2X Criteria<sup>34</sup>

- Founder is a woman.
- 90% of senior leadership are women.
- Board is composed of 42% women.
- 95% of full-time employees are women.
- 90% of services specifically or disproportionately benefit women.

Phulki is a **gender-transformative** business.<sup>35</sup>

Phulki has 170 full-time employees, 95% of whom are women. The 2 permanent employees include the Executive Director and the Accounts Lead. All other employees are contracted annually. As Phulki has a not-for-profit as well as a corporate arm, employing people on a contractual basis enables them to take on responsibilities across both entities as well as move between its different programs. The enterprise has an executive board that consists of 7 members, 3 of whom are women. The enterprise has adopted policies to ensure equal pay for equal work, ensure non-discrimination, prevent and address sexual harassment, safeguard vulnerable groups, and provide for maternity and paternity leave.

More than half of Phulki’s costs go towards recruiting personnel and engaging consultants. However, Phulki is restricted in its ability to access talent and hire resources due to limited funding. To retain talent, the enterprise has focused on creating a culture that enables its staff to gain the skills and knowledge necessary for their professional development.



Moreover, employees are matched to responsibilities based on their interests and potential which allows them to thrive. As a result, Phulki has achieved an attrition rate of 1–2% over the last two years.

### 3.6 Support received to date

| Financial  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Aga Khan Foundation, Bangladesh Shishu Academy, and Adidas</b></p> | <p>The enterprise has received grants to support its childcare programs from the Aga Khan Foundation, Bangladesh Shishu Academy, and Adidas. A grant of BDT7,20,58,430 (approximately US\$924, 301)<sup>36</sup> from the Aga Khan Foundation (2015–2019) was particularly helpful, as it helped Phulki to develop and pilot its standardized childcare model. Phulki had previously customized its childcare model to suit the resources and needs of individual communities and garment factories. However, with support of the Aga Khan Foundation, Phulki developed a standardized childcare model. This included a 3-room set-up with separate spaces for play activities for 2–4-year-olds and pre-school activities for 4–6-year-olds, as well as a separate area for breastfeeding and a communal space. Moreover, the enterprise standardized the curriculum and model of care.</p>   |
| <p><b>Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands</b></p>                      | <p>The enterprise benefited greatly from the Niche program (2016–2019) with the Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands. A grant of BDT1,02,14,203 (approximately US\$130,184)<sup>37</sup> allowed the enterprise to develop its 5-year plan as well as an organizational structure that better suited its long-term objectives. The program also helped Phulki develop and implement its vision for Phulki Ltd. Moreover, it provided capacity training for its employees, enrolling them in several professional development programs. These programs focus on subjects ranging from ECD training to training care workers to writing business proposals to using technology and tech tools.</p>  |
| Non-financial  |  |
| <p><b>The Ashoka Foundation</b></p>                                      | <p>The founder was awarded the <a href="#">Ashoka Fellowship</a> in 1999. One of the most significant periods of growth occurred with the aid of the fellowship. The Ashoka Foundation introduced the founder to several large international brands. As a result, Phulki was able to advocate more effectively for international retail brands to include the availability of childcare facilities as a mandatory part of their compliance requirements. This endorsement also played a pivotal role in Phulki's advocacy efforts with the government, which led to regulations that mandated the provision of childcare facilities in the workplace. The Ashoka Fellowship also helped the organization develop a unique childcare model that was affordable and accessible to mothers from low-income communities. The Fellowship spotlighted Phulki's efforts, giving it international visibility, which supported the enterprise's growth.</p> |

\* A full summary of the support received by the enterprise is available [here](#).

### 3.7 Key business drivers and challenges to growth

#### Key business drivers

##### Ecosystem

- Holistic approach to address the challenges faced by women and communities:** While many organizations address select challenges faced by women, Phulki takes a broader lens and addresses interlinked challenges faced by women and their communities. For instance, the enterprise recognizes that to create long-term change in how childcare is viewed, it must work with the community and address not just the problem of access to and affordability of childcare, but systemic challenges such as existing cultural norms. Thus, Phulki's approach to childcare considers not only children but entire communities as beneficiaries. Moreover, Phulki has integrated learnings and insights from its existing programs to provide more comprehensive support to the women and communities that it serves. Phulki's experience across its childcare centers has enabled it to better understand the many challenges that confront women and communities. Several of Phulki's initiatives such as the women's cafe were born of these experiences. It has also introduced initiatives such as providing access to counselors and legal aid at the women's cafes.
- Ability to build trust:** Over the years, Phulki has managed to build a sense of trust with the communities that it supports. This has helped generate acceptance for Phulki's expanded portfolio of services, such as its women's cafe and awareness programs. This trust has enabled Phulki to convince community members to take on the responsibility of running established childcare centers, turning them into self-sustaining facilities. Moreover, Phulki's reputation has also played a significant role while establishing partnerships with corporations and firms to deploy childcare services for their employees.
- Engagement with stakeholders to influence policy:** Phulki has a long history of advocacy, in which it has successfully engaged with policymakers to introduce reforms for the childcare sector in Bangladesh. For instance, Phulki was able to convince MOWCA to set up childcare facilities across the Ministry's departments and offices. It was also able to convince the government to request large banks to set up childcare facilities across their various branches. Through the Ashoka Foundation, the enterprise was able to connect with several international retail brands and convince them to include a provision in their compliance requirements that made it mandatory for their partner factories to provide childcare facilities to employees. Moreover, Phulki's efforts led to the government including a provision in the Bangladesh Labour Act of 2006 that mandated factories with over 40 female workers to provide space for the use of their children under the age of 6. Phulki's efforts in collaboration with other actors have influenced the government to enact the Child Daycare Centre Act in 2021.
- Founder's resilience:** Suraiya Haque's ability to hold firm to her convictions even in the face of strong opposition and to persevere has enabled the enterprise to grow despite challenges. Even though she had limited experience in creating large-scale change, Suriya Haque was driven by her conviction that low-income women should have access to childcare facilities. She advocated relentlessly for the implementation of labor law provisions that mandated factories to establish childcare facilities. Her leadership has enabled the organization to advocate for better childcare

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <p>policies and the organization is a key partner in the government’s current efforts to release detailed regulations under the Child Daycare Centre Act 2021.</p>  |
| <p>Operations</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Standardized model of childcare:</b> Phulki has been able to develop a standardized model of childcare. This enables corporations and communities to take over operations of daycare centers from Phulki after the initial set-up phase. Moreover, Phulki is able to train care workers to deliver a standard quality of care across all its childcare centers (located in communities as well as in factories). Furthermore, being able to transfer the day-to-day operational responsibilities to communities and factories frees up the enterprise’s resources enabling it to expand its presence across different locations and sectors.</li> <li>• <b>Ability to apply its learnings across its operations:</b> Phulki’s ability to learn from individual experiences and apply them across its various programs has helped it innovate and integrate necessary initiatives into its portfolio. For instance, the enterprise adapted the principles that inform the child-to-child (CTC) approach and integrated it across all its initiatives. By identifying leaders in the community as well as across programs, the enterprise was able to enable the sharing of information and learnings across a large number of beneficiaries. This enabled it to scale its impact, something that may not have been possible if the enterprise had tried to reach out to each member of the community on its own, given its limited resources and staff.</li> </ul> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Challenges to growth</b></p> |   |
| <p>Financial</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Lack of access to capital:</b> There has been a reduction in the number of grants and amount of grant funding available to Phulki, ever since Bangladesh was classified as a lower-middle-income country in 2015, as this restricts the enterprise from accessing funds set aside for low-income countries. Moreover, the enterprise has observed that many grants are directed towards health-focused initiatives. Phulki also lacks access to investor funding, as it is a not-for-profit enterprise. In response, Phulki has set-up Phulki Ltd., a social impact business that will provide consultancy and management services, and which is expected to generate revenue. Moreover, Phulki continues to engage with relevant stakeholders and consultants that can guide its growth.</li> <li>• <b>Exchange rate fluctuations:</b> The enterprise’s operations and programs have been adversely impacted due to fluctuations in the exchange rate of the Bangladeshi Taka.</li> </ul>  |
| <p>Operational</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Operational sustainability of the childcare centers:</b> In order to ensure long-term sustainability of its childcare centers, Phulki encouraged and trained garment factory workers to take over the day-to-day operations in collaboration with their respective factories after it had successfully set up and operationalized a center. However, the enterprise realized that many garment factory workers frequently moved in search of better employment opportunities. This posed a challenge for sustainability of the centers. In response, the enterprise began focusing on community members who</li> </ul>  |

were permanent residents or had worked at a factory for a long time and trained them to take over management of childcare centers.

- **Brand building and marketing its services:** Until recently, Phulki focused on building trust with communities, so it had limited resources to focus on external brand building. To increase its reach, the enterprise needs wider recognition of its impact. It needs to engage in brand-building activities as well as develop a marketing strategy that will increase adoption of its services. Phulki needs to further enhance its visibility to stakeholders such as policymakers, factories and corporate clients, funders, and investors. Limited visibility has also affected Phulki's ability to attract partners that could enable it to create additional innovations in program delivery. Finally, as Phulki has always focused on program delivery, this has led to the creation of siloed images of the enterprise's work. Most partners recognize Phulki's efforts in a single area, rather than see the organization's impact across a gamut of interrelated issues.
- **Small management team and limited ability to scale various initiatives:** Phulki operates with a limited number of staff across its various programs. It has a small management team, which is responsible for strategizing future growth. Given the number of initiatives the organization is involved in, the small size of its team limits its ability to scale aggressively.

## Ecosystem

- **Competition:** The enterprise faces competition from informal childcare centers in communities. These centers provide affordable services to low-income communities. However, such centers are unregulated, and there are concerns about the quality of care provided. Phulki has attempted to overcome this by creating awareness of the importance of the quality of childcare amongst the communities it serves.
- **Social norms related to women's responsibility for childcare:** The enterprise has observed a reluctance to obtain childcare services outside the household. Families and communities view mothers that choose to work as failing in their parental responsibilities. Homemakers who want to send their children to play schools or daycare centers are viewed through the same lens. The prevailing mindset, which deems formal childcare unnecessary and favors untrained, unskilled, low-paid nannies providing inadequate and unsafe at-home services, persists. Moreover, the enterprise has found it difficult to gain trust of mothers. Many believe that their children are at risk of kidnapping or trafficking at daycare facilities. The enterprise has observed gradual changes in these perceptions, and many more corporations now offer childcare services. Several banks in Bangladesh have also made it mandatory for their branches to have a childcare facility. Phulki has also engaged with communities and workers to create awareness and explain the need for childcare. By making women aware of their rights at home and the workplace, Phulki builds their ability to challenge entrenched perspectives.
- **External perceptions:** Phulki operates as a not-for-profit and is therefore viewed as a donor-reliant organization. With the creation of Phulki Ltd. the enterprise is focusing on providing services that can generate revenues and help it create long-term changes in the childcare ecosystem. However,

Phulki Ltd has limited visibility. Moreover, many external stakeholders are unaware of Phulki Ltd.'s mandate and for-profit status and still perceive Phulki and Phulki Ltd. as being the same, which has affected Phulki Ltd.'s ability to attract investors. Phulki is gradually working towards changing this by creating clear communication for its various services and demonstrating impact through real-life examples of its revenue-generating model.

## 4 - IMPACT DEEP DIVE

### 4.1 The impact theory of change of the enterprise

---

#### Mission statement

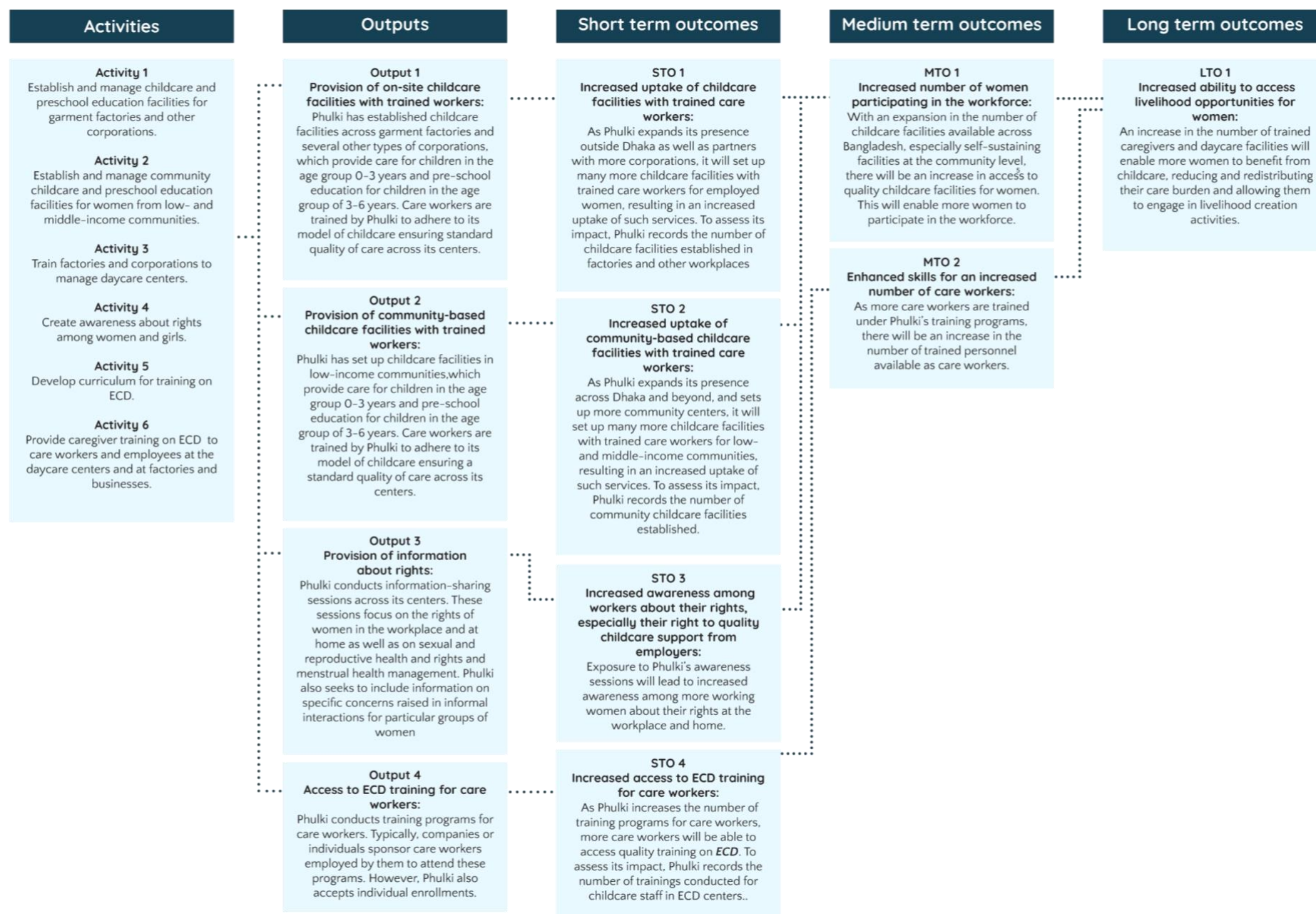
*Phulki envisages a future where women are empowered and children can grow in an environment that is secure, healthy and provides them with proper education.*

---

#### Theory of change

To reduce and redistribute the burden of unpaid care work for women and households, Phulki has developed the following theory of change.

## Phulki's pathway to reducing and redistributing the burden of unpaid care work for women and households across different income groups





## 4.2 Current impact and measurement practices

### Commercial data:

Phulki records the following:

- Number of factory and community-based daycare centers opened
- Number of childcare centers set up in low-income areas
- Number of children from ECD centers that transferred to primary school
- Number of domestic workers supported through its training program
- Number of trainings conducted
- Number of sanitary pad packets sold

### Surveys measuring impact:

Phulki has undertaken and been part of several studies that examine the impact of childcare facilities on women's empowerment and welfare. A study that Phulki conducted in 2019 revealed the following:

- 99% of respondents who used Phulki's childcare facilities indicated that the facilities provided a safe space for children and included sufficient amenities; 97.9% indicated that daycare facilities provided sufficient care for children.
- 96.9% of respondents who used Phulki's childcare facilities indicated that they could work sufficiently as a result of their children being cared for, compared to 69.8% of respondents who did not avail of any daycare facilities.
- 84.5% of respondents who used Phulki's childcare facilities believed that children of working mothers received better care at the daycare center than elsewhere.

### Phulki's impact:

Phulki has achieved the following results

- Number of clients served: 820
- Number of factory and community-based daycare centers operational: 35 (2022)
- Number of children from ECD centers that transferred to primary school: 10,061 (as of December 2022)
- Number of domestic workers supported through training programs: 1,974 (from 2006-2023)
- Number of trainings conducted for childcare staff on ECD: 236 (across 20 batches held across September 2022 to December 2023)
- Number of sanitary pad packets sold: 80,567 (from 2021 to 2023)





## Measurement challenges

**Maintaining continuity:** The enterprise finds it challenging to maintain continuity of responses for its impact surveys, as many beneficiaries frequently relocate due to better job opportunities, evictions, and financial challenges. Thus, interviewing the same community member over a long period of time has proved to be difficult. As a result, maintaining continuity in impact data is a challenge.

**Authenticity of responses:** Low-income community members or factory workers are often reluctant to share information. They believe that their responses will jeopardize their jobs or paint them in a negative light. Moreover, community members occasionally believe that Phulki's attempts to study childcare are an attempt to move childcare responsibilities away from women and create discord in families. Thus, community members can be suspicious of Phulki's efforts and unwilling to respond or participate in surveys.

The organization believes that if it can demonstrate the monetary value of childcare at 3 levels - to individual families, to businesses or factories, and to Bangladesh's economy - it will greatly increase investment in and establishment of quality childcare facilities. Thus, it would like to conduct studies that can measure:

- Benefits to a family if they invest in quality childcare and education.
- Impact of provision of quality childcare services on employee retention, and the subsequent benefits to enterprises.
- Impact of availability of quality childcare services on Bangladesh's economy.

## 4.3 Customer's own experiences of the solution

Understanding the social context, emotional needs, preferences, and barriers faced by women who use Phulki daycare services for their children is crucial for potential investors to understand where Phulki excels and where it has room to grow. The following sections provide insights into the foundation of the business's market success and its impact on the lives of mothers with children enrolled at Phulki's daycare centers. This aims to assist investors in making well-informed investment decisions.

To inform this analysis, the research team conducted 12 in-depth interviews with women using Phulki daycare services to gather insights into their lived experiences and realities.<sup>38</sup> This section presents the results of the qualitative impact deep dive, commencing with a customer overview. It is followed by an exploration of various women's personas and their journey to using Phulki services. The section concludes with a qualitative overview of Phulki's impact, as experienced by these women in their daily lives.



### 4.3.1 Customer snapshot

Women who use Phulki daycare services for their children are generally aged 20–35, with an average age of 28. The women interviewed had diverse educational backgrounds: the majority had received primary education, while a few had reached higher levels such as 7 or 9. A minority had no formal education.

Among the interviewed women, the majority were married and living with their children, while a small minority were separated from their spouse and living with their children. The average household size was 2–5 members, with 1–2 children between the ages of 2–15.

A majority of women interviewed were employed within the garment industry as sewing, machine, and painting operators. Their spouses were often involved in other roles in the same industry, such as drivers, rickshaw pullers, ironmen or laundry personnel. This highlights the demand for childcare services due to both parents' active work involvement.

The monthly income of Phulki customers who are mothers working in garment factories, ranged from 9,000BDT to 14,000BDT (US\$82 to US\$127), with an average of 10,818BDT (US\$98). This surpassed Bangladesh's minimum wage of 8,000BDT (US\$73). Several mothers reported living with other earning members in the family. The average monthly income of the household ranged from 10,000BDT to 34,000 BDT (US\$91 to

US\$309)<sup>39</sup>, with an average of 23,000BDT (US\$209).

In the absence of childcare support from extended families, women sought secure and caring environments for their children and thus chose Phulki Daycare Centers for peace of mind. The prospect of educational benefits, convenience, affordability, and recommendations from their social network were significant factors in their choice of daycare. Phulki's dependable admission process further solidified its position as its preferred daycare center. Some parents also consider Phulki to be a superior and more affordable choice compared to informal caregivers. Typically, parents pay a monthly fee of BDT500–800 (US\$4.5–7.20).

The daycare centers cater to parents by offering flexible timings: drop-offs are usually between 7:30 – 8:00 am, while pick-ups extend from 5:00–10:00 pm, thus accommodating parents with diverse work schedules, enabling parents to effectively balance their work and childcare responsibilities.

Most women learned about Phulki through word-of-mouth from family members, neighbors, colleagues, and friends. This suggests that Phulki's reputation and the positive experiences of current and past users were crucial in attracting new users.



### 4.3.2 Customer personas

The qualitative research revealed 2 primary personas among Phulki's customers:

- ❖ **The Young Professional:** Embarking on her professional journey, this young woman in her early 20s is stepping into the workforce following the birth of her first child. Financial independence drives her, leading her to Phulki. Her confidence in the daycare center grew from knowing a trusted relative who had already chosen Phulki for their childcare needs.
- ❖ **The Working Mother:** This persona paused her career after the birth of her second child. Eager to dive back into her role at the garment factory, she learned about Phulki through a colleague. Unfamiliar with it at first, she took a proactive approach, visiting the center and observing its operations. Impressed by what she saw, she entrusted Phulki with the care of her children.

These distinct personas were created through a qualitative analysis of customers' characteristics, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Each persona is descriptive, actionable, and unique, reflecting the customer's primary motivations, challenges, and awareness of the benefits they receive from Phulki, and providing insights relevant to their decision to use Phulki. This understanding enables the Phulki team to empathize with the customers, thereby fine-tuning their offerings to increase their reach and more effectively address customer demands.

Below is an in-depth examination of these 2 distinct personas.



### Jamila's Bio

Jamila is a 23-year-old married woman with 1 child under the age of 5. She is employed as a machine operator in a garment factory, earning a base monthly income of 10,000BDT (US\$91), exclusive of any overtime payments. Her husband is also employed, likely in the same factory, serving as a supervisor with an income of 14,000BDT (US\$127). Their combined household income totals approximately 24,000BDT (US\$218) per month.

Jamila learned about Phulki through a trusted relative, and within a day of discovering the facility, she promptly registered and enrolled her child.

### Jamila Ali

#### The Young Professional

#### Demographic Information (of the persona she represents)

**Age:** 20-26 years

**Marital status:** Married

**Children:** 1 child

**Education:** Completed primary school

**Monthly Household Income:** BDT24,000(US\$218)

**Last Job:** Previously unemployed

**Hours spent on care each working day:** 3 hours

### Motivation

Jamila's decision to start working was fueled by her desire to attain financial independence, to support her widowed mother in the village and provide additional financial assistance to her family alongside her husband's earnings. She was introduced to Phulki by a trusted relative who had already enrolled their child in the facility, leading her to place her trust in their positive feedback and enroll her own child.

Her experience with Phulki has been overwhelmingly positive, with her child having attended the daycare for the past 18 months. Jamila takes a keen interest in what the children are learning and what games they play at the daycare and has noticed a positive change in her child's social skills and overall well-being. As a new mother, she initially grappled with anxiety and concerns about her child's well-being, but now she takes pride in her child's health and growth.

Her husband actively shares in the household's responsibilities and assists in picking up their child from Phulki. When discussing her working hours, she stated that she works enough hours and, if possible, she would work less, so as to spend more time with her child, highlighting her commitment to family life.

Jamila embodies the 'young professional' persona, as she represents young mothers entering the workforce while caring for her first child

*Due to the financial crisis in my family, I had to join work. Then I had no one to take care of my child. So, I decided to send my kid to Phulki daycare. A relative suggested Phulki daycare to me. She said she kept her baby here. After listening to her, I kept my baby in Phulki one day. Then I noticed my baby was happy. Then I decided to keep the baby here.*

**Young Professional, 23 years old**

### Behavioral traits/ Jamila's perception of the benefits that she receives

- Jamila actively participates in Phulki's monthly meetings focused on childcare advice and instructions for parents, highlighting her commitment to her child's development. This is also displayed as she takes an interest in the activities her child is involved in within the daycare.
- Her decision to join the workforce is driven by the desire to achieve financial independence, save for the future, and provide support to her widowed mother in the village.
- Jamila places a high degree of trust in the opinions and advice of those around her, as evidenced by her swift decision to enroll her child in Phulki based on a relative's positive recommendation.
- Being a young mother, she is invested in her child's social and mental development. Thus she values Phulki's role in fostering these skills from a young age.
- Despite facing negative comments from people in her social circle, Jamila remains resolute in her decision to utilize Phulki's services, acknowledging the tangible benefits it offers to her child. This commitment is shared with her husband, as they jointly affirm the value of Phulki for their child's well-being



## Rina Amin The Working Mother

### Demographic Information *(of the persona she represents)*

**Age:** 27–35 years

**Marital status:** Married

**Children:** 1 child

**Education:** Likely to not have completed primary school

**Monthly Household Income:** BDT22,100 (US\$200)

**Last Job:** Worked at a garment factory

**Hours spent on care each working day:** 2.5 hours

### Rina's Bio

Rina, a 33-year-old married woman, is a dedicated mother to her 2 children, one of whom is below the age of 5 and the other who is under 18. Residing with her husband and children, their combined household income amounts to 22,100BDT (US\$200). Rina holds the position of a sewing operator within a garment factory, with an approximate monthly income of 10,000BDT (US\$91), excluding overtime earnings. Unlike her, her husband is employed in a role outside the garment industry.

She found out about Phulki through a colleague and this prompted her to conduct a thorough assessment of Phulki, its staff, and the overall environment. After being assured of its safety and suitability, she decided to enroll her child in the daycare center.

### Motivation

After Rina's pregnancy with her second child, she took a temporary break from her job, intending to return once the child was born. Her strong motivation to rejoin the workforce was primarily driven by the need to provide, together with her husband, for their family. The decision was not without its challenges, as Rina faced considerable stress regarding her child's care. She had previously attempted to secure childcare from her village through a family member's assistance, but that fell through.

Rina's colleague introduced her to Phulki, sparking her interest in the daycare center. Rina invested time and effort to ensure that Phulki provided a safe and suitable environment before enrolling her child, who was just under 3 years old at the time. Enrolling her child in Phulki has enabled Rina to work longer hours in the factory, thereby increasing her income through overtime.

Over the past 3 years and 4 months, Rina's child has had a positive experience at Phulki. While Rina might not be fully aware of the activities and lessons her child partakes in, her happiness derives from her child's contentment at Phulki. Knowing that her child is well-fed, bathed, receives nap times, and has the opportunity to interact with other children brings her peace of mind. Rina's positive perception of Phulki has also led her to recommend it to 2 other mothers who have subsequently enrolled their children there. Despite limited support from her husband on domestic chores, Rina receives assistance from her elder child upon their return from school.

Rina exemplifies the 'working mother' persona, as she was actively employed even before she had the child at Phulki and demonstrated a strong commitment to her work, even embracing overtime opportunities

*I admitted my child after 15 days of first hearing about Phulki. In these 15 days, I visited Phulki many times and tried to observe their environment. After 15 days, I admitted my child to Phulki.*

### Working Mother, 35 years old

### Behavioral traits/ Jamila's perception of the benefits that she receives

- Rina is family-centric, as her decision to return to work is primarily driven by her commitment to supporting her husband and children. She is focused on ensuring her family's well-being and financial stability.
- She values the convenience and affordability of Phulki as it is located right next to the garment factory, making it easy for her to drop her child in the morning and pick them up after work.
- She values the freedom that Phulki has given her to work longer hours in the factory and thus earn more through overtime. This shows that she is dedicated to her job and increasing her income to support her family.
- Rina takes a careful and thorough approach when evaluating childcare options. She was meticulous in vetting Phulki to ensure it was a safe environment for her child before enrolling









### 4.3.3 Journey maps







The personas are illustrative of how different women workers decided to take up the services offered by Phulki. In the following section, journey maps are used to add additional detail to describe the step-by-step emotional experience that mothers undergo from their initial introduction to Phulki to their eventual experience and utilization of its services.

Journey maps are a visual representation of the highs and lows experienced by mothers as they engage with Phulki. Journey maps can guide Phulki to identify opportunities for improvement and ensure that the diverse needs, wants and constraints of the mothers and their children, are considered in the expansion and refinement of their services, or reach.







The journey to utilizing the daycare services by Phulki typically starts with a need for external childcare caused by a financial crisis or stress within the family. The mothers gain awareness about the organization, often through colleagues and referral networks. During the admission phase, Phulki provides information about their childcare service and requests parents to submit documentation and an admission fee. The mothers then begin bringing their children to the center every day before work. Once enrolled, the child and mother experience the impact of Phulki, and the parents are engaged by Phulki through regular follow-up meetings. Mothers experience changes in their relationship with their children and can focus more on their employment due to reduced childcare responsibilities. Over time, many of these mothers become advocates for Phulki within their broader community.







**Table 1:** Journey map for female workers using Phulki daycare services







| Stage                                  | <br>Activities   | <br>Caregiver Goals | <br>Emotions          | <br>Barriers  | <br>Levers   |
|--|---|--|--|--|---|
| <b>Necessity of childcare services</b> | <p>Faced with financial crises, many families find themselves in situations in which women are compelled to enter the workforce. This necessitates seeking external childcare solutions to ensure children's well-being during their absence.</p> | <p>To secure employment and arrange alternate childcare.</p>   | <br>Stressed, worried | <p><i>Extended family unavailability:</i> As other family members are also engaged in paid work, they are unable to provide in-home childcare, leaving a gap in the family support system.</p> | <p><i>Community trend in childcare outsourcing:</i> A significant number of mothers in the community are actively seeking childcare options, turning to individuals and specialized services to meet their needs.</p> |







| Stage               | <br>Activities   | <br>Caregiver Goals       | <br>Emotions                    | <br>Barriers  | <br>Levers  |
|---------------------|---|--|--|--|--|
| Discovery of Phulki | <p>Women actively explore childcare options within their social network, including family, neighbors, colleagues, and friends. Through these networks, many learn about Phulki.</p> | <p>To identify a reliable child care service provider or individual for their child during work hours.</p> | <br>Intrigued, curious, anxious | <p><i>Reliability and safety concerns:</i> Many women face challenges in finding childcare providers that are both safe and reliable.</p> <p><i>Trust issues with caregivers:</i> Mothers often feel apprehensive about leaving their children with individuals they do not know personally.</p> <p><i>Age limitations at Phulki:</i> Some mothers recalled instances of Phulki not accepting children under 2 years old which presents difficulties for working mothers with infants.</p> <p><i>Social stigma for younger mothers:</i> Younger mothers often face community judgment for not being able to care for their babies independently.</p> | <p><i>Community endorsements of Phulki:</i> Many women, mothers, and husbands in the community are either aware of or have used Phulki's services and give positive feedback.</p> <p><i>Positive first impression:</i> Initial visits to Phulki centers, characterized by their cleanliness and professional staff, leave a good impression on mothers. The centers' focus on teaching alphabetic knowledge to children is seen as an added advantage.</p> <p><i>Accessibility of Phulki centers:</i> The convenient location and easy accessibility of Phulki centers make them a favorable choice for mothers in the community.</p> <p><i>Multiple pre-admission visits for mothers:</i> Women are given the flexibility to make several visits to the center, allowing them to thoroughly observe the environment and facilities before deciding to enroll their child.</p> |



| Stage   | <br>Activities   | <br>Caregiver Goals                                    | <br>Emotions             | <br>Barriers   | <br>Levers   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| <b>Registration process and advance payment</b> | <p><b>Documentation &amp; advance payment:</b> Women interested in enrolling their children at Phulki speak with a representative to complete registration. This includes providing essential documentation.</p> <p>To successfully register, women must submit the following documents for their child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admission form</li> <li>• Picture of child</li> <li>• Copy of child's birth certificate</li> <li>• Father's National ID (NID) card</li> <li>• Details of parents' employment</li> </ul> | <p>To gather information about Phulki, complete the necessary documentation, and pay the required fees for their child's admission.</p> | <br>Interested, cautious | <p><i>Overcoming family skepticism:</i> Women faced negative perceptions held by some family members about external childcare, which they faced challenges in overcoming to enroll their child in a daycare center.</p> <p><i>Document preparation time:</i> Typically, women require 1-2 weeks to gather and organize all necessary documents for their child's admission.</p> | <p><i>Ease of document accessibility:</i> Most families find it straightforward to locate and provide the required documentation proof.</p> <p><i>Flexible documentation submission for employment:</i> Phulki offers flexibility for women who are finalizing their employment, allowing them to submit their employment information at a later date.</p> <p><i>Informed parental engagement:</i> Phulki ensures that mothers are well-informed about the daycare process, including details on meals, educational activities, and hygiene practices like bathing.</p> |

| Stage                       | <br>Activities   | <br>Caregiver Goals           | <br>Emotions                  | <br>Barriers  | <br>Levers  |
|-----------------------------|---|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Experience at Phulki</b> | <p><b>First day at Phulki:</b> Women introduce their children to Phulki daycare by bringing them in for their first day. Typically, women drop off their children at Phulki around 7:30 am and pick them up between 5-7 pm.</p> <p>After receiving information from Phulki representatives, women observe their child's reactions to the daycare to determine ongoing use of the service.</p> | <p>To evaluate their own and their child's responses and experiences after starting at the daycare center.</p> | <br>Nervous, eager, emotional | <p><i>Adjustment for children:</i> Some children require time to adjust to being in daycare and around other children.</p> <p><i>Emotional challenges for mothers:</i> Mothers often experience hesitancy and sadness leaving their children alone for the first time, worried that their child might cry and feeling a sense of missing them.</p> | <p><i>Flexibility of early pick-ups:</i> During the initial adjustment period, some mothers opt to bring their children home early from Phulki to help them gradually acclimate to the new environment.</p> <p><i>Children's positive response:</i> Children return from Phulki in high spirits, often appearing happier than when left alone at home or with relatives.</p> |

| Stage | <br>Activities   | <br>Caregiver Goals           | <br>Emotions  | <br>Barriers   | <br>Levers  |
|-------|---|--|--|---|--|
|       | <p><b>Ongoing engagement with Phulki:</b> Mothers typically utilize Phulki's daycare services for their children on an average of 6 days a week.</p> <p>Women contribute a monthly fee ranging from BDT500 to 700 (US\$4.5-US\$7.2) for ongoing access to the daycare services. Occasionally, they also offer a small additional tip to the staff as a gesture of appreciation.</p> | <p>To delegate childcare responsibilities to Phulki during work hours and foster a relationship with them.</p> | <br><p>Requires effort but excited and thankful</p> | <p>Mothers are required to provide meals for their children, as Phulki does not offer regular meals. Additionally, they feel that Phulki could provide basic items like bags and books, and an electricity backup, especially during summer months.</p> <p><i>Concerns over space and individual attention:</i> Some parents believe that the centers are overcrowded and suggest that Phulki should either expand its facilities or increase the number of rooms to better accommodate the children.</p> <p><i>Desire for greater parental involvement:</i> A few mothers express a wish to have more opportunities to offer input and suggestions regarding childcare at Phulki.</p> <p><i>Concerns over fee increase:</i> Some parents find the recent hike in the monthly fee burdensome, adding to their financial stress.</p> | <p><i>Quality care and environment:</i> Phulki's experienced staff are commended for caring for the children attentively, creating a safe and clean environment.</p> <p><i>Educational and social development:</i> Children receive lessons on manners, the Bengali alphabet, and rhymes, and enjoy playing with toys provided at the daycare. They also form friendships with other children, contributing to their happiness and social growth.</p> <p><i>Community building among mothers:</i> Women appreciate the opportunity to meet and share experiences with other parents at the daycare, fostering a sense of community and mutual support.</p> <p><i>Parental engagement and assurance:</i> Parents appreciate the regular updates and follow-up about their child's progress and additional advice on childcare. Some mentioned that the personalized attention to each child's habits and mannerisms increased their comfort and trust in Phulki's management.</p> <p><i>Cost-effective services:</i> Parents recognize and appreciate that Phulki's services are about BDT500 (US\$4.5) cheaper than hiring individual caregivers. Additionally, they prefer Phulki due to concerns over the inconsistent care and potential safety risks associated with individual workers.</p> |

| Stage                            | <br>Activities   | <br>Caregiver Goals | <br>Emotions                      | <br>Barriers   | <br>Levers   |
|----------------------------------|---|--|--|---|---|
| <b>Loyalty and sustained use</b> | <p>Women recognise the long-term benefits of using Phulki childcare services. They assess their satisfaction based on its impact and often recommend it to others in their community who might benefit from these services.</p> | <p>To maintain the use of their services and advocate for them within the mother's community.</p>    | <br>Encouraging, satisfied, happy | <p>Mothers would like Phulki to open more branches in other areas for it to be accessible to more mothers.</p> <p>Phulki could consider a separate branch for younger infants below the age of 2 years.</p> | <p><i>High satisfaction and recommendations:</i> Women report high satisfaction with Phulki's services and frequently recommend them to other mothers in their community.</p> <p><i>Positive reputation:</i> All the women interviewed indicated that they have not encountered any negative feedback or experiences regarding the use of Phulki's services.</p> <p><i>Expansion request:</i> Mothers express a desire for Phulki to open additional branches in various areas, making the service more accessible to a larger number of mothers. Additionally, they also suggest Phulki to consider establishing a dedicated branch for the care of younger infants.</p> |

#### 4.3.4 Phulki's impact

This section presents the impact of Phulki daycare centers on customers' daily lives, based on their qualitative interviews. Quotes are the customer's own words.

All customers have noted significant improvements in their lives since using the Phulki daycare center. Women in particular have benefited, reporting an increased ability to concentrate on their paid work without the constant worry for the well-being of their children.

### Qualitative evidence of theory of change

#### Long-term outcome

**LTO1:** Increased ability to access livelihood creation opportunities for women by reducing and redistributing their care burden through the availability of quality childcare facilities.

- Employment and financial stability:** The Phulki daycare center has revolutionized the lives of many women, enabling them to actively participate in the workforce and achieve financial independence. This empowerment extends beyond the women themselves, positively impacting their families and communities. Women now have the means to support not only their immediate family but also their parents in rural areas, who previously had no other source of income. Moreover, Phulki has significantly improved the workplace experiences of women. Prior to Phulki, many women reported difficulties and often received unfavorable treatment from employers, primarily because of their need to manage childcare by leaving work early. With reliable childcare support in place due to Phulki, women are now able to balance their work and family responsibilities effectively.

*"Yes, there are a lot of changes for the Phulki daycare center. Now I can earn money for Phulki, because they keep my child and take care of her. So, I can contribute financially to my family and buy something for my baby and myself. Now I can save money. So, there are changes in my financial situation for Phulki. My mother is alone in the village house. My father is dead. So now I can help my mom with money."*

**Young Professional, 23 years old**

*"Thanks to the Phulki daycare center, I am able to work and earn with peace of mind, knowing my child is in safe hands. This has changed my life, allowing me to support my family while ensuring my child's well-being."*

**Young Professional, 23 years old**

- Reduced hours on household tasks:** Many women have noted that, despite their total working hours remaining largely unchanged, the way they manage their time has significantly shifted. This adjustment is primarily due to 2 key factors. First, Phulki's service of washing children's dirty and soiled clothes eliminates a time-consuming task for mothers. Second, as Phulki teaches children to eat independently, mothers no longer need to dedicate as much time to feeding them. This has led to a reduction in daily care and domestic work, ranging from 30 minutes to 2 hours. However, many women are opting to work additional hours to increase their earnings and improve their family's financial situation.

*"There are some changes. I do not have to wash my son's dresses. So I get relief from that work. Now my son can eat with his hand. But in the past, I had to feed him with my hand. Now I am also relieved from that work. Even now he can go to the bath alone. So I am stress free."*

**Young Professional, 26 years old**



*“Now I can work longer than before. Now I can work till 10:00 pm. Otherwise, I have to leave my office at 7:00 p.m. Earlier, I could not work longer in my office. I had to request for leave from my supervisor. So they behaved badly with me. But now I have not any problems like this. Now I can work more time in my office. So my seniors are happy with my work and I can earn more money. In the past, I could work from morning 8:00 am to 7:00 p.m. in the evening. But now I can work till 10:00pm at night. So I can work 2 to 3 hours extra.”*

**Working Mother, 28 years old**

**Medium-term outcomes**

**MTO1:** Increased and improved access to quality childcare facilities at workplaces and in the community.  
**MTO2:** Enhanced skills for an increased number of care workers.

- **Increasing preference for quality childcare with Phulki:** A noticeable shift is occurring among parents who are opting for Phulki over informal childcare options, driven by its superior quality and cost-effectiveness. Women have reported their children’s prior experiences with informal childcare did not include clean environments or constructive learning activities. In contrast, Phulki offers a more nurturing setting for just BDT500–800 (US\$ 4.5–7.2) compared to the BDT2,000 (US\$18) charged by informal services. This switch not only ensures children are in hygienic, engaging, and educational environments but also allows parents to save BDT500 (US\$4.5) each month. Parents have also observed that their children clearly prefer Phulki’s daycare services over staying with grandparents or relatives. This preference is likely due to the opportunity at Phulki for children to socialize with other children their age, participate in age-appropriate activities, and enjoy playtime in a structured setting. This trend underscores a crucial insight: the demand for childcare is gradually pivoting towards facilities like Phulki that prioritize quality. As awareness of the benefits of such an environment grows, it is expected that more parents will opt for professional childcare services over informal alternatives, signaling a shift in the market towards higher quality, structured childcare solutions.

*“I kept my baby for 2 months at a women’s home in our area. I had to pay her BDT2,000 monthly. There, my son used to play with dirty things. Sometimes, my child could not be found. That woman did not look after my child properly. Then I decided to keep my son in the daycare center.”*

**Working Mother, 28 years old**

*“Yes. There are so many differences. My mother is an older woman. She is sick. She can’t maintain my daughter properly. But in Phulki there are so many children. My daughter can play with them. My daughter can learn so many things from here. Even Phulki’s madams are very expert in childcare. So, my daughter feels good here.”*

**Young Professional, 23 years old**

- **Positive mental health & reduced stress for mothers:** Nearly all women reported reduced stress. They no longer worry about their child’s safety and reported being able to focus whole-heartedly on their jobs.

*“There are no physical changes actually. But I feel mentally peace with the Phulki daycare center. Because I have not faced any disturbance from my son. In the daytime, he stays at the Phulki. So I can do my duty in the office. But I noticed one thing that my child is healthier than in the past after using the daycare center. Because the Phulki daycare center is taking care of my child very well. They provide purified water and keep all the kids clean. They also feed them in time and help them to sleep properly.”*

**Young Professional, 22 years old**

**Short-term outcomes**

**STO1:** Increased access to childcare facilities with trained care workers.  
**STO2:** Increased access to community-based childcare facilities with trained care workers.  
**STO3:** Increased awareness among workers about their rights, especially their right to quality childcare support from employers.  
**STO4:** Increased access to **ECD** training for care workers.



- **Endorsement and trust in Phulki:** Many women have actively recommended Phulki to other parents, especially working mothers, in their community. They recognize and value the dual benefits of Phulki: enabling a working environment and positively influencing their children’s development. This trend not only promotes the acceptance of external childcare solutions but also encourages women to pursue job opportunities beyond the household.

*“Yes, I have already recommended 7-8 parents and they also admitted their kids.”*  
**Working Mother, 35 years old**

*“Yes. I will recommend Phulki to others. Because my child is safe and secure here. So, I suggested to others that they could keep their child here and work peacefully and they will benefit.”*  
**Young Professional, 23 years old**

## Outputs

- O1:** Provision of on-site childcare facilities with trained care workers for women in the ready-made garment sector as well as other industries.
- O2:** Provision of community-based childcare facilities with trained care workers.
- O3:** Provision of Information on worker’s right to demand quality childcare support from their employers (such as factories and corporations employing over 40 workers).
- O4:** Provision of ECD training for care workers.

- **Satisfaction with Phulki’s services:** All women interviewed reported being fully satisfied with Phulki’s services. Their satisfaction primarily stems from the nurturing and caring environment that Phulki offers. Many women highlighted the cleanliness of the facility and the kind treatment their children receive. They also valued the lessons their children learned on politeness and respect. Moreover, they appreciated Phulki’s learning activities through rhymes, stories, alphabets, and songs.

*“Phulki’s environment is good. They keep our child clean. And they take care of our child. They are so clean. I like it very much. If any kids become dirty or defecate, they clean it immediately.”*  
**Working Mother, 32 years old**


- **Childcare information sessions:** Many women expressed gratitude for the monthly informational sessions organized by Phulki. They found these sessions immensely beneficial, offering valuable insights on child-rearing, nutrition, and other relevant topics.

*“One thing that I like very much is arranging Parents Meeting and informing parents about baby caring and they teach us different types of instructions on how to take care of our baby in different situations and different weather and different seasons with different activities.”*  
**Young Professional, 26 years old**

## 5 - LOOK FORWARD

### 5.1 Growth and sustainability plans

The enterprise has identified the following avenues for growth:

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  <p>Increase the number of childcare facilities</p>               | <p>Phulki aims to increase the number of onsite childcare facilities that it will establish and manage. It plans to expand its operations to remote areas outside of Dhaka city, especially places where there are limited educational and childcare facilities. For instance, Phulki plans to approach Bangladesh's sugar mills, as well as tea plantations (located largely in Sylhet) to set up childcare facilities for their women employees. The enterprise plans to leverage Phulki Ltd.'s work in developing a business case for franchising its childcare services and market it to other brands, factories, and investors, such that it can scale its operations.</p>   |
|  <p>Introduce childcare services for middle-income households</p> | <p>The enterprise aims to introduce childcare facilities for middle-income households in Bangladesh. Revenue from these facilities will be used to subsidize childcare facilities for low-income households. It plans to establish one middle-income community center in 2024 in one of Dhaka's commercial areas, so it can partner with corporations headquartered in this area and offer childcare facilities through the center to their employees.</p>  |
|  <p>Expand services</p>   | <p>The enterprise aims to develop afterschool services to support children who have commenced formal schooling. The enterprise aims to assist government in its plans to set up daycare facilities in schools so that teachers as well as working mothers in the community can use these services. The enterprise also plans to expand the services provided through its community centers. Finally, the enterprise has been working with Bangladesh government to address increasing instances of children drowning in rural areas. It has assisted government in designing a program for rural areas whereby communities and mothers can supervise young children in a structured manner to reduce instances of drowning. Phulki will partner with government to implement this program across the country in the near future. The enterprise has also observed that several women are dropping out of garment factories because of increasing automation across ready-made garment factories. Thus, in order to retain such women in the labor force as well as create opportunities for women who are not working, Phulki is providing entrepreneurship and skills training on handicrafts, stitching, cooking, etc. so women can become financially independent.</p> |
|  <p>Sell ECD material to low-income households</p>              | <p>The enterprise is in the process of turning its ECD material into products it can sell to factories and corporations. It further aims to expand sales of ECD material to households in Bangladesh. The enterprise creates age appropriate handmade toys for children aged 0-6. It sells these toys and an ECD book through childcare facilities in factories. It plans to make the materials available to schools as well as through its website in 2024.</p>  |





### Product partnerships

Phulki aims to partner with a manufacturer to make bio-degradable sanitary napkins that can be sold to women and girls in low-income urban settlements. Phulki also plans to partner with garment factories to sell clothes created by women that participate in its vocational training programs.

## 5.2 Ask of investors and stakeholders

### Financial needs

Over the next 5 years, Phulki seeks US\$5 million in grant funding to expand the number of community (low-income) and middle-income childcare facilities and provide after-school services for children aged 6-12 years. The cost of establishing and managing one community (low-income) childcare facility which caters to 40 children on average for a year is about US\$22,000. Providing skill development training to mothers costs an additional US\$11,990. Women are taught skills like sewing and making handicrafts in order to increase avenues through which they can earn their livelihood. The cost to establish and manage 1 middle-income childcare facility for a year is about US\$51,700. Phulki seeks an investor or partner that can provide the capital expenditure (US\$51,700) required to establish a daycare facility for middle-income households. While Phulki has the technical know-how to establish and manage the daycare, it needs financial resources. Through capital expenditure funding, it can increase access to quality childcare services for middle-income households.

### Non-financial needs

**Technology support (personnel):** The enterprise seeks personnel with IT expertise to develop digital modules for its awareness training sessions and after-school programs for children.

**Fundraising support (personnel):** The enterprise seeks personnel with fundraising expertise to increase funding for scaling up of programs.

**Marketing support:** The enterprise seeks support to build its brand and increase the visibility of its work amongst middle-income customers and other stakeholders (policymakers, funders, and investors). This will enable the enterprise to attract investors, access grants, and collaborate with relevant partners.

**Mentor support:** The enterprise seeks mentorship to strengthen its business model. It especially needs support to understand the various operational models available to social businesses, such that it can adapt and adopt practices that can enable Phulki Ltd. to grow.

### 5.3 Lessons learned

Phulki's experience shows that it is important to invest resources in brand building. The enterprise believes that it could have made a greater impact if it was better recognized across the world. Recognition would enable it to develop more partnerships, increase its access to brands, help it gain more expertise, and raise funds. Moreover, working towards increasing its participation in global networking events and global early childcare programs would have enabled Phulki to improve its curriculum and scale faster. If it were better recognized, Phulki's advocacy efforts may have yielded results faster.

Over time, Phulki also realized the need for creating a self-sustaining model. Initially, community childcare centers were set up under specific grants. However, to create long-term impact, it was necessary for the centers to continue functioning even after a grant period ended. Phulki began to seek community support to keep centers operational and eventually set up Phulki Limited to generate revenue from its activities to support ongoing and future initiatives. This experience demonstrates the importance of developing a long-term vision as well as cultivating the ability to develop creative solutions to strategic challenges.

The enterprise believes that documenting its programs and efforts could have helped improve the skill set of the organization as a whole. Such documentation could serve as evidence of the impact of its programs. This would have helped the enterprise strengthen its outreach to potential funders and partners, as well as helped convince community members, factory owners, etc of the value of childcare. Moreover, it would have aided Phulki's advocacy efforts significantly.

Phulki's experience also demonstrates that it is important to understand key stakeholders. Through its interactions across its childcare centers, Phulki was better able to understand barriers for women to work and introduced several initiatives such as making a breastfeeding corner mandatory across its childcare facilities, establishing the women's cafe as well as establishing awareness and training programs. Within the women's cafe, Phulki's interactions led it to provide counselors and vocational training, among others. All of these are a direct result of Phulki's approach. It believes that its initiatives must address the real needs of its beneficiaries, even if they fall outside its original program design.

## 5.4 Recommendations for policymakers, investors, and entrepreneurs

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  <p>Policymakers</p>    | <p>The enterprise believes that a strong monitoring body will enable the implementation of Bangladesh’s current childcare policy. So far there has been limited momentum to establish such a body and limited funds have been mobilized by the government to set up and operationalise such a body.</p>  |
|  <p>Investors</p>       | <p>Investors need to adopt a broader lens while considering organizations like Phulki, which seek to focus not just on 1 or 2 aspects of a challenge, but to address several interlinked issues. For instance, instead of viewing Phulki as a childcare facilities provider, investors could look at it as a solutions provider and better understand its vision of addressing the many interwoven challenges faced by women. This will allow them to better assess the impact created by organizations like Phulki.</p> <p>Investors should encourage enterprises with limited experience in engaging with the entrepreneurship ecosystem to access mentorship support. Investors can do this either by incorporating a component of technical assistance in their investment process or by helping enterprises to access such assistance from ecosystem enablers such as incubators and accelerators, that investors typically and routinely liaise with. This will enable enterprises to learn from others’ experiences, overcome typical challenges, and become more investment-ready.</p>   |
|  <p>Entrepreneurs</p> | <p>The organization believes that understanding stakeholders is key to developing successful programs. It therefore believes that entrepreneurs must always put in the effort and time required to build a deep knowledge of the cultural and social norms that govern their intended beneficiaries.</p> <p>It is important to invest in strategies that record and demonstrate impact. Planning and investing in detailed data collection from the outset can play a positive role in demonstrating impact to potential investors and partners. Moreover, investing resources in collecting and digitizing data can also aid enterprises in enhancing existing operations and creating strategies for future growth. Developing focused communication that demonstrates impact is another key factor in building partnerships and onboarding key stakeholders. For instance, Phulki approaches childcare and women’s empowerment holistically and has established several initiatives to address interlinked challenges. However, to external stakeholders, these interlinkages may not be obvious, and they may perceive Phulki as being spread across various endeavors. It is therefore important for enterprises to develop clear communication on their impact and long-term vision.</p> |



Entrepreneurs can increase and leverage partnerships to create long-term change at scale. For instance, while Phulki has partnered with brands, as well as a few other NGOs, there is scope for it to boost partnerships that focus on implementing its childcare facilities across other sectors to increase impact.



## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> World Bank. (2022). *Total population of Bangladesh*.  
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=BD>
- <sup>2</sup> World Bank. (2022). *Rural population (% of total population) – Bangladesh*.  
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?locations=BD>
- <sup>3</sup> World Bank. (2022). *Urban population growth (annual %)–Bangladesh*.  
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.GROW?locations=BD>
- <sup>4</sup> World Bank. (2020). *Percentage of the urban population living in slums*.  
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POP.SLUM.UR.ZS?locations=BD>
- <sup>5</sup> Habitat for Humanity. (2018). *The Housing Need in Bangladesh*.  
<https://www.habitat.org/where-we-build/bangladesh#:~:text=The%20housing%20need%20in%20Bangladesh&text=UNICEF%20estimates%20there%20are%204,living%20in%20low%20dying%20areas>
- <sup>6</sup> Centre for Policy Dialogue. (2020). *A huge number of children in Bangladesh are living with multi-dimensional poverty*.  
<https://cpd.org.bd/huge-number-of-children-in-bangladesh-are-living-with-multidimensional-poverty/>
- <sup>7</sup> UNICEF. (2021). *Country Office Annual Report 2021: Bangladesh– Update on the context and situation of children*  
<https://www.unicef.org/media/116196/file/Bangladesh-2021-COAR.pdf>
- <sup>8</sup> UNICEF. (2016). *Nutrition–Building a foundation of lifelong health*  
<https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/nutrition#:~:text=In%20Bangladesh%2C%2028%20per%20cent,difficult%20for%20them%20to%20learn>
- <sup>9</sup> UNICEF. (2021). *Country Office Annual Report 2021: Bangladesh– Update on the context and situation of children*  
<https://www.unicef.org/media/116196/file/Bangladesh-2021-COAR.pdf>
- <sup>10</sup> UNICEF. (2021). *Country Office Annual Report 2021: Bangladesh– Update on the context and situation of children*  
<https://www.unicef.org/media/116196/file/Bangladesh-2021-COAR.pdf>
- <sup>11</sup> UNICEF. (2022). *Each drowning death is preventable*.  
<https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/press-releases/each-drowning-death-preventable-who-and-unicef#:~:text=DHAKA%2C%2025%20July%202022%20%E2%80%93%20Each,Bangladesh%20die%20due%20to%20drowning>
- <sup>12</sup> World Bank. (2022). *Why quality and affordable childcare is vital for inclusive growth in Bangladesh?*  
<https://blogs.worldbank.org/endpovertyinsouthasia/why-quality-and-affordable-childcare-vital-inclusive-growth-Bangladesh>
- <sup>13</sup> International Finance Corporation. (2019). *Tackling Childcare: The business benefits and Challenges of employer-supported childcare in Bangladesh*.



---

<https://www.ifc.org/en/insights-reports/2010/tackling-childcare-the-business-benefits-and-challenges-of-employer-supported-childcare-in-bangladesh>

<sup>14</sup> International Finance Corporation. (2019). *Tackling Childcare: The Business Benefits and Challenges of Employer-supported Childcare in Bangladesh*.  
<https://www.ifc.org/en/insights-reports/2010/tackling-childcare-the-business-benefits-and-challenges-of-employer-supported-childcare-in-bangladesh>

<sup>15</sup> World Bank. (2019). *What Works for Working Women? Understanding Female Labor Force Participation in Urban Bangladesh*.  
<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/265491570091030693/pdf/What-Works-for-Working-Women-Understanding-Female-Labor-Force-Participation-in-Urban-Bangladesh.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> World Bank. (2022). *Raising the Quality of Child Caregiving in Bangladesh*.  
<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/03a3169d-7d48-5dd5-83fa-308a389b7d63/content>

<sup>17</sup> International Finance Corporation. (2019). *Nearly three-quarters of Bangladesh firms do not offer childcare*.  
<https://pressroom.ifc.org/all/pages/PressDetail.aspx?ID=17694>

<sup>18</sup> UNICEF. (2014). *Better Business for Children: Understanding Children's Rights and the Ready-Made Garment Sector in Bangladesh*. UNICEF. Retrieved December 9, 2022, from  
<https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/media/301/file/BB4C%20Report.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Bangladesh ECD Network. (2020). *Community-Based Childcare Centers in Bangladesh: Sustainability and Scaling- Fininding best practices for childcare models that help children survive and thrive*.  
<https://www.syngs.info/files/2019-bangladesh-dpp-childcare-brief.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> UN Women. (2020). *Understanding the Gender Composition and Experience of Ready-Made Garment Workers in Bangladesh*. <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/10/bd-understanding-the-gender-composition-and-experience-of-ready-made-garment-workers>

<sup>21</sup> UNICEF. (2014). *Better Business for Children: Understanding Children's Rights and the Ready-Made Garment Sector in Bangladesh*.  
<https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/media/301/file/BB4C%20Report.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> WIEGO. (2020). *The Cost of Insecurity: Domestic Workers Access to Social Protection and Services in Dhaka*.  
[https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/file/WIEGO\\_PolicyBrief\\_N19\\_Bangladesh%20for%20WEB.pdf](https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/publications/file/WIEGO_PolicyBrief_N19_Bangladesh%20for%20WEB.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> World Bank. (2022). *Why quality and affordable childcare is vital for inclusive growth in Bangladesh?*  
<https://blogs.worldbank.org/endpovertyinsouthasia/why-quality-and-affordable-childcare-vital-inclusive-growth-Bangladesh>

<sup>24</sup> World Bank. (2019). *What Works for Working Women? Understanding Female Labor Force Participation in Urban Bangladesh*.  
<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/265491570091030693/pdf/What-Works-for-Working-Women-Understanding-Female-Labor-Force-Participation-in-Urban-Bangladesh.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> World Bank. (2022). *Raising The Quality of Child Caregiving in Bangladesh*.  
<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/03a3169d-7d48-5dd5-83fa-308a389b7d63/content>

<sup>26</sup> World Bank. (2022). *Raising The Quality of Child Caregiving in Bangladesh*.  
<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/03a3169d-7d48-5dd5-83fa-308a389b7d63/content>



<sup>27</sup> Child-to-Child is a rights-based approach to children's participation in health promotion and development. The Child-to-Child approach is grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and is based on the belief that children can play a meaningful role in their own lives. Thus the CTC approach actively involves children. By encouraging their participation in Child-to-Child activities the personal, physical, social, emotional, moral and intellectual development of children is enhanced. Under Phulki's adoption of the approach, the enterprise identifies children ambassadors that are taught about health, hygiene and safety and encouraged to and share these with other children and adults in the community.

<sup>28</sup> The Amader Kotha helpline was established in July 2014 to provide workers with a mechanism to report and resolve safety and other concerns in the RMG sector in Bangladesh. The Amader Kotha helpline allows women working in garment factories to report safety issues anonymously. This helpline was initially established as a project of the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety following the Rana Plaza tragedy. Amader Kotha is a collaboration among 3 project partners – Clear Voice, a project of The Cahn Group that operates hotlines and builds effective grievance mechanisms in supply chains; Phulki, an NGO working to improve the lives of workers and their families in Bangladesh; and ELEVATE, the parent company of Laborlink, a leading business risk and sustainability solutions provider.

<sup>29</sup> Ashoka Fellowship. (n/d.). Suraiya Haque, Phulki. Case Study: *Bringing the Children to Work*. <https://www.ashoka.org/en-pt/story/suraiya-haque-phulki>

<sup>30</sup> The Rana Plaza collapse was a structural failure that led to the collapse of a building that houses several garment-manufacturing units, leading to the death of more than 1,000 workers.

<sup>31</sup> The Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, also known as “Alliance” was a group of 28 global retailers formed to develop and implement Bangladesh Worker Safety Initiative, a 5-year binding commitment to improve worker safety in Bangladesh after the collapse of Rana Plaza in 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Swedwatch. (2016). Still a Lost Generation.

<sup>33</sup> Xe Currency Converter. (2024). Convert Bangladeshi Takas to USD Dollars. <https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/>

<sup>34</sup> 2X criteria can be found [here](#).

<sup>35</sup> Businesses were assessed on a 21-point scale, with scores of 0-7 being gender unintentional, scores of 8-14 being gender intentional and 15-21 being gender transformative.

<sup>36</sup> An average exchange rate of US\$1 = BDT77.95 for 2015 has been used here.

<sup>37</sup> An average exchange rate of US\$1 = BDT78.46 for 2016 has been used here.

<sup>38</sup> The research team conducted 12 in-depth interviews with customers of Phulki daycare services. Phulki shared a list of customers who fulfilled the following criteria: female customers, have been a customer of the Phulki for a minimum of 3 months. The customers for interview were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in age, occupation, socio-economic status. An interview guide was used to ensure consistency in the questions asked, although some follow-up questions were added as necessary to explore topics in more detail. The interviews were conducted in Bengali, audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The data collected from these interviews was analyzed thematically in NVivo to identify key themes and patterns in participants' responses. Given the small sample size and purposive sampling, one of the limitations of our analysis is that it might not be representative of the different socio-demographics of all Phulki customers.

<sup>39</sup> Currency World. US\$1 = 111BDT. <https://currency.world/>



The Care Economy  
Knowledge Hub



**IDRC · CRDI**

International Development Research Centre  
Centre de recherches pour le développement international



**Busara**

**Canada**



SAGANA



**OPEN SOCIETY  
FOUNDATIONS**



**intellectap**

AAVISHKAAR GROUP

**COREWOMAN**