



"It's a comprehensive program along with outreach camps": Parag Sharif and Nurul Kabir of Orbis International on the work of the Clear Vision Collective

Ambika Samarthya-Howard

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Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Can you introduce yourself?

Parag Sharif: My name is Parag Sharif. I'm a coordinator at Hospital.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Can you explain to me a little bit about how you set this up?



Parag Sharif: Okay, so this one is a program. We know that there is a campaign going on. Followed by this campaign, we ask people to come here free of cost. Our medical team, technicians from the vision center, come here to technically screen the patient, and provide the spectacles. And if they find any cataract patients, we refer them to the vision center. And from there, we facilitate [the process to get] the final surgery.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: And what if they just needed reading glasses? How do they get them?



Parag Sharif: They need reading glasses for enhancing their livelihood. You can see there is an optometrist, who screens the patient, and they prescribe. They do have the red card holder. They are giving the fee. Those who can pay, they pay.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: And can you tell me, have you had people who have needed glasses but said no, they don't want the glasses?

Parag Sharif: Young people mostly reject glasses. But for the older people, since they don't have any other option, they have to take the glasses.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: But have you had an older person say that they don't feel comfortable wearing glasses?

Parag Sharif: Not yet. They feel good. Look, if you don't have one leg, you have to have a catch. If you have a problem with sight, you need to have glasses.



Ambika Samarthya-Howard: And how many eye camps have you had here for the campaign?

Parag Sharif: Actually we used to do it every week, at least three camps here, organized locally.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: And how many people come to each camp?

Parag Sharif: On an average 100 to 200.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Why did you do them so many times? If it's the same location.

Parag Sharif: No, not the same location. It's a different location.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Wow. And so sometimes it's in Sherpur, sometimes it's elsewhere?

Parag Sharif: We give emphasis [to Sherpur] because we have a program under the CVC program. So we have taken initiatives in Sherpur. We have other programs in different districts. But we give the emphasis in Sherpur as the most economically disadvantaged area, where there are less service providers. So we are providing.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: For the people who do get reading glasses, what do they get them for? What have you heard from people?

Parag Sharif: For the reading glasses, they can start a new job, [get] new work.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Do you feel like they tell other people?



Parag Sharif: Yes, yes. Because today, in the morning, there were less people. Then, when they get [glasses], they go back home and they send the other people to come here. So now it's a bit crowded.

Eleven spectacles so far have been provided. Out of eleven, two were sold, they were paid [for]. Nine were free of cost.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: And this is your colleague?

Parag Sharif: Yes.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Can you introduce yourself?

Nurul Kabir: I am Nurul Kabir, Program Manager of Orbis International. We are working in collaboration with CVC. We are one of the members of CVC and have been working since 2019 under the guidance of VisionSpring and CVC.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Do you want to say a little bit more about the campaign?



Nurul Kabir: Yes, sure. It is a fairly effective campaign because the people of Bangladesh usually don't know [about eye] problems. They say I am able to see less. I'm not able to read the Quran, the holy book. I am not able to process rice. They feel this, but they don't know where services are available, how to get the service they need.

This is the main problem of our community people that they are not aware of the problems. Usually, eye problems are very much neglected. They go for other treatments, but eye problems are neglected as they're not as aware.

So this campaign is able to make the people aware that eye service is essential. This is a critical problem. If the eye is not working, the whole body is not working. He has to get assistance from others if he's completely blind or she's completely blind.

This campaign is making people aware about the services that VisionSpring and CVC members are providing in their community through the Eye Mitra pharmacy program, the Vision Center program, outreach programs and school site testing programs. So when services are declared or when an eye problem is detected, please go to the nearby Vision Center.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: But the campaign ends this week, right?

Nurul Kabir: Yes.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: What do you think is going to happen in the future to get people to continue to get reading glasses?



Nurul Kabir: Mr. Parag showed you one leaflet, right? So, at other outreach camps the people are aware about making and when they come here, one leaflet is given about the eye problems, as well as where the services are. That way it's done, but the campaign makes people more aware. It spreads the messages to the community that eye problems are critical and eye services are available here and there.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: But if the campaign ends and it doesn't continue, what do you think will help keep people engaged?



Nurul Kabir: This year we have planned 60 outreach camps and 50 school site testing programs. In 60 outreach camps, people, when they're announcing about the service, they come here. In the schools, the students and their neighbors know that their eye screening will be performed. And the students, the important message is if one gets service, if one gets the reference leaf, they deliver the message to other people, their community people and neighboring people. So one-by-one, this messaging is spreading.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Can you tell me about the outreach camp?



Nurul Kabir: At the beginning of the outreach camp, an announcement is made in the surrounding community that at a certain time in a certain place on a certain day outreach camps will be organized. In that outreach camp, eye screening will be made and a referral will be made for the cataract.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: I see. So even though you're not doing the campaign, you're still going to do the eye camps and you'll still do the school camps?

Nurul Kabir: Yes, yes.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: What's the difference between doing that with the campaign and doing that without the campaign?

Nurul Kabir: [The] campaign is a comprehensive program. It's a comprehensive program along with outreach camps. So it is additional.



Additional means the street drama is done, and other activities. For example, in the street dramas, folk songs are given. Additionally, we observe World Sight Day, we observe International Women's Day, we observe Diabetic Day. So during those events, we also make campaigns like awareness-raising campaigns, street drama, art competition, discussion and other things. So people know, beside the campaign, people know about the eye care service of the CVC.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: What is the major limitation of doing eye camps and these outreach camps?

Nurul Kabir: Time is a limitation. Time means this is the peak season of rice harvesting. So you see less people because they are busy in the paddy field. Women are busy processing rice, so this is a busy time. After the rice harvesting period, the people will have enough time to come. Even in the hospitals, the number of patients is less because of harvesting, paddy harvesting.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: What is your biggest advice to other people trying to do these camps?

Nurul Kabir: Choose the right time. Choose the right time when the people have enough time to get the service. So if you arrange during that time, service delivery will be bigger than this time, harvesting time. Or in another country, maybe they have another business, so think about the business of the people, think about the leisure time of the people.

Ambika Samarthya-Howard: Thank you, that makes sense.

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Ambika Samarthya-Howard (she/her) is Solutions Journalism Network's Chief Innovation Officer. She strategizes on communications, metrics, impact, product and technology, leveraging platforms for the network and creating cool content. She also leads the Solutions Insights Lab, an initiative of SJN that uses targeted research and analysis to identify and interrogate what's working and what's not in a particular sector or field. She has an MFA from Columbia's film program and has been creating, teaching and writing at the intersection of storytelling and social good for two decades. She has produced content for Current TV, UNICEF, Havas, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Prism.

** This interview has been edited and condensed.*