

COMBATTING GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN BANGLADESH

2022 NEWSLETTER



Photo: A factory employee working at the Bhandar Jute Mills, Bogura in June 2022. Photo: UN Women/Rawyan Shayema

The Combatting Gender-based Violence in Bangladesh (CGBV) Project is funded by the Government of Canada. The project strengthens efforts to ensure that women and girls, including the most marginalized, are free of violence at home, work and public spaces.

The year 2022 has been exceptional for CGBV. Despite a year that saw pushback against women's rights worldwide, CGBV contributed to social and transformative changes, the culmination of a four-year-long journey toward preventing gender-based violence in Bangladesh. **Nationally, the reformation of the Evidence (Amendment) Act 2022 finally came to fruition, the result of years' worth of advocacy for more robust rape law reforms.**

Normative and policy frameworks were implemented at the district level with educational institutes and a workplace where two *Zero Tolerance to Sexual Harassment* (ZTSH) policies were launched. Progress was made at the community level, where

2,702 women and 1,220 men are now advocates against rigid gender roles and unequal power dynamics.

Engagement with organizations such as Prevention Collaborative, Raising Voices, and Global Rights for Women, UN Women brought global evidence and initiatives into the national discussion, influencing policymakers and GBV experts and generating research and knowledge on prevention programming. UN Women contributed to shifting the public discourse on gender and violence by engaging with youth, communities and local public officials through building organizational capacity in preventing violence against women (VAW), demystifying gender stereotypes, addressing typically silenced gender issues and providing lifesaving information to women at risk or subjected to violence.

Read on to know how we repelled the pushback in 2022.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS



63,925

people were reached through social media in 2022.



14,314

people were engaged through behavioral change campaigns.



3,922

2,702 women and 1,220 men from the community engaged in violence prevention interventions.



733

388 female and 345 male government officials engaged through capacity building workshops.



656

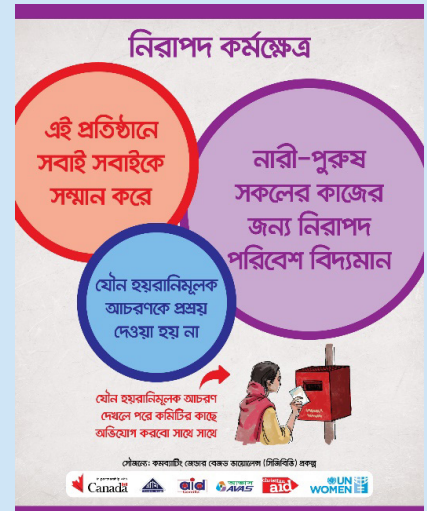
282 women and 374 men were trained on sexual harassment and GBV prevention.

Social Media, Communication and Awareness Materials: Reaching out to communities and changing mindsets

78,239 people reached with communication materials to promote positive behavioral and attitude changes



Information Education and Communication (IEC) materials included ways to identify, prevent and respond to domestic violence and sexual harassment in public spaces and campuses for survivors and bystanders and targeted materials on harmful social norms.



Testimonials from our beneficiaries



“
The confidence I have gained from the sessions has helped me find my voice, and stand up to my perpetrator.
MILI
Human Rights Defender, Bhandar Jute Mills, Bogura



“
There is nothing a man can do that a woman cannot. We should be doing our part in making sure women have equal rights as we do.
ALIM
Technician, Bhandar Jute Mills, Bogura

OF SOCIAL NORMS AND TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE: STORIES OF UNDAUNTED WOMEN AND MEN ALLIES

Breaking Barriers: One Step at a Time

Human-centered Stories

With support from implementing partners DRISTI and SUVO, our partner WE CAN published a storybook depicting six powerful stories of beneficiaries. They fought against restrictive social norms that perpetrate GBV and whose journey towards transformative change serves as a beacon of hope for all.

From Jannatul Begum Jannat and Nasrin Begum's fight for justice against their perpetrators to

Shabnaj Begum's stand for her right to education, Fatematz Zohora Shormi's bravado in standing up to her bullies, to young Rafiuzzaman Rafi's refusal to be a bystander to sexual harassment in his campus and finally, Imam Abul Bashar's activism and sermons condemning violence against women and girls (VAWG) and stand for equality, the impact stories will urge readers to revisit their views, attitudes, and behaviour that normalize a culture of violence.



Breaking Barriers
One Step at a Time
প্রতিবন্ধকতা পেরিয়ে
এক ধাপ এগিয়ে

“With support from UN Women and partners SUVO and WE CAN (Amrai Pari), I began to be aware of my inner power and regained self-confidence to file a criminal case against my ex-husband.”



Jannatul Begum Jannat

SASA! Together Community Activist from Patuakhali

Photo: WE CAN/Tanvir Murad Topu

“I became aware of the many ways in which women are subject to violence. I have filed a police case against those who tortured me. I am fighting for fair justice, and I need to win this fight.”



Nasrin Begum

SOSJ Family Prevention Group Member from Cumilla

Photo: WE CAN/Ashraful Huda

“I was very shy, never ventured out alone in the evening. Neither did I ever protest. I am no longer afraid to walk outside alone at night.”



Fatematuz Zohora Shormi

Student Leader from Patuakhali Government College, Patuakhali

Photo: WE CAN/Tanvir Murad Topu

“Earlier, there were no such activities for preventing sexual harassment. We were not even aware of such things. Now I learned to take a stand against sexual harassment in my campus-Bogura Polytechnic Institute.”



Rafiuzzaman Rafi

Student Leader from Bogura Polytechnic Institute, Bogura

Photo: WE CAN/Tanvir Murad Topu

“Since becoming a Community Activist, I realized that men abuse their authority and power to torture women. A change came over me. In any religious gathering, I talk about how women are honored in our religion. Once, I used to encourage men to be violent towards women, now I work to stop violence against women.”



Abul Bashar

SASA! Together Community Activist from Cumilla

Photo: WE CAN/Ashraful Huda

“With support from UN Women and partners DRISTI and WE CAN (Amrai Pari), now I inspire other girls in my village to educate themselves. I tell them that there is no other alternative to courage in achieving our rights.”



Shabnaj Begum

Student Leader from Patuakhali Government College, Patuakhali

Photo: WE CAN/Ashraful Huda

Not All Heroes Wear Capes: Meet the Inspiring Josna Banu

Josna Banu, from Bogura, Bangladesh, fought abuse to break free from a life of violence. With support from UN Women, she has been supporting other survivors to seek justice against GBV. Read her story here: [From Where I Stand: “The torture made me more defiant and more resolute to wrestle with my fate, a man’s world. The once-a-child Josna finally came into her own.”](#) | UN Women – Asia-Pacific

“I have always dreamt of a happy home. Four grandkids and two abusive marriages later, life has taught me that not only homes, but a society can prosper when women can forge their scars, their miseries, and their fears into weapons with the men as active allies by their side, to battle a common enemy: gender-based violence.”



Josna Banu

SASA! Together Community Leader from Bogura

Photo: UN Women/Rawyan Shayema

Visual Storytelling

A mother and daughter-in-law duo promote respectful relationships in families

Please listen to how a mother and daughter-in-law duo has been promoting healthy relationships within families through Shomman o Shomtaar Jibon family-based intervention. Click here: [A mother and daughter-in-law duo promote respectful relationships in families | UN Women Bangladesh - YouTube](#)



Photo: UN Women/Rawyan Shayema

Tahera Begum - a Human Rights Defender

Hear from the inspiring Tahera Begum on how she became a Human Rights Defender, advocating for a sexual harassment-free workplace and empowering her fellow workers to challenge gender stereotypes at their factories. Click here: [Tahera Begum - a Human Rights Defender | UN Women Bangladesh - YouTube](#)



Photo: UN Women/Rawyan Shayema

THE GRASSROOTS MOBILIZATION: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The CGBV Project engages with communities in Patuakhali, Cumilla and Bogura districts to promote respectful relationships, gender equality and safe public spaces to prevent VAW.

Courtyard Meetings: Road to Respectful Relationships

Drawing on community and family-based VAW prevention interventions, 'SASA! Together and Shomman O Shomotar Jeebon' held a series of courtyard sessions throughout the year across 12 villages. Community members were deeply engaged

in rapport-building sessions on positive social norms and dismantling unequal power relations between men and women.

The members also built a more robust understanding of how individuals and the community can work together to foster respectful relationships. The courtyard sessions encouraged men to challenge rigid gender roles and women to overcome their fears and share their stories.



Courtyard Meeting in Bogura. Photo: WE CAN



Photo: UN Women/Rawyan Shayema



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The courtyard sessions helped me to understand how harmful community norms and unequal power relations between men and women drive violence against women.

JOSNA BANU

Community Leader under UN Women's Combatting Gender-Based Violence Project in Bangladesh

CAMPAIGNING FOR CHANGE: THROUGH KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND AWARENESS

By engaging with communities, men and boys, the project focused on how gender concepts are internalized. It promoted alternative masculinities and sought to transform gender relations within universities and the surrounding community to prevent GBV.

Engaging Young Men as Gender Equality Advocates

Recognizing the urgent need to engage and involve young men in addressing GBV, youth engagement workshop with students from Patuakhali Science and Technology University were organized. Young men decoded ideas, concepts and myths

surrounding masculinity and expressed their opinions on what constitutes manliness and strength. Male students and student leaders congregated for lively debates and thought-provoking activities throughout the workshop.



Photo: The students at PSTU gathered in a circle to reflect power and its relationship with gender. Photo credit: UN Women/Rawyan Shayema



Photo: UN Women/Rawyan Shayema



I cannot stop my sister from going out. If society cannot guarantee her safety, then we need to work within our system. The discriminatory social norms need to change.

ISHTIAK

Student Leader, Patuakhali Science and Technology University, Patuakhali

Changemaker Leaders and Activists Campaign to Spread Awareness on GBV

Engaging with communities to create awareness on prevention of domestic violence, elimination of gender power imbalance and promotion of respectful relationships, changemaker leaders and activists organized behavioural change campaigns across 12 villages. They engaged with communities and created awareness on preventing domestic violence, eliminating gender power imbalance and promoting respectful relationships.

Transport Campaign

Public transport authorities participated in a campaign on 'How to Prevent Sexual Harassment in Public Transport' aimed to sensitize them on their roles in ending sexual harassment in public spaces. The campaign raised awareness on how the transport sector plays a crucial role in preventing violence and ensuring safe mobility for women and girls. Several sticker campaigns were also organized to step up awareness on sexual harassment.

INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Institutional change on multiple levels is an essential prerequisite for the sustainable prevention of sexual harassment. The CGBV project works with employers and educational institutions in project districts to assess the strengths and gaps in how institutions are implementing legal requirements to prevent sexual harassment.

One educational institute and Chamber of Commerce adopted, launched and disseminated the ZTSH policies, paving the road toward violence-free and gender-friendly campuses and workplaces.

WORKPLACES

Human rights defenders stand for gender equality and a violence-free workplace

Human rights defenders visited various factories in Cumilla and Bogura. They held refresher training sessions with factory workers about the qualities of a conducive workplace environment and relationships, leadership, gender-based discrimination and prevention of GBV at workplaces.



As a Human Rights Defender, I shall strive to ensure that all female workers in this factory understands that a safe and violence-free workplace is every woman's right-much like I did.

KOHINOOR

Human Rights Defender, Bhandar Jute Mills, Bogura

CHAMPIONING ADVOCACY: AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF STUDENTS AND SURVIVORS

The CGBV project supports advocacy initiatives seeking to implement laws, policies and strategies that prevent and respond to GBV.

Students Say “NO” to Sexual Harassment

A ZTSH policy was launched in Patuakhali Science and Technology University. The policy promotes violence-free campuses and engages senior management in preventing and responding to sexual harassment. The ZTSH policy indicates implementing the Bangladesh High Court Directive on sexual harassment across educational institutions.



University management and students present at the launching event on 22 June 2022: Photo: WE CAN/ Tanvir Murad Topu



The anti-sexual harassment policy needs to be widely circulated among the student councils and student leader groups. So, we know how and where to report cases of harassments.

TRISHA MALLIK

Student, Patuakhali Science and Technology University



Trisha Mallik voicing her questions at the event on 22 June 2022. Photo credit: WE CAN/ Tanvir Murad Topu

Amendment of the Evidence Act 1872 Section 155(4)

In November 2022, marking a long-awaited watershed achievement for survivors of sexual violence, the Parliament passed the [Evidence Act \(Amendment\) Bill 2022](#). The result of concerted advocacy of civil society, women rights activists and the Rape Law Reform Coalition, the Bill now prohibits the questioning of a rape survivor's character during cross-examinations and contains a provision allowing the admissibility of digital evidence before a court.



Implementation of High Court Directive 2009 to Prevent Sexual Harassment on Campus

On 29 September 2022, UN Women Bangladesh, and University Grants Commission (UGC) jointly organized a sharing event on implementing High Court Directive 2009 (HCD) to prevent sexual harassment on campus. The event aimed at discussing the implementation of HCD and reflected on UGC's monitoring tools that would help the Sexual Harassment Prevention Committee (SHPC) members to understand their roles and

responsibilities in preventing and responding to sexual harassment and GBV on campus. The event also oriented the participants on the Whole of School approach as a prevention practice against sexual harassment in universities.

The event was graced by Professor Dr. Dil Afroza Begum, Chair (additional charge), UGC and convenor, SHPC; Dr. Mohammed Alamgir, Member UGC; Dr. Ferdous Zaman, Secretary UGC; Diya Nanda, Deputy Country Representative, UN Women; and Farzana Sultana, Development Advisor, Government of Canada. Other participants who attended were the members of SHPC and representatives of 13 public and private universities located in Dhaka.



Photo: (L-R): Dr. Ferdouse Zaman, Secretary UGC; Dr. Mohammed Alamgir, member UGC; Professor Dr. Dil Afroza Begum, Chair (additional charge), UGC and convenor, SHPC; Farzana Sultana, Development Advisor, Government of Canada and Diya Nanda, Deputy Country Representative, UN Women, present as guests at the event on 29 September 2022. Photo credit: UGC

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

National Dialogue on Actions against Sexual Violence

To mark 16 Days of Activism against GBV, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Development Partners under the Local Consultative Group for Women's Advancement and Gender Equality and the United Nations in Bangladesh jointly organized its inaugural event. The global theme for the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence (GBV) 2022 was, **'UNiTE! Activism to End Violence against Women & Girls!'**

This year's campaign aimed to honor and acknowledge women's movements. It amplified the voices of feminist leadership in their diversity, working to prevent and eliminate VAWG across the world.



Photo: (L-R): Mr. Md. Muhibuzzaman, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs; H.E. Alexandra Berg von Linde, Ambassador of Sweden; Fazilatun Nessa Indira MP, Honorable State Minister, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs; Mr. Md. Hasanuzzaman Kallol, Secretary, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs; Gitanjali Singh, Country Representative, UN Women and Kristin Blokhuis, Country Representative, UNFPA at the inaugural event. Photo credit: UN Women/Murad Asad



Photo: (L-R): Ms. Farida Parvin, Director General, DWA; Ms. Taslima Yasmin, Associate Professor, Department of Law, Dhaka University; Ms. Ummey Kulsum, Joint Secretary (Opinion), Law and Justice Division; Ms. Kate Sangster, Head of Development Cooperation, DFAT and Ms. Nobonita Chowdhury, Director, GJD, BRAC, speak at the plenary on actions against gender-based violence moderated by Sharmin Islam, Gender Specialist, UNDP. Photo: UN Women/Murad Asad

The national dialogue brought together the Government of Bangladesh, civil society organizations, women's groups, and development partners. It provided a space to identify areas of collaboration and share commitments to support the country's dynamic feminist movement and their efforts to eliminate VAWG.

The inauguration session followed by a plenary to unpack the multidimensional nature of gender equality and the role of the women's movement in creating momentum in the national discourse around GBV. The discussion highly emphasised on the need for a Sexual Harassment Law, immediate legislative reforms such as changing the problematic definition of rape, swift implementation of existing GBV laws, and having conversations around and interventions on social norm change to prevent GBV effectively.

Debunking GBV Myths: BLAST Raises Awareness on Commonly Held Misconceptions about GBV Issues

To raise awareness of the flawed cultural notions propagating GBV repeatedly, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) developed a video series to address and debunk the common myths surrounding the issue. Watch the video series on BLAST's Facebook handle here: [Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust \(BLAST\)](#)

