

Case Study

Addressing violence against women in Bangladesh



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This case study is based on lessons from the joint programme “**Joint UN programme to address violence against women in Bangladesh**” [Read More](#)

CHAPTERS



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I. SUMMARY

Violence against women (VAW) has been a serious social, cultural and economic problem in Bangladesh, where nearly two out of three women have experienced gender-based violence during their lifetime, and domestic violence is a common, though largely underreported, occurrence. The programme on VAW from 2010 to 2013 (the Programme) aimed to contribute to the long term sustainable socioeconomic development of rural Bangladesh through poverty alleviation in rural areas, and by supporting poor women under development programmes as indicated in the Bangladesh Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper¹ (PRSP) and based on its commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Programme encouraged the adoption and implementation of policies for preventing violence and supporting survivors by enhancing the capacities of the government, improving information and providing support to NGOs and civil society. It also invested in changing the attitudes and behaviour of men, women, boys and girls to reduce VAW and discriminatory practices such as dowry, early marriage and trafficking. In addition, it supported the extension of services for survivors of gender-based violence with immediate care, relief and rehabilitation through a comprehensive package including the expansion, renovation and

improvement of the existing shelter system in select programme intervention sites.

1. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2005/cr05410.pdf>





2. THE SITUATION

When the Programme began, organizations responsible for ensuring access to services were inactive: the Union Parishad standing committees (UP-SC) on Women and Child Welfare, Culture and Sports, the smallest rural administrative and local government units in Bangladesh. Furthermore, the funds for the District Legal Aid Committees (DLAC), which were allocated to ensure legal services to survivors of violence, were going unused.

Survivors of violence did not have information about the facilities provided by the government and NGOs, and the majority of women were not aware of their rights. As a result, they were unable to obtain necessary support. The Government of Bangladesh and other organizations also had inadequate systems for providing information on services and rights, nor were these systems enabled to collect prevalence data, record the number of cases filed or track the causal factors linked to VAW. Consequently, the problem remained unaddressed.

In the seven districts where UNFPA worked with the Ministry of Women & Children's Affairs (MoWCA), there was no shelter available where survivors of violence could obtain holistic support. Women and girls were not able to come forward to speak against the perpetrators, as abuse and VAW, particularly domestic violence, were generally perceived as a private matter.



Joint programme communication material



3. STRATEGY

An objective of the Programme was to develop a mechanism to set up effective linkages between different service providers and the survivors, as the main concern was that while there were agencies with resources available to provide support, they were unable to benefit survivors due to lack of information. The Programme focused on building the capacities of the UP-SC on Women and Child Welfare, Culture and Sports, in collaboration with the DLAC, to ensure the provision of legal services to female survivors among marginalized groups. A database was piloted in 44 unions under six upazilas (sub-districts) in six project districts, with information on women survivors of violence and the services provided. The database was compiled with Upazila-based information and first shared with the respective Upazila Women's Affairs Officers. It was then further analysed and shared with the respective District Women Affairs Officers.

Recognizing the consequences of VAW on poverty reduction interventions, the Programme linked with the programmes Rural Employment Opportunities for Public Assets (REOPA)² and The Local Governance Support Project: Learning and Innovation Component (LGSP-LIC) (two projects implemented by the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives together with UNDP) to address the issue of gender-based violence. With BRAC³ as the technical and field implementation partner, the project was implemented in Barguna, Habiganj, Narsingdi, Feni, Satkhira, and Sirajganj districts until June 2013.

An important objective of the Programme was to empower rights holders, especially rural women, and including vulnerable groups, by increasing access to justice through capacity-building and sensitization, awareness building and mobilization of communities. The targeted rights holders included members of REOPA Women Crew Groups (WCG)—women employed under the social safety net

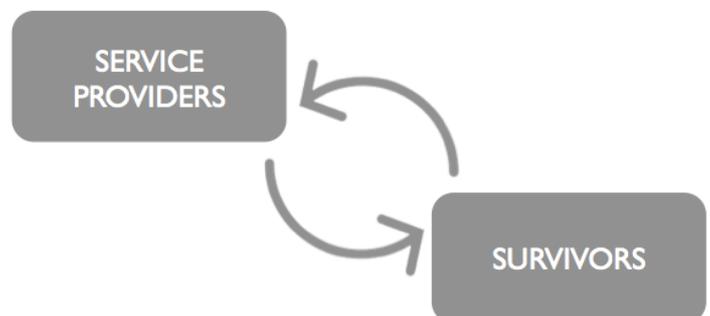
scheme—and also local communities.

Another objective was to build the capacities of duty bearers by activating and building the capacity of two nationally mandated committees (UP-SC and DLAC headed by District Judges) for rendering support to survivors; enhancing capacities for the local government officials, Union Facilitation Teams (Local Youth) and Women Development Forum members (elected UP women leaders) for providing support and care for women and girls who are vulnerable, and/or have survived violence; and supporting the establishment of linkages between UP-SC and human rights organizations at national and district levels.

The Programme also invested in significant community outreach efforts, including through the effective use of Community Theatre to reach large populations, which are often illiterate.

² REOPA is a social safety net project that works to provide employment primarily to vulnerable rural women through road maintenance projects.

³ BRAC is an international NGO whose mission is to “empower people and communities in situations of poverty, illiteracy, disease and social injustice.”





4. RESULTS AND IMPACT



In order to address issues related to data and information needs, a VAW database was piloted in the six districts of the project. The database built an evidence base regarding the violence affecting women in 44 unions under six *Upazilas* of six districts. The Women Development Forum, Union Facilitation Teams (Local Youth), members of REOPA WCG and the BRAC *Palli Shomaj* (Village Federation) collected field data. BRAC, as the field partner, compiled this information and shared it with the respective *Upazila* and District Women Affairs Officers. One aim was to strengthen the coordination of information between the demand side (community members, UP/*Upazila* Standing Committee, *Upazila*/District Women Affairs Offices) and the supply side (DLAC and District Administration including police, hospitals, shelter homes, BRAC and other NGOs). The pilot testing intervention under the project actively involved the respective six *Upazila* Women Affairs Officers (UWAOs) and the corresponding

six District Women Affairs Officers (DWAOs) who were reporting monthly on VAW incidents to the district administration and to the central level.

As a result of this pilot initiative, data was collected on the number and type of incidents (such as acid attacks, rape, murder, physical torture, dowry, early marriage, family conflict, suicide and *hilla* marriage⁴) as well as the type of support provided (such as court cases by DLAC, counselling and legal aid by BRAC, *shalish*⁵ by the UP, and others). From September 2012 through May 2013, a total of 811 incidents were reported from 44 unions and were included in the pilot database.

Working through the REOPA programme allowed direct access to the WCG members, many of whom endured various forms of violence in their lives. Over 97 per cent (23,638) of WCG members received training as a part of the BRAC Community Empowerment Programme, including medical aid, counselling and rehabilitation. They were also made aware of their rights under Bangladeshi law, and that common cultural practices such as beatings or child marriages are illegal. Over 23,800 REOPA WCG members received a service card each with a hotline number and information related to obtaining immediate support if faced with violence. As a result of their participation in the training, the women became aware of issues such as gender-based discrimination; the concept, categories and causes of VAW; steps to take for prevention and protection against violence; and relevant laws. A positive outcome of the training was that 90 per cent of the participants reported understanding.

that women must be free from these injustices in order to fully enjoy their rights and to effectively participate in society. After receiving the training, the WCG members also reported becoming more confident about asserting their rights.

Capacity-building activities also targeted District-level officials and were attended by District Commissioners, Additional District Commissioners, Upazila Executive Officers, police superintendents, civil surgeons and judges. Over 4,900 district, Upazila and local government officials and members received sensitization and capacity-building support so that they could provide counselling and survivor support.

Over 4,900 UP members received training on VAW issues, and all of the male UP members participated. The objective of the training was to sensitize elected representatives about gender-based discrimination and VAW in the family and society, so they have the capacity to prevent violence and to be able to take effective steps to provide emergency support to survivors.

The capacities of 2,335 local youth (Union Facilitation Team members) and 1,003 elected

women leaders on VAW were enhanced so that they could act as whistle-blowers in their communities to bring justice for women who did not know what actions to take if a survivor of violence approaches them and solicited support. They also became sensitized about different laws related to VAW in Bangladesh and are able to give guidance and aid to the survivors through knowledge of immediate measures to take in cases of violence and about the types of facilities available.

Popular theatre was also used as a tool for information dissemination to the rural population. BRAC staff assisted local artists to develop community dramas focused on the issue of VAW. Over 535 popular dramas on VAW, human rights and women empowerment were staged in villages where 178,629 community members attended and heard key messages on how to respond to VAW.

⁴ Temporary, often forced marriages

⁵ Traditional system for informal dispute resolution.



15,511

Marriages were registered



1,056

Community members solicited legal, medical and counselling services



858

Family conflicts were resolved



243

Early marriages were stopped



5. CHALLENGES

Before the training, the members were not interested in attending because they felt that VAW was not an issue of concern. They believed the training to be only for women and that there was nothing relevant for them to discuss about VAW. Gradually, upon becoming better informed about gender-based discrimination, they became more aware about discrimination and VAW issues in their personal, family, as well as community lives. UP members have since made commitments to assist survivors of VAW and to continue discussions on VAW prevention with community members.

Also, there was a lack of communication between the UP standing committees, human rights organizations at national and district levels and the DLAC.





6. LESSONS LEARNED

- Concerted efforts and support from different actors were key for stopping VAW. Success depended on strong linkages between women's groups, local government bodies and national government services.
- It was important to provide typically excluded women with information regarding the availability of services and assistance in their areas.
- Working through existing networks, such as those developed around the REOPA, helped leverage resources and maximize results.
- Popular Theatre was an effective tool for information dissemination, awareness building and increasing the knowledge base of rural populations on various socio-economic issues that affect their lives and to mobilize women and men against social injustices.
- There was no alternative to government institutions for ensuring sustainability of project outcomes. It was important to strengthen the capacity of all government offices working on VAW.
- Involvement of the district authority, who plays a convening role for the concerned Government officials from different sectors, was the driving force for delivering the support required to survivors of violence.
- Service provision and community mobilization went hand in hand; local people become more aware of women's rights issues and sought service to redress VAW.
- Identification and celebration of positive masculine practices toward women's empowerment and facilitation of community dialogue had the potential to instil self-reflexive practices among participating men to bring positive changes in their communities.



MULTIPLE ACTORS
TO STOP VAW



KEEPING WOMEN
INFORMED



WORKING WITH
ESTABLISHED
NETWORKS



POPULAR THEATRE
FOR INFORMATION
DISSEMINATION



STRENGTHENING
GOVERNMENT
OFFICES



INVOLVING
DISTRICT
AUTHORITIES



COMMUNITY
MOBILIZATION



PROMOTING
PROMISING PRACTICES
AMONG MALES



7. SUSTAINABILITY AND POTENTIAL FOR REPLICATION

The programme is replicable in other countries where similar socio-economic conditions exist which make women particularly vulnerable to violence. To ensure the sustainability of the Programme in Bangladesh the following efforts must be continued:

- The creation of a credible database on VAW in Bangladesh, including completion of the Policy Dialogue on the National Database on VAW in order to highlight key national achievements, challenges and the way forward based on studies, findings and field experience.
- Increasing popular theatre and dramas, which have proven to be extremely effective, in order to have a greater impact on information dissemination on ending VAW.
- Capacity-building of government staff at the community level. Continuing to promote the application of lessons learned through follow-up trainings, which provide an opportunity for members to share their experiences, as well as to reinforce the content learned.

