



## «Dakkha Nari» Project, Bangladesh

Social and economic empowerment of women and girls in Bandarban, Chittagong Hill Tracts

### Final Project Report 2019-2020

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<p><u>Objectives</u></p>	<p><b>«A safe life in dignity through social and economic empowerment of women and girls who are affected by gender based violence (GBV)»</b></p> <p>Outcome 1: Women and girls are capacitated with vocational skills and improve their livelihood</p> <p>Outcome 2: Women, girls and community members are sensitised for GBV and group activities combat and prevent GBV</p>
<p><u>Expenditure</u></p>	<p><b>CHF 146'987</b></p>
<p><u>Project duration</u></p>	<p>January 2019 – December 2020 (revised project duration)</p>

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## Summary

The project was designed to empower women and girls affected by gender-based violence (GBV). It did so with a community approach that reached women, youth and the community as a whole. With its activities it contributed to Bangladesh's national priorities in the sector of gender. The main achievements of the project are:

- The project attracted and worked with a great number of women, adolescent and communities (indigenous and Bengali) and organised them in groups. This network combats and prevents GBV through sensitization sessions that also included cross-cutting issues like women rights, sexual harassment and sexual reproductive health rights (SRHR).
- Most beneficiaries are between 16-40 years old. Their capacities and knowledge were strengthened in different ways. They act as the watchdog of the community to reduce violence against women and handle GBV cases through the initiative of group members. With this understanding and knowledge, they volunteer for social peace in their villages.
- The implementing NGO, AKS, put a strong effort to develop harmony between women, men and adolescents within the communities through sensitization events like women's days or awareness sessions at schools.
- In 21 villages of Bandarban Hill District, youth groups with a total of 502 members (281 girls, 221 boys) were founded which brought solidarity of boys and girls in regard to gender issues.
- One of the major areas was to strengthen the capacity of women and adolescent girls to increase incomes through vocational training. The average monthly income of women increased from about BDT 3'000 to 7'000 (CHF 30 to 75). Adolescent girls also gained income, mainly through sewing, in average between BDT 2'500 to 5000 (CHF 25 to 50).

The project period was revised two times. First the project start was delayed to January 2019, mostly because of funding reasons. In March 2020 Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown in Bangladesh stopped the continuation of activities. The project period therefore was prolonged until December 2020. Despite these difficulties the project was able to produce some key results.

The overall investment was CHF 146'987. This cost corresponds with the budget.



## Project Activities

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### Beneficiaries

The project has been implemented in Bandarban District, a region where human rights violations are prevalent. Regarding beneficiary selection the first priority were women and adolescent girls who are victims of gender based violence and the second priority were females from ultra-poor families (women-headed households: widows, divorced).

The total beneficiaries were 3'520 persons:

- 85 trainees for vocational training and business support
- 428 members of saving groups
- 220 youth peer groups members
- 87 community watch group members
- 1'450 participants in awareness raising sessions in the villages
- 420 students attending awareness raising in secondary schools
- 830 participants in public Women's Rights Days celebration

## Key results under outcome 1: Women and adolescent girls are capacitated with vocational skills and improve their livelihood

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### Skills Trainings

85 young women joined the 3-4 months long vocational trainings in sewing, embroidery, beautification and mobile reparation. Training institutions were Women Welfare Affairs Institution, Bangladesh Small and Cottage Institute, Ujanipara and Bangladesh Jatiya Mohila Songstha. 79 of the graduates got institutional certificates after completion. The course attendants were empowered with skills and improved their livelihood. They also participated in awareness trainings, regular meetings of girls peer groups, women's days and awareness sessions at schools. This means they also were empowered through awareness and solidarity. The average monthly income of the graduates according to self-declaration increased from BDT 2'500 to 5000 (CHF 25 to 50). 11 of them are employed, 1 opened an own sewing shop, and 69 are working part-time offering their service at home for neighbours/villagers.



### Formation of village savings groups

16 groups with 428 members were formed. This self-help credit approach (SHC) empowers the women and introduced a collective savings mechanism. Group members have the chance to invest in their own micro-projects: poultry rearing, vegetable gardening, handicrafts making etc. The groups with the guidance of AKS set up regulations, leadership structures and shared decision making processes. They meet every month. The groups are managed well including financial and bank account management. The individual micro-projects are run with high efforts next to regular household work. One part of the profit is contributed to the group saving account. By self-declaration it was stated the average monthly income increase ranges from about BDT 3'000 to 7'000 (CHF 30 to 75).



## Key results under outcome 2: Women, adolescent girls and community people are sensitised for GBV and group activities combat and prevent GBV

### Group formation and collective action

The project successfully worked with a large number of women and adolescents, organised in groups in the communities. All the relevant beneficiaries were part of such groups – saving groups, peer groups, community watch groups. The groups were formed (including regulations and roles assignment), trained and guided. The groups were sensitised regarding Gender Based Violence along with other cross-cutting issues of prevention and protection, like child marriage, sexual reproduction health rights (SRHR), human rights, women leadership or alternative livelihoods options. Through their regular meetings, sensitisation and awareness was created, what lead to more responsiveness within the communities. The groups encouraged women to share their own realities, problems, pain and challenges with others. They tried to find solutions and took action. For example in Amtali village, where Devi Tanchangya was beaten by her husband. The group interfered, and a village discussion lead by the village head was initiated, resulting in the husband stopped beating his wife. Or in Lango village, where a Bengali boy used to tease an indigenous girl and the youth group talked to his family, what caused him to change his behaviour. The collective action of the groups helped them gaining and increasing confidence.



### Youth involvement

Youth involvement was one of the encouraging successes of the project.

#### a. Peer groups

Instead of 6 peer groups, 21 groups were formed with a total of 502 members (281 girls, 221 boys). It was great to see the solidarity of boys and girls and the solidarity with victims of GBV. The group members arranged bi-monthly meetings by themselves and discussed GBV topics and other issues. They are found to be aware of GBV and committed to help victims. Most beneficiaries of the skills trainings also are member of the groups.



#### b. Sensitisation at schools

Awareness lessons at three schools were organised: Sangu High School, Don Bosco School and Mro Abashik School, in Bandarban. The students of grades VIII-X attended. The lessons were lead by AKS staff with members of the youth peer groups assisting. The sensitization lessons on equality and girls' rights at schools enriched the relationship between girls and boys and increased the dignity of girls, which contributed to bring cohesion and solidarity. School authority reports that the use of slang words at school reduced what created a comfortable zone for girl students.



Students are found to raise their voices in case of eve teasing, and speak out if girls' rights or child marriage is concerned.

## Project final evaluation: Findings and recommendations

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An external evaluation by Mrs. Coxy Talukder, ASHIKA Development Associates, Rangamati, was conducted from October-December 2020.

### Most relevant findings

- Young people can be effectively used as volunteers for community benefit. AKS involved all direct beneficiaries between 16-40 years (considered the young generation). Their capacities were strengthened in different ways. They acted as the watchdog of the community to reduce violence against women. With their understanding and knowledge, they volunteered for making peace in their respective villages.
- The economic initiatives and the unity among group members enhanced confidence. This was reflected in their behaviour within families. Group members said they are taking part in family decision making and they are contributing their little income to the family especially for educational purpose of their children. It was mentioned that when group members have started contributing income to their family, the husbands and mother in laws also have become more positive to women's mobility (going out, taking part in AKS events, group meetings etc.).
- The business initiative was successful. The adolescent girls who attended vocational trainings became talented. The savings groups were active: the demand for taking a loan from the groups is high. The savings group members run their production with high efforts next to their households work. The groups opened bank accounts, what will help them to become successful entrepreneurs, as the country's loan system requires bank accounts for loans for women up to BDT 25'000 (CHF 270) without mortgage. The certificates of the training institutions (facilitated under this project) will also help to get a loan for entrepreneurship.
- The victims of violence don't stand up and turn against the practices in the society. But the project empowered them economically, what gave them a voice. Also the government institutions appreciated this during the key informant interviews. Line department, traditional institutions and educational institutions were involved in the project and were sensitised. They agreed on their responsibilities for rehabilitation of GBV victims in accordance with the government directives under different acts.
- In the indigenous areas (Bandarban), this type of rights based project is very new. Only AKS is implementing such a project on ending GBV and child marriage. The project included trainings in different trades like embroidery, block batik, sewing or beauty parlor, what is innovative, as NGOs usually use a short-term approach.

### Recommendations

- The different members of the women's groups require more attention. The real poor women from the indigenous communities who are working in the field often are not able to join the group. They are living in very remote places and are not able to join the meetings on a regular basis.
- The group members from better off households (though they are also poor) are not facing serious social and gender related challenges. During the discussion they were not so concerned about gender aspects. They are used to male domination in decision making and their own role in all household activities.
- The amount allocated per saving group, BDT 13'750, should be higher. Each group has more than 13 members. Only 3-5 members received first loans. The investment would be more effective with a higher amount.

## Case studies

### U Yoinue Marma



I am from Lemu Jhiri Aga village and have two sisters and one brother. I am the eldest. When I still was a child our father left us and married another women. After my mother had to feed the family with great difficulty. Then she became very ill. I had to stop schooling in order to earn money with day labour. Like this we could survive and my younger siblings could continue school.

One day AKS visited our village. I was given the opportunity to participate in a 3 months sewing training in the skills training of Department of Women's Affairs. At the end of the training I moved back to my village. I started to sew cloths at home but did not have so many orders. Later AKS told me about a job in Bandarban Marma Bazar. I met the shop owner and discussed with him in detail. I

started to work there with simple work first. I am paid a beginners salary of BDT 3'000 (CHF 30) and get food for free. If there are festivals and we have more orders I earn BDT 5'000 (CHF 50). Now I can support my family and I also try to deposit some money in the bank whenever possible. My dream is to open my own sewing shop in the future. But until then I will have to save much more money.

### Thung Mraching Marma

I had a good family with my husband for many years. We have one daughter and one son. Our daughter is married now. Eleven years ago, my husband suddenly died of an illness. All the responsibilities fell on me. My family had to go through so many difficult days. But somehow I made a living with our agriculture. Many time the harvest was low and I had to borrow money. I would not know how to survive without loans.

Not long ago a saving group was founded in our village. To increase my agriculture I proposed for a loan at our meeting. I was given BDT 10'000 (CHF 100) to grow vegetables and corn. Half of the loan I already paid back by selling the vegetables. When the corn is ripe, I hope to sell it and make a profit of BDT 6'000-7'000 (CHF 60-75), after the repayment of the loan and covering all expenses. I am very glad to be a member of the village saving group.

