

# UN Women-Bangladesh Organizes Short Film Competition on the “HeForShe” and the End Violence Against Women Campaigns

## 15-16 September 2019

“Women are largely overlooked in the casting of intrepid protagonists in films, roles traditionally reserved for male actors. Film scripts generally condemn women to the shadows, or they are invariably depicted as victims of suffering, violence and abuse,” commented Syeda Samara Mortada, Communications Analyst for UN Women. “We have to end such stereotyping of women and depict them in a positive light.”

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Ms. Mortada thus set the tone of a two-day boot camp that had 10 participants who were all young aspiring filmmakers. They had earned their place in this event after being shortlisted as candidates for the UN Women #HeForShe Short Film Competition. The two-day event brought them together so they had an opportunity to hone their filmmaking skills with well-known film producers.

UN Women-Bangladesh tasked Bangla Communications Ltd. to help in organizing the Short Film Competition. To that end, the company worked assiduously with the UN Women team to ensure the endeavour was a success.



The goal of the contest was to disseminate messages on what constitutes sexual harassment, its impact on women and why such behaviour must cease. Through this contest, it was hoped men would seek to challenge deeply held and internalized beliefs and values that fuel, normalize or tolerate gender-based violence. The shortlisted participants will receive technical training on producing films and on gender thematics. Short videos distributed over the mass media and social media – created by men for men -- can be a powerful means to sensitize people about violence against women.

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Shamim Akhter, an acclaimed filmmaker whose work addresses gender norms, kicked off the boot camp with a speech giving an overview of the medium of short film, its salient features, how it is different from a full-length feature film, various technical aspects of filmmaking, its budget, among other themes. “A good short film is the result of a lot of hard work, a good deal of patience, time and, of course, talent,” Shamin Akhter told the audience.

“I really hope the participants enjoyed the learning experience from the different sessions and go on to become creative filmmakers,” noted Syeda Samara, and then she briefed the participants on the HeForShe campaign and its objectives. She spoke about the concept of gender and sex. Through a series of photographs and videos she showed how women are portrayed in the mainstream media, typically as an object whose sole purpose is to satisfy men’s pleasure. Participants took part in lively debates during group sessions that exposed them to the underlying beliefs shaping both our gender biases and society’s disparaging attitudes towards women. Syeda also took the floor to explain the campaign in greater detail, and why it was so important.

Shamim Akhter returned to centre stage once again in the post-lunch session. This time she provided more details on the art of filmmaking, covering a large swathe of themes from conceiving a film, its storyline, to the different stages a film advances through, and also how gender issues find expression in films. The participants listened to her in rapt attention and asked a lot of questions when they came across topics that aroused their curiosity.

The last session of the day involved the subject of acting, a critical part of filmmaking and featured Kripa Kana Majumdar, Lecturer, Theatre and Acting Department, Jagannath University. The participants learned about the fundamentals of acting through Ms. Majumdar’s focus on the short film genre. It was an interactive session with the participants learning about some key aspects of acting. The day ended with the participants reviewing the discussion and holding a Q & A session.

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Day 2 of the workshop began with the screening of the film, *Ekdin Pratidin*, by the legendary film director, Mrinal Sen. The movie was specifically selected as it is closely related to the subject matter of the campaign. The screening session was followed by a one-on-one session with Apu Mehedi, script and content writer, who coached the individual participants on how to develop good quality scripts on the basis of the synopses they had submitted.

After the participants shared their ideas and thinking behind their synopsis, Mehedi explained to each participant how he/she could transform their synopsis into a well written script that could be transformed into a potentially successful film.

The third session of the day, which Jahidur Rahim Anjan, a noted Bangladeshi film director, conducted focused on two major topics -- the script development process and the techniques of directing a short film.

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Next, a session on cinematography and essential camera skills took place. “Cinematography is the art of concealing one’s talent, not showing it off,” explained Pankaj Palit, a noted cinematographer. “A person has to have the skills to bring a story to life on the screen.” Palit demonstrated some of those requisite techniques in order to deepen the participants’ learning experience during the two-day workshop. The last two sessions focused on providing detailed instruction on the technical aspects of



Filmmaker Humayra Bilkis focused on the fundamentals of directing, with particular attention accorded to the short film genre. She pointed out that, “Even though it represents an effort by the director and entire film crew, cinema is known as the actor’s medium. At the end of the day, the viewers’ attention will mainly focus on the acting, so acting is a vital factor in filmmaking.” Next, Sazzad Zahir, instructor, Bangladesh Cinema and Television Institute, led a discussion on editing, sound, colour and other related technical subjects.

The two-day boot camp ended on a high note. After such a stimulating programme, the participants packed their bags, excited and enlightened, thanks to their interaction with some famous names in filmmaking. They were now poised to make a renewed commitment to produce short films they could be proud of. They were now ready to move on to the next stage of the competition—to write their own script in a week's time.

**The names of top ten short film makers who participated in the workshop are as follows:**

1. **Title of Synopsis:** Jochhnar Chupkatha

**Name of Participant:** Salil Majumdar

A father-in-law stands besides his daughter-in-law in breaking social stigmas.

2. **Title of Synopsis:** Arunodoy

**Name of Participant:** Ali Haidar Shihab

A story of an elderly man who sets up a closed circuit camera in his area to prevent eve-teasing.

3. **Title of Synopsis:** Bicycle

**Name of Participant:** Abu Rayhan

The story of a daughter's fight to receive an education and to help her father by earning a livelihood.

4. **Title of Synopsis:** Pakhi Number 8

**Name of Participant:** Sazid Ul Huq

The story of a married woman who wants to complete her education.

5. **Title of Synopsis:** Rakhkhana

**Name of Participant:** Dhuduk Dewan

A night guard helps a working woman to feel secure when she returns late from work.

6. **Title of Synopsis:** Shomanupatik

**Name of Participant:** Md. Intajer-e-Jahan

A singular narrative in which violence itself is a character and the female protagonists move to vanquish violence.

7. **Title of Synopsis:** Amar Tinni

**Name of Participant:** S. M. Abdullah Al Fatin

A woman dreams of producing a film and a friend stands beside her to help her realize that goal.

8. **Title of Synopsis:** Phooler Nam Maloti

**Name of Participant:** Sohel Arian

A story that depicts two families from two socioeconomic classes.

9. **Title of Synopsis:** Prottasha

**Name of Participant:** Avik Chowdhury

The story of a brother who makes his sister aware about gender violence and inspires her to take preventive action to fight against this phenomenon in her daily life.

10. **Title of Synopsis:** An Occurrence at a Shop

**Name of Participant:** Akhiuzzaman Menon

A story about a girl who is wounded in a bomb blast and then finds unlikely rescuers at a nearby shop where she seeks shelter.