



IN BRIEF

ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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Photo : UN Women/Rawyan Shayema

THE ISSUE

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a systemic human rights violation. Violence happens in both public and private places and has many forms, including domestic or intimate partner violence, sexual harassment, assault, online violence, rape, and sexual violence in armed conflict. It is rooted in unequal gender power dynamics, gender stereotypes and discriminations, patriarchal values, and historical inequalities between men and women. Violence against women and girls results in immediate to long-term physical, sexual, and mental health consequences, including death. It negatively affects women's general well-being and prevents them from fully participating in society. Violence has long-lasting repercussions not only for women but also for their families, the community, and the country at large.

Over the last few decades, Bangladesh has adopted several laws and policies to promote gender equality and address violence against women and girls.

The National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children (2018-2030) and [the National Action Plan to Prevent Child Marriage \(2018-2030\)](#) are in place. However, challenges remain in implementing these measures. Women have limited access to affordable, essential, and adequate redressal services. Simultaneously, the social stigma attached to survivors of violence, restrictive social norms, and behaviours that normalize violence, all hinder women, girls, and sexual minorities from enjoying their human rights and fully participating in public and private life. This challenge calls for a gender-transformative and intersectional approach to drive policy and social change to end VAWG. The approach must include engaging men and boys as agents of change, strengthening the capacity and accountability of national machineries on gender equality, adopting a comprehensive survivor-centred approach to violence response, supporting civil society and the women's movement, and duly implementing legal instruments and development policies.

STRATEGY

In line with Bangladesh's [8th Five-Year Plan](#) and the [United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework \(UNSDCF\) 2022-2026](#), the UN Women country programme (Strategic Note) for Bangladesh contributes to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. UN Women is committed to ensuring that women, girls, and sexual minorities, especially those from excluded groups, live a life free from violence, discrimination, and harmful social norms and practices.

APPROACH

UN Women works to prevent and respond to VAWG, to increase access to services for survivors of violence, to end gender stereotypes and to make private and public spaces safer for women and girls, including women with disability. UN Women implements its interventions at both national and local levels, covering Bogura, Cumilla, Dhaka, and Patuakhali districts. As of 2023, the Governments of Canada and Japan, UNICEF, the United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD) and private sector partners, including FAST Retailing have been supporting the interventions since 2020.

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Advocate for Policy Change: To strengthen the normative and policy framework that prevents violence, UN Women advocates for gender-responsive national laws. Therefore, UN Women involves women's groups, civil society organizations (CSOs), and organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) to improve their agency and coordination in holding duty bearers accountable to comply with international and national obligations.

Transform Social Norms: UN Women focuses on evidence-driven strategies to eliminate discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes that perpetuate violence against women within families, communities, schools, universities, workplaces, and public spaces. These strategies are executed through the "Combatting Gender-Based Violence in Bangladesh" project, with generous support from the Government of Canada, and the "Ending Gender Stereotypes in Classrooms" project with The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative.

Improve Access to Services: To improve the quality of and access to comprehensive VAWG services (police, judiciary, and social services),

UN Women focuses on strengthening the capacity of institutions and CSOs providing services.

- With generous support from the Government of Japan and FAST RETAILING Co. Ltd., UN Women has implemented the project titled "Women and Girls at the Centre of COVID-19 Prevention and Response through Livelihood Options and Gender-Based Violence Services". The project supported Tarango^[1] to expand its integrated shelter house model, which provided quality essential services and economic empowerment opportunities to women and girls who have experienced violence.
- UN Women also supports Bangladesh Police in gender-responsive policing by operationalizing the Justice and Policing module of [Essential Services Package for Women and Girls Subject to Violence](#).

Generate Evidence-Based Knowledge on VAWG

Prevention: To support innovative approaches and to expand the knowledge base, UN Women aims to scale up and inform learnings on prevention programming and responses to VAWG.

RESULTS

(2020-2022)

Advocate for Policy Change: CSOs, women's rights organizations (WROs), and OPDs have increased capacities, agency, and coordination to advocate for normative and policy reforms.

- UN Women supported CSOs for evidence-based advocacy leading to the **repeal of section 155(4) of the Evidence Act 1872**. This section of the code allowed questioning a rape survivor's character. In addition, the CSO-led advocacy supported the drafting of the **Sexual Harassment Prevention and Protection Act 2021**.
- **9,106 direct beneficiaries** benefited from the implementation of eight Zero Tolerance to Sexual Harassment (ZTSH) policies in educational institutions, workplaces, and local government institutions across three districts (Bogura, Cumilla, and Patuakhali).

Transform Social Norms: Community women and men, students, and institutional staff have increased understanding of gender power relations through the promotion of **evidence-driven transformative social norms that prevent VAWG in families, communities, educational institutions, and workplaces**.

- **10,503 community women and men** engaged in promoting healthy relationships for gender-equal families and communities.
- **2,726 students** participated in initiatives to promote alternative masculinities and the transformation of gender relations within universities and the surrounding communities.

[1] A women's shelter where women and girls can access temporary accommodation, medical and legal support, psycho-social counseling and financial and vocational training

Improve Access to Services: Survivors of violence have greater access to quality and survivor-centric services and livelihood opportunities through integrated COVID-19 safe shelters.

- The Bangladesh Police Women Network Strategic Plan (2021-2023) was launched to ensure **gender equality in the country's police force** and the **empowerment of female police officials**. Bangladesh Police has increased capacity to deliver **gender-responsive and survivor-centric services** through the implementation of the Handbook on Gender-Responsive Police Services.
- Along with essential services such as medical, legal, and psychosocial support, **240 VAWG survivors and marginalized women** also gained income opportunities through different skills training and job placements.

Generate Evidence-Based Knowledge: The government, public and private institutions, CSOs, and OPDs have enhanced capacities to strengthen knowledge generation and adopt evidence-driven VAWG prevention, response, and disability-inclusive programming.

- Through UN Women's social media platforms, more than **773,431 people, including faith leaders**, are equipped with the knowledge to promote positive social norms to prevent VAWG in their day-to-day lives and within their circle of influence.

IMPACT STORY

SHORIFA BEGUM

Shorifa Begum (not her real name) is a Community Leader under the UN Women Combatting Gender-Based Violence (CGBV) Project in Bangladesh, funded by the Government of Canada. The project focuses on primary prevention, that means stopping violence before it occurs, so that all women and girls live a life free of violence at home, at work, and in public spaces. The following is her account of her survival journey.

Married off at the age of 12, I was a child who was brutally thrust into an unknown world that included a husband, a new family, and the social expectations that came with the role. I lost my innocence the day I realized my husband was a degenerate gambler, but I was silenced into acceptance and compromise by my mother and sister-in-law. Motherhood gave me a newfound courage to fight back. The abuse that followed was something out of a nightmare, with my little daughter there to witness it all. That incident had the entire village talking. So much so that my father rushed to my marital home, took one look at his daughter's broken body and spirit, and decided enough was enough. Soon after, I started carving my own path to independence. I enrolled in a skills development training programme on sewing, won a sewing machine, and kick-started my small tailoring venture, which allowed me to raise my daughter and contribute to household expenses. Ten years down the line, I got married to a widower, and fate, it seemed, had a cruel sense of humour. All my past trauma resurfaced when the physical and verbal abuse began, a second time around. However, the torture made me more defiant and more resolute to wrestle with my fate – a man's world. UN Women's intervention in unpacking restrictive social norms and gender power imbalances made this possible. The courtyard sessions helped me understand unequal power relations, harmful



Photo: UN Women/Ravvyan Shayema

community norms, and the positive benefits of non-violence both for an individual and the community. As my confidence grew with each reflective conversation, I became involved in community leadership and started engaging with community members to work towards preventing violence against women. Since then, as a community leader, I helped obtain justice for two domestic violence survivors who are now on their way to gaining financial independence and made sure that the young boys within my community know better than to perpetrate sexual harassment. I have always dreamed of a happy home. Four grandchildren and two abusive marriages later, life has taught me that not only homes, but society can only prosper when women can forge their scars, their miseries, and their fears into weapons with men as allies by their side, to battle a common enemy: gender-based violence.