

Innovators Against Gender Based Violence Award Pitch Day

5 September, 2019



Canada

"Violence against women and girls persists to this day because of the underlying imbalance in the power dynamics between men and women," says a young female innovator while pitching her business model that addresses these very issues. "Further equalization and empowerment are needed," she adds. On 5 September 2019, UN Women in Bangladesh organized the final round of the competition "Innovators against Gender-Based Violence" to provide a platform for young women innovators. A total of 11 participating teams — handpicked from all over the country — were invited to pitch their solutions for combating gender inequality and for boosting women's empowerment. Through their pitches, they aimed to address the various underlying causes of violence against women and girls, to improve their access to educational and economic opportunities and to promote their equal status in society.

75 Applications
11 Shortlisted
03 Winners



UN Women has been implementing a Project entitled , "Combating Gender-Based Violence Against Women" (CGBV), aimed at preventing and eliminating violence against women. Since women best understand women's problems and may not have had the requisite economic and social opportunities as their male counterparts to exercise their innovations, this competition was initiated to make their voices resonate through innovations.

The competition was launched in March 2019 and was open only to women aged between 18 and 35 years. The process from shortlisting to the final Pitch Day included a boot camp and a pre-incubation workshop to polish their ideas and enhance their technical knowledge. The teams received further preparatory training before they went on stage to present their ideas and compete for the chance to win further incubation support.



Eleven teams of 24 astute young women took part in the Pitch Day of the 'UN Women Against Gender-Based Violence' initiative that was held at Lakeshore Hotel Gulshan, Dhaka, on 5 September 2019. Each team was assigned five minutes to present their innovations to a three-member jury after which the floor was open for a Q & A session. The members of the jury panel were Ms. Shoko Ishikawa, Country Representative, UN Women Bangladesh, Ms. Zareen Mahmud Hosein, Founder of HerStory Foundation, and Mr. M Asif Rahman, Founder and CEO of A.R. Communications.

The evening began with each of the 11 teams pitching their ideas to the judges. The presentations addressed various perspectives, objectives and propositions to decrease, prevent and eliminate gender-based violence. "Seventy-five per cent of working women in Bangladesh face some kind of daily harassment", Team Sanctum stated in their proposition that stressed the need for immediate action to address the dire situation of working women in Bangladesh. The young women innovators brought various kinds of creative approaches to successfully demonstrate their ideas. While many ideas were based on technology, such as apps, some addressed the need to create awareness using innovative methods such as stage dramas or cartoon sketches. Team Flame Up The Souls proposed using popular theatre shows to design a stage drama based on GBV, and to create awareness on the issue and its prevention.

In the course of the evening, Guest Speaker, Zaiba Tahyya, founder of the Female Empowerment Movement (FEM), encouraged the participants by recounting anecdotes of her own journey. Ms. Zaiba is a key women innovator who has made an impact in Bangladesh with her own endeavours and contributed to the fight against gender-based violence. Sharing her own struggles as she set out to initiate "Project Attorokkha"— a self-defence class dedicated to the slum dwelling women of Dhaka — she stated, "People said I could not change the mentality of people. I took that as my core challenge". While sharing some of her success stories from the projects with the participants, she noted that her confidence had grown over time, she pointed out that women did not share incidents as much as they should. Zaiba stressed, "Although we can support the women privately they still lack the courage to come out as they lack external support and are unaware of their legal rights."



Ms. Shoko Ishikawa, Country Representative, UN Women Bangladesh, also highlighted the significance of preventing gender-based violence, "If we fail to stop the violence before it occurs, we cannot truly break the cycle." Ms. Shoko further stated, "During tonight's presentations many preventive ideas emerged that are going to be valuable for women survivors of GBV." When one of the teams came up with the idea of raising awareness through traditional theatres, she pointed out in this era of technological innovation, such established approaches were praiseworthy.



Mr. Bijon Islam, CEO of LightCastle Partners Ltd., gave the closing remarks for the evening thanking all the participants and judges for what had been an innovative journey. He stated, 'While I congratulate the winning teams, I would like to encourage other teams to remain steadfast and continue fighting against gender inequality with their unique endeavours.'

The winning teams will receive incubation support from LightCastle Partners Ltd. in the upcoming month and a seed fund of US\$5,000. At the end of the incubation period, the ideas that will have been further elaborated and honed will be launched in areas of Bangladesh where discrimination is higher and no protests are heard.

The evening came to a close with the announcement of the 3 winners from 11 teams. One of the winning teams, "Revive", proposed to empower deprived women through introducing a low-priced biodegradable cotton sanitary napkin, named Charu, for the under-privileged. Addressing their plan to disseminate awareness about GBV through product marketing, they stated, "While we are preventing GBV why not point out the core reason for discrimination and raise awareness through it?" Three- young women who represented the group "Freya", another winning team, vouched to create awareness through on- line and oThine workshops targeting students enrolled in tertiary education. Team "BIR", consisting of two young women, sought to create awareness among women and men about gender rights through specifically tailored animations.

