

Change  
the  
World

NATIONAL DIALOGUE ON  
ACTIONS AGAINST  
SEXUAL VIOLENCE  
2020

EVENT BRIEF, DECEMBER 2020



Kingdom of the Netherlands



UNITED NATIONS  
BANGLADESH

# Experts Meetings on Sexual Violence

22 November, 2020.

On the occasion of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence (GBV), the UN in Bangladesh and the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) organised a two-part National Dialogue on Actions against Sexual Violence as a follow-up to the 2019 National Dialogue. This was a hybrid event that consisted of an in-person series of Experts Meetings, of which the outcome was presented and discussed during a Virtual Dialogue that took place on 25 November to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

This year's theme "Orange the World: Fund, Respond, Prevent, Collect," focused the National Dialogue discussions on gaining a stronger commitment to addressing the root causes of sexual violence. The Dialogue took stock of the achievements and challenges faced in implementing the 10 Actions to Stand Against Rape endorsed in 2019 and sought to identify solutions to fight impunity and ensure justice for survivors.

The first part of the National Dialogue, the 'Experts Meetings', was held on 22 November at Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel. Consisting of a three-part roundtable discussion, the meetings brought together activists, legal experts, government officials, UN Agencies, the judiciary, law enforcement agencies, academia, development partners, civil society organisations (CSOs), youth and media representatives.



Session 1 moderated by Ms. Maheen Sultan, BIGD and chaired by Dr. Abul Hossain, Project Director, MSPVAW, MOWCA



Session 2 moderated by Professor Dr. Md. Rabiul Haque, University of Dhaka and chaired by Prof. Mohammad Moshuazzaman, National Curriculum Text Board (NCTB)



Session 3 moderated by Barrister Sara Hossain, BLAST and chaired by Ms. Umme Kulsum, Joint Secretary, Law & Justice Division, MoLJPA.

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# SESSION-1: Gender Inequality and Drivers of GBV

The first session, titled ‘Gender Inequality and Drivers of GBV’, unpacked the causes of GBV including issues of patriarchy and systemic sexism.

The participants talked of the current GBV termed as the ‘pandemic within a pandemic’, the public outcry against the present rise in rape cases, the media’s representation of such cases and the ordinance promulgating the death penalty for rape.

The heart-wrenching story of Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) GBV caseworker Ms. Samsunnahar, segued a discussion on how society can ensure women live free from violence instead of focusing on the notion of ‘protecting women’ and the internalisation of consent.



Ms. Shoko Ishikawa, Country Representative, UN Women.



Dr. Abul Hossain, Project Director, MSPVAW, MOWCA.

“Women don’t want protection, they want freedom.”



Ms. Maheen Sultan, BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD).

Ms. Shoko Ishikawa, UN Women Country Representative, urged the Government to draw on the “rich CSO expertise to address sexual violence” and adopt findings from modern feminist discourse into its strategies. Ms. Shomy Hasan Chowdhury, Co-Founder of Awareness 360, stressed the importance of taking the conversation on GBV from “the roundtable to the dinner table”. The session concluded with MoWCA’s Project Director Dr. Abul Hossain committing to review the holistic National Action Plan to End Violence against Women on an annual basis.

## SESSION-2:

# The Importance of Gender Equality and Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Preventing GBV in Schools

The second session, 'The Importance of Gender Equality and Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Preventing GBV in Schools,' stipulated the need for a Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in institutions and training centers.

The discourse revolved around the lack of a concrete framework on age-appropriate CSE and how CSE should address human rights, gender equality and sexual health.

“TRUST is the most important aspect in any Sexuality Education/ violence awareness class.”



Ms. Umama Jillur, Founder, Kotha.



Ms. Asa Torkelsson, Country Representative, UNFPA.

Participants also discussed teachers pedagogy, training materials and teachers ability and willingness to teach CSE.

Mr. Sohanur Rahman of MenEngage Alliance urged CSE to be “inclusive of the transgender community” and Kotha’s founder, Ms. Umama Zillur emphasised the “need to scale up Peer Education programmes for effective CSE”.

Ms. Asa Torkelsson, UNFPA Country Representative, concluded the session by encouraging the audience to push towards behavioral change for a violence free world.

## SESSION-3: Access to Justice for GBV Survivors



Mr. Sudipto Mukerjee, Resident Representative, UNDP.

The final session of the day, 'Access to Justice for GBV Survivors', focused on the gender biases that are still entrenched in the justice system.

Participants discussed how these biases contribute to the low rate of GBV reporting, the issue of double victimisation and the need for law reforms and stronger implementation of current legislation and policies.

Ms. Shireen Huq, founding member, Naripokkho, described the “culture of silence and victim blaming that discourages women from lodging complaints” during a discussion that contemplated the stigma towards rape survivors, pervasive re-victimisation and the persistent issue of delayed and denied justice.

As Barrister Sara Hossain stressed the urgency of “law reforms within a human rights framework”, the experts closed the session by calling for national guidelines to establish a functional multi-sectoral referral system; accessible and affordable services for GBV survivors available at all levels; response/risk mitigation programmes designed and implemented through a feminist lens; implementation of measures to prevent double victimization of GBV survivors at all levels of the legal system.

“There is pressure for women to not only drop rape cases, but also to marry her rapist”



Ms. Shireen Huq, Founding member, Naripokkho.

# Virtual Dialogue on Actions Against Sexual Violence: 25 November 2020



Honorable State Minister Fazilatun Nesa Indira from MoWCA attended as the chief guest in the inauguration of the Virtual Dialogue on Actions against Sexual Violence.

The second half of the two-part National Dialogue officially commemorated the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

The event was attended by approximately 120 panelists from various ministries, UN Agencies, development partners and CSOs.

Honourable State Minister Fazilatun Nesa Indira from MoWCA attended as the Chief Guest, while Judith Herbertson, Development Director at the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Bangladesh, and Ms. Mia Seppo, United Nations Resident Coordinator, joined as special guests.

The inauguration was chaired by Ms. Kazi Rowshan Akhter, Secretary at MoWCA and moderated by Dr. Abul Hossain, Project Director, Multi- Sectoral Programme on Violence against Women (MSPVAW) at MoWCA.

The inaugural session saw Dr. Hossain describing MoWCA's active role in meeting the objectives of the '10 Action Points' developed in last year's Dialogue. MoWCA has engaged men, especially religious and community leaders, in conversations on stereotyping and power dynamics.

Calling violence against women and girls (VAWG) "the most systematic violation of human rights globally, even more so because of COVID-19", Ms. Judith Herbertson emphasised the importance of helping victims of GBV through appropriate legal reforms and protections, and the provision of medical support and psychological counselling.



Ms. Mia Seppo, Resident Coordinator, United Nations Bangladesh.

The UN Resident Coordinator Ms. Mia Seppo highlighted the re-energised, intergenerational feminist movement that has brought marital rape to the forefront. Seppo argued that “comprehensive action that addresses the root causes of sexual violence and that puts women and girls’ rights at the centre” should be the Government’s approach to combatting VAWG.

An analysis of the ‘10 Actions to Stand Against Rape’ and Experts Meetings recommendations was presented by Mr. Nahim Razzaq, Member of Parliament, in an effort to hasten efforts to prevent GBV.

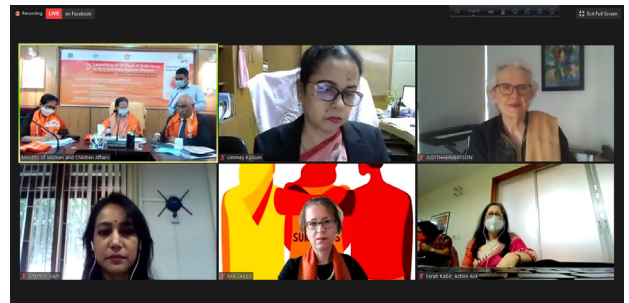
This presentation informed a panel composed of government representatives from the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Home Affairs.

The panel discussed strategies to reinforce attention on the issue and to accelerate interventions to end sexual violence. Ms. Farah Kabir, Country Director of ActionAid Bangladesh, moderated the plenary session and Q&A round.

Concluding remarks were provided by Ms. Farida Parvin, Additional Secretary at MoWCA.

The National Dialogue wrapped up with a commitment from the Ministry of Health to develop official guidelines for health care providers to respond more effectively to GBV cases and survivors.

The Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs also committed to ensuring that law enforcement agencies never refuse to report cases of rape, nor practice any form of discriminatory or prejudiced behavior. The ministries also pledged overarching commitments to strengthen coordination and accountability across all sectors in order to end GBV.



Panelists at the National Dialogue on 25th November 2020.



Panelists at the National Dialogue on 25th November 2020.



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**UN Women Bangladesh Country Office**

Road: 43, House: 39, Gulshan 2, Dhaka - 1212, Bangladesh

Tel: +88 02 988 3828, 985 6641

Fax: +88 02 985 8a593

[www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org)