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POP CULTURE WITH A PURPOSE

Violence Against Women in Bangladesh - Edutainment

Violence against women and adolescent girls is a systemic and ingrained problem in Bangladesh. Oxfam Novib worked with a group of local partners in Bangladesh, including BRAC, WECAN, HASAB and Rupantur, to address the problem in the Khulna Division through an intervention strategy centered on the utilization of edutainment methodologies.

The project combined interactive, high quality modern communications tools, including televised docudramas and public service commercials, and traditional edutainment, such as street theatre, together with targeted and more intense school and community interventions in 10 select locations in the Khulna Division.

As a result, more than 3,000 students (60% were girls) and 3,000 parents reported changing their values and attitudes towards sexual violence against adolescents. Through a mass campaign, the project reached approximately 500,000 people across the Bangladesh.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN BANGLADESH

Violence against women is a global problem, but the plight and situation of women and girls is particularly dire in Bangladesh. A significant number and percentage of Bangladeshi women suffer regular violence, mostly by partners or family members, often linked to sexual harassment and repressive relations.

Globally more than 30% of women experience physical or sexual partner violence; in Bangladesh more than 60% of women are victims of physical and/or sexual partner violence (WHO, Lancet 2014; BDHS, BBS 2013). More than 80% of unmarried women and adolescent girls in Bangladesh report experience with sexual violence (BBS 2013).

Underpinning this situation is a culture of eve-teasing that perpetuates this cycle and accepts a traditional 'boys will be boys' culture, resulting in widespread harassment and assault. As a consequence, girls and women in Bangladesh are among the least likely women anywhere in the world to speak out on such issues while also having among the highest rates of early marriage and pregnancy.

The ratification of important treaties, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the agreement on the international efforts, such as the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals, have done much to advance the status of women. Civil society is creating pressure on corresponding laws and policies at the national level in Bangladesh to put an end to gender inequity and VAW. Unfortunately, however, their implementation still lags and women continue to suffer structural and frequent violence in their home and in their partner and sexual relations.

Physical and psychological violence is widespread in Bangladesh. Women victims are often unprotected and perpetrators are not punished. Female citizens of Bangladesh are often deprived of their basic rights. Men (but also women) by and large legitimize this violence with socio-culturally and religiously inspired traditions and norms that sanction aggressive and repressive male behaviour, the accept the culture of eve-teasing among children, adolescents and women, and that perpetuate a culture of female inferiority, both in the public and private spheres. The media and their portrayal of women and gender relations often reinforce these norms and stereotypes.

In Bangladesh, the constitution guarantees equal rights for women, but in reality women do not have equal access to information, to education (at the secondary and tertiary levels in Bangladesh), to economic opportunities, basic human rights services and decision making power. The dominating patriarchal culture denies their human dignity and their recognition as citizens.

The incidence of violence against women and girls (VAW) is very high and is the major factor in women's subordination. Intimate partner violence and gender based violence is common place, as is dowry related violence, sexual harassment, limitations in mobility and even acid throwing. Sexual harassment is very common and it is the main cause of girl suicides and a major driver for very early marriages. Notions of honour and the fear of sexual harassment lead families, and in many cases girls themselves, to seek and pursue early marriages in Bangladesh. While Bangladesh has made substantial gains to combat the

institution, Bangladesh continues to have the fourth lowest mean age of marriage and the lowest median age of marriage globally.

Moreover, many Bangladeshis lack basic knowledge of and an understanding of sexual harassment, the ill effects of domestic, partner and gender violence, and the spectrum of actions considered harassing. Most Bangladeshis identify physical forms of violence as such, but they lack awareness and understanding on a number of related, and in some cases equally or more damaging, forms of violence, including verbal and psychological violence and harassment.

The culture of acceptance and impunity for perpetrators has resulted in Bangladeshi women being among the least likely to speak out on issues, cases and incidents of violence, including intimate partner physical and sexual violence. Adolescent girls in particular are often reluctant to speak out or up for fear of loss of honour, reprisal and retribution.

Most cases of VAW go widely unreported and uncovered. Considering this very alarming situation, Oxfam Novib and its partners decided to take strong initiatives to stop the violence against women and through edutainment in order to reduce the incidents, rates and prevalence of violence against women and girls. .

COMBATING VIOLENDE AGAINST WOMEN

The Pop Culture with a Purpose project was set up as an edutainment campaign to combat Violence against Women (VAW) Oxfam Novib convened an alliance or organisation working toward an end to violence against women through edutainment. The alliance members included BRAC, HASAB, WE CAN and Rupantur. Oxfam Novib worked intensively to help develop and improve the capacity of the respective implementing partners and alliance members. Ultimately, the consortium aimed to aims to upscale the successful experiences

The specific objective of the project sought to contribute to the reduction of the incidence sexual harassment in Khulna district in Bangladesh by challenging existing gender norms, values and attitudes that perpetuate violence against women.

Throughout the project Oxfam Novib provided coordination and managerial support and steering as well as technical input on both edutainment strategies and interventions and technical expertise toward strategies to address violence against women. Oxfam Novib also helped the Bangladesh alliance and project partners connect to and coordinate with other global and country teams working on the project.

POP CULTURE WITH A PURPOSE

Since 2005 Oxfam Novib has invested in the exchange of experiences around edutainment. This s resulted in a Global Edutainment partnership. The Pop Culture with a Purpose project was one component under this global partnership. It applied a rights-based approach, to shift and transform unequal gender norms and power distribution that manifests itself in the violation of women's human right to safety, bodily integrity and health. Norms and power relations are central to socially legitimizing and maintaining VAW. As such, their transformation is central to VAW prevention.

The project used edutainment: a strategy that combines mainstream mass communication with community education and mobilization. Media nowadays

are the most popular and reliable and effective medium key in shaping how people see the world. Programs on TV and radio, magazines and cell phones and internet-based communication all over the world tend to reproduce gender inequalities, reinforce stereotypes about men's and woman's desired behaviour. In most countries mass media do not address social issues or stimulate people to critically reflect on their own situation.

In most of the developing world, edutainment and the critical use of social new media is a new and emerging phenomenon. Edutainment strategies can help changing stereotypes and use the same 'mass communication weapon': they are attractive, high quality media that reach large numbers of people. Such media can be used to project role models, create public awareness, inform people about their rights and support lobby and advocacy strategies for human rights aimed at national or international levels. So edutainment could be used as a effective and timely technique and way to change the negative behaviours and attitude towards women.

This project addressed the various forms of VAW and their underlying causes. It aspired to contribute to changes that allow women and girls to lead a violence free life. This requires them to be empowered and the underlying norms to be challenged. The project was above all geared towards prevention. It focused on physical, sexual violence, marital rape, sexual abuse and harassment, harmful traditional practices, child marriages and forced marriages; as these occur at home and publicly. Special and particular focus, however, was placed on sexual harassment of adolescent girls.

As the key strategy of the project, Edutainment (Education Entertainment), a strategy that engages mass audiences, particularly youth and women, through the power of attractive, persuasive and cutting edge media, popular culture and arts and combines those with on the ground and virtual community education and mobilization, was effective in conveying awareness about sexual harassment and violence against women. In Bangladesh traditional cultural elements like pot songs (a very popular traditional song) were mixed with street theatre shows and three episodes drama series. The various forms of media and culture were all based on the same message: Don't blame the girls; Listen to girls, Trust and Stand by them. These strategies alongside a strong basis of community change-makers already formed by local partners resulted in a impactful communication towards girls and boys, parents, teachers and the broader community, including law enforcement officers, politicians.

The project applied the following strategies:

- *Development of Behavioural Change Communication (BCC) publications/materials:* Developing materials on Sexual Harassment (SH) to sensitise community people, link up with the education institutions. These materials will be developed for community peoples, students & teachers, youths, project staff and different internal & external audiences. A few examples of BCC materials are poster, booklet, leaflet, billboard, banner, workbook, reports, journals etc.
- *Capacity building of Local level Alliances:* Strengthen local level alliance (district) to promote and strengthen the program and ensure services in a sustainable manner.
- *Orientation & Capacity building:* Integration of gender to ensure youth girls and boys are equally benefited from different programmes and projects implemented by Alliances. In addition to, development of

human resources with necessary skill and competence to link Gender and SH issues within the programme context and objectives.

- *Sensitise the education institutions:* Working with local education institutions (Teacher, Management committee, parents, Local Elected and community) to ensure gender friendly environment for girls in and out of institutions system.
- *Campaign to End VAW:* Implement phase wise alliance led institution based & media campaign in target area to reduce sexual harassment. This program has identified at least no of students who will bring change within their own lives also influence others to take visible stand to end SH.
- *Action Research:* Organise necessary research and documentation to review and understand the progress of the whole campaign and change processes.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The project has resulted in the following outputs and outcomes.

- 10 school based theatre groups formed and 120 students developed their skills on theatre performance.
- 160 SMC members and teachers developed their skills to manage school based awareness interventions.
- 12 folk performers developed their skill to perform awareness raising *pot songs* in the community.
- 210 individuals were mobilized as *change makers* to disseminate the awareness raising messages.
- 3 short video clips and 4 dramas were produced and aired in television.
- 4 CSOs developed their skills to manage edutainment interventions.

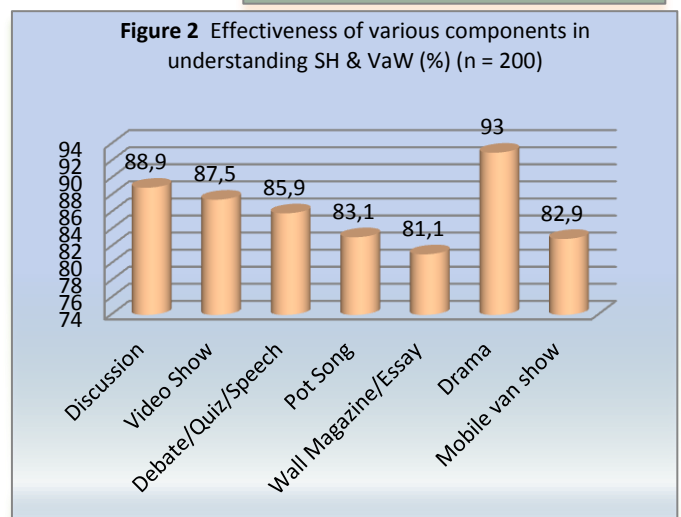
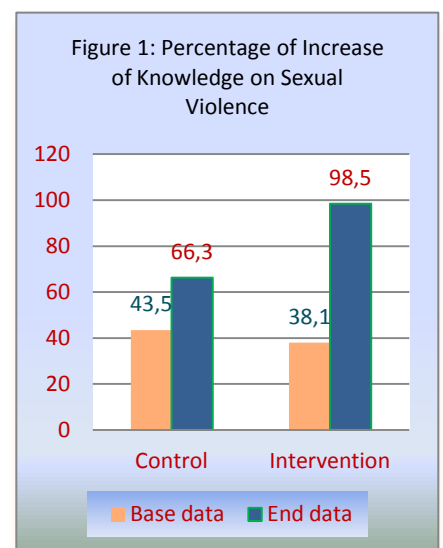
Outcome

More than 3,000 students (60% were girls) and 3,000 parents reported changing their values and attitudes towards sexual violence against adolescents. Through a mass campaign, the project reached approximately 500,000 people across the Bangladesh.

The program was evaluated through a rigorous and systemic approach. This project adopted a *quasi-randomized control* design and assigned the adolescent boys and girls, their parents, community leaders and school teachers from 15 school communities to two intervention conditions (10 school communities) and a control group (5 school communities).

The study showed a positive and significant improvement in terms of knowledge-awareness and behaviour on sexual violence against adolescent girls in the household and community. The study showed that knowledge of the project beneficiaries on various types of sexual violence increased by 158.5% in intervention area whereas the knowledge increased by 52.4% in control area [Figure 1]. The knowledge and awareness on different incidents of sexual violence prevalent in the community were significantly increased.

The edutainment strategies and components had positive correlation increasing the knowledge and awareness. Highest number (93%) of the respondents



informed that they were highly influence by 'drama' regarding increasing their knowledge, awareness and behaviour on sexual violence against adolescent girls [Figure 3]. The findings showed that other edutainment components used in this project e.g. video show, mobile van show, pot song etc. had significant effect on improving knowledge and awareness on sexual violence. The data showed that the project had impact on behaviour as well. About 95% of the respondents said that they would support the girl if she experienced any kind of sexual violence

LESSONS LEARNED

- Use of popular culture and media can play significant role to change gender norms and values in the society. In this regard, systemic combination of local cultural elements with the modern electronic elements engaging mass population can play significant role to change the social norms.
- Men and boys engagement need to be increased more. The positive image of the boys and men need to be highlighted more, particularly in the edutainment products. Because, at some point the men and boys might feel stigmatized to some extent.
- Adolescents girls and boys learn more and change behaviour from those activities where they could participate directly in the edutainment strategies.
- The capacitation and level of knowledge among school teachers in essential. In many cases it is a pre-condition to build the capacity, awareness and understanding of teachers who will be conveying, teaching and imparting the same messages around violence against women and girls.
- Greater effectiveness was found when the project addressed multiple stakeholders and target groups.
- Multiple strategies had a reinforcing role and increased the impact and uptake of messages; the result was greater than the mere sum of its parts.
- Direct participation in the project yielded better results, as would be expected, than those who merely absorbed messages in one passive (not direct participation) form.
- Edutainment materials and interventions need to provide positive images and models for boys and men. Without positive role models and images boys and men can feel stigmatized and made to play the villain. With the inclusion of positive images and role models, boys and men have avenues and models to emulate in positive and proactive ways.

STORIES

“AYESHA: STANDS FOR HERSELF AGAINST CHILD MARRIAGE”

Ayesha Khatun studies in class VI in Zia Girls' Secondary High School. She lives together with her younger sister, mother and grandparents. Her father passed away quite a few years ago. Her grandfather is a day labourer and her mother and grandmother work as the maid servants.

The road reconstruction work was going on by the Khulna City Corporation near to Ayesha's residence. Jahir was one of the day laborers in that project who used to work with Ayesha's grandfather as well. However, Jahir saw Ayesha while her way to school and got attracted to choose her for his son's bride. Jahir shared his plan with Ayesha's grandfather. Since they had been working together for quite a bit times, they developed an affinity and friendship between themselves. Therefore, Aysha's grandfather delightedly accepted the proposal and agreed himself without consulting anyone in the family to give her (Ayesha) marries off Jahir's son.

Later, when this issue was discussed in the family, Ayesha got upset with this. She considered this as a child marriage. Through attending different sessions under the project, she developed a consciousness regarding the negative impacts of the Child Marriage. Moreover, Ayesha's mother who got child marriage went through lot of critical consequences observed by Ayesha herself also developed her awareness to some extent regarding the consequences of child marriage in life. Ayesha believed that due to child marriage, her mother couldn't finish her study; she became the mother of children at premature age and she had been unhealthy and sick altogether. She thought about all these issues and imagined the same sufferings in her own life. She thought that if she got married then, her schooling and education would be suspended and she would face financial crisis in future as well. She was going through mental distress and agony.

Ayesha discussed her concerns and all these negative consequences of child marriage with her mother. She was 'against child marriage'; but her mother was afraid to go against Ayesha's grandfather's decision as it might cause wrangle in the family. So, having no *hope* in the family, Ayesha denounced that she wouldn't get married; nevertheless, her grandparents paid no attention to her opinion.

Ayesha was worried about the aftermath. Anyway, she organized her classmates following the learning in the trainings and she had some hope and belief that her friends might take some initiatives to save her from this crisis. So, she shared the situation with her classmates and requested them to *save her life*. Her classmates consoled and promised her that they would do their best to protect this child marriage. Initially, Ayesha's classmates tried to convince Ayesha's mother to stop the marriage; but they failed. They realized that that even Ayesha's mother was convinced to give her daughter married off at early age. Her classmates also tried to convince her grandparents; but that did not work as well. Her grandfather told them unabashedly that he was determined to marry his granddaughter off; the date had been finalized after his words to the bridegroom's father and he had no longer any wish to send his granddaughter to school to continue her study.

The education of Ayesha was about to end. Under this situation, Ayesha's classmates discussed the issue with one of the assistant teachers in the school. The teacher thought about what actions to be taken to stop this. Finally, the teacher consulted with the Headmaster and with other teachers in the school. Then, the teacher visited Ayesha's grandfather along with her students. She (the teacher) requested her (Ayesha) grandparents to stop this early marriage informing them that it was not legal - according to the law, child marriage is a punishable. They also tried to aware them about the unpleasant consequences of child marriage. Indeed, they also warned them they would involve law enforces on behalf of the school if the marriage was not stopped. They also suggested them to inform this to the family of the bridegroom. Indeed, Ayesha's family was convinces and her marriage was stopped. Ayesha got a new life and she resumed her school again.

Ayesha is determined to continue her study whatever hurdles she faces in life. She dreams to build her career through education. With her dreams and determination to materialize, she has started working as maid servant like her mother and grandmother in others' houses to be self-dependent and cover her educational expenses. She is unwavering to finish her study.

In our society, many girls are facing the curse of child marriage. The numbers of the girls are still very few who take the initiatives to prevent the child marriage and steps forward to fulfill their dreams and potentials. Therefore, the story of Ayesha is indeed a tale of a victory of her own and our project that developed the consciousness among she to stand

ROBIN SIR: DREAM AND DARE TO CHANGE

“Girls of our school often used to face various types of harassments, eve teasing on their way to school. Several times they shared this with us. Even we also informed the guardians and the school management committee about this. We, sometimes, used to talk about how we could to get rid of these of harassments. I almost started to believe that there was no solution to this. Under such situation, in 2013, some awareness raising activities were started by a NGO (RUPANTAR) in our school and community. Initially I was not very convinced. Nevertheless, at one stage I got bit interest and participated in some events and observed some actions & activities. After that, I was so influenced and stimulated to take part to prevent sexual harassments against the girls and women. I became a change agent in my school and community.”

This is how Teacher Robin, known as Robin Sir in the community, expressed his enthusiasm and engagement in the project. Robin sir teaches sports and physical education in the Nirala Secondary High School.

However, Robin sir acknowledged that after participating in the activities of the project he became more conscious about the sexual harassments against his school girls. He wanted to be more active to prevent this situation. Out of this thought, he formed a group involving other thirty two (32) like-minded people to take some practical initiatives to prevent sexual harassment in their community. He also started to discuss the sexual harassment issues regularly with his sports team to raise their consciousness. Robin sir and his group got connected with different activities under the project improving their knowledge and consciousness. Gradually, they became more aware, vocal and active to prevent any forms of violence and sexual harassment against women & girls. He also actively involved the girls of his schools to raise their awareness on this.

Unlike previous trends, the space was created for lively and open discussion about the mitigation of sexual harassment in the event of the annual sports of the school which was initiated by Robin Sir and his team. “Now a day, this issue has become an important topic of discussion in most of the school functions” Robin Sir said.

He has also attached his team with some voluntary activities. Through his teammates he came to know about Nadim and Sharif who were the students of class VIII and used to smoke and sexually harass girls. Robin Sir individually met those students. Instead of reproaching them, he developed an affable relationship with them initially. He discussed several issues with them informally and asked them to join the campaign under the project. Gradually they developed their values and changed their behavior. Robin Sir says, “*Now they are good and gentle boys. Girls no longer complain against them since there has been change in their behaviour. I am really delighted to see such changes as it was all/entire my dream*”.

Now, Robin Sir is very much hopeful and enthusiastic to bring change. He wants to leverage his initiatives to achieve the changes in larger scale.

SHAHEEN: BREAKING THE SILENCE

“Listen to girls, Trust and stand by them – a book from which I have learnt many things. I’d like to thank those who have come forward to help us and enlighten us with such important information and knowledge.”

– Shaheen, student of class VII of Saheed Zia Secondary High School.

Shaheen experienced different uncomfortable experiences in her life, but she didn’t have any clear idea regarding those. She did not know that those were various forms of sexual harassments. After getting involved with the activities of the project, she came to know many things about sexual harassment. Now she realizes that even she herself was the victim of sexual harassment in past. Now she has a clear idea about different forms of sexual harassment.

Shaheen shares, *“Initially I did not understand the fact and thus, gave no importance to this matter. However, being involved with this project, we participated in a drama titled Kusum Koli. The experience from this drama made us all more aware about different sexual harassments.”*

She further informed, *“I want to disclose an issue, even my close neighbors, at my early teenage, used to touch different parts of my body as fun and jest. I didn’t protest at that time as I didn’t understand anything and was not aware of this. There were some behavioral features that I never liked and felt uncomfortable but I couldn’t disclose due to fear and shyness. However, whenever I tried to talk about those issues with my family members, they scolded me in return and made me stop by saying that it was a matter of shyness which should not be disclosed. They further said that if this sort of issue was revealed, it might ruin not only her future but also the family’s reputation.”*

“Now I’m very careful and sincere. I remain very conscious so that I don’t face any sexual harassment even in fun and jest. At the beginning of this project, when I discussed this issue with my mother; she, even, denied the fact saying that these were the matters of shame and this sort of topic should not be openly discussed. Rather she was worry that from where and how I got to know about this. Now I understand this matter clearly and believe that this must be discussed openly.”

“I also participated in the quiz competition in this project with others and I got a prize too. I strongly believe that like me, my classmates are also aware and deeply concerned about the sexual harassments and believe in taking necessary actions regarding this. I want to state with conviction that the books, dramas, quiz competitions and other activities of this project have enhanced my mental strength to fight against sexual harassments.”

“I have already taken the decision that the untold complains should be disclosed now. We should move forward rather than keeping ourselves silent. We have to organize campaign and demonstration against sexual harassments.”

ZARINA: REGAINING SELF-CONFIDENCE

Zarina Khatun is a student of class VIII of Lions School & College. She attends a coaching center after school. Her residence is quite far from the coaching center. However, Zarina used to return to her house by a rickshaw van in the evening. There was a boy who also used to come in the same van. Though Zarina was not interested but the boy was very much eager to chat with her and trying to become closer to her. He always used to find some excuses to check and take Zarina's copies and books. After few days, the boy suddenly tried to touch her body. Due to fear and shyness, Zarina could neither protest nor disclose this to others. Being fully helpless, she finally shared the issue with her father. Her father decided to stop her going to coaching center. She became mentally upset. She thought herself why she would stop going to coaching for a reckless boy, what her fault? And one day her father stopped her going to coaching.

"My morale and confidence level was going down. I thought there would be no one to help a girl like me whose father is a poor taxi driver. Besides, I never wanted my parents to face any difficulties for me. I thought it would be better to remain quiet rather than protesting."

These were the statements of Zarina.

When the project started, she participated in different campaigns according to the advice of her school teacher. About Zarina, her class teacher commented that she was a regular, quiet and serious student of the class. She liked the discussion, training, workshop meetings on the prevention of violence against women. Her interest towards the project activities began to grow and finally she became an active participant. She also won prize in the quiz competition. As her father stopped her going to coaching, she decided to share her leanings from the project with her father.

"I recalled that event. I thought that if I could protest on that day, the boy never dared to touch my body. I might not need to complain to my father and my coaching might not have stopped."-said Zarina.

Now Zarina asks herself why she couldn't protest that harassment on that day. However, now she believes that she is able to protest those sexual harassments now. She is fully self confident now!

RAISING MORALITY

A teacher from the Lion School & College objected to use the phrase- *Sexual Harassment* when the project was launched in the school. Only for using this phrase in the project activities, she didn't want to involve herself and students with this project.

"I found the message of the project was very significant when I heard about this, but I recommended them to change alternated word to the phrase 'sexual harassment'. I don't think that can be an appropriate word to use in the community. Even the guardians and students might be hesitant and uncomfortable to communicate using this word." the teacher said.

Later on, based on the several discussions between the school authority and the activists of the project, it was clear that the honorable supreme court of Bangladesh has already declared and finalized some behavioral features as sexual harassments. At one stage, the principal was motivated to be involved in the activities project. His colleague had already known about the project and inspired to get involved as well. He realized that it is very important to know about the behaviors connected to sexual harassments. Then she (teacher) thought about her own student life. To her knowledge, this sort of harassment happened in many women's lives she remembered, but hardly anyone could define and protest those as sexual harassment at that time. However, now, the students of her school are learning many things regarding the sexual harassments quite clearly and their ideas are upgrading. This fact of realization motivated her positively and she felt the urgency to be involved in this project. After that, she expressed her desire to get involved with this project along with her students.

Further she informed, *"Even few days ago at the time of coming to school, I noticed a boy teasing a girl and she was feeling shy and helpless. I know them but don't want to disclose their names. Then I called them individually and tried to make them understand. The boy gave me words that he would no longer behave in that way. Anyway, what he did was absolutely sexual harassment."* She added, *"There were some other incidents such as some boys used to write indecent letters to girls or write sexually explicit messages and pictures on the walls. Even through mobile phone, some boys harass girls in many ways; they show different types of postures and gestures while seeing girls. All these are sexually harassing activities. Now I am trying to make them aware of so that the boys behave decently with their female classmates. It's my expectation that I'll motivate my own children and students to become ideal citizens in the future."*

A DRAMA - MORE THAN JUST ENTERTAINMENT

Munira's father is a development worker. She heard about the process of development of the society from her father. She is also keen to work in the same field like her father.

A drama, "The Voice of the Girls" was staged at the Lions School & College as a project activity. Munira, a student of class VIII, performed in the drama. When she heard about the drama to be staged, she was enlisted as one of the performers to play the role of a teacher. She became very excited. However, initially she could not understand that the drama was going to be staged in order to convey messages related to 'sexual harassment'. While rehearsing, she came to know and learn many things about the issue. In this way, Munira has expressed her experience gained from her performance in the drama. Munira says, "We are three sisters; have no brother and I'm the eldest one. When I was in class III, I used to go to school together with some senior sisters from our locality. Once, one of them was being teased with slang language by some reckless boys. She was helpless, and she had no choice but to listen silently and quietly. I became shocked and so I shared this with my mother." My mother said, "You do not need to go to school with them and never pay any attention to the words of those reckless boys."

"I was very much depressed and often thought why they were misbehaving like that. Actually, I didn't get the point that it was sexual harassment. Even that victim didn't have the idea about it and she has no idea that she could have raised her voice against this. However, I often thought that what would be my role if in case I face the same nuisance? She was always occupied with this question in her mind" - said Munira.

Whatever knowledge and ideas that Munira has gathered from this project, she will try to inform and transfer to her two younger sisters. The drama was a great event of learning in her life. It has already made an everlasting learning impression in her life. Munira comments, "My confidence level has become very high after acting in this drama. We have to raise voice".

TUSHAR: I HAVE CHANGED MYSELF

The Head Teacher was thinking about Tushar. He used to get complains from the school girls about Tushar's behavior. It was very disgusting. Tushar's naughtiness was beyond limitation. Even the teachers in the class were extremely disturbed. So, the head teacher called the parents of Tushar to notify them about it. When they came, he said, "*Why is your son behaving so aggressively? He is disturbing our school environment.*" His parents discussed about possible ways to change such irritating behavior of their son. They also expected the wholehearted cooperation from the school to change their son. Tushar is a student of class VI of the Khan Jahan Ali High School.

The head teacher along with other teachers inspired Tushar to participate in the ongoing project activities in the school on violence against women. Taking initiative and giving due importance, the head teacher discussed the matter of Tushar with the project staff and volunteers. As a result of collective efforts and cooperation, Tushar gradually became interested in project activities. He started attending and participating in different functions of the project. His class teachers have observed that he has become regular in the class and attentive in his study. His behavior with the girls and others has changed. Now there is almost no complaining from girls and teachers.

Once, going to the head teacher he said, "*Sir, what I did was not right, I involved myself with the project activities. My fellow students helped me a lot for this. I have to change myself.*"

Tushar himself talked with his teachers and expressed his desire to know more about his study. The teachers also gave him time and tried to solve his problems with much care. The teachers feel that Tushar is highly interested in the project activities and for their encouraging behavior he has changed himself. He has given words to his guardians that he would not ever behave like past and carry on his study. The head teacher himself is amazed to see the change of Tushar as it was beyond his imagination.

WE ARE CHANGE MAKERS

The Headmaster of the Dhaka Match Industries Secondary High School is acting as the advisor of 'Change Makers'. He organizes different meetings and seminars with this group. With active involvement of the group members, he tries to solve different types of problems existing in the school and in the locality in collaboration with the different activities of the project. The social awakening organization of this school is the 'Change Makers'. It has 25 members.

Rozina Akhter, a student of class X, is the leader of this organization. Rozina says, "Both boys and girls study together in our school. We are participating in different campaigns and quiz competitions of the project. Being involved with the different actions and activities of this continuous project, our attitude and views have already changed enormously. Teasing in students are going down. We are very grateful to our teachers and the project for achieving such progress."

Pintu, a member of this group comments, "We have been able to bring some changes among boys in particular. They used to tease and harass the girls in various ways. The project staff has arranged number of consultation meetings with us, organized different programs and inspired us that helped us change our mentality. We the members of change maker group took collective decision not to tease and harass the girls anymore; rather consider them as good friends. We can behave with them like brother. Our motto is to change our self. With this purpose the group, 'Change Makers' was formed."

Azom, another member of the group is a good cricket player. Azom says, "*I know that those who are the students of the school today, will not be here after the School final Examination (SSC). I have learnt many things from seniors of this group. I do not have clear idea about various forms of sexual harassment. Now my concept is very clear. I also dream to see positive contribution of our group to bring progressive changes in our school and the society. I am fortunate for being member of this group and being engaged with this group. It's a great achievement of my life.*"

The advisor of 'Change maker', remarks, "*School is supporting the 'Change Maker' group in many ways. This group is working on the overall environment of the school along with maintaining its cleanliness. It is their dream that general students will learn many things from the group and thus will continue to work in keeping up name and fame of the school. Time will come when all of us at the school would be proud to say 'we are change makers'.*"

SHEULI: GIRLS TO BE COURAGEOUS

“A reckless boy named Tareq, used to tease me on my way to school. He used to look at me in a bad way”- This was stated by Sheuli, a student of class VIII of the Hajee Abdul Malek Girls' High School.

“I was passing through difficult times. I thought possibly there is no way to bring the reckless boys into right path. They will continue teasing the girls. It is very hard and challenging too to talk against them.” said Sheuli.

“During that time, the volunteers of the project used to come at our school. From them, I came to know about different activities of the project”.

When the activity started, Sheuli attended several sessions about the prevention of violence against women. She was so pleased to know that debate and drama would be organized under the project. She wanted to act in the drama. She was so excited that the drama would be staged in their locality and her guardians would be able to watch. The name of the drama was “*JHINUK*” (Oyester).

Sheuli commented, “After acting in the drama, my confidence level has gone up. Now I believe that one day sexual harassment will be removed from our society. I have learnt that we have to raise voice and protest and stop violence. I am regularly attending the activities of the project. I have also learnt that we have to be confident as girl to protect our dignity. I am discussing everything with my classmates very openly and they are also doing the same. I have a dream to be independent and famous one day. Even I have a vision to work for the teenagers to make them confident to say ‘NO’ to sexual harassment and violence against women.”

To describe her role after acting in the drama she says, “One day, the reckless Tareq was driving bicycle in front of me and making obscene gestures. At one stage, he proposed to me love. Standing in front of him, I asked with courage, wouldn't you have any sister? If I were your sister and a boy like you teased me, what would have been your reaction? Before he left the place, with extreme courage, I said, I am warning you in a very polite way if you disturb me further I will complain it to the police.’ Since that day, Tareq disappeared. I shared all these with my father after returning home. On that day, my classmates, Hafiza, Bristy and Sumaiya were with me.”

Today it became very clear to her that the activities of Tareq were sexual harassment. She thinks that there should be protest against those who commit this sort of offence. Girls should be courageous. Thus by thinking about now and then, she was acquiring courage and determination in her mind. She was questioning herself, struggling to find out answers to those questions! Sheuli has realized that if the girls remain quiet, boys like Tareq will continue teasing and taunting them. She feels, girls should be courageous and strong!

TO BRING CHANGE

Initiated by the project staff the Headmaster of the Dhaka Match Industries Secondary High School was lecturing at a students' forum focusing on Rights of male and female, Violence against Women, Early Marriage and its negative effects etc. The speaker highlighted the role of students as future leaders and their role for the development of the country and society. Juthi Akhter was highly motivated by the speech of the Headmaster and decided to get herself involved in the project activities to do something for the society. Juthi a student of the school participated in the quiz and debate competitions of the project. From there she has gathered knowledge about the sexual harassment and violence against women and women's rights.

"I didn't think much about the matter. Gradually, I observed that the girls of our locality are much neglected, they are getting married at an early age and many women are maltreated. I thought that as a student and future leader of the country, I need to do something for the benefit of the society and country. I thought to organize a 'Mothers club' in my locality in collaboration with some of my neighboring friends and classmates. Primarily, we arranged a discussion meeting with the mothers of our friends and discussed about sexual harassment and violence against women. Especially, we tried to make mothers understand about harmful effects of early marriage. It was not easy to motivate mothers. Whenever we faced difficulties to carry on our activities, we sought assistance and cooperation from our school teachers."- Juthi, a student of class IX made the statement.

Juthi began to create awareness among local boys on violence against women and sexual harassments with a desire to get their support to prevent violence against women in their locality. Her mother was very supportive and instrumental to her mission of social activities.

"The initiative I have taken in order to change my locality and the society, I believe I will be able to continue this journey of change. I express my gratitude towards my classmates, teachers, friends and the project staff"- said Juthi.

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