



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT COMBATTING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (CGBV) IN BANGLADESH PROJECT (2018-2023)

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Context

Bangladesh, a country with a population of 169 million, stands as one of the most densely populated nations. Emerging from the abyss of poverty in 1971, Bangladesh is scheduled to graduate from the classification of Least Developed Countries (LDC) in 2026.¹ Despite its remarkable economic growth and human development achievements, gender inequalities and violence against women (VAW) continue to pose significant challenges, hindering the wellbeing of women and girls, and their potential to benefit from advancements. Existing inequalities have only been further exacerbated by the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Government of Bangladesh has endeavoured to address the prevention of VAW through various interventions. However, these efforts have largely focused on raising awareness rather than effecting substantial social norm changes. Moreover, the current laws pertaining to VAW still carry discriminatory elements and have yet to be fully implemented and interpreted with a gender lens. Despite recent reforms and new laws to prevent violence against women and girls, the complexity of the legal process, coupled with delays in investigation and case disposal and limited legal awareness and gender sensitivity among duty bearers, impede the effective implementation of these laws.²

1 The World Bank in Bangladesh, 2023 on <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/bangladesh/overview>

2 Ibid

Against this backdrop, the UN Women Bangladesh Country Office is actively engaged in supporting the government's commitments to implement the international normative standards on gender equality and women's human rights. Operating within the framework of its triple mandate—normative support, operational activities, and the United Nations system coordination—UN Women collaborates with a range of stakeholders in Bangladesh, including the government, civil society and women's organizations, the United Nations agencies, and development partners to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

COMBATTING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PROJECT

The Combatting Gender-Based Violence in Bangladesh (CGBV), a primary prevention project which was designed under the EVAW programme portfolio and aimed to address the root causes of gender-based violence (GBV) by prompting transformative changes in policy, institutions, and all layers of society to ensure sustainable reduction in VAW. The project implemented multi-sectoral and evidence-based prevention interventions to stop violence before it occurred and strongly emphasised research, advocacy, and knowledge management on VAW prevention. Implemented from 20 March 2018 to 30 June 2023, the CGBV project was funded with a Canadian dollar (CAD) 5 million (equivalent to USD 3.8 million) by the Government of Canada.

This final evaluation of the CGBV project was commissioned by the UN Women Bangladesh Country Office. This report provided an overview of the evaluation process, methodology, evaluation findings and recommendations.

Evaluation Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the evaluation was to serve as an accountability tool, providing a learning opportunity to inform the design of the future VAW prevention programmes undertaken by UN Women in Bangladesh, as well as other stakeholders involved in the CGBV project. The key objective of the evaluation was to assess the contribution of the CGBV project in preventing VAW through sustained and comprehensive actions at individual, family, institutional and societal levels. The specific objectives were to assess:

- The relevance and coherence of the CGBV project design, strategies, approaches, partnerships and UN Women's contribution to meet the needs of women in relation to the national priority.
- The effectiveness and organizational efficiency of the CGBV project in strengthening women's legal protections from VAW and changing social norms/attitudes/behaviours to prevent VAW.
- The efficiency of the management systems, human and financial resources, as well as approaches and partnerships in meeting project outcomes.
- The impact and sustainability of the achieved outcomes of the CGBV project.
- How the human rights approach and gender equality principles were integrated into the implementation of the CGBV.

The geographic scope of the evaluation was the three districts in Bangladesh—Bogura, Cumilla, and Patuakhali, where the CGBV project was implemented.

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation employed a theory-based gender-responsive approach. The reconstructed theory of change (TOC) served as the foundation for con-

tribution analysis. The evaluation questions were formulated using the criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD/DAC), comprising relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, gender equality and human rights. The TOC of the CGBV project was assessed with the evaluation questions.

Primary and secondary data were gathered from multiple stakeholders involved in the CGBV project. Using a participatory approach to engage relevant stakeholders in the evaluation, both rights holders and duty bearers were included and organized into four distinct categories, CGBV Project Management Team, CGBV Project Responsible Parties, CGBV Project Institutional Beneficiaries and CGBV Project Individual Beneficiaries. The evaluation consulted a total of 74 individuals (51 women and 23 men) across all four categories of stakeholders from the three project districts and Dhaka.

Certain limitations were present in the evaluation process, including a partially remote implementation mode of the evaluation management team and communication, as well as data collection challenges. Additionally, limited time and human resources allocated for data collection constricted the breadth and depth of data collection. Finally, the resignation of the International Team Leader and the onboarding of a new evaluator delayed the evaluation process.

The evaluation processes, products and ethical conduct were guided by the UN Women Evaluation Policy and the Ethical Guidelines for the United Nations evaluations.

Evaluation Findings

RELEVANCE

The evaluation respondents affirmed the relevance of the CGBV interventions, strategies, and approaches in meeting the needs of public and private institutions and communities, especially

women and girls, to address GBV throughout Bangladesh. This pervasive form of human rights violation hampers women's and girls' full participation in national development endeavours. The CGBV project strategies were informed by research, fostering a system-wide approach that evoked public discourse on eradicating societal impunity around GBV while promoting systematic changes within institutions to deter it.

The evaluation highlighted the emphasis on legal reform and promotion of favourable social norms to prevent VAW which was aligned with UN Women Strategic Note 2017-2021 and Bangladesh's 7th Five-Year Plan and continued to remain relevant for the 8th Five-Year Plan and current Strategic Note (2022-2026). However, the TOC outcomes are ambitious to achieve in a short timeframe with insufficient resources.

UN Women's partnerships with national and international organizations, as well as government institutions, proved to be highly relevant in contributing to local to national initiatives to prevent GBV. However, partnerships at the national level need to be expanded, and the CGBV project could have benefitted more from an active engagement with the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs at the national and local levels.

Although crisis response was not part of the project design and TOC, the relevance of the project became evident during the COVID-19 pandemic as it shed light on the increased levels of violence against women and girls and their restricted access to essential services in those conditions. Despite numerous challenges in timely implementation, the project adapted and reprogrammed activities to respond to the critical emerging needs due to the pandemic.

EFFECTIVENESS

The CGBV project's interventions effectively contributed to its intended outcomes, including strengthening legal protection for VAW survivors, shifting social norms at the community level

to prevent VAW, and expanding the knowledge base. It helped create an enabling environment to address sexual harassment by supporting the implementation of legal frameworks and enhancing duty bearers' understanding of addressing GBV at the local level. Nevertheless, varying degrees of success have been observed due to personal commitment to the cause of GBV prevention by government officials.

A range of knowledge products emerged from the CGBV project, effectively increasing the knowledge base for prevention programming. The knowledge products, including evidence-based research, and policy briefs on the drivers of VAW and consequences of violence, human interest stories, booklets, posters, and factsheets, data were developed and disseminated through various platforms. However, the evaluation evidence indicates limited systematic tracking methodology for monitoring the usage of these different knowledge products.

The project was effective in increasing the knowledge and capacity of women and girls on sexual harassment and contributed to policy advocacy to prevent VAW. Capacity-building efforts of CGBV challenged deep-rooted social norms by engaging men and boys in the community. Though male engagement served as a catalyst for social transformation, the project design did not have clear strategies outlining how their engagement would extend beyond the project interventions.

EFFICIENCY

Despite all the challenges, UN Women successfully managed and implemented the project. The project experienced initial delays as the Responsible Party (RP) was terminated within six months after inception. Moreover, contrary to the initial plan, the community approach models were tested in three districts simultaneously instead of one, making necessary adjustments to accommodate this shift. UN Women's CGBV Project Management Team managed these

issues with remarkable efficiency. However, due to limited specialised skills and knowledge of prevention programming in the country, the RPs staff faced challenges in implementing multiple prevention interventions at one go. The CGBV project's RPs also faced challenges with a lesser number of staff to implement multiple prevention approaches simultaneously.

The technical project partnership with MoWCA was another factor that compromised the efficiency of the project to some extent. Although coordination efforts were made at the national and local levels, collaboration between the field offices of the Responsible Parties and the local government for integrated services to prevent VAW was not satisfactory due to the lack of synergy between government and non-government service providers at the local level that was ultimately a barrier to efficiency.

IMPACT

The overall length of the project spanning five years was quite short to achieve long-term sustainable change. Preliminary findings confirmed promising progress for higher-level results from the accomplishments in the CGBV project. The achieved outcomes at the local level had undeniable implications for changing the social norms that had perpetuated GBV, impacting the lives of women and girls for the better. Despite limitations in scope and time, the results of the CGBV project's comprehensive approach, based on a social-ecological model of prevention, were evident in addressing VAW from policy to individual levels.

The law reform advocacy succeeded in abolishing discriminatory provisions in Section 155[4] of Evidence Act 1872, thereby improving the judicial process for rape survivors seeking justice. The support for implementing normative frameworks created an enabling environment (policy, mechanisms, capacity, and awareness) to prevent and respond to sexual harassment at the

workplaces and tertiary educational institutions engaged in the project. Among the 12 intervention villages from the three districts, there were specific cases denoting an increased community awareness of VAW as a human rights violation. However, deeply entrenched unfavourable social norms and the project's limited timeframe and resources posed difficulties in creating lasting change.

COHERENCE

The CGBV project reflected coherence with the National Women's Development Policy and the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women (NAP-VAW), both crucial to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, it was fully aligned with internationally recognized normative standards, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The CGBV project also complemented existing programmes by the United Nations agencies and other organizations in Bangladesh, contributing to gender equality and the prevention of VAW.

SUSTAINABILITY

Although the CGBV project lacked an explicitly articulated exit strategy and sustainability plan, it had programming elements that contributed to the sustainability of the results from its interventions at the individual, community, educational, and legislative levels. For example, the existence of a normative and policy framework was expected to sustain the gains achieved concerning preventing sexual harassment in private and public institutions. The project's collaborations with duty bearers also paved the way towards institutionalizing VAW prevention. While community mobilization had sparked individual-level change, further capacity development and institutionalization of accountability measures were needed to ensure lasting impact. Hence, scaling up initiatives is crucial for ensuring broader sustainability, which requires longer-term funding.

GENDER EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The CGBV project was designed based on a human rights framework to contribute to achieving gender equality. This approach was methodically followed in the design and implementation of all interventions of the project. It promoted the active participation of both women and men in the project, enhancing their capacities and involving them in decision-making in their communities, workplaces, and educational institutions to address the root causes of VAW. However, by restricting its definition of vulnerable groups, the project encountered limitations in capturing the experience of intersectionality.

Lessons Learned

The evaluation presented an opportunity to reflect on key lessons learned from the CGBV project for consideration in future programming. In terms of project design, a holistic approach that recognised diversity and intersectionality and engaged with men and boys in VAW prevention was instrumental in fostering transformative social change. There was a higher chance for success when both right holders and duty bearers were engaged, as this strategy directly promoted accountability to address the issue and ownership of the results. Encouraging meaningful participation from the local community ensured lasting influence and the adoption of improved attitudes. By utilizing evidence-based approaches, the CGBV project was able to captivate beneficiaries' interest and promote their involvement. The project reiterated the significance of a robust legislative framework for normative assurance in eliminating discriminatory practices against women and girls. Essential insights gleaned from the CGBV project highlighted securing commitment and action from higher authorities as a prerequisite for establishing preventive mechanisms in advance. Limited engagement with government institutions

and apex bodies from the design phase might jeopardize project achievements pertaining to the duty bearer's accountability for VAW prevention and the overall sustainability of the project.

Conclusions, and Recommendations

CONCLUSION 1

Relevance, Effectiveness and Coherence

In terms of relevance, the CGBV project addressed the needs of women and girls while concurrently catering to the institutional requirements. It substantially contributed to an enabling legislative and policy environment in line with global and national standards for GBV prevention and response. Despite pandemic-related challenges to timely implementation, the project shed light on the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women's lives and the increase in violence against women. The CGBV project partnered with reputable civil society organizations to implement the different components of the project. While the project benefited from UN Women's strategic partnership with the University Grants Commission and high-level district-based leadership of key institutions, it needed to engage other key government stakeholders at the national level as a sustainable effort. The project effectively involved men and boys in the social norm change process; however, a follow-up plan regarding their continued engagement beyond the project intervention was lacking.

Recommendations

1.1 Continue with a second phase of the CGBV project using the same holistic and integrated approach and socio-ecological prevention model to allow the manifestation of long-term results by scaling the project horizontally (i.e., replication of successful strategies in an expanded geographical scope) and vertically (policy, legislative reform, and institutional scaling).

1.2 Enhance the effectiveness of the second phase of the CGBV project by narrowing focus on the replication of the most successful strategies (e.g., engagement of men and boys) and community-based approaches tested in this project coupled with effective planning and follow-up mechanisms based on adaptive management principles it is currently employing.

CONCLUSION 2

Efficiency

UN Women employed adaptive management strategies to address the crisis of COVID-19 by reprogramming the project activities. The flexibility of project management was acknowledged by partners as an effective response to the pandemic. It also enabled and supported partners to learn from real-time experiences how to navigate the project in humanitarian crises. Striking a balance between limited financial and human resources and quality of outcomes was a challenge for the project. Inadequate coordination between local-level stakeholders compromised the efficiency of the CGBV project to some extent.

Recommendations

2.1 In the second phase of the CGBV project, address the challenges stemming from issues in communication, coordination and human resources that compromised efficiency while continuing with practices which increased the efficiency of the CGBV project, such as adaptive management and results-based monitoring.

CONCLUSION 3

Impact & Sustainability

Impact-level results through transformation in social norms require a longer timeframe. The CGBV project had triggered changes at individual, community, education, and legislative levels

within the project's limited scale, but broader sustainability required replication and upscaling. The potential impact stemmed from reformed discriminatory laws, a supportive environment for survivors to report harassment, and increased awareness of violence against women (VAW) as a human rights violation. Although the programming elements largely promoted sustainability, entrenched unfavourable social norms and the limited timeframe and resources challenged the potential of impact-level change; hence, the project needed an explicitly articulated exit strategy for the project's sustainability.

Recommendations

- 3.1 Secure longer-term support to replicate and upscale the results of the CGBV project. A longer duration is more likely to establish structures and behavioural changes that can sustain the project's results. The focus should be on institutionalizing the prevention of VAW through intensive efforts targeting apex bodies by strengthening the system and capacity.
- 3.2 Ensure the second phase of the project has a sustainability and exit plan that includes strategies to transfer the ownership of results to relevant stakeholders with milestones to assess the efficacy of the exit plan. These strategies, such as capacity development, gender-responsive budgeting, collaboration with other development partners to advance social change synergistically, etc. should be embedded within the results framework to ensure implementation.

CONCLUSION 4

Gender Equality and Human Rights

Designed with a human rights framework in mind, the CGBV project aimed to promote gender equality and prevent GBV through laws, policy changes, institutional strengthening and transforming social norms. This objective was systematically pursued through a holistic approach to addressing VAW from policy to individual levels. The project design addressed the root causes of GBV, adopted a comprehensive system approach to prevent VAW and supported the development of the capacity of duty bearers and right holders to prevent VAW and ensure gender equality. The project actively involved both men and women, enhancing their capabilities to participate as change agents to affect a shift in perceptions and attitudes. The project focused on legal reform to protect rape plaintiffs and created an enabling environment for survivors of GBV to report sexual harassment.

Recommendations

- 4.1 Strengthen the integration of gender equality and human rights-based approach in the project strategy and enhance inclusivity with intersectional considerations in line with the "leave no one behind" commitment of the organization. When needed, address the capacity gaps of partners to apply these principles in all phases of the project.

**UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION
DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY
AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. A
GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND
GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED TO
ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON MEETING
THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.**

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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