

# GIRLS ADVOCACY ALLIANCE (GAA) GAA **SUCCESS STORY** BOOKLET





GIRLS ADVOCACY ALLIANCE (GAA)

# GAA **SUCCESS** **STORY** BOOKLET



**PUBLISHED BY**

Terre des Hommes Netherlands, Bangladesh Country Office

**EDITED BY**

Mahmudul Kabir

**PUBLICATION**

December 2020

**DESIGN & PRINT**

PATHWAY / [www.pathway.com.bd](http://www.pathway.com.bd)

“GAA Success Story Booklet” is published in Bangladesh for the first time. No part of this report may be reproduced or transmitted in any form, by any means (electronic, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written permission of the publisher.

© Terre des Hommes Netherlands





## PREFACE

---

“GAA Success Story Booklet” is a compilation of six success stories – from a long list of successes – that emerged through successful implementation of Girls Advocacy Alliance (GAA) in Bangladesh. GAA – a regional program – is an alliance of the four organisations: Plan International Nederland, Terre des Hommes (TdH) Netherlands, Defence for Children – ECPAT Netherlands (DCI-ECPAT) and Global March. The programme has been implemented under the Dialogue and Dissent (D&D) policy framework of and in strategic partnership with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA).

The goal of the GAA project is “By 2030, Girls and Young women in Bangladesh are living in an enabling environment, free from gender-based violence and economic exclusion.” GAA Bangladesh intends to address gender based violence – in the form of child trafficking, sexual abuse and exploitation, child marriage – which are pervasive as the inception document of the project says. In Bangladesh, the project has been implemented by TdH Netherlands and Plan International Bangladesh from the period 2016 – 2020.

TdH NL has worked on child trafficking and online sexual abuse and exploitation issues with two Consortiums led by INCIDIN Bangladesh and Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) respectively, pursuing the outcomes stated in the Bangladesh Theory of Change. On child trafficking, while INCIDIN has partnered with Nari Maitree, Community Participation and Development (CPD), BNWLA, SEEP and Rights Jessore, ASK has worked with Agrogoti Sangstha, ACD and Mukti Cox’s Bazar on online sexual abuse and exploitation issues.

All the stories presented here show policy and or practice level changes aligned with a pathway of changes involving community, government, civil society and private sector (internet service providers). **Story 1** describes developing and introducing a “Handbook of Safe Internet Use” in 100 secondary schools. Using the handbook, community, civil society and local level institutions collaboratively contributed to an online child safety environment for the children. **Story 2** states how the National Curricula and Textbook Board is going to promote child safety issues by incorporating online safety issues in the secondary curricula. A significant number of internet service providers become sensitized on child safety internet services and are jointly working with ASK Consortium to sensitize their fellow providers. The association of the service providers is ready to adopt a code of conduct to provide safe internet for the children monitored by the Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC). **Story 3** depicts a pen-picture of such behaviour change.

**Story 4** delineates a different National Plan of Action on Human Trafficking 2018-2022 – as compared to its predecessors – institutionalizing child and youth participation and being implemented effectively to combat child trafficking. Besides, the National Human Rights Commission, Bangladesh – a guardian institution of the state – in association with a civil society organization, is promoting child rights and combating human and child trafficking. It has developed a strategic partnership with INCIDIN Bangladesh to carry this forward. **Story 5** sheds light on that. **Story 6** discusses how the concerned government actors and the judiciary have taken proactive measures by establishing a long-demanded special tribunal to prosecute trafficking cases in the backdrop of log-jam in court cases.



In terms of achievement, these are not all there is. There are more, despite having been affected by COVID 19. To overcome the challenges of the global pandemic, the project has re-strategized its implementation strategy to mitigate the problems to the extent possible. **Story 7** presents the impact of COVID 19. It is to mention that on the ground of child protection, all of the names of the children and their parents have been changed.

In achieving all these far-reaching and eye-catching achievements, Girls Advocacy Alliance has utilized a number of lobby advocacy strategies that include: lobby; awareness campaigning; mobilization and activism; linking and networking; research; and capacity development. Besides, the booklet has also documented important lesson learned emerged through project implementation. In conclusion, it is evident that GAA Bangladesh has made significant strategic contributions in addressing gender based violence. However, to achieve the milestones set out in the sustainable development goals, collaborative efforts and engagement of relevant stakeholders are of paramount important in eliminating gender based violence and changing social norms in relation to gender.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

---

Terre des Hommes Netherlands would like to extend its sincerest gratitude to the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the support it provided to promote the rights of children, girls and young women in Bangladesh. It also extends the greatest appreciation to the organizations including INCIDIN Bangladesh and Ain o Salish Kendra who instrumentalize 2 projects for the last 5 years. TdH NL specially acknowledges the contribution of the children, community members, local institutions, local administration at the subnational level and government officials, Internet Service Providers Association of Bangladesh, policy makers, and members of the Parliament for the support they provided in this project. Further, TdH NL also likes to extend its heartiest thanks to the representatives of the civil society, private sector and government who provided useful information in conducting the study. Furthermore, TdH NL thanks the research team, particularly its lead Ms. Sanaiyya Ansari, for sincere work and efforts.

**Mahmudul Kabir**  
*Country Director*  
*Terre des Hommes Netherlands*



## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

---

<b>ASK</b>	Ain o Salish Kendra
<b>ATSEC</b>	Action against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children
<b>BBS</b>	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
<b>BTRC</b>	Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission
<b>CoC</b>	Code of Conduct
<b>CCOAB</b>	Cyber Café Owners Association of Bangladesh
<b>CTC</b>	Counter Trafficking Committee
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>CRDF</b>	Child Rights Defenders' Forum
<b>DSHE</b>	Directorate of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education
<b>GAA</b>	Girls Advocacy Alliance
<b>GBV</b>	Gender Based Violence
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technology
<b>ISP</b>	Internet Service Providers
<b>ISPAB</b>	Internet Service Providers Association of Bangladesh
<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>MoHA</b>	Ministry of Home Affairs
<b>MoU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>MP</b>	Member of Parliament
<b>NACG</b>	National Action and Coordination Group
<b>NCTB</b>	National Curricula and Textbook Board
<b>NCCC</b>	National Curricula Coordination Committee
<b>NHRC</b>	National Human Rights Commission
<b>NHRCB</b>	National Human Rights Commission Bangladesh
<b>PCTSCN</b>	Prevention of Child Trafficking Through Strengthening Community and Networking
<b>SAIEVAC</b>	South Asian Initiatives to Ending Violence Against Children
<b>SECOTT</b>	Sexual Exploitation of Children Online and Travel and Tourism
<b>TdH NL</b>	Terre des Hommes Netherlands
<b>ToC</b>	Theory of Change



## TABLE OF CONTENT

---

Preface	v
Acknowledgement	vi
Abbreviations and Acronyms	vii
Chapter 1: Success Stories	1-32
1.1 Handbook on Safe Internet Use: A Lighthouse for Child Protection	2
1.2 Safe Internet Use: A Curricula Level Solution	9
1.3 Child-friendly internet: a Code of Conduct for Internet Service Providers	14
1.4 National Plan of Action on Human Trafficking 2018- 2022: With a Difference	18
1.5 A Guardian Institution: Streamlines Child Protection	22
1.6 Prosecution of Human Trafficking Cases: Heralding a New Era	27
1.7 Global Pandemic: A Deterrence	31
Chapter 2: Lesson learned	33-35



# CHAPTER 1



## 1.1 HANDBOOK ON SAFE INTERNET USE: A LIGHTHOUSE FOR CHILD PROTECTION

### One.

Hosne Ara, a resident of Lalmatia in Dhaka, had been noticing a change in the behavior of her only son Bappi (15) for some days. The ninth Grader preferred books all day long and loved to play cricket with friends on the street in front of the house rather than play computer games, listened to music in his spare time, gossiped with his father on various topics. But now that boy did not want to leave his room for a long time. One day when Hosne Ara tried to enter his room in need, she saw the door locked from the inner side. That should not be. There can be no situation like closing the door from inside. She was upset and expressed her disappointment to her son as much as possible and told the boy never to lock the door this way. Bappi did not say anything, shook his head affirmatively, and went to his room. But he did not keep his word. She found the door again locked from inside! Bappi was a very obedient boy, he never disobeyed his parents or disrespected them. But he did it again even after promising his mother not to do it!

Hosne Ara was surprised to see the report card of Bappi's half-yearly examination and found that he had dropped straight from A-plus to A-minus, not even an A-grade! It was the first time in nine years that the first boy in the class became the eighth! If this trend continued, his Secondary School Certificate (SSC) result would be horrible, thought Hosne Ara. She could not manage to understand what happened to such a talented boy suddenly. She was wondering by whom Bappi was influenced and began to spoil himself. But how could she blame someone else when the boy does not go out of the house at all?



### Two.

Sharmin Sumi, a tenth Grader at a Government Girls High School of Rajshahi, was one of the most beautiful girls, not only in her class but also in the entire school. She was good at reading, excelled at dancing, singing, and even recitation. So many boys were wandering behind Sumi in many ways. But Sumi did not notice anyone. The darling daughter of the parents used to go to the mother first and tell her about any problem, then the father. Even if someone gave a love letter, she did not open it herself, rather handed it directly to her mother. Sumi's father Saeed Hasan and mother Rasheda Begum were immensely proud of their daughter. At this age, it was rare for a girl to be so alert and so focused. Luckily, they had become the parents of such a girl.





But one day Rasheda was shocked to see her daughter. She woke up in the morning as usual and went to her daughter's room to wake her up. But she saw that the girl was awake for the whole night! What happened to her? Why did she stay up all night? And what did she look like? Black shade fell under her eyes in one night, and she looked like a ravenous crow with unkempt hair. She must have cried a lot at night, her red eyes indicated. Rasheda panicked. She froze in fear of the unknown! As soon as she tried to step out to call Saeed, Sumi stopped her. She almost whispered in a scary voice, "Don't say anything to Dad, he can't stand it. Dad will kill me!"

Although the stories of Bappi and Sumi are different, they are woven in the same thread. Talented students like Bappi started getting addicted to watching pornographic movies on the internet. He used to watch these videos with the door closed all the time. It has affected his studies, his behavior, and his normal life. Since it is forbidden to see such pictures, he is always obsessed with a criminal mindset. With the door of the room locked from the inside, he watches movies that are 'for adults only,' which distracted him from all his other activities. That affected his studies and was reflected in his exam result.

Sumi, on the other hand, suddenly fell in love with a man online whom she had never met face to face, about whom she knew nothing about. She had various conversations with him on Messenger, Emo, Viber. She wrote many things at a young age that she should not have written.

She also took part in singing or reciting poems, and sending pictures of herself. The picture was sometimes a little too bold! What she did, she did out of emotion. She was carried away by the intelligence and sense of humor of the man on the other side, and sometimes his ability to appreciate or flirt. As a result, she loved him and believed him. But suddenly one day she found out that the man on the other side was not as she thought he was, but a middle-aged or old man with a wife and children, a child even older than her! Sumi was struck in the head by a thunderbolt. She wanted to get out of this relationship. She wanted to cut off all communication with him. And then that cheater on the other side started blackmailing her. He had pictures of Sumi, he had videos. With those pictures and videos, he could easily forge and make offensive videos, which, if published online, will humiliate Sumi's self-esteem. The fraudster sent her a sample of the offensive content last night. Seeing that, Sumi was sleepless all night! What would she do now? How would she show her face to anyone? How could she make such a big mistake? Should Sumi commit suicide?

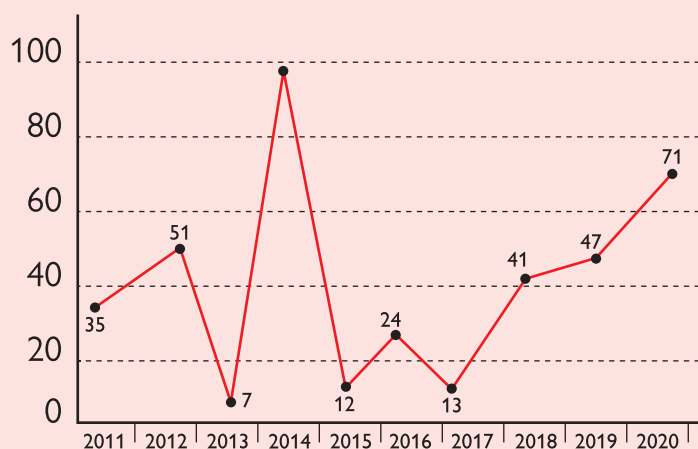
In each of the above cases, and many other cases not mentioned here, the main reason behind the involvement of young, underage children in various inappropriate, unjust, and even criminal activities through the internet is due to unconsciousness, inexperience, ignorance – in a word, lack of awareness. Children and teenagers may not know about the evils of using unsafe internet. The internet is as much a blessing as it is a curse today - if it cannot be used properly. Parents also have a lack of awareness.

According to Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), up to October 2020, about 110.762 million people in Bangladesh are using the internet, among them, 102.106 million are availing it through mobile phones.



## ONLINE CHILDREN SEXUAL ABUSED AND EXPLOITED

2011 = 35 People  
 2012 = 51 People  
 2013 = 7 People  
 2014 = 98 People  
 2015 = 12 People  
 2016 = 24 People  
 2017 = 13 People  
 2018 = 41 People  
 2019 = 47 People  
 2020 = 71 People



*In 2020*, out of 71 cases, 31 were under 18, 12 were over 18 and 28 age were not mentioned.

Source: ASK Child Rights Unit

Graph 1: An increased projection of online sexual abuse and exploitation.

As we know that nearly half of our total population belongs to the child category (age-group of below 18 years), we can assume that half of these internet users may be under-aged. We do not have the actual statistics of these users, but the figure is mammoth, no doubt. And it is a matter of concern that, according to a recent survey conducted by Plan International, 73%<sup>1</sup> of adolescents are a victim of online sexual abuse and exploitation. These young, adolescents and under-aged people are very interactive on social media. They are highly active on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, WhatsApp, Imo, and other social media platforms.



The graph shows, from 2011 to 2020, a total of 399 people, including 98 children, were abused on the online platform, as reported by ASK. It very clearly delineates that online sexual abuse and exploitation has increased tremendously in recent years.

As this burning issue has been growing day by day, all the concerned people are finding a way out to fix it. One misconception is often found in common, that is blocking some unwanted sites providing adult or harmful contents can be a solution to make the internet safe for them. However, it is not about few or more sites to be reported as unsafe. In a sense, the entire internet domain is unsafe if its users are not aware of its safe usage.

From that point of view, to make aware and sensitize all concerned people including parents and guardians, community people, and teachers so that their presence and existence in the cyber domain remains safe and secured, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) Consortium has developed a Handbook on Safe Internet Use in

1 [https://plancanada.ca/file/planv4\\_files/biaag/SOTWGR2020-CommsReport-EN.pdf](https://plancanada.ca/file/planv4_files/biaag/SOTWGR2020-CommsReport-EN.pdf)

collaboration with different stakeholders. The handbook is an outcome of the Girls Advocacy Alliance (GAA) project, which is a 5-year joint effort (2016-2020) of four international organizations (Plan Nederland, Terre des Hommes Netherlands, Defense for Children-ECPAT Netherlands, and Global March) funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The goal of the GAA project is “By 2030, Girls and Young women in Bangladesh are living in an enabling environment, free from Gender-Based Violence and Economic Exclusion.” In Bangladesh, Plan International Bangladesh and Terre des Hommes Netherlands (TdH NL) are jointly implementing the project. GAA Bangladesh hopes to initiate lasting changes in society that will benefit girls and young women by working with four key actors: government; private sector; civil society organizations; and community leaders.

In GAA Project, TdH Netherlands Bangladesh has been implementing two themes: Online Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation; and Child

Trafficking. A Consortium of partners led by ASK in partnership with the ACD Rajshahi and Agrogoti Sangstha, Mukti Cox's Bazar has been implementing the project called “Sexual Exploitation of Children Online and Travel and Tourism (SECOTT).”

Ambica Roy, the Coordinator of the Child Rights Unit of ASK urged the necessity of the project, “We cannot stop our children from using the internet as it has become a part of their lives. Nowadays even their education has been transformed into internet-based distant learning. How can we stop them and why? Rather, we should make them aware of the dangers of unsafe use of the internet and prepare them to be safe and secure. That is why the change was so important considering the targeted 2020 outcomes and aligned with the GAA Theory of Change.”

The handbook was developed following a systematic process which includes conducting a baseline survey for the findings from which



Guideline to use Handbook on Safe Internet Use



the need for a tool for awareness-raising was detected. As a result, the issues for preparing documents were identified and the write-up of the contents was prepared and discussed with the relevant technical experts. Finally, with a proper design and illustration of the output, the printing process was conducted for the final publication of the handbook.

Topics covered in the handbook include: several case studies; typologies of sexual abuse and online child abuse and their types, and medium; nature and extent of abuse and exploitation; social taboos; which kind of people sexually abuse children online and how; types of cheating and sexual abuse using social media; ways to protect from online sexual abuse, etc. Besides, various technical aspects, such as how IP works, filtering and blocking and how they work, encryption, hash, photo DNA, cloud computing, splash pages, etc. are also described in user-friendly ways. Furthermore, the handbook discusses how parents and guardians should have a relationship with their children, how they should play a positive role in monitoring their children. Children and adolescents have been

given ideas about the provisions in national law on online sexual abuse. Finally, the names and places of organizations they may visit to receive support are also included.

To reach the targeted group of this handbook, that is the children as well as young and adolescent people under 18 years of age, the main strategy was introducing it in the secondary schools. Several activities had been implemented from 2016 to 2020 to make this program a success. Some of these activities were: organizing Child Rights Defenders Forum (CRDF) members; with parents; conducting a series of workshops with young and adolescents on safe internet using and the handbook; disseminating 2000 copies of the handbook among the students of 28 schools; organizing briefing meetings with School Managing Committees, parents, etc.

On the other hand, Agrogoti Sangstha and ACD formed and organized CRDFs to train them on the promotion of safe internet usage so that they disseminated their messages with their fellow children. Specific activities are:

- 12 briefing meetings with the School Managing Committee members and teachers from 2016 to 2017;
- 20 meetings with parents and 90 workshops with young and adolescents on safe internet use from 2016 to 2020;
- ASK conducted a series of meetings jointly with the ICT Division to create mass awareness on the handbook among the wider community;
- Community radio programs with Nalta Radio Station and Padma Radio in Satkhira and Rajshahi to create awareness among the wider community on Safe Internet Use;
- Lobby and advocacy with the education department officials at upazila and district level drawing their support to introduce the handbook in the secondary schools in Cox's Bazar, Satkhira and Rajshahi from 2018 – 2019;
- ASK Consortium conducted a number of sessions with 9 organizations promoting children with disabilities to make aware their stakeholders preventing and protecting children from online sexual abuse and exploitation. They conducted 8 training sessions on “Handbook on Safe Internet Use” with their targeted audiences in Dhaka in 2020.





Mohammad Rafiqul Islam an Education Technology Expert, and the Team Leader of the Education and Life Skill Program of the ICT Division under the a2i program of the government, worked with this project very closely and participated in different meetings, policymaking sessions. Besides, he was involved in some other activities of the a2i programs regarding the handbook issues which include publishing the handbook through “Kishore Batayan” of the a2i program of ICT division; taking over the dissemination of the handbook for the children and adolescents through various sensitization programs.

“The handbook should be treated as a major success of the project as it has reached and been shared among a huge number of children below 18 years of age and guided them about how to use the internet safely and securely, and how to appear safely in the social media platforms. This was the biggest success of the project that it could make a behavioral change practice of its target group.”

*-Mohammad Rafiqul Islam*



Consultation meeting with the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education regarding the content of the handbook

As a result, the handbook was introduced in 20 schools by 2018 in Dhaka, Rajshahi, and Satkhira which by 2020 rose to 100 schools. In Satkhira, the District Education Office wrote a letter to 62 schools to introduce the handbook in the secondary schools. Many of them responded accordingly, creating a domain of online child protection.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Fahmida Shimul, Assistant Teacher, Lalmatia Girls' High School, who usually teaches Bangla and Sociology in Junior and Secondary level classes, expressed her opinion about the handbook as well as the project, “From my personal experience, sexual abuse and harassments were happening directly and physically in the past days; but at present,



virtual harassment added a new problem in addition to those. The girls were safe earlier, but today, even our boys are not, as the type of abuse and exploitation has changed in many ways. Even we as adult persons sometimes face harassment by different kinds of people and circumstances, then what could be done with the under-aged, innocent children? Considering all these circumstances, I appreciate the project and welcome the handbook on safe internet use they have published. At least, now we have a minimum tool to give in our children's hands. We have something to guide them."

This handbook very precisely depicted the extent, tools, and means of online child sexual abuse and exploitation and came up with very handy tools to combat a technology-related menace. The handbook has proved very demanding and effective as it is related to a very critical development issue of the country and has been playing a vital role in raising awareness among the teachers, School Managing Committee members, parents and community people, journalist, children and adolescents regarding the safe use of internet through sharing an evidence-based message. Internet Service Providers Association of Bangladesh (ISPAB) have highly appreciated the messages of the handbook. Realizing the usefulness of the handbook, 500 internet service providers across the country have posted the soft copy of the handbook on their websites.

Making aware and sensitized of all relevant stakeholders, the information provided in the handbook significantly contributed to protecting children from online abuse and exploitation. Engagement of parents, community, local institutions, and local level duty bearers in the process have created protective environments for children.

Children – around 46% of the total population - are the future citizens of our country. Without taking appropriate measures, Bangladesh has made a digital booming. Thus, making aware and sensitizing all relevant stakeholders, the "Handbook on Safe Internet Use" has contributed in protecting and preventing children from online abuse and exploitation. The "Handbook on Safe Internet Use" has, therefore, emerged as a Lighthouse for Child Protection.





## 1.2 SAFE INTERNET USE: A CURRICULA LEVEL SOLUTION

Sharifa Khatun is 17 years old and lives in Sadar upazila of Satkhira district. In 2019, she was admitted in class XI in Satkhira Government Technical School and College. Her parents bought her an Android mobile phone as per her demand. Although she did not know the use of this smartphone well, her friends helped her learn to use it. Gradually, it became an addiction for her. She opened her Facebook and Messenger accounts at the end of November 2019, with the help of a friend named Russell (pseudonym) of the same area. Russell was two years older than Sharifa and was proficient in technological matters. He was studying in Honors first year and was working part-time at a mobile phone shop. Hence, Sharifa had learned very well how to operate Facebook, Messenger, etc. by that time and didn't need to learn from Russell about the titbits anymore. This way, a distance was created between them. Although

she did not notice at all since her Facebook and Messenger accounts were opened by Russell, he had the passwords of those two accounts, which Sharifa did not change.

One day Russell suddenly offered love to Sharifa and she refused him. Russell began to blackmail her. Having Sharifa's account password, he could easily get her personal information, chatting history, etc., and keep them with screenshots. Russell even had personal photos of Sharifa. By manipulating those photos, he made some dirty pictures of her and threatened to humiliate her by spreading them on Facebook.

If this story is taken as an example, it can be seen that such an image exists in many places in Bangladesh. The trend of online sexual abuse and exploitation has increased, which is a new arena of Gender-Based Violence (GBV).





Opinion sharing meeting with the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE)

According to the USA National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), Bangladesh is the fourth rank<sup>2</sup> in the world considering the online child abuse and exploitation during the COVID 19 pandemic. In 2016, a Telenor study showed 49%<sup>3</sup> of school students are the victims of cyberbullying. In most cases, the internet is being used through mobile phones and controlled by unfamiliar people who do not know much about technology. That is why the level of damage caused by the unsafe use of the internet has been increasing in recent times.

This calls for awareness and knowledge on safe internet use. Policy level interventions are thought to be appropriate as it involves millions of children and adolescents' safety and security across the country. From that point of view, besides making aware and sensitizing students, teachers, parents and guardians, ASK Consortium has made constructive engagement with the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) and the relevant actors of the government including Ministry of Education, ICT Division and Directorate of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education (DSHE), Government of Bangladesh.

As the intervention of the project, ASK Consortium has developed a guideline on safe internet use in collaboration with different stakeholders. It is an outcome of the Girls Advocacy Alliance (GAA) project, which is a 5-year joint effort (2016-2020) of four international organizations (Plan Nederland, Terre des Hommes Netherlands, Defense for Children-ECPAT Netherlands, and Global March) funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. GAA Bangladesh hopes to initiate lasting changes in society that will benefit girls and young women by working with four key actors: government; private sector; civil society organizations; and community leaders.

2 <https://www.amadershomoy.com/bn/2020/04/20/1125447.html>

3 <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/49pc-children-encounter-cyber-bullying-351262>





Following the implementation process of the project, several advocacy events were undertaken by ASK, which includes a series of consultation meetings with the NCTB to create demand for guidelines on Safe Internet Use as well as the inclusion of some content in the NCTB curriculum from the guideline the Consortium has developed.

At the initial stage, ASK joined a meeting (18 September 2018) organized by the Ministry of Education (MoE) to urge the necessity of a guideline on Safe Internet Use and submitted 4 important contents for inclusion in the ICT subject through the revision of the curriculum.

Further, ASK organized (3 December 2019) an opinion sharing meeting with the DSHE to finalize the contents of the guideline to introduce them in the secondary level national curriculum.

Some of the specific events are:

- Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) organized a dialogue on 12 February 2019 NCTB at its Office. Analyzing points put forward by ASK, the full body of NCTB including its Chair, agreed in principle to accept the issues;
- On 19 May 2019, at CIRDAP Auditorium, ASK organized a dialogue involving NCTB, government officials, educationist, civil society;
- On 3 September 2020, ASK conducted an online roundtable in collaboration with Daily newspaper Dainik Samakal to create the demand for safe internet use;
- On 29 August 2020, ASK jointly conducted an online consultation meeting in collaboration with a2i program, ICT Division on safe internet use.



Opinion sharing meeting with the NCTB





Opinion sharing meeting with the NCTB at NCTB Office on 12 February 2019

As the program had been going on its way, meanwhile the NCTB decided to revise its curriculum as a regular process. This was an opportunity to incorporate the guideline or significant parts of it in the revised curriculum. And an initial decision had been made by the NCTB that in the revised curriculum of the year 2022, a significant part of this guideline would be considered. This is the biggest success of the project.

Ambica Roy, the Coordinator of the Child Rights Unit of ASK, spoke about the process of incorporating the guideline in the national curriculum, “Initially, the NCTB were not aware of the objective of the project, but as soon as they were aware, they became supportive, helpful, and effective to implement the project. In most of the cases, they were even taking the lead to organize different meetings, training sessions and workshops, idea sharing sessions, and other activities. They were providing meeting venues, inviting the participants from

different bodies, sometimes bearing and/or sharing other costs as well. Without their supportive role, none of the success could be achieved yet. After collaborating with these bodies, the project got a smooth way forward to move on and reach the students.”

Ambica Roy also narrated “with invitation from NCCCC, on 18 November 2020, ASK in collaboration with CAMPE - a well-known organization promoting education in Bangladesh - submitted the content to be added in the curricula which has been highly appreciated by the committee members.

Knowing about the affirmative decision of incorporating topics from the guideline to the upcoming secondary curriculum, Mrs. Fahmida Shimul, a CSO member and teacher of Lalmatia Girls’ High School, expressed her satisfaction, “Even we, the adults, the educated guardians sometimes do wrong things on the internet out of ignorance. Sometimes we feel shy to



share our mistakes, feel scared to ask help from anybody, if it becomes a subject of humiliation. So goes with our children. Now as these topics are being included in national curriculum, they become a must-read for all the students. They'll be careful, safe, and secure. This will create a better, inclusive environment both online and offline."

A huge prospect is created as the government declared an integrated curriculum to be introduced in the secondary level, in which all the subjects are compulsory for every student, while some of the subjects including ICT was

an optional one in the previous curriculum. That means, once the guideline or its significant contents are included in the ICT or Digital Literacy subject of the new curriculum, all the students will have to study it as a compulsory subject. This way, an enormous opportunity is opened up to reach every student of the country in the secondary level and sensitize them about safe internet use. Incorporating Digital Literacy in secondary level curricula will contribute to safe access to the internet to millions of children, adolescents and young people in Bangladesh.

"We would like to incorporate a good deal of topics taken from the guideline developed by the ASK Consortium. Because we think not only the IT knowledge, students should know about safety and security issues, precautions and utilize the maximum benefit from it without being harmed. As a process, we kept this published in the newspaper as well as shown on our website from 5 to 20 November 2020 to take opinion from the stakeholders and the interested citizens. ASK also submitted their proposition and those are incorporated as well. And now it is at the stage of getting the final approval of the National Curriculum Coordination Committee (NCCC). However, the printing of the curricula will be done in 2021 as per decision of the government due to the global crisis of COVID 19. The revised curricula will be effective from 1 January 2022."

—*Professor Md. Moshuazzaman*  
Main Member Curriculum, NCTB





### 1.3 CHILD-FRIENDLY INTERNET: A CODE OF CONDUCT FOR INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDERS

In recent years, Bangladesh has made an internet boom by rapidly expanding its connectivity pursuing its commitment to Digital Bangladesh. The slogan of Digital Bangladesh attracts millions of children, adolescents, young men, and women who, for valid reasons, access the internet.

Going by a few statistics: in the period between 2016 to September 2020, internet use has increased from 20% to 67% and cell phone use rose from 73% to 98% in the population of legal age (Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission). 93% of users access the internet through cell phones.

In these days of COVID 19, the internet proved to be an effective means of daily life including office work, studying and distance learning. The only problem is that proliferation has taken place without appropriate protective measures, particularly for the children and adolescents vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

The result of such unmonitored proliferation of the internet is as horrific as devastating. A recent survey conducted by Plan International says, 73%<sup>4</sup> of adolescents are the victim of online sexual abuse and exploitation. A Telenor study<sup>5</sup>, conducted in 2016, says that 49% of

school students in Bangladesh are the victim of cyberbullying.

Being the first generation of users, many of the children are unaware of its negative impacts. So goes with their parents and caregivers. Therefore, various forms of abuse and exploitation due to lack of awareness using the internet have become a matter of grave concern.



Laws and policies related online sexual exploitation

At present, there are 4 laws and policies (the ICT Act 2006, the Pornography Control Act 2012 and the Digital Security Act 2018 and the Broadband Policy 2009) to deal with online

4 [https://plancanada.ca/file/planv4\\_files/biaag/SOTWGR2020-CommsReport-EN.pdf](https://plancanada.ca/file/planv4_files/biaag/SOTWGR2020-CommsReport-EN.pdf)

5 <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/49pc-children-encounter-cyber-bullying-351262>







Dialogue session with the Internet Service Providers' Association of Bangladesh (ISPAB)

sexual exploitations of children. However, none of those have any specific provision on the issue of online child sexual exploitation. As all internet service providers (ISPs) of Bangladesh need to sign a service contract with the BTRC to provide internet services, ASK's project under GAA called "Sexual Exploitation of Children Online and Travel and Tourism (SECOTT)" started working with ISPs to develop child-friendly safe internet services.

At the onset, the ASK Consortium has conducted a legal analysis of the existing laws and policies. The findings of the analysis have been shared with different level stakeholders such as local administration, local government, community people, youth group members, theater group members, CSOs and adolescents. Apart from that, ASK Consortium partners – Agrogoti Sangstha, ACD and Mukti Cox's Bazar – conducted a series of meetings with

the representatives of the proprietors of the broadband connections shops, representatives of the service centers, mini shops for mobile phone's balance top-up and movie download at the local level in Satkhira, Rajshahi and Cox's Bazar.

With inputs from this sharing meeting, a renowned IT expert developed a draft Code of Conduct for the private sector to provide child friendly internet services.

Following this, the Consortium has also organized a sharing meeting for reviewing the Code of Conduct with the Cyber Cafe Owners' Association of Bangladesh (CCOAB) and the Internet Service Providers' Association of Bangladesh (ISPAB). As a result, the president and secretary of CCOAB and chairman of ISPAB showed their eagerness to work jointly and attended a meeting.





Dialogue session with the ICT Division and BTRC on code of conduct

The specific advocacy actions and events include:

- 12 briefing meetings were organized with the private sectors on the safe internet use of children and reviewing the existing Code of Conduct;
- 12 meetings were also held with different internet service providing organizations and telecommunications in the district of Dhaka, Cox's Bazar, Satkhira, and Rajshahi;
- On 18 December 2018, a dialogue session was organized involving the Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC) and CCOAB and the ISPs;
- On 18 April 2019, another dialogue session entitled "Protecting and Preventing Online Sexual Exploitation of Children and Cyber Security: Rights & Responsibility of the Internet Service Providers" was held with the ISPAB in the ISPAB Office in Dhaka;
- On 10 July 2019, another dialogue session was organized with the participation of the higher-level officials of different government bodies including the ICT Division, the BTRC etc. The Minister, Post and Telecommunication, Government of Bangladesh, was present there.

Speaking about the Code of Conduct, Mr. Emdadul Haque, General Secretary, Internet Service Providers Association of Bangladesh (ISPAB) said, "We usually take part in various activities with the BTRC at different times to prevent pornography and provide safe internet. We are committed to the implementation of the Code of Conduct. ASK has been working with an important national issue that is playing an effective role in protecting our young generation from being endangered. And we are happy to be a part of this work. In fact, we both are working to protect our children from online abuse and exploitation."

Two glaring examples of collaboration:

By June 2020, around 500 members of the ISPAB posted the updated soft version of the "Handbook on Safe Internet Use" developed and produced by the GAA project.



In September 2020, the ASK Consortium and the ISPAB jointly developed and the ISPAB distributed 6000 copies of a poster titled “Use of Safe Internet - the Rights of the Girl Child”.

Due to government restriction related COVID 19, BTRC was available for engaging with the civil society from 1 September and onward.

Therefore, on 27 October 2020, the BTRC organized a virtual meeting with ASK to adopt the Code of Conduct (CoC) for the ISPs. In the meeting, the Chair of BTRC observed that BTRC considers the Code of Conduct useful. However, approving this needs permission from the Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications & Information Technology.

The general secretary Internet Service Providers’ Association of Bangladesh confirmed, “Though not officially approved, we use the Codes of Conduct in our work such as subscription form, monthly bill-slips, etc. to make the customers aware about the issues, so that they may think twice before violating any of the codes. We will happily sign the Code of Conduct once Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission invites us to do so.”

“ASK gave us a presentation where high-ranking officials including our chairman were present. We have gotten their suggestions. Discussing this with our in-house meetings, we sent the proposal to the ministry. I am informally informed that the proposal is approved by the Ministry.”

**Mr. Azizur Rahman**

Director, Systems, Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory  
Commission





## 1.4 NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING 2018 - 2022: WITH A DIFFERENCE

Rehana Khatun, 13, lived in Satkhira Sadar Upazila under Satkhira district. Rehana came from an extremely poor family. She used to go to school like other children her age. The sixth-grade student dreamed of finishing her studies and standing on her own feet. She would support her poor father, eliminate their poverty, become self-reliant, and alleviate the suffering of herself and the people around her. But Rehana could no longer move towards her dreams. Before that, a chain fell on the girl's hand. In reality, an invisible chain was tied to her two hands from birth in the societal context of Bangladesh which is made of poverty, illiteracy, short-sightedness and recklessness.

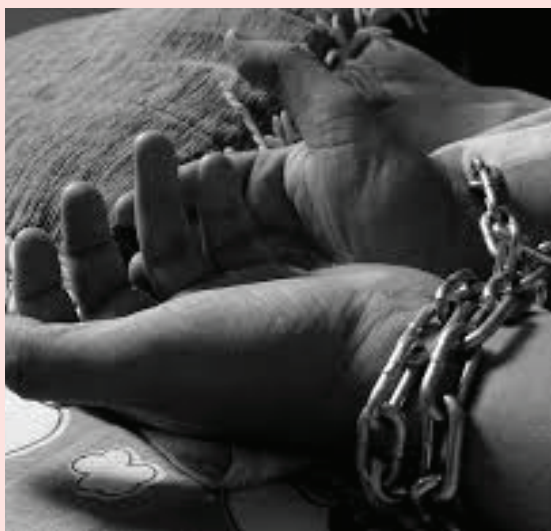


Photo credit: elsa.no

Satkhira is one of the major trafficking passages to India through the land border. The district has a high rate of internal and cross-border child trafficking. Children are mostly trapped through early and fake marriages and easily pushed to the neighboring country by traffickers. Child marriage thus culminates in child trafficking - a blatant violation of human rights. The helpless people from this kind of disaster-prone border-

area usually surrender to fate. Moreover, the obstinate blow of the recent global pandemic COVID 19 was like a stab wound to the head. All things considered, when Rehana's family could no longer find a way to survive, her father Rahmat Ali got a marriage proposal for her.

Rehana was a child, so her opinions were not accepted. Meanwhile, Rahmat Ali was uncaring, even knowing about how big a curse child marriage is. But Rahmat Ali did not think about the possibility of his daughter being trafficked. He rather thought that, if his daughter was abducted, kidnapped, or raped by the goons, there would be no way to show his face in society. It was unimaginable for a poor person like him to go to court or the police station and seek justice. Better let her be married instead – he thought. In this way, just as he could avoid the fear of disgrace, as well as the burden of a person's daily necessities! Thinking about all these, Rahmat Ali agreed to the proposal.



Photo credit: siragu.com

Sakibur Rahman, a social worker and a member of the sub-district Counter Trafficking Committee (CTC), suddenly came to Rehana's house and convinced her father Rahmat that the



decision to marry off Rehana at such a young age was wrong. The marriage was stopped. Rehana survived marginally.

But Sakibur had no idea that it was only for two days. So, two days later, when he got the news that Rahmat had married off his daughter in the dark of night, his surprise knew no bounds. He rushed to Rahmat's house again and saw that what he had heard was true. Rehana was not at home. Why did he do it again knowing everything? The poor father Rahmat said he had no choice. There was no income in the family. Moreover, there was stagnation in livelihood due to the devastating COVID 19. He had more children. How would he live with them? The cost of arranging a wedding in such circumstances was also a luxury. In response to Sakibur's question, he said that he did not spend any cost to arrange the wedding. On the contrary, rather the bridegroom gave him some money. Sakibur understood what had happened. In the rural society of this country, there is a bad practice to ask for dowry from the girl's father in marriage. But here, in this case, the bridegroom had given money to the girl's father. No doubt it was a false marriage. The motive behind this was nothing but fraudulence. Who knew whether she had been trafficked in the meantime!

Sakibur did not waste time. He rushed to the local administration without delay. Earlier, he spoke to the two local institutions - the District Legal Aid Committee and the District Counter Trafficking Committee. He could spread his network quickly. The local police gave their sincere efforts and other CSO members also tried their best. As a result, three days later, Rehana was found in an abandoned house on the border. Alone, helpless, upset, and traumatized!

This was not just a stand-alone incident which had happened only in the Satkhira district.

Rather, this is a common scenario for all border areas across the country. Many poor people take great risks without thinking of the consequences for immediate gain and do not hesitate to get dropped into pitfall. Getting out of this is not easy. This requires awareness, caution, social resistance, and strict enforcement of state law. As Sakibur Rahman says, "since I have been working in this field, I usually experience the main problem is lack of awareness among the common people. We don't see strong social activism to make aware these marginal people to develop stronger social resistance. From that point of view, the project was incredibly significant to make them aware and save them from a big loss."



Photo credit: hrmagazine.co.uk

Making National Plan of Action on Human Trafficking effective and combating child trafficking strategically, Prevention of Child Trafficking through Strengthening Communities and Networks (PCTSCN) Consortium implemented by 5 partners with INCIDIN Bangladesh as lead under GAA has undertaken a comprehensive yearlong (from June 2017 – July 2018) lobby and advocacy actions involving the concerned government agencies and that of CSOs including the international NGOs and made a point of departure. As a part of the implementation and intervention of the project, INCIDIN Bangladesh mobilized civil society members to engage against different counter-





Annual national conference of PCTSCN Consortium 2017

trafficking activities which include educating community people on the negative impact of child trafficking; becoming CSO member in different government structures such as CTC, District Legal Aid Committee, etc.; and engaging with local government agencies to prevent child trafficking.

As part of advocacy, the PCTSCN Consortium had organized a series of meetings, consultations, dialogues, press conferences, etc. following insider approach which include: Organizing meeting with Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) and NPA Drafting Committee; Press conference on implementation of NPA; Meeting with MoHA; Facilitate form Thematic Group for NPA in a meeting organized by MoHA; National-level meeting with Planning Commission involving Winrock International; National-level press conference to include children's concerns in NPA 2018-2022; Consultation with relevant ministries (MoHA, Ministry of Labor and Employment); Bi-annual conference; and an annual conference on NPA.

Following insiders' approach (getting involved with different structures of the government as thematic and issue based expert), the lead of the PCTSCN Consortium worked as the technical expert in the GO-NGO coordination process in implementing NPA 2015 - 2017. INCIDIN Bangladesh has been a member of the NPA Drafting Committee and recognized

as the Principal Advisor to the government in this regard.

A bunch of strategies contributed to the success of the actions, activities, outputs, strategies, and interventions, such as lobbying with concerned government agencies including six ministries related to human trafficking; Advocacy campaign with journalists and civil society organizations; Linking and networking with multi-stakeholders including organizations combating human trafficking at national and regional levels (Winrock International through its trafficking project, SAIEVAC through its regional chapter, etc.); Capacity development of GAA implementing partners; and finally the active participation in government-led committees (GO-NGO coordination committee and NPA drafting committee) should be identified as the key moments of success of the project.

And finally, the government approved the new NPA on human trafficking 2018-2022 in December 2018 that specifically includes the issue of child trafficking with the proper direction of the resource. The Ministry of Home Affairs has recognized PCTSCN as the key contributor in shaping the actions regarding child trafficking in the NPA. The NPA itself lauded very highly the role of the PCTSCN project and the support from TdH NL. Signed by Mr. Shamsur Rahman, the then Additional Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs,





the forwarding reads:

“I am grateful to all who have contributed in development of this NPA – especially, the members of the NPA Drafting Committee along with the representatives of different ministries, government agencies, national NGOs, international development partners and experts. Special thanks to ATSEC Bangladesh (a national anti-human trafficking network) for organizing the divisional consultations and PCTSCN for providing inputs on child trafficking along with WINROCK International, INCIDIN Bangladesh and USAID for extending overall technical assistance.”

The uniqueness of the approved NPA is that it makes considerable efforts in developing social and economic safety-nets. It designs specific interventions to combat trafficking in children. Special attention has been given to harmonize the NPA with the SDG indicators and aligned with those of the 7<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan. Efforts have also been made to comply with international standards. To overcome uncertainty on the implementation of planned activities, sources of the budget have been identified in the NPA.

Just to note that the Government of Bangladesh has consistently been implementing NPA to combat human trafficking since 2009 (e.g., NPA of 2009-2011, 2012-2014, and 2015-2017). However, according to Adv. Salma Ali, Human Rights Lawyer, “The salient features of the previous NPAs were that they made significant emphasis on raising mass awareness, rather than giving more importance to strengthening the social and economic safety of people being trafficked. This way, it can be said that these NPAs did not address child trafficking specifically. Moreover, those NPA’s life span was too short, just 3 years only, and they were not financed - making them ineffective and rendering children vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.”

In comparison with the previous NPAs, Mr. Binoy Krishna Mallick, Executive Director, Rights Jessore, a member of the ATSEC describes the effectiveness of the current NPA, “In the new NPA there is a clear indication to prevention and protection of the child and human trafficking

by forming of CTC at different administrative tiers at Union, Upazila and District levels. For the first time, children and youth have been included in the CTC. We believe that if this committee is properly formed and made functional that will create a community based child protection mechanism to save both children and humans from trafficking.”

As the new NPA on Human Trafficking 2018-2022 holds specific focus and resources to address child trafficking, thus the outcome is causally related to the pathway of Theory of Change of the GAA project. The heightened awareness among the policymakers on the special needs of children and legal provisions of addressing child trafficking gradually led to this change.

Efforts have also been made strategically to make the NPA on human trafficking operational. These include: synchronizing the target/indicators with the indicators of SDG; building capacity of the concerned government agencies; strengthening and equipping National Authority and Fund. Overall, by activating different community-level anti-trafficking committees and ensuring children, young people and civil societies participation in such committees, a strong social activism has been created to make the marginal and vulnerable people aware and develop stronger social resistance to stop child trafficking. Thus National Plan of Action on Human Trafficking 2018-22 appeared to be a National Plan of Action with a difference.



## 1.5 A GUARDIAN INSTITUTION: STREAMLINES CHILD PROTECTION

The National Human Rights Commission Bangladesh (NHRCB) is one of the most important guardian institutions to defend and promote human rights. One of the important thematic areas of the NHRC is the protection of child rights. To advance the thematic area further, the NHRC searched for a credible-renowned civil society organization to develop partnerships in carrying out its institutional mandate as stipulated in the section 12 (k) of The National Human Rights Commission Act 2009, "To encourage and coordinate the efforts of Non-Governmental Organizations and institutions working in the field of human rights."

In Bangladesh, a significant number of children and young women are trafficked every year, both intra-country and cross-border. Most of the trafficked children are girls, and when

rescued, they become traumatized, abused, and exploited young /adults. Therefore, it is important to address the child trafficking issues creating an enabling environment for girls and young women free from GBV.

As child trafficking is a severe violation of human rights, INCIDIN Consortium thought the involvement of the NHRCB as a strategic partner in the Girls Advocacy Alliance (GAA) lobby and advocacy would be immensely helpful. The involvement of the NHRC was critically important because the point on human trafficking raised by it in the public domain carries special significance. Being a state institution, the NHRCB could take one of the GAA issues - combating child trafficking - further, both nationally and regionally contributing to reaching the GAA outcomes on a broader scale in general and reducing GBV in particular.



INCIDIN Bangladesh organized the annual conference with the NHRC (26 December 2017)







### Memorandum of Understanding

Between

National Human Rights Commission Bangladesh

and

INCIDIN Bangladesh (PCTSCN Consortium/ATSEC Bangladesh)

Based on long working experience and mutual consent on the issue of combatting trafficking in persons, with special focus on children/girls and young women- National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Bangladesh and INCIDIN Bangladesh (on behalf of the PCTSCN Consortium/ATSEC Bangladesh) agree upon the following:

1. The National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking (led by the Ministry of Home Affairs) needs to be adequately resourced and effectively implemented through coordinated efforts of different ministries and departments of governments together with that of NGOs, INGOs, bilateral donors, development partners and UN agencies.
2. The Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act (2012) needs to be implemented realizing its full potentials in offering protection to the victim and witness, quick disposal of the cases through special tribunals and extension of redistributive justice to the survivors for social integration etc.. In this regard, the rule of the Act needs to be adopted and accordingly adequate institutional structures (the Fund, Authority and Tribunal etc. as narrated in the rules) and resources (including adequate allocation of financial resources, capacitated and committed human resource) need to be put in place.
3. The special concerns and provisions as reflected in the Act (2012), Children's Act (2013), CEADAW and UNCRC need to be brought into effect through effective implementation of NPA and the laws.
4. The concerns of the girls and young women in relation to trafficking merit special attention in the process of implementation of both the Act and NPA.

Based on the above mentioned common understandings with respect to the effective implementation of the Act (2012), Rules and NPA to combat trafficking in persons with special attention given to children, girls and young women; National Human Rights Commission Bangladesh and INCIDIN Bangladesh (on behalf of the PCTSCN Consortium and ATSEC Bangladesh); unanimously resolve to mutually cooperate in-

1. Holding multi-stakeholder dialogues
2. Public disclosure
3. Placing policy propositions and petitions
4. Monitoring and reporting
5. Capacity building

The Memorandum of Understanding as narrated above will work as guideline for joint actions as deem necessary. It can be reviewed jointly or individually to suggest any change and can be modified with consensus of National Human Rights Commission Bangladesh and INCIDIN Bangladesh (representing PCTSCN Consortium and ATSEC Bangladesh).

*Hiranmaya Barai*  
Hiranmaya Barai  
Secretary

National Human Rights Commission  
Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh  
BTMC Bhawan (8th Floor), 7-9 Kazi Nazrul  
Islam Avenue, Kawran Bazar, Dhaka-1215  
15 May 2017

*A.K.M. Masud Ali*  
A.K.M. Masud Ali

Executive Director, INCIDIN Bangladesh  
Chair, PCTSCN Consortium  
Chair, ATSEC Bangladesh  
8/19 Sir Syed Road, Mohammadpur,  
Dhaka-1207  
15 May 2017







Multi-stakeholder consultation (17 May 2017)

To persuade the objective the PCTSCN (Prevention of Child Trafficking through Strengthening of Community and Networking) project and NHRC have worked together since the start of the project in 2016. On 15 May 2017, the NHRC and the PCTSCN agreed on collaboration, and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on the issue of combating child trafficking which is a great achievement for the Consortium supported by the GAA project.

Signing Memorandum of Understanding has been possible as all members of the PCTSCN Consortium were very familiar with the Chair of the NHRC and had a working relationship with him. The lead of the PCTSCN has been

chairing the national action and coordination group (NACG) working closely with the South Asian Initiatives to Ending Violence against Children (SAIEVAC), with which the NACG had a partnership. These contributed to building credibility and acceptance of the PCTSCN.

The signed MoU recognized that the statutory national oversight organization – the NHRC – has incorporated the child trafficking issue as one of its thematic issues. The result of working together has created a greater impact on child trafficking issues at the policy level, ultimately contributing to eliminating GBV. In achieving this, several meetings, workshops, conferences and consultations took place. Some of these are:

- The annual national conference on policy legal advocacy for combating child trafficking was held on 29 March 2016, at the CIRDAP Auditorium, where Professor Dr. Mizanur Rahman, Chairman of NHRC, attended as the Chief Guest;
- In April and May 2017, two consecutive meetings were organized with the Secretary and the Honorable Chairman of the NHRCB to raise concerns over the finalization of the Rules of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012 and to highlight the need for focusing separately on child trafficking within the National Plan of Action (NPA);
- On 17 May 2017, a multi-stakeholder consultation was organized involving the CSOs, representatives of children and young women, government officials, law enforcing agencies, and community leaders. The Honorable Chairman of the NHRC graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. It led to a heightened voice of the commission on child trafficking related legal issues and promoted the path towards the signing of the MoU with the PCTSCN.



On signing MoU, both NHRC and PCTSCN project have intensified their collaboration in persuading issues stated in the MoU, creating enormous impact on child protection. Some of the collaborative events are:

- On 26 December 2017, INCIDIN Bangladesh organized an annual conference involving the NHRC;
- The annual conference of the PCTSCN Consortium and the Action against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children (ATSEC) members 2019 was held on 29 September 2019, at the CIRDAP Auditorium Dhaka, jointly organized by Nari Maitree and INCIDIN Bangladesh.

In creating a child protective environment, the Consortium followed the strategies: organizing joint programs with the NHRC to inform and motivate them on the concerns regarding child trafficking; organizing media campaign to highlight the discussions on child trafficking and the commitments expressed by the NHRC in this regard; linking the NACG and the SAIEVAC with the NHRC to develop a joint strategy to combat child trafficking.

With consistent lobby and advocacy with the Ministry of Home Affairs and six associated ministries, the Rule of the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012 was also adopted in January 2017, which enabled the PCTSCN to engage the NHRC in

holding the government accountable to combat child trafficking.

Signing the MoU has brought the opportunity to address the human trafficking issues in broader aspects nationally and regionally. Partnership with the NHRC has further strengthened the GAA efforts on getting the National Plan of Action 2018-2022 resourced particularly establishing and equipping National Authority to monitor human trafficking; better enforcement of Rules on Human Trafficking 2017; and establishing the Special Tribunals at the divisional level as stipulated by the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012.

“The NHRC Bangladesh has the mandate for the children’s wellbeing and their rights. Through this MoU, it has given us a space to address the child trafficking issues with the government mechanism and also helped to work with CSOs jointly on child rights and protection issues. A child rights committee formed headed by the Deputy Director of the NHRC to look after children’s issues, in particular. The PCTSCN has raised collective concerns of the CSOs on combating child trafficking by effective implementation of the law and the National Plan of Action within the Child Rights Committee of the NHRC.”

*Kazi Reazul Hoque*  
Ex Chair of the NHRCB





“The NHRC appointed Human Rights Panel Lawyers as a response to the call of the PCTSCN Consortium. The lawyers have been directed to give priority to the cases involving child trafficking. The PCTSCN Consortium organized a number of events including celebration of World Day against Trafficking in Person 2016 involving the NHRC Bangladesh.”

*M Robiul Islam*

Deputy Director of the NHRC

Transcending the national boundaries, the effort has influenced the regional instruments. The SAIEVAC (South Asian Initiatives to Ending Violence against Children) regional secretariat organized a workshop with the NHRC in Bangladesh to follow-up on its regional action plans with the Human Rights Institutions in South Asia to combat child marriage. INCIDIN Bangladesh as a Chair of the NACG (National Action and Coordination Group) – a group of the CSOs promoting child rights – and the CSO Board member of the SAIEVAC – an inter-governmental body promoting child rights – introduced the linkage between child trafficking and child marriage on the forum. Therefore, in the future, there is a possibility of addressing the concerns over child trafficking through this forum. Streamlining child protection by the National Human Rights Commission has contributed to child protection in Bangladesh.



## 1.6 PROSECUTION OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING CASES: HERALDING A NEW ERA

Seven special tribunals to prosecute human trafficking-related cases will be formed soon – informed **Syed Mahmud Hossain**-

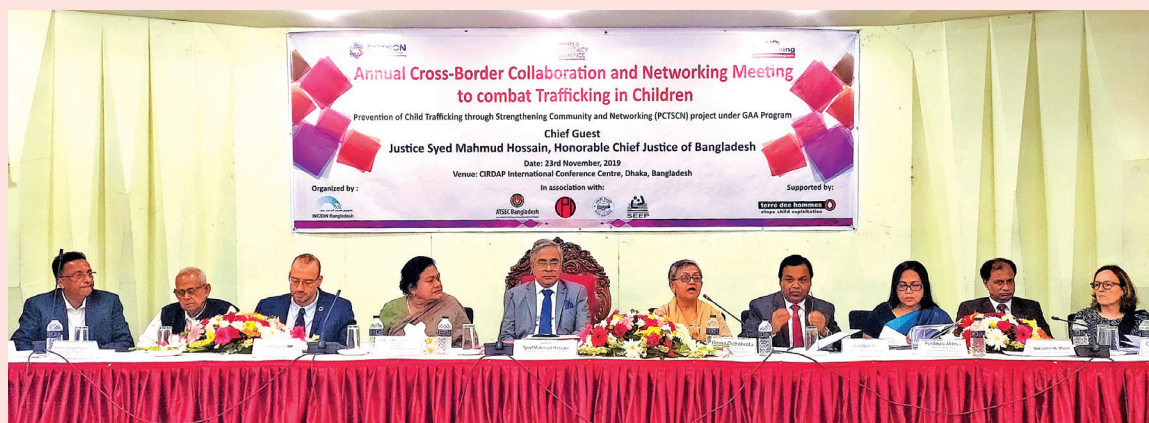
The honorable Chief Justice of Bangladesh. These tribunals will be set up at seven divisions of the country, and proper steps will be taken for speedy disposal of human trafficking cases, especially child trafficking. The honorable Chief Justice was attending as the Chief Guest of the Inaugural Ceremony of Cross Border Collaboration and Networking Meeting to Combat Trafficking in Children.

The program was held on 23 November 2019 at the CIRDAP auditorium, organized by INCIDIN Bangladesh, a member of the Consortium “Prevention of Child Trafficking through Strengthening Community and Networking (PCTSCN).”

It is appropriate to refer to human trafficking as the slavery of recent times. The organized criminal chain victimizes women, men and children in different forms of exploitation for the pursuit of profit. The sectors in which people are exploited through human trafficking include; commercial sexual exploitation; forced labor; forced prostitution; bonded labor; and

the sale of organs, etc. The traffickers take advantage of people’s needs and attractions for employment, earning, marriage, migration, and mobility. Women and children from Bangladesh are also trafficked to other countries for commercial sexual exploitation or exploitation through labor.

Generally, human trafficking cases are presented to the general court for trial. According to the data provided by the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, about 36 lakh cases are pending in various courts of the country. Among them, 4,784 cases are of human trafficking (The Daily Star on 18 June 2019). Due to the high



23 November 2020, cross-border collaborative conference attended by the Chief Justice of Bangladesh





Dialogue with the Parliamentary Caucus on Child Rights to demand the establishment of the special tribunals on human trafficking (20 June 2019)



Human chain demanding the establishment of the special tribunals

number of cases in the general court, the trial of trafficking cases has been delayed years after years. A suit has been going on for years, making it difficult to ensure justice. In doing so, the respondent often takes the advantage of it. The plaintiff is unable to continue the case years after years and is forced to accept the defendant's offer of compromise. As a result, the matter is decided out of the court, and it becomes impossible to provide appropriate punishment for this heinous crime. Consequently, a sense of impunity prevails. Implications of this are very enormous both at the individual level and public spheres as well. The rate of conviction is low, giving leverages to the perpetrators. In the public sphere, on trafficking standards,

Bangladesh has been downgraded as Tier 2 Watch List for the years of 2017, 2018, and 2019 by the Department of State of the USA. This means that inadequate measures are taken in combating human trafficking.

“Seven special tribunals are to be established in divisional cities. The districts include Dhaka, Chattogram, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet, and Rangpur. They will start functioning from March this year,”

*Law Minister Anisul Huq, MP*  
The Daily Star on 13 February 2020





He added that the tribunals will surely help speed up the trial process of the human trafficking cases.

The government established seven special tribunals for speedy trials in human trafficking cases. A series of GAA actions and lobby and advocacy events spread over 3 years have contributed to the achievement. Some of these are:

- The annual national conference on policy legal advocacy for combating child trafficking was held on 29 March 2016, at the CIRDAP Auditorium, where Professor Dr. Mizanur Rahman, Chairman of NHRC attended as the Chief Guest;
- On 30 August 2018, a cross-border conference was held in Dhaka participated by distinguished guests from Bangladesh and India. The demand for forming the special tribunals raised from that conference also;
- On 31 March 2019, INCIDIN Bangladesh submitted “A Citizen’s Petition for Action” on the urgent need of establishment of the special tribunal under Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act - 2012 to the Minister, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs;
- On 7 April 2019, INCIDIN Bangladesh, on behalf of the civil society of Bangladesh, submitted a list of trafficking cases to the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs for speedy trial as per the suggestions of the Minister of the concerned ministry;
- On 6 May 2019, Honorable Chief Justice, Bangladesh Supreme Court, received a citizen’s petition from the Drafting Committee of National Plan of Action on Human Trafficking and the Action against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children drawing his attention to immediately form the special tribunals on human trafficking;
- On 20 June 2019, a Dialogue was organized with the Parliamentary Caucus on Child Rights to demand the establishment of the special tribunals on human trafficking for speedy trial of trafficking cases;
- On 20 November 2019, INCIDIN Bangladesh organized a Human Chain demanding the establishment of the special tribunals;
- On 29 December 2019, a dialogue was organized with District Judges to further accentuate the demand for the establishment of the special tribunals.

On establishing special tribunal to try trafficking cases, **A.H.M Habibur Rahman Bhuiya**, the Joint Secretary, Ministry of Law, Justice & Parliamentary Affairs said,

“As stipulated by the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012 and the Rules 2017 to set up the special tribunals for human trafficking cases, the government intensively worked on it. Eventually, in the year of Mujib Borsho (2020 – the birth centenary of the Father of the Nation), the government decided to establish the special tribunals and we believe that it will help to get justice to the victims of trafficking.”





Replying to a question about her opinion about the special tribunal and its impact on reducing trafficking cases, Adv. Salma Ali, human rights defender and President, Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association and a member of the ATSEC Bangladesh said, "We had to go through a lot of criticism due to our delayed and dysfunctional prosecution system. We demanded a special tribunal for a long time and eventually got it. We hope that this tribunal will help to reduce trafficking cases and be able to produce justice for the justice seekers".

Despite having a very specific legal provision, and continual demand from different actors including the civil society and the victims of trafficking, the establishment of the special tribunals was delayed. With demands from the relevant actors, the tribunal was finally established. Proper functioning of it will result in quick justice for the justice seekers - a right enshrined by the constitution of Bangladesh – heralding a new era in prosecuting child and human trafficking cases.



## 1.7 GLOBAL PANDEMIC: A DETERRENCE

Under the Girls Advocacy Alliance (GAA) Project, Terre des Hommes Netherlands Bangladesh has been implementing two themes: online child sexual abuse and exploitation; and child trafficking. Two Consortiums led by Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) and INCIDIN Bangladesh have successfully achieved the outcomes narrated in the Bangladesh Theory of Change. Some of the outcomes are: Developing Handbook on Safe Internet Use; Formulating NPA on Human Trafficking with resource direction; Signing MoU with National Human Rights Commission; and the Establishment of the Special Tribunals on Human Trafficking. At the final year of the 5 years' project, the global pandemic – COVID 19 – seriously hit some of the final results of the project. And some of the outcomes are not fully achieved.

Bangladesh started lockdown – officially called general holidays – at the end of March and continued till 30 May (quoting the state minister, Ministry of Public Administration, Hindustan Times reported). On 31 May, the government ceased general holidays partially, saying it would allow limited office work. From 1 September, withdrawing all sorts of restrictions, the government allowed all kinds of activities maintaining social distancing. Though there was

no restriction from September onward, getting policy makers and high officials' involvement was challenging as they are still busy with the pandemic related response.

Kartick Chandra Mandal, Programme Specialist – Research and Knowledge Management, Terre des Hommes Netherlands, Bangladesh Office mentioned, "Since it was the last year of the project, we were all set for the last-minute works. Two issues, in particular, have severely hampered some of the outcomes. During the COVID situation, people were terrified of being attacked by COVID 19. At that time, activities like advocacy would not work. Considering the circumstances, the project was then revising the activities and working modalities – working virtually and splitting in groups where possible – to take the program to all those places and beneficiaries. That means the project started delivering its messages focusing on COVID. Whether it was advocacy, group meetings, or awareness campaigns at the community level, discussion about COVID 19 awareness received priority in all the programs. Thus, after making people aware of the COVID, the message related to the project was delivered. Some of the sessions have been entirely dedicated to raising awareness on COVID 19."

The second point is: the main job of the project is the lobby and advocacy involving government officials and policymakers. During restrictions, all activities have been stopped except responding to emergency work. And it was normal that the government focused on the issues directly related to the COVID 19 pandemic situation. As a result, at that time, government officials did not want to take part or respond in any of the activities like lobbying, advocacy, etc. - neither physically, nor virtually.



In compliance with the rules of the government of Bangladesh, from 1 September 2020, the project has started holding limited meetings following the guidelines of the World Health Organization. “Since then, all the other NGOs like ours started working, and the government officials naturally could not accommodate everyone together. We were no exception. This is why a number of results including two advocacy outcomes have been seriously affected. These outcomes are: advocacy with National Curricula and Textbook Board to include online child safety issues in the secondary level school curricula; and signing the Code of Conduct with the internet service providers involving the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission,” – added Kartick Chandra Mandal.

Inclusion of the signing of the Code of Conduct for internet service providers could have been completed very successfully by now if the regular activities of the project had not been hampered by the pandemic. This is echoed by Mr. MA Hakim and Mr. Emdadul Haque, the President and the Secretary of Internet Service Providers’ Association of Bangladesh respectively. Both of them reaffirmed, “We are on the signing process of the Code of Conduct. Meanwhile, the pandemic has delayed the process.” In the same way, Mr. Azizur Rahman, Director, Systems, BTRC expressed his regret to inform that the much-needed Code of Conduct may have been signed by this time if all the processes and activities were not slowed down affected by the COVID 19 crisis.

Inclusion of online safety issues in the secondary level curricula is also being delayed. As we heard from Professor Md. Moshuazzaman, Main Member Curriculum (National Curricula and Textbook Board), the decision of inclusion of online safety issues is at the final stage. However, the printing of the curricula will be done in 2021 as per decision of the government due to the global crisis of COVID 19. The revised curricula will be effective from 1 January 2022. Had the COVID 19 not been there, we could see a revised curriculum on 1 January 2021.



# CHAPTER 2





## LESSON LEARNED

---

The following lessons learned emerged from 5 years' implementation of GAA project:

- For effective lobby and advocacy outcomes, collaboration and coordination amongst the civil society organizations is prerequisite. Organizational credibility and acceptance to the government officials and policymakers are equally important for successful lobby and expected outcomes;
- The project GAA has successfully mobilized, sensitized and engaged all relevant stakeholders including children, youth, community, civil society, government and private sectors actors. Therefore, a collaborative approach and active engagement of relevant stakeholders facilitates development of an effective and useful protective mechanism that sustainably ensures protection of children from all forms of abuse and exploitation;
- Creating civil society activism together with activating relevant committees at different administrative tiers as stipulated in the policy documents help operationalizing law and policies resulting in a protective mechanism for children, adolescents and youth;
- To engage with different stakeholders such as the National Curricula and Textbook Board and Internet Service Providers, the project generated information through research and analysis of relevant laws and policies. Creating, sharing and disseminating evidence based information helps sensitize important stakeholders including decision makers in the private and public sectors;
- Providing knowledge and information to the parents, community, formal and informal leaders and stakeholders is important to sustainably address violence against children, adolescents, girls and young women;
- A deeper understanding and proven partnership of the CSO actors regarding government planning process work to build confidence of the government actors on the credibility of the advocates and the advocacy messages;
- Active engagement of children, boys, girls and young men and women helped to influence changing social norms and practice, which ultimately reduced the fear of violence among girls and young women and they have now started to disclose GBV issues. When actions are organized jointly and messages against gender discrimination and voices against GBV come from different directions, gender discriminating social norms get changed;
- A strategy - getting involved with the government mechanism through membership or having relevant thematic expertise leads to bringing desired changes - mentioned as an insider's approach in the project document. Laws and policies related to child protection have spaces and processes in which CSOs have access as insiders. It has proved an effective lobby and advocacy strategy;
- For effective lobby and advocacy work, a combination of multiple approaches including insiders' approach and outsiders' approach - influencing from outside - are extremely useful;
- In working with child trafficking issues, INCIDIN Bangladesh and National Human Commission, Bangladesh have signed a memorandum of understanding. Working with guardian institutions such as the National Human Rights Commission amplifies advocates' voices and sensitizes policy makers to get better outcomes;



- National level lobby and advocacy can benefit by identifying appropriate global commitments as these provide opportunity of holding the government responsible to its international commitments and advocating with such commitments reduces resistance of the policy actors to CSO propositions;
- Internet service providers provide internet service through a work contract with the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission. From a security perspective such service provision needs to be monitored. Involvement of ASK has brought that into discussion. Working with private operators (online service providers), despite having legal provisions, involvement of CSOs promotes accountability.



# GIRLS ADVOCACY ALLIANCE

**terre des hommes**   
**stops child exploitation**



**MUKTI**  
COX'S BAZAR



**Nari Maitree**  
our vision is to establish an equitable society



Community Participation and Development (CPD)



RIGHTS JESSORE

