



Center for Development Communications DEVCOM

Concept Note

Thematic Dialogue on “Gender Equality and Women Empowerment: the normal is new, the violence not”

Date: August 24, 2020

Background

The SDG 5 is about Gender Equality and as per the goal “Women and girls, everywhere, must have equal rights and opportunity, and be able to live free of violence and discrimination.” Women’s equality and empowerment is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, but also integral to all dimensions of inclusive and sustainable development” (UN Women)¹. The Bangladesh Government is also committed to establish equal rights of women and men in all spheres of the state and of public life as part of a constitutional obligation under Article-28. However, till date women are in a worse situation due to patriarchal social structure, norms and values.

The current pandemic (COVID-19) situation has created further threats for the women, all over the world, and also in Bangladesh. ‘Disease outbreaks affect women and men differently, and pandemics make existing inequalities for women and girls and discrimination of other marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities and those in extreme poverty, worse, (COVID-19: A Gender Lens PROTECTING SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS, AND PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY, 2020)². Globally, recent media reports have shown that, Gender Based Violence (GBV) has increased significantly. During the lockdown, women and girls are facing physical, sexual and psychological violence. Bangladesh is also not an exception. As per a survey conducted by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), “a total of 13,494 women and children have experienced domestic and other forms of violence during the nationwide shutdown in 53 districts of the country last month, of which 4,160 victims reported that they were abused for the first time in their life”. MJF has also observed that the number of incidents of violence against women and children has increased in May by 31 percent compared to in April” (The Daily Star, June 24, 2020). Many other civil society organizations have also expressed their observation that, the pandemic has increased torture and violence against women and girls at all spheres of the society.

The overall situation illustrates that, it is high time to relook on the process of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment, which is imperative to achieve SDG Goals and Targets. , At a time when the law enforcing agencies and civil society organizations are engaged in addressing pandemic related crisis, the abusive behavior of the perpetrators has created new threats in the society. It is still uncertain as to how long the COVID-19 crisis will continue globally, and also in Bangladesh. Therefore, the new trend of violence against women and girls may further increase, which is highly alarming. Besides, there are other negative consequences, such as, due to restricted mobility, the social and economic empowerment process of women and girls might be interrupted. On the other hand, the women and human rights activists are also

¹ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-5-gender-equality#:~:text=Women%20and%20girls%2C%20everywhere%2C%20must,of%20inclusive%20and%20sustainable%20development.>

² https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/COVID-19_A_Gender_Lens_Guidance_Note.pdf



Center for Development Communications DEVCOM

worried that there might be a higher dropout rate of girls in the education sector, during the new normal life or post pandemic period.

The development practitioners think that, all these requires urgent action to eliminate the root causes of discrimination against women and girls, at all levels of the society. Now a days, it is important for all stakeholders in the development sector, including NGOs and Civil Society Organizations to think about the new ways to overcome this unwanted condition. This requires integration of gender component in all of the existing interventions of Government, Development Partners, NGOs and Civil Society Organizations and the Private Sectors.

In the Thematic Dialogue on “Gender Equality and Women Empowerment: New areas to think during the New Normal Life”, Gender Experts and Women Rights Activists will express their expert opinions in this regard and the stakeholders will share their learning, understanding and put forth the recommendations. It is worthy to mention that, all stakeholders need to be aware about the issue so that they can identify strategies correspondingly. However, all these require an in-depth understanding about the implication of the problem, as well as to think and act in an effective way to stop violence against women and girls at all levels of the society.

This participatory dialogue session will exchange process on the aforementioned issues among all levels of stakeholders in Bangladesh.

Objective of the Dialogue:

- Understand the current situation of women and girls who are vulnerable to Gender Based Violence that has been accelerated by Covid-19
- Understand the ongoing activities and identify the gaps in the process of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment programs in Bangladesh
- Generate recommendations on the roles of all stakeholders and identify the policy advocacy issues to stop GBV and promote Gender Equality and Women Empowerment through a holistic process.

Participants

Government representatives, UN Agencies, INGOs, NGOs from District and Divisional level, Development Practitioners and Media Personnel will join the Thematic Dialogue.

Date: August 24, 2020

Time: 11:00 AM - 1:15 PM

Media: Zoom Cloud Platform (link and passcode is available in the email body)

Expected Outcomes

By the end of the Consultation, the NGOs may develop concise understanding on future planning and strategic directions, in relation to address GBV against women and girls, as well as will be able to identify the future course of actions to promote Gender Equality and Women Empowerment process. Participants, however, will also be able to recommend for policy advocacy agenda to draw attention of the policy makers.