

POWER Project Empowered the Women

Promoting Opportunity of Women Empowerment and Rights (POWER) is an international development programs funded by the Foreign Ministry of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. ActionAid Bangladesh facilitated this Program in Bangladesh in partnership with SKS Foundation. SKS Foundation implemented the Program as 'POWER Project' in Gaibandha & Lalmonirhat district during April 2015 to December 2020. The Project has made around 5000 vulnerable women aware on their economic rights while the women have acquired the ability to earn and manage control over that. The formation of women groups & federations, strengthening their savings, sensitizing women through meetings & trainings in protecting their social rights especially standing against violence against women have created visible impact. The Project has contributed significantly in Recognition, Redistribution and Reduction of Unpaid Care Work (UCW), Practice of Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture (CRSA), Access to Market of Women and Building their Network and Coalition at National and International level. The Project has generated significant value at different sections of the society ranging from the grassroots to the policy level.

The women groups evolved as women's collective and community level bargaining agent on behalf of women based on their transformation of themselves, their families' male counterpart and communities relating to personal, social & economic development. The grassroots organizational strengths gained through different capacity building initiatives and actions of the groups & federations contributed in enhancing the collectiveness. Human rights-based actions of the federation leaders created their acceptance and reputation in the community that positively impacted the advocacy initiatives in favor of women's entitlements. The women group members under the Project now take pride in resolving violence against women (VAW) cases.

Economic engagement has been promoted as a prime motivating factor for women economic empowerment. The success of the group businesses came through the women's collective effort, communication with customers, mutual trust between group members, hard work, and learning from mistakes. As a part of rejuvenating process of community structures, women leaders have ensured their social status, all women's voices are heard in the community.

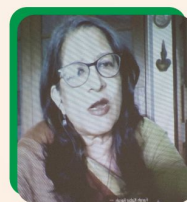
The women group members in the project areas utilize the supportive environment created by redistributing Unpaid Care Works and time-saving intervention such as day care center to get themselves involved in IGAs. Being sensitized by the women groups & Federations, the Union Parishads are committed and preparing a gender-responsive annual budget including time-saving interventions. The advocacy initiatives of the women federations, community members and local governments have started supporting reduction of women's burden of Unpaid Care Work and to engage in income generation activities.

The decision-makers, service providers, development professionals, opinion leaders, media people, community allies & Women Federation members from national & local level further validated the project outcome in a Consultation. They pinpointed the salient achievements and learning of the POWER Project which have replicable value.



Abdul Matin
Deputy Commissioner,
Gaibandha

"Half of the population of Bangladesh is female. Once our women were in the house always. They were only involved with household works. The social environment has been changed. Now-a-days, the greatest number of women are involved with productive activities and others are trying to do that. So, we are walking comfortably and in future we will run to be a developed country. Under the leadership of our Prime Minister, Bangladesh has taken a 10-step initiative for empowering women which are contributing to SDGs in 1, 2, 5 & 11. The effective implementation of the POWER Project has also generated the learning, if women can get involved with income, values of male counterpart could be changed & decision-making power of women could be improved in the family and society. The Women Federations under the POWER Project have made good examples in mobilizing the women. We are ready to provide necessary assistance to get the Federations registered."



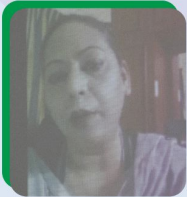
Farah Kabir
Country Director,
ActionAid Bangladesh

"POWER is not only a project, it's a heart-to-heart relationship. Thanks to Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Dhaka for creating such opportunity to meet & mobilize the rural women, local administration and different stakeholders by the project intervention. A half of our country's population is female. Most of them are not getting minimum scope to contribute in development due to lack of recognition of their works, lack of involvement in Income generating activities, and absence of women-friendly policies in our country. With SKS Foundation's successful implementation, the learning & achievements of POWER Project have created women-friendly environment in the respective communities. I believe, the women leadership will be built day by day if we could continue our efforts following the result of POWER Project at all levels."



Mahfuza Khanam Mita
President,
Bangladesh Mohila Parishad,
Gaibandha

"It's a unique Project that individual, institutions, donor agencies as well as government agencies have participated and given expected assistance to ensure achievements and learnings of the POWER Project through empowering women in different communities. I request the donors to come-up and continue with such type of effective projects for enhancing the power of women as well as replicate achievement of the POWER Project to the wider community."



Mushfiqia Zaman Satiar
Sr. Policy Advisor,
Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands,
Dhaka

"It's a great satisfaction that the POWER Project participants have earned a lasting result through successful implementation. Participation of the representatives from the administration and the LGs is also exemplary. I believe, result of POWER Project will be continued and will extend to other communities and areas. We request the Government of Bangladesh to take initiative to sustain the results in future and establish a suitable system for women empowerment in the real spirit."



Bethi Begum
Chairperson,
Fulchhari Upazila Nari Federation,
Gaibandha

"Organizing women and group formation was the primary task of the Project. After that, awareness raising on human rights, women rights, power relation analysis of individual & institutions have been conducted. Through this process, around 500 women have gained skills, knowledge and got involved in economically productive activities out of 2500 direct participants. They are sound enough to raise their voice, and got involved in different committees i.e. market committee, SMC, UP, etc and playing active role."

Palash Kumar Kundu
Assistant Director,
SKS Foundation



"The women groups and federations are strengthening their savings, sensitizing the women in protecting their social rights especially standing against violence against women have created visible impact in the intervention areas. The Project has contributed significantly in the Recognition, Redistribution & Reduction of Unpaid Care Work, practice of climate-resilient agriculture, women's access to market. Human rights-based actions of the federation leaders created their acceptance and reputation in the community. The women groups under the Project are resolving violence against women cases. Economic engagement has been promoted as a prime motivating factor for women empowerment. Advocacy initiatives of the women federations, community members and local governments have started supporting reduction of women's burden of Unpaid Care Work and to engage in income generation. The project implementation has added value at different sections of the society ranging from the grassroots to the policy level."

Md. Helal Uddin
South Asia Advocacy Coordinator,
ActionAid Bangladesh



"We've played our role in designing and implementing the POWER Project effectively. Primarily, we had some confusion that the project intervention may hamper family relationship between husband and wife. Finally, it didn't happen like that rather relationship between family members have been increased. The POWER Project has contributed to reduce violence against women. And to establish actual empowerment of women, the Project has emphasizingly covered 4 areas i.e. reducing workload of women in Unpaid Care Work; increasing engagement of women in productive/income generating works; creating market access of women with their products; and reducing violence against women."

Md. Khalilur Rahman
UP Member,
Kanchipara UP, Fulchhari,
Gaibandha



"The POWER Project has implemented different activities for ensuring women empowerment in collaboration with the Union Parishad. Women group leaders are informing UP for legal action if violence against women/children takes place in the community. The UP is also supporting women for their voice against violence against women and early marriage. And thanks to the law-enforcing agencies and stakeholders for coming forward with their active support in reducing violence against women."

Minara Begum
Chairperson,
Lalmonirhat Sadar Upazila Nari Federation



The mobilized women have been involved in IGA implementation process. They have been self-reliant getting seed capital from the Project and by their own earning money. Two Federations of Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila got registration from Women Affairs Department and registered Federations received TK. 18,000 & 60,000 as grants from the government department in FY-2020. The Federations and groups are flagging out on violence against women, prevention of early marriage, recognition of Unpaid Care Work, receiving service in agriculture, organizing seed bank, seed preservation, etc."



SM Biplob Islam
District Correspondent,
Boishakhi Television,
Gaibandha

“The project intervention has made community women aware on women rights & entitlements and they have been capacitated on relevant issues. It was much encouraging that the mobilized women did the maintenance works of Tub-well during & after the devastating flood. They also rescued and shifted the vulnerable families in the safer places during flood, etc. Now women are bold enough to say something standing in front of a big audience. Phone number of service agencies is available to the women and they are communicating for getting services. Women are stopping early marriage in their community just by making phone call to UNO, Police, UP bodies, journalists and so on.”



Santona Rani
Chairperson,
Rajpur Union Federation,
Lalmonirhat

“SKS Foundation has capacitated the participants under the POWER Project in relation to women empowerment. Based on this, the project participants are communicating freely with different GO-NGO offices. This has resulted accordingly as local administration has allotted 1000 Kg rice for the Day Care Center of Rajpur union. Alongside, the Rajpur Union Federation has received 4 no. of swing machines from the local administration while 5 no. of swing machines have also been provided by the LGSP fund.”



Ranjit Kumar Pal
Project Officer,
POWER Project,
Lalmonirhat

“The most effective step is to introduce the community women with various hotline numbers and availing the services. This knowledge has made them capable to prevent violence against women and children, and to convey disaster related messages to others in advance. Now, they are capable to disseminate right messages to right persons through the hotline numbers. If mobilized, the community women are able to play a role in developing the society.”



Most. Zenthi Akter
Chairperson,
Udakhali Union Nari Federation,
Fulchhari, Gaibandha

“Before our involvement with the POWER Project, I was engaged and busy only with household chores. Now I am doing business outside managing my family. My husband is cooperating me. We have learnt more through trainings, meetings and other events arranged under the POWER Project. This has sensitized me a lot to do something for the women empowerment collectively. But we’ve a long way to go and necessary support is expected from the policy-makers and development stakeholders to make it a common scenario countrywide.”



Lucky Begum
Member,
Kanchipara Union Federation,
Fulchhari, Gaibandha

“The POWER project participants went to National Parliament and placed a demand to change national policies in favor of women. Locally, we have been solving different important cases regarding violence against women/children uniquely through groups, local government institutions, and relevant stakeholders. Alongside, a unique group of women got involved in repairing & disinfecting Tub-wells after the devastating flood. The news of this achievement was broadcast in TV channels.”



Shah Alom Jadu
Secretary, Fulchhari Press Club,
Gaibandha

“The exemplary achievements of POWER Project has encouraged me to capture news on the Project issues several times. I found the mobilized women under POWER Project were assisting vulnerable persons to get the service of different safety net programs. It was much impressing that men counterpart was sharing household-based works with women based on the outcome of POWER Project intervention.”



Beli Begum
Chairperson,
Gazaria Union Federation,
Fulchhari, Gaibandha

“The Project has turned many of the local women capacitated and work for the society. I’m proud to be one of them. Being mobilized by the Project, I received the *Joyeeta Award* from the Government in 2017, 2018 & 2019 and *Nasrin Smriti Award* in 2019. Our advocacy stopped 7 early marriages, 7 vulnerable women got swing machines, and the Day Care Center received a solar panel and Tk. 10,000 from UNO of Fulchhari upazila. Alongside, the local UP is providing electricity bill and a little meal for the Day Care Center.”



Md. Ashrafur Islam
Project Coordinator,
Power Project,
Gaibandha

“The most interesting learning of the POWER Project is that Unpaid Care Work in our society have been given value in families and in institutions. I had talked the issue in school & college, and found the students didn’t give that much value to the works that women do in the family from morning till night. Being mobilized & oriented, they have taken the issue sincerely and promised to share Unpaid Care Works of women. It’s a change of attitude in the society.”



Most. Ojifa Begum
Chairperson,
Kulaghat Union Nari Federation,
Lalmonirhat

“We have participated in sensitization meeting at Union Parishad, community school, different meetings & events. This opportunity has given us a new pathway and source of light in our life. We never thought that we would be able to come out of our house. Gradually, we are experiencing that the male members of our families are holding a good fellow-feeling to the women.”



Sultana Parvin
Project Coordinator,
POWER Project,
Lalmonirhat

“Though the formal education of the community women is less, they have been capable in influencing organizations or relevant persons to obtain services like legal aid, agricultural supports from government and non-government sectors through practical knowledge and education. Some of the women mobilized under POWER Project have won the *Joyeeta Award* and that has encouraged and motivated others in the society to come forward and hold positive change.”



Rasel Ahmed Liton
Chief Executive,
SKS Foundation




“It’s proven, women can do all types of works. Men can do women’s works too. The POWER Project has made it clear to the community people. The POWER Project has tried to involve women in income generating activities and in turn growing leadership. With effective intervention, 14 women have come-up as *Joyeeta* under the POWER Project areas. District administration and other duty bearers are already aware of the POWER Project’s intervention and can get into the details of the Project’s achievements & learning relating to women empowerment from the Consultation. SKS Foundation will also reach the consolidated learning of the POWER Project to be scaled-up under the policy protection by the Government. Thus, the national goal on women development could be achieved.”



Learning Points

- 1. Women can be self-dependent economically by participating in productive activities through equal distribution of Unpaid Care Works. This helps in increasing dignity of women in the family and society as a result of their economic empowerment.**
- 2. If mobilized, women can participate & perform their role actively in different committees of the Government and service providing institutions. This helps to enhance women-friendly environment in the society which in turn contributes to reduce discrimination.**
- 3. Women are capable to produce agricultural products as well as operating business if they are provided with required information, skill and opportunity with policy support in recognition & redistribution of Unpaid Care Works.**

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