

“Strengthening the Feminist Movement to Fight Against Violation of Rights”
Report on
Union-level Dialogue on GBV, Gender Norms, Decision-making, and Inclusion



Venue: Union Parishad premises
Organized by: Nice Foundation and 8 CSOs

Supported by: FON-CREA

Introduction:

From January to May 2025, the Nice Foundation, along with 8 CSOs, organized 12 Union-level dialogue sessions out of the 15. These sessions were held across the 12 unions and wards of Batiaghata, Dumuria, Dacope of Khulna; Khulna city corporation; Ukhiya of Cox's Bazar; Comilla Sadar; Jhenidah and Barisal. The dialogues, conducted at each Union Parishad premises, brought together a diverse set of stakeholders, including local government representatives, standing committee members, religious leaders, village police, educators, youth, and community members- covering men, women, adolescents, persons with disabilities (PWDs), and transgender individuals.

The sessions were aimed at fostering inclusive discussions on gender-based violence (GBV), harmful social norms, community-based decision-making, and inclusive governance, with a strong focus on local leadership and inter-sectoral collaboration.

Objectives of the Dialogue:

1. Raise awareness on the forms and impacts of GBV.
2. Promote inclusive leadership, particularly for women, adolescents, and gender-diverse groups.
3. Encourage community reflection on traditional gender norms.
4. Facilitate dialogue on issues like child marriage and women's reproductive autonomy.
5. Promote cooperation between Government Officials, civil society, local governance, and Civil Service Organizations.

Topics that openly discussed:

- Why does GBV occur?
- How do social norms and stereotypes contribute to discrimination?
- How can we ensure inclusive participation in decision-making, especially for women, adolescents, transgender individuals, and persons with disabilities?
- And most importantly, what can we do together to bring about meaningful change?

Key Themes:

- Gender-Based Violence (GBV) was discussed as encompassing physical, psychological, structural, and economic violence. Many stakeholders emphasized the need to address GBV not just through law enforcement, but through education, family awareness, and social support systems.
- Imams, priests, and educators actively contributed to the dialogues, advocating for inclusive religious messaging and moral education. They acknowledged the role of faith-based and cultural narratives in either perpetuating or challenging gender stereotypes.
- Participants shared concerns regarding the exclusion of transgender individuals and PWDs. Speakers emphasized the importance of inclusive participation in community decision-making and the protection of rights for all, regardless of gender identity or physical ability.
- Stories shared during the sessions highlighted early marriage and lack of autonomy over reproductive decisions as key areas needing attention. Local leaders called for stronger legal enforcement and community-level sensitization.

- Participants highlighted the challenges women face in accessing leadership roles and governance spaces. Several female Union Parishad members shared their experiences advocating for greater representation and influence.
- Some stakeholders pointed out instances of legal misuse, including false allegations, calling for balanced gender justice frameworks that protect both women and men from exploitation.

Stakeholders participated

- Women and Men Participants
- Religious Leaders (Imams/Priests)
- Local Government Representatives
- Local leaders
- Teachers, Health Workers, CSO Members
- Transgender and PWD

Notable Quotes from Participants:

“Without respecting women, society and family cannot flourish.” – Brati Sundor Chakroborti, Priest

“Our daughters must rise with strength. Society must learn to support that.” – Asma Parvin, Panel Chairman of Union Parishad

“Transgender persons are born human, yet are treated less than human. This must change.” – Rabeya Sultana, Project Director, Nice Foundation

Challenges Identified:

- Continued stigma against transgender persons and PWDs.
- Underrepresentation of women in formal decision-making spaces.
- Resistance to change comes from traditional and patriarchal segments of the community.
- Incomplete understanding of GBV's systemic forms among certain groups.

Expected Outcomes of the Dialogue Session:

- Enhanced participants' understanding of gender-based violence (GBV), gender norms, discrimination, and the rights of all genders, including women, men, and transgender individuals.
- Encouraged open dialogue and mutual respect among community members, local leaders, and service providers by sharing personal experiences and social realities related to GBV and gender inequality.
- Ensured the active involvement of all genders in community decision-making processes and policy discussions, especially marginalized groups like women, adolescents, transgender people, and people with disabilities.
- Motivated individuals and communities to reflect on traditional gender norms and inspire shifts in attitudes and behaviors that uphold equality and human dignity.
- Identify local challenges and co-develop actionable strategies that promote gender justice and create safer, more inclusive environments at the union level.

Recommendations:

- ✓ Extend similar dialogues to additional unions and educational institutions.
- ✓ Establish local-level GBV monitoring committees.
- ✓ Provide training and legal referral services for survivors of violence.
- ✓ Actively involve men and boys in gender equity campaigns.
- ✓ Create platforms for the empowerment of transgender and PWD individuals.

Conclusion:

The Union-Level Dialogue Sessions have created platforms for open, inclusive, and meaningful community discussions on gender equality and GBV. By engaging a cross-section of society from religious leaders and elected officials to educators and grassroots activists, these dialogues have sown the seeds for local change and greater community accountability. Continued effort and support are essential to convert these conversations into long-term impact and systemic transformation.

Photos of Sessions:



Raghunathpur Union, Dumuria, Khulna



Raghupur Union, Comilla Sadar



7 No Ward, Barisal Sadar



Jhenidah municipality, Jhenidah



Chadpai Union, Mongla, Bagerhat



Botighata sadar union ,Botiaghata,Khulna