Under USAID funded Human Rights in Development project of Bandhu Social Welfare Society arranged Divisional Lawyers’ Conference in Barisal Division on 4 February 2017. 19 (nineteen) lawyers from the districts of Barisal division and 4 (four) community representatives participated in the conference.

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**Event: at a glance**

**Venue:** Hotel Sedona, Barisal

**Participants:**
- 19 Lawyers, 4 community members
- 1 Journalist, 1 international NGO representative

**Time:** 9:00 am – 4:30 pm

**Chief Guest:** Mr. Akram Hossain
Additional DIG, Barisal Division Bangladesh Police

**Facilitators:**
- Md. Fosiul Ahsan
  Director-Program, Bandhu
- Moshiur Rahman
  Asst. Manager, Bandhu
- MHM Shihab Ahmed Shirazee
  Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh
- Dr. Tareq Alam
  Program Officer-D&R Bandhu
He said that lawyers and other stakeholders including law enforcement need to extend support to this community. Asking the lawyers to contact him if any support is needed for providing legal support to this 3rd gender populace, he announced that he would instruct all police stations of Barisal division to assign an official for the support to this 3rd gender community.

After the event, USAID’s HRID team was advised to issue a letter of thanks together with a follow up on his commitment.

After learning about Bandhu and USAID’s HRID project, the sessions on SOGI, Ain Alap and national and international legal perspectives, environment was created by the facilitators so that hesitation on asking questions on same gender issues melts down. It was really encouraging that lawyers gradually opened up on the gender diversity issues and asked so many questions on the same gender relationship issues including if there is any scientific study on the reasons for their inclinations towards same gender.

**Event coordination**

The coordinating efforts of the USAID’s HRID team from the day before the event starting from follow-up with the lawyers whether they had started their journey for the event from their respective districts and in-person welcoming them at hotel lobby from afternoon till evening and facilitate their hotel accommodation made a good impression on the HRID activities and overall about Bandhu.

At the same time, follow-up with the Chief Guest and community representatives for re-confirming their presence on time, proved effective as they all were on time on the event day (Saturday, 4 February 2017).

**Engaging local resources**

As this was an event in an area where Bandhu does not have any field office, taking support of an influential journalist to approach the Additional DIG for his consent to be the Chief Guest of the event was an effective move.

In terms of liaising with community members through engaging Shopno Choya, the only CBO in Barisal Sadar was also praiseworthy step as this will help overcoming the initial level mental and social barrier to create bridges between them and lawyers.

**Views from the Event**

The contents of the speech of Chief Guest were mixtures of his feelings towards 3rd gender communities. He mentioned their rude behaviors while collecting money from families of new born children or from social occasions like marriage ceremonies. But he also underlined the need for creating spaces for this community in terms of jobs or individual business.

He said that lawyers and other stakeholders including law enforcement need to extend support to this community. Asking the lawyers to contact him if any support is needed for providing legal support to this 3rd gender populace, he announced that he would instruct all police stations of Barisal division to assign an official for the support to this 3rd gender community.
The lawyers were also engaged in a group work activity in the 2nd half of the event where they identified
- the problems/challenges that the gender diverse communities may face in terms of legal issues
- the possible way out/forward and
- ideal roles of Bandhu's panel lawyers in terms of extending supports to these communities.

It was observed that some wonderful ideas came up such as

a) Awareness building among people on 3rd gender population utilizing the religious leaders considering socio-cultural sensitivity
b) Establish shelter home for the sick, aged and survivors of violence
c) Arrange life-skill training and trade-based training for the hijra population and facilitate creating livelihood provisions in the social system

The details on this will be on the narrative event report that the HRID team will produce soon.

Recommendations from the event monitoring:

- Since the lawyers arrive between afternoon and evening of the day before of event, a welcoming session through a dinner (utilizing the allocation of per diem for dinner) can be thought of as a part of ice-breaking on sensitive issues like gender diversity, human rights from the perspective of health rights.

- At the end of session, an evaluation on the level of understanding on SOGI and human rights issues can be conducted. (Lawyers may be asked to write top four lessons learned on a card and stick to board without mentioning names)

- Lawyers to be motivated to engage in dialogues with the chief guest and special guests (if available) so as to have even more fruitful discussions on the legal issues of the gender diverse population.

- Considering the huge coordination tasks of confirming participation of lawyers from various districts of a division, confirming Chief Guest and Special Guest(s), logistics, food & accommodation of participants, bills adjustments with the participants immediately after the event maintaining prescribed formats and procedures, returning travel plan should not be planned on the event day.