Reducing the impact of HIV on men who have sex with men and transgender populations in South Asia

HALF YEARLY REPORT
Bandhu Social Welfare Society (BSWS)
Dhaka, Bangladesh

JULY-DECEMBER 2014
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Introduction

Bandhu Social Welfare Society (BSWS) was formed in 1996 to address concerns of human rights abuse and denial of sexual health rights, and provide a rights-based approach to health and social services for the most stigmatized and vulnerable populations in Bangladesh, including men who have sex with men (MSM), kothis/hijras and their partners. BSWS have been officially registered since 1997, starting with a staff of just two and a small programme in Central Dhaka supported by the Royal Norwegian Embassy. Over the years it has emerged as a national community-led organization currently providing social and health services to a broad range of sexual minority populations in 21 districts in the country.

A core objective of BSWS work with MSM and Hijras/transgender people is to advocate and provide for an environment where the respect and dignity of all sexual minority populations, irrespective of their specific gender and/or sexual identity, is assured. Furthermore, BSWS seeks to create an enabling social, policy and legal environment, thereby supporting sexual minorities to more effectively respond to issues around their sexual health rights and basic human rights.

Mission:

Bandhu Social Welfare Society works toward the well-being of sexual minorities by facilitating sexual and reproductive health services and supporting human rights, dignity and alternative livelihoods of their choices.

Vision:

Bandhu Social Welfare Society envisions a Bangladesh where every person, irrespective of their gender and sexuality, is able to lead a quality life with dignity, human rights and social justice.

BSWS Strategic Goals:

Goal-1:
Enhanced coverage and comprehensive services of SRHR including HIV for sexual minority communities and their partners

Goal-2:
Reduced physical, social, psychological and legal harassment and stigma of sexual minority communities

Goal-3:
Enhance decision making ability of the sexual minority communities in program and policy issues

Goal-4:
Improved livelihood options for the sexual minority communities

Goal-5:
Enhanced capacity and sustainability of the BSWS
## At a glance Ongoing Project and Donors

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MSA Project

The Multi-Country South Asia Global Fund HIV Programme (MSA Programme) is a regional HIV programme operating in eight countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The overall goal of the programme is to reduce the impact of, and vulnerability to, HIV among men who have sex with men, hijra and transgender people through Community Systems Strengthening (CSS).

The programme supports building the capacity of in-country and regional community-based Sub-recipient organizations engaged in service provision (HIV prevention, care and support services), policy development and advocacy, partnership building with local governments and health departments, research related to MSM and transgender issues, and on creating stronger community systems to support and sustain this work. In order for the interventions carried out by the community-based organizations (CBOs) to be both effective and sustainable, it is necessary to build their capacity, create stronger linkages and networks between community organizations, community-led interventions and government, and provide longer-term support to these groups.

The programme is currently in Phase 2, which will run from July 2013 to December 2015, supported by a $16.7 million grant from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Phase 1 ran from 2011-2013). For Phase 2, the United Nations Development Programme Asia-Pacific Regional Centre (UNDP APRC) has undertaken the role of interim Principal Recipient.

To reach this goal, there are three proposed objectives:

a. To improve the delivery of HIV prevention, care and treatment services for MSM and transgender populations in South Asia
b. To improve the policy environment with regards to MSM, transgender, and HIV-related issues in South Asia
c. To improve strategic knowledge about the impact of HIV on MSM and transgender populations in South Asia.

Planned Activities from July-December, 2014

Key achievements:

- Organized a Regional Consultation on Faith, Cultural Diversity, Access to Health and HIV with 26 regional participants, including religious leaders. The two-day consultation was held from 18-19 August 2014 and developed country wide Action Plans for further follow up (for more detail please visit www.bandhu-bd.org).
- A media forum has been formed consisting of 20 media professionals from electronic, print, online and FM radio. Also, a media gatekeepers meeting was organized as per the media forum action plan.
- The Media Fellowship initiative was completed successfully between October-December 2014. A total of 10 influential media representatives were assigned for the fellowship and 30 articles on different issues were produced for a variety of media (articles are available in www.bandhu-bd.org).
- Seven CBOs have achieved the minimum capacity as a result of capacity development on financial policy, M&E policy and good governance systems, and strategic partnerships have been fostered with other health service providing organizations.
- Five CBOs developed their three-year strategic plans.
- A country-wide Hijra Pride festival was organized and the “Dhaka Declaration” and policy consultation was held with policy makers.
- Conducted eight needs-based training for CBOs Executive Committee members, volunteers and staff as a part of capacity building initiatives.
Activity Updates:

City level mapping of health services to address HIV issues among MSM and TG people:

An orientation session on the 7 City Mapping Study for Local City Consultants was organized by APM Global Health from 22-24 September 2014 in Hotel Dusit Thani, Bangkok. From Bangladesh, Ms. Umme Farhana Zarif, Programme Manager, MSA Programme, BSWS and Mr. Zahid Hossen, Consultant attended the Local Consultants Workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss the methodology of the study and to formulate a work plan with each country. Representatives from each SR of the country along with local consultants of each country participated in the workshop.

Under this study, two workshops were conducted, titled “Momentum workshop” and “Visioning workshop” dated 15 November and 27 December 2014, respectively. In the Momentum workshop a total of 18 participants attended representing different selected organizations including NGO, GOB, CCM and community representatives. The Visioning Workshop was conducted on 27 December 2014. A total of 22 participants attended and provided significant recommendations for further scaling-up of HIV programmes in Bangladesh.

Produce a range of advocacy and empowering information resources and toolkits:

BSWS produced a significant number of posters on five different themes during the celebration of Hijra Pride 2014. With the remarkable and commendable recognition of hijra as a third gender by the Government of Bangladesh on 10 November, 2014. 2013, Bandhu Social Welfare Society celebrated the Declaration’s one year anniversary with the Ministry of Social Welfare and UNAIDS. The divisional activities (Chittagong, Sylhet, Rangpur, Rajshahi, Barisal and Khulna) held on 2 November 2014 included: (i) colourful rally; (ii) hijra talent hunt competition; (iii) henna festival; and (iv) consultation meeting of community representatives with local administration, law enforcement agencies and relevant stakeholders and authorities.

The major objective of the poster development was to reduce the stigma and discrimination and create mass awareness in Bangladesh. BSWS covered the seven divisional cities with thematic posters to create positive views towards the community.
Training programme for emergent CBOs and in-country downstream partners:

Title: Training on Leadership Development  
Date: 15-17 July, 2014  
Number of Participants: 30

**Objective:**  
To enhance leadership on HIV prevention and empower to create a sustainable environment for MSM and TG/Hijra in Bangladesh.

**Outcome:**  
Participants learned about their life situation in a new dimension, explored social and personal life-based needs and concerns, strengthened confidence in decision making, developed strategies for improving leadership, and analyzed the roles and responsibilities of good leaders.

Title: Training on Documentation and Report Writing  
Date: 24-27 August, 2014  
Number of Participants: 30

**Objective:**  
The objective of this course was to provide the trainees with a comprehensive understanding of the good documentation practices and the techniques of quality report writing tailored to the specific needs of the organization.

**Outcome:**  
Participants were able to employ an efficient process for planning and organizing information and ideas, eliminate “information dumping” in reports, understand the writing techniques, eliminate jargon from the text, and reduce the amount of time required to write and read reports.

Title: Training on Project Management, Advocacy and Human Rights  
Date: 24-28 September, 2014  
Number of Participants: 30

**Objective:**  
- The major objective of this Training was to provide basic knowledge on project management in relation to human rights and advocacy of sexual minorities in Bangladesh. Participants also learned skills and ways to be a change-maker/advocate in the areas of human rights.

**Outcome:**  
Participants are able to gain knowledge and skills on human rights, human rights & sexual minorities, violence, harassment, stigma, laws in Bangladesh related to sexual minorities, evidence based advocacy, use of BCC/IEC tools in advocacy, Motivational Intervention (MI+) and its impacts, case management, storage management, staff management and supportive supervision, outreach approach, STI & HTC services, treatment, care and support for MSM and TG PLHIV, monitoring, evaluation and documentation, financial Management, and HR management.
Title: Training on Gender and Sexuality
Date: 26-30 October, 2014
Number of Participants: 31

Objective:
The participants became sensitized on issues related to gender and sexuality and so as to implement gender and sexuality sensitive development activities.

Outcome:
Participants were able to understand gender and sexuality issues and related laws. The content of the session included: The Gender game, Stereotypes: self-disclosure, violence against sexual minority, Sexuality Circles, What are the masculinity and femininity, Sexual and reproductive health, Sexual abuses, Rights of Sexual minority, Stigma and Discrimination, MSM & Law situation in Bangladesh, and Love and relationships.

Title: Training on Team Building
Date: 11-13 November, 2014
Number of Participants: 30

Objective:
• Improve staff intra- and inter-personal communication skills and positive attitudes to strengthen team work.
• Enhance staff individual capacity and skills towards the achievement of organizational goals.

Outcome:
• The following outcomes of the training resulted:
• Improved intra- and inter-personal communication skills of CBO representatives and positive attitudes developed to strengthen team work.
• Enhanced individual capacity and skills towards the achievement of organizational goals.

Title: The Training on Financial Management
Date: 9-11 December, 2014
Number of Participants: 34

Objective:
At the end of the training, the participants were able to build the financial management capacity in their own community based organization, personal dealings and professional life as well. Participants were able to take right measurements through a team approach on financial management. Participants were able to manage their own CBO related financial responsibilities in groups, other official communication, personal, professional and logical issues with full confidence and upholding their financial reporting capacity within a short period.

Outcome:
Participants were able to manage difficult situations, identify and explain the process of budgeting, develop ability to collect bills, approval procedure, documentation and how to make good decisions, basic features of cash management for effective implementation of the activities, etc.
If we analyze the 6 trainings, it is clearly seen from the graph that the pretest average was lower than post test average score. The pre-test average score of Training on leadership was 66 whereas post test score was 94. If we look at the Training on Documentation and Report Writing, the pre test score was 47 and post test score was 96. The pre-test score of Training on Project Management, Advocacy and Human Rights was 12 while the post test score improved to 52. The pre-test score of training on Gender and Sexuality was 42 and post-test score 62. The pre- test score of training on Team Building was 47 whereas the post test score was 89. The pretest score of the training on Financial Management was 50 whereas the post test score was 60. It is clearly seen that post test scores improved substantially over pre test scores for each training. From the analysis we can conclude that after completing the trainings the participants' knowledge on respective training agenda has been increased.

The above bar graph depicting average training pre and post test scores clearly illustrates the improvements in knowledge among participants.

Achievements/Success

- All trainings have been conducted as per the plan with 100% attendance.
- Supplied training materials and proposed methods were effective and well suited to the capacity of participants.
- All the participants were sincere and eager to learn and to develop their capacity.
- They are utilizing their learning skills in their daily life and promoting their rights in their locality (i.e., negotiating during job seeking, house rent and access to treatment in public hospitals and conducting local level networking efficiently)
- Improved responsiveness and participation to share feedback during open discussion sessions reflects their involvement and interaction in the training methods.

CBO on-site technical assistance and monitoring visit/CBO visit:

As a part of CBO onsite Technical Assistance and Monitoring, the team of the MSA Programme visited five CBOs (Shapno in Rajbari district, Arpon Manob Kollan Sangha in Jessore, Chattala Jubo Sangha in Chittagong, Shammo Manab Kollan Sangha in Comilla and Setu Bandhon in Mymensingh) during the reporting period and provided technical support on the following issues:

- Registration follow up
- Assist to develop three-year strategic plan
- Assist to develop guidelines on finance and M&E
- Monitor documentation process
- Guide to practice good governance and assist to conduct regular EC meetings, AGM and dissemination sessions with EC members.
- Develop capacity development plans for CBOs to identify gaps and mentoring accordingly
- Assist to develop monthly work plans and reports
Achievement:

- Three-year strategic plans of 5 CBOs have been developed.
- Four CBOs are under process to get registered.
- Mapping of health service provider organizations completed.
- Financial and M&E guidelines were developed.
- Strengthened the referral mechanism with other health service providing organizations.

Advocacy Meeting on Human Rights in partnership with the National Human Rights Commission

A meeting on Human Rights was held with the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on 14 September 2014 in Dhaka at the NHRC Conference Room.

The rights movement for sexual minority populations has gained considerable momentum in recent years though the time is yet to come where open discussions on the issues can be made publicly and directly. “There is much work to be done in order to uphold sexual minority rights in Bangladesh” said Dr. Mizanur Rahman, Chairman, Jatiyo Manabadhikar Commission (JAMACON). “The struggle for equality in terms of human rights issues of sexual minorities is still in its early stages,” he added.

Dr. Mizanur Rahman was addressing a national level advocacy meeting organized by Bandhu Social Welfare Society (BSWS) in partnership with Jatiya Manabadhikar Commission (JAMACON).

According to Dr. Rahman, JAMACON will play the role of collaborator with BSWS in working for the human rights of sexual minority populations in the country and will stand alongside BSWS in addressing discrimination. He said also that JAMACON would invite BSWS along with other organizations at its upcoming conference to exchange views on the facts and implementable ideas to fight for removing discrimination and ensuring the human rights of sexual minorities.

During the meeting the MSA Programme team presented on the ongoing and planned activities related to human rights. Umme Farhana Zarif Kanta, Program Manager of BSWS briefed on the Ain-Alap - a legal help unit of BSWS. The meeting had an open and interactive discussion session where the participants shared their experiences and provided valuable suggestions to move forward with activities smoothly.

Sohel Rana, a victim and beneficiary of BSWS, shared his painful experience as a community representative. In response, the JAMACON Chairman assured BSWS to provide all sorts of legal support to address the problem along with such other discrimination cases.
Meet the justice: A case study

Sohel Rana had been working at Bangladesh Medical Studies and Research Institute (BMSRI). Due to social stigma, he kept his gender identity hidden. From the time of disclosure of his gender identity, offensive and abusive remarks from colleagues and management became a regular phenomenon for him. Despite that Sohel Rana continued his job amid the adverse environment.

At a point of time, he took leave to attend his ailing father and after five days he went to office to resume duties. But then he came to know that he had been terminated from his job. After rigorous consultation and pleas to his supervisor, Sohel Rana succeeded to manage to start working but the authority stopped providing his salary and other benefits.

As information depicted, Sohel Rana had been working for 10 years in BMSRI. In the month of May 2013 he was approved a leave for two consecutive days to take care of the treatment of his sick father. As his father’s health condition deteriorated, he had to extend his leave for three more days.

After 5 months of his nonpayment from his employer Sohel Rana met AIN ALAP through a Watchdog Committee member to seek justice from his employer. AIN ALAP stepped forward, looked into the details of the allegation he brought against BMSRI and after that submitted a dispute to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)\(^1\).

Entrusted with the constitution of Bangladesh (e.g. the constitution of Bangladesh declares “Work is a right, a duty and a matter of honor for every citizen who is capable of working, and everyone shall be paid for his work on the basis of the principle from each according to his abilities to each according to his work” and “The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race caste, sex or place of birth”) NHRC filed the case and moved forward.

A total of seven hearings were held where both parties (e.g. the victim and disputant) attended. The strong standpoint of NHRC stayed as BMSRI failed to justify their decision of not providing salary and other benefits to the victim as correct.

As the NHRC found truth in the victim’s allegation, it arrived at a position to issue a notice to BMSRI for paying off the dues of Sohel Rana from May 2013 to September 2013. Following the notice BMSRI handed over all the dues in presence of the Additional District Judge, Honorable Director of NHRC and BSWS representatives. Moreover, BMSRI has been requested and they have primarily agreed to take necessary initiatives to reinstate Mr. Sohel Rana and finally from 1 January 2015 Sohel Rana joined in his previous position.

Achievement:

- Strong commitment of NHRC to ensure the rights of sexual minorities
- Quarterly basis session is organized to share the updates
- Good rapport built up between BSWS and NHRC

Representatives from NHRC participated in an International seminar to ensure the justice of third gender.
Human Rights Cell (HRC) to Monitor Human Rights abuses of MSM and TG in Bangladesh

A Human Rights Cell (HRC) was established to support the ongoing and future work of Bandhu Social Welfare Society on the human rights issues of the MSM and TG/Hijra in Bangladesh. Broadly, the Cell, under the MSA Programme, will provide all necessary support to BSWS in the overall coordination, design and implementation of activities aiming at protecting rights and wellbeing of sexual minority communities.

One of the guiding principles of the HRC is to strengthen the integration and mainstreaming of the rights-based approach to the work on sexual minorities issues. A set of activities, ranging from human right abuse case documentation to policy advocacy, has undertaken under the HRC. The cell closely works with Human Right Commission of Bangladesh, UN agencies, NGOs, lawyers group and Media working on human rights issues. The Project DIVA provides necessary support to run the HRC smoothly and functionally.

On the Dated 30th September, 2014 at Conference Room, Project Management Office, 177 Noyatola, Moghbazar, Dhaka a discussion meeting organized by Multi Country South Asia Global Fund HIV program (MSA-Phase 2) to create a network among the members of HR cell and other organizations who provide legal assistance for MSM and TG population. During the event, the participants have awarded about the nature of the work HR cell would do and the participants would help to expand the network of HR cell by involving other legal organizations who work for MSM and TG population, to make HR cell a more comprehensive form. The participants acknowledged that Human Rights Cell is a representative body to address legal issues regarding MSM/TG community from DLLG (District Level Lawyer Group), Watch Dog Committee Members, from BSWS representatives.

He shared the success story of Sohel Rana and how Sohel Raha achieved his legal rights to the participants in the meeting. Md. Moshiur Rahman also shared the abuse incident from Mymensingh and shared his experience how it was resolved.

It was decided that, HR cell will expand and invite other legal organizations to make HR cell more comprehensive HR cell will clearly mention the responsibilities for each of the representatives of the cell so that the members will be aware about their role in the field That is why more networks will be build up among different organizations. HR cell will produce a report which will help the members to recap the issues discussed in the meeting.

The participants expressed that human rights cell will work to monitor the abuse cases on MSM and TG population and thus will demonstrate its work through publication and promotional materials, which can help to create awareness about the human rights situation of MSM and TG population.

To make Human Rights Cell in a more comprehensive form Maksuda Sultana suggested that the BSWS Media Advocacy Group can be tagged with HR cell in a representative manner and this will influence the work of HR cell in a positive way.

Achievement:

- Violations of Reports are documented properly.
- Community people are more concerned to claim their Rights and feel free to share their status.
- Quarterly updates are being shared among the members and established linkage with local level networks
- Filling the evidence-based case and seeking the support of NHRC where necessary.
Regional consultation on Faith, HIV and SOGI:

A regional consultation on Faith, Sexual Diversity, and Access to Health & HIV was held on 18-19 August 2014 in Bangladesh where a total of 26 participants attended from other South Asian Countries. In addition, a significant number of guests represented different sectors including Government, UN agencies, Civil Society, Faith Based Organizations, INGO and NGOs in the consultation. The major objectives of this event were:

• To develop a paper on Islam, linking the role of religion in gender identification, sexual diversity and access to health services

• To convene two-day regional consultations that will explore issues on Faith especially on sexual diversity and access to health.

• To develop a range of recommendations for further actions including outlining a number of resources addressing individual needs for psycho-religious support, thus helping to promote more positive and affirming attitudes towards sexual minorities in Muslim majority countries.

Achievement:

At the end of the consultation, each country developed an Action Plan where each South Asian countries committed to implement their assigned tasks within their country as per time frame. The focus of the action plan was to reduce stigma and discrimination and Zero HIV new infection, reduce stigma and ensure the rights of MSM and TG, create enabling environment for sexual minorities, empowerment of sexual minorities, access to all health services, design effective response to HIV/AIDS, to cover all KAPs, to ensure enabling environment, Strategic Information gathering, to enhance gender equity and Human Rights, to ensure support for PLHIV & KAP.
Regional HIV Treatment Literacy Training for Trainers Bangkok

Under the capacity building of BSWS staffs, Mohammad Rofiqul Islam, Sr. Officer “Training & Counseling” and Khandoker Pervez Ur Rahman, Counselor attended the Regional HIV Treatment Literacy Training of Trainers in Bangkok. First phase of the training was on 10-12 September and second phase was on 28 September- 1 October 2014. This was Regional TOT package developed by APN+ as part of MSA project led by UNDP APRC, Bangkok. The venue of the consultation was in Rembrandt Hotel, Sukhumvit soi 18, Bangkok. A total of 14 trainees (community representatives and HIV doctors) from other Sub-Recipient i.e Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka also attended.

The overall objectives were:

- Increase program participants’ understanding on the concept and application of Treatment as Prevention (TasP) and knowledge of HIV treatment;
- Develop capacity of MSM and transgender community members in the delivery of treatment information and treatment literacy activities;
- Identify opportunities for community knowledge transfer on TasP and health rights; and
- Develop strategies for improving access to rights-based comprehensive HIV-related services for MSM and transgender people

Through this training- the trainee learned how to advocate people specially MSM and Hijra’s regarding HIV treatment and survival. A the end of the session Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Pakistan made up an individual county plan which will be implemented to enhance the HIV treatment literacy program with MSM and transgender under this grant.

Achievement:

Master trainers have been developed to carry out country level training package. A clear understanding on specific package has been gathered throughout the training and a good network with other countries developed. This training also created opportunity to transfer the community knowledge amongst each other and helped to develop strategies for further comprehensive HIV related services.

Pilot training on Health Sector/Stigma:

The Regional Training of Trainers “The Time has come: Enhancing HIV, STI, and other Sexual Health Services for MSM and Transgender People in Asia and the Pacific” was organized by UNDP from 19-22 November 2014 at Bangkok. The overall package was developed by UNDP and WHO-SEARO to support the implementation of the Multi-Country South Asia Global Fund Programme (MSA) in eight South Asian Countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka). The regional ToT was jointly organized by UNDP and WHO and the objective of the training was to produce a group of master trainers that can train the national trainers among the health care providers in the seven countries. As a part of this, BSWS nominated 4 Health Service Providers from Bangladesh.

Achievement:

This training helped to expand and strengthen the capacities of the ToT participants for further advocate and support towards MSM and TG HIV-related programs. This training also helped them to deepen their understanding of the HIV prevention, care and treatment response for MSM and transgender people in the country. After the training the ToT participants already designed to implement the assigned training for Govt. Health Service providers and worked on National Curriculum development.

Media Advocacy Initiatives:

In Bangladesh, there are two categories of mass media- print media and electronic media. Media has made good progress in its struggle to establish democracy and rights. This is an encouraging sign that so many newspapers and weeklies are coming out in this country. In leading a nation towards a new height of development, electronic media can play a tremendous role. A free media is the key to promote good governance and promote Human Rights of marginalized and stigmatized population especially the vulnerable
group for HIV in Bangladesh. To ensure the rights of MSM and building a stigma and discrimination free society BSWS initiated a media advocacy group consisting 10-15 influential media personnel from both from print and electronic media. In line with the project objectives, the Media Advocacy group will focus on the following objectives:

1. To facilitate a more positive media environment on reporting on MSM and hijras
2. To improve the policy and legal environment for MSM and hijras
3. To facilitate the process of effective implementation of Project MSA phase 2 activities in Bangladesh, and
4. To create a sustainable milieu for the MSM and hijras in Bangladesh.

Under this activity one Media Advocacy Meeting was conducted on 6th September 2014. The aim of this meeting was to sensitize media personnel for extending cooperation and support towards upholding as well as establishing human rights of MSM/TG population in Bangladesh. A total Fourteen (14) forum members attended the meeting. They were committed in developing an enabling environment to implement the BSWS programs, provide evidence based information and opportunities for media engagement in positive reporting, cover the advocacy initiatives with multi-level Stakeholders including the government high officials and capacity building initiatives for emergent CBOs/NGOs.

Media Fellowship program:

In Bangladesh, media reporting on sexual minority groups has often been prejudiced, inaccurate and sensational resulting in a distortion to the public’s views on sexual orientation and gender identity issues. To remedy this, Bandhu Social Welfare Society launched its 4th Media Fellowship initiative that leverages the influence of the media to work as a positive force for improving the human rights and health of these vulnerable populations.

BSWS believes that by engaging with communities and raising awareness among media practitioners, the media can influence public opinion and policies and programmes, and contribute to a more effective HIV response in the region. BSWS intends to make a bridge between the sexually minority groups and the media in order to cater better understanding between the two and create a positive attitude towards these minority people. This year journalist fellows from 10 different newspapers, online media, radio and television contributed to make mass media more responsive and sympathetic to the sexual minority communities, tried to reduce misreporting, ignite new horizon for journalistic reportage, highlighted the rights of the sexual minority population and pave ways for creation of a higher degree of social tolerance.

However, to orient the journalists on sexual minorities’ issues, a residential orientation session was held on 18-19 October 2014 at Hope Centre, Savar, Dhaka. In the session the following issues were covered: MSM Framework vs Local & Global Situation, screening documentary on ‘Will This Change’ to know the level of stigma and discrimination by the society, Media Fellowship : Expectation & Challenges, Legal Framework and International treaties, Story Planning and Strategies of media fellowship and how to involve media gatekeepers in the process, etc. At the end of the session, the fellows got clear views about the MSM and TG community, gathered knowledge and information on homosexuality, gender, sex and sexuality, national and
**Achievement:**

During three months fellowship, a total of 30 articles produced and aired both in print and electronic media. The electronic features were also disseminated by the respective fellows in the social media for further sharing. After three months fellowship, a grand finale award ceremony was organized by BSWS on 14th December 2014. A total of 78 guests including 10 media fellows attended the grand closing program. Advocate Md. Fazle Rabbi Miah, Honorable Member of Parliament and Honorable Deputy Speaker, Parliament of Bangladesh attended the program as Chief Guest. In addition, Mr. Leo Kenny, Country Director, UNAIDS, Syed Ishtiq Reza, Director, News, Ekattor Television, Nawajish Ali Khan, Advisor, Program, ATN Bangla, Abdul Matin Khasru, Honorable Member of Parliament were present as Special Guests. As award, each fellow received completion Certificate, Crest and BDT 50,000 to cover field visit, communication, local travel and other unforeseen expenses in connection with the assignment.

**Some recommendations of the program are:**

- Arrange training for the journalists, so that they can address stigma and discrimination of the targeted population and take effective steps to generate evidence based report and publish in different media.
- Need to highlight their untold sufferings in the print and electronic media thus will people to change their attitude towards TG and MSM community.
- BSWS can start negotiation with other stakeholders’ i.e poet, writer, and film makers in assistance with Media fellows to produce relevant positive story/drama or film highlighting the Hijra tradition and culture for mass awareness.
- BSWS should continue the series of meetings with MP to formulate related policies for hijra as third gender in Bangladesh.


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M&E Systems Strengthening Assessment (MESSA) Workshop

A one-day consultative workshop was held on 12 November, 2014 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. In coordination and collaboration with relevant stakeholders, the workshop was funded by UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub with technical assistance from UNDP-Bangkok, NASP, and UNAIDS Bangladesh country office. The overall objective of the workshop was to review and strengthen the existing national M&E system (inclusive of capacities of implementing organizations) using the 12 components tool in order to ensure quality service delivery for MSM and Hijra/TG in Bangladesh.

A large range of stakeholders from diverse professions and disciplines participated in the workshop. Unfortunately the UNDP staff member from the Bangkok Regional Hub could not join the workshop due to some priority issues and the Executive Director of BSWS apologized to the participants on behalf of UNDP during his plenary presentation. The organizations participated were: NASP under the Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (PR-RCC-HIV grant); Country Coordination Mechanism (CCM); UNAIDS; UNICEF; WHO; ICDDR,B (PR-RCC-HIV grant and funding BSWS as a SR); Save the Children (PR-RCC-HIV grant); Ashar Alo Society (Organization working with PLHIV); CBOs working with TG (Badhon Hijra Shangha, Shustha Jibon, Somporker Noya Setu); Light House (SR of ICDDR,B); HASAB (Link up project); two organizations working on reproductive health and rights (RHSTEP and BAPSA) and finally BSWS. Representatives from all the organizations participated actively and contributed in various capacities in the workshop.

Objective:

The overall objective of the workshop was to review and strengthen the existing national M&E system (inclusive of capacities of implementing organizations) to ensure quality service delivery for MSM and Hijra/TG in Bangladesh. The specific objectives were to

- Assess the national M&E Plan and the capacities of the Program’s implementing partners who are working with MSM/MSW and TG;
- Evaluate how the M&E activities of the Programs are linked and integrated within the National M&E System;
- Develop a budgeted action plan to strengthen M&E systems.

The key recommendations generated from the workshop are presented below:

- Strengthen NASP (with appropriate structure, human resources and other logistical supports) by positioning it into the regular organogram of the DGHS with approved work plan and budget and clearly defined roles and responsibility of staff.
- The M&E unit should regularly liaise with M&E focal points of different partner organizations to coordinate M&E activities and to promote an effective functioning M&E system.
- Nationally endorsed HIV M&E training curriculum should be developed that will be followed by all stakeholders.
- NASP should develop a national database of training institutions and trainers who provide M&E training.
- System for on the job training and supporting supervision should be formalized both at national and umbrella organization levels.
- Functional task analysis for assessing M&E human resource capacity across the sector should be conducted.
- An annual work plan of M&E-TWG and inventory of stakeholders, partners and service delivery points need to be maintained and individual members may take responsibility in a cyclical manner to ensure regular meetings and actions.
- Establish coordination of monitoring and evaluation activities by holding regular meetings of M&E TWG and other groups working with strategic information and strengthen coordination mechanisms among donors, ministries and technical working groups.
- Joint planning with key stakeholders, CCM, and individual meetings with organizations involved in
M&E should be maintained. Joint M&E activities with representatives from different organizations; and joint field visits to local projects should be strengthened and maintained.

- The TWG should be expanded including representation from relevant ministries, organizations working with MSM/MSW/TG, CBOs, relevant research/private organizations, self help groups, public administration, etc. to develop a multi sectoral M&E Technical Working Group.
- While revising the national M&E plan aligning with the revised NSP (2011-2017), the findings of mid-term review of NSP and lesson learnt from program implementation should be incorporated. Standard routine monitoring tools, details data collection procedure, data quality assurance, data utilization plan, capacity building plan should also be incorporated. The plan should also include strengthening the capacity of partners involved in the monitoring and evaluation of HIV/AIDS programs.
- While updating the budgeted M&E plan, commitment from different sources should be sought in order to minimize/fulfill the funding gaps.
- The revised M&E plan should articulate detail of all twelve components of a functional national HIV M&E plan.
- In order to align and harmonize all external development partners’ HIV-related programs, there is need for strengthened internal coordination with different sections of Development Partners.
- Funding requirement should be ensured (or at least committed from Government/development partners) while revising the budget and M&E plan.
- M&E Plan should include guidelines on resource allocation from National to implementation level entities.
- Update and implement advocacy strategy in order to fight stigma, discrimination, gender inequalities and punitive laws hindering the HIV response.
- Identify priority areas for HIV M&E communication and advocacy and develop advocacy agenda annually.
- National guidelines need to be developed for recording, collecting, collating and reporting program monitoring data from health information system and civil society/community-based systems.
- MIS reports need to be generated monthly or at least quarterly.
- Develop/revise quality assurance tool and incorporate in all guidelines in order to ensure data quality.
- Technical and financial assistance should be provided to the CBOs working with MSM/MSW/TG to develop their M&E system.

- The Surveillance should be conducted in every two-year interval.
- The national size estimation exercise should be conducted in every 3 years interval.
- A yearly research agenda should be prepared, reviewed and approved by NASP or NASP designated body.
- Explore and include (based on evidence) more vulnerable groups in the national surveillance.
- Structures, mechanisms, procedures and timeframe for transmitting, entering, extracting, merging and transferring data into the national HIV M&E database needs to be clearly defined or updated.
- As per National M&E Framework and Operational Plan all program areas need to be properly reflected in the national database.
- Skilled manpower with Equipment and supplies need to be available at all levels.
- Quality control mechanism in data collection, auditing and its utilization need to be maintained at all levels.
- National guidelines and tools for supportive supervision on M&E should be developed and included in the National M&E Plan.
- Data quality assurance/data auditing protocols should be developed and included in the National M&E Plan.
- A national research agenda should be prepared for each year and the final list should be available in the NASP website.
- Policy level advocacy should be strengthened to integrate research findings in policy formulation
- Stakeholders’ information needs should be assessed on regular basis.
National Coordination and Capacity Building Workshop:

In the period July-December 2014, BSWS organized one workshop to create a common understanding of emergent issues of MSM, TG and Hijra population in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, at present more than 260 NGOs are the members of STI/AIDS network and most of them have no proper knowledge on Sexual Minority needs and concerns. As a result, BSWS created an opportunity to arrange workshop inviting different civil society members thus aimed to increase the effectiveness of national response and sharing knowledge and skills on MSM, TG and Hijra issues. A total of 39 participants attended from 35 NGOs and CBOs out of 260 STI/AIDS Network members of Bangladesh.

Achievement:

Through this workshop, BSWS tried to generate knowledge on gender, sexuality and human rights and other sensitive issues according to the need of partner organizations so that local partners can render their support to marginalized population within their working area.

Community System Strengthening (CSS) and Advocacy Seed Funding:

Considering the need and the objective of the South Asian Regional HIV Program with a strong CSS focus and with reference to the Global Fund’s CSS Framework, one of the main components in the program is Advocacy Seed Grants aims to provide support towards MSM and Transgender lead organization on community driven initiatives in advocating related policy environment at local or national level. As a part of process, a two day orientation workshop was organized by APN+ from 25-26 September in Bangkok where each country representatives attended. After the workshop, Country-wide Action Plan was developed. According to guidance of APN+ and action plan of Bangladesh, BSWS called RFP through BSWS website and two national daily newspapers. A total of 29 proposals were received from different NGOs and CBOs. On the other hand, an ad hoc committee was formed consisting 4 members of NASP, UNAIDS, PLHIV Network and BSWS. The panel already reviewed the proposals and under process.
Hiijra Pride 2014

With the remarkable and commendable recognition of hijra as third gender by the Government of Bangladesh on 10 November 2013, Bandhu Social Welfare Society (BSWS) jointly with the Ministry of Social Welfare and UNAIDS organized Hijra Pride 2014 to commemorate the day of third gender recognition for Hijra community by the Government of Bangladesh. The divisional activities (Chittagong, Sylhet, Rangpur, Rajshahi, Barisal and Khulna) held on 2nd November 2014 included (i) colorful rally (ii) hijra talent hunt competition (iii) henna festival and (iv) consultation meeting of community representatives with local administration, law enforcement agencies and relevant stakeholders and authorities.

The central activities (Dhaka) started on 8th November 2014 with the inauguration of Henna Festival in the presence of their Excellencies - the Ambassadors of Sweden, Norway and other officials from different foreign missions, community members and huge gathering of mass population. The main events on 10 November 2014 included a colorful rally, consultation meeting of community representatives with policy makers, administration, law enforcement agencies and relevant stakeholders and authorities, grand finale of hijra talent hunt competition and cultural program by hijra community.

Pride Rally

Pride rallies were organized at all divisions on 2nd November 2014. Hijra and their gurus (leaders) with banner and festoons and placards and drum beats were joined by civil society members, students, pedestrians, journalists and lawyers. The central level rally (in Dhaka) was on 10 November 2014 where an approximate 1500 hijra marched in the country's first ever Pride parade to mark one year recognition of third gender from Press Club to National Museum. The rally with dancing and singing of hijra with colorful saris, banners and festoons and a huge Bangladeshi flag drew undivided attentions of the general people and media.

Consultation Session

The divisional consultation sessions were organized on 2nd November 2014 with the top echelon government officials of district/division administration, members of civil society and hijra community. A presentation was made on the current scenario of hijra population in the country in comparison to neighboring countries, what so far has been done for Hijra Community in the country, what needs immediate and future attention and what are the challenges. Each divisional consultation session came up with recommendations which were presented at the Central Consultation session held in Dhaka on 10 November 2014 with Ms. Tarana Halim MP as the Chief Guest, Ms. Mily Biswas, Additional Police Commissioner, Dhaka Metropolitan Police and Mr. Leo Kenny, Country Director, UNAIDS as the Special Guest. Professor Dr.
A.K.M Nurun Nabi, Vice Chancellor, Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur chaired the event. In line with those recommendations, the central consultation session designed a way forward with specific recommendations and termed it as “Dhaka Declaration” with a view to addressing and establishing human rights issues of hijra community and placing them in a position where they will be able to add value to the society and its growth with dignity and honor.

**Henna Festival**
The henna festivals were organized in all divisions which gave a tremendous momentum to the Hijra Pride festive. People of all strata including hijra community members took spontaneous participation and colored their mind with various designs with henna. The central level Henna festival was organized at different locations of Dhaka city during 8-9 November 2014.

**Talent Hunt and Grand Finale**
The talent hunt competition had a thriving response from the hijra community. A total of 16 top scorers from all divisions competed at the Talent Hunt Grand Finale held at National Museum Auditorium in Dhaka on 10 November 2014. The singing, dancing and acting before a huge audience of hijra community, policy makers, officials from government and non-government sectors, foreign diplomatic missions, UN agencies gave the program a meaningful festive mood with a distinct message that if given opportunities, the hijra community can also contribute in the country’s growth like others.
Award for the acknowledgement of unparallel contribution and social services towards the well-being of the nation:

On 24th December 2014, Sher-e-Bangla A. K. Fazlul Huq Gobeshona Parishad awarded “Bijoy Smriti Padak-2014” to Mr. Shale Ahmed, Executive Director of BSWS for his unparallel contribution and social services towards the well-being of the nation. On behalf of Mr. Shale, Mr. Md. Shahidul Alam, Director-F&A of BSWS received the award.
Attending Bi-regional meeting on the dissemination and roll out of the WHO 2014 in Manila Chaired by Shale Ahmed Executive Director:

According to UNAIDS estimates, there were 350 000 new HIV infections in 2013 in Asia and the Pacific. More people living with HIV are accessing treatment - 1.56 million in 2013. In the past five years, however, the overall numbers of new infections have remained largely unchanged. New HIV infections are occurring among key populations, such as people who inject drugs, men who have sex with men, transgender people, sex workers and their partners.

WHO headquarters released the Consolidated Guidelines on HIV Diagnosis, Prevention, Treatment and Care for Key Populations at the July 2014 International AIDS Conference in Melbourne, Australia. These guidelines provide an important opportunity for Member States to: (i) adjust national strategic plans to strengthen HIV surveillance among key populations; (ii) refocus HIV prevention on high impact interventions at the required scale and quality targeting key populations; (iii) adjust HIV prevention and treatment targets to reach key populations; (iv) strengthen partnership between stakeholders including affected key populations and people living with HIV; and (v) adjust plans for HIV/AIDS funding including for the Global Fund’s New Funding Model. This meeting aims to start a coordinated process for roll-out and implementation of the new WHO guidelines on HIV and key populations in Asia and the Pacific.

Shale Ahmed Executive Director of Bandhu Social Welfare Society as a representative of CSO was nominated by the Ministry of Health of Family Welfare to participate the meeting that took place from 26-27th November 2014 in Manila, Philippines. He was also nominated by the participants to chair the session of day two of the meeting.
Knowledge management:

Resource Centre: The resource center of BSWS is now fully functional for all, especially for the young MSM/TG population who are not willing to disclose their identity. A significant number of visitors including adolescents, students, teachers, like minded organizations, and CBO’s employee visited the resource center for different purposes. They were mostly interested in reading books, research findings, BSWS publications, Journals, browsing internets, using computers, watching different movies and video documentation.

Teambuilding: As a part of teambuilding BSWS regularly disseminates different news of latest activities in UNDP teambuilding.

Networking:

Regular meetings with RCC (country program): In Bangladesh, at present two programs is being implemented under Global Fund. To avoid duplication and to complement and supplement each other, BSWS regularly conduct meetings with RCC country program. The basic objective of these meetings were to share the updates of both programs and how to develop Financial and M&E guideline for CBOs and how to ensure maximum services towards CBOs. These initiatives really helped both programs to provide maximum support towards Community System Strengthening in Bangladesh and for the first time BSWS jointly organized financial management training for CBO members.

Annual Sharing and Strategic plan review meeting in Nepal:

BSWS arranged three days’ workshop in Nepal in order to review its strategic plan at the Hotel Holy Himalaya, Kathmandu, Nepal. A total of 30 participants joined this workshop. The inauguration was held on 17th December 2014 where Chairman, Executive Director, Executive members, staffs of Bandhu Social Welfare Society and the ED and staff of Blue Diamond Society were present. The outcome of this workshop was that participants have identified achievement, challenges, learning from 2014 and planned for 2015.
Photo Exhibition Diversity Voice

‘Diversity Voice’, has been thought by Rofiqul Islam Royal (Bangladesh) & Sebastien Chatelier (France), before to turn into a community in Bangladesh. For the first time in Dhaka, an exhibition has shown every single kind of person part of this community: gay couple, lesbian couple and transsexual couple. Beside a celebration, an opening ceremony has to be a union: between subject and person. The 24th of August 2014 6pm, at EMK Center Dhaka, approximately 150 persons have joined us. Maximum of them were community’s members and got interact with each other by relax, but constructive approach. Open minded regarding to the subject, embassies of Canada (Mr Daniel Loutfi), Sweden and Netherland (Mr Henrick Van Asch Van Wijck), were present to support this unique initiative. Several international NGO’s have also join Diversity Voices, such as Plan International, CARE.

Ms. Mily Bishwas, additional Police Commissioner of Dhaka, was the chief guest to officially open ‘Diversity Voices’. Determined and convinced, she declared her commitment towards the Hijra community. Meaningful, her presence could have been interpreted as engagement from the government, in direction of the gender and sexual minorities of Bangladesh. To conclude by joy, Boby Hijra, executive director of Sustha Jibon, Shakib, member of Essence of the Soul group & Aunannya, have provided a dynamic, emotional and sexy dance performance. Here was also a message: Behind the stigmas, a traditional and smiling community is existing.