Bangladesh Achievements Under the Multi-Country South Asia Global Fund Regional HIV Grant (MSA) 2011-2018
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FOREWORD

The Multi-Country South Asia Global Fund HIV Programme (MSA Programme) was instrumental in carrying out evidence-based advocacy, fostering partnership with Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) at different districts, civil societies, local government, health departments and prime stakeholders to address HIV-related issues that are affecting Men who have Sex with Men (MSM), Hijras and Transgender (TG) populations through creating stronger community system, strengthening health system and capacity building initiatives.

In Bangladesh, this project mainly focused on Policy Advocacy & Human Rights, Community System Strengthening (CSS) and knowledge generations amongst targeted beneficiaries. Over the course of implementation, Bandhu implemented a number of activities and achieved significant results which include:

**Policy Advocacy and Human Rights:** Bandhu conducted series of advocacy with multi-level stakeholders including Policy Makers, Parliamentarians, high officials of Government and achieved significant results. Strong linkages and collaboration with National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), National Legal Aid Services (NLASO), National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) and other legal aid service providing organizations had also been developed. Bandhualsoformed a lawyer's panel and extended support to Ain Alap- a legal help line to ensure legal support to the community members.

**Capacity Building of CBOs and other Stakeholders:** Bandhu supported to establish 31 CBOs (Community Based Organizations) at different districts with the direct support of MSA grant. Besides these, Bandhu also arranged capacity building trainings and orientations with Government health service providersto ensure stigma free services for community from Government set-ups at local level.

**Knowledge Management:** Bandhu established a Gender and Sexuality Resource Centre to empower community people through providing accurate and appropriate information on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and acts as a hub for organizations, resources, services and programs of interest to the Gender Diverse population.

Despite various challenges related to socio-cultural perspective in Bangladesh, the MSA project completed with significant results and had become a role model to other community organizations in national and regional level. However, we need to continue our sustainable work to achieve the treatment target of 90-90-90 by 2020, thereby ending AIDS by 2030.

Shale Ahmed
Executive Director
Bandhu Social Welfare Society
The Multi-Country South Asia Global Fund HIV Programme (MSA Programme) was a regional HIV programme operated in seven countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The program initially started in 2011 and continued till December 2018 including the project closure period (October-December 2018). This program supported in reviewing policies and making reforms through evidence-based advocacy. Furthermore, it fostered partnership with Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), civil societies, local government, health departments and key stakeholders to address HIV-related issues affecting MSM, Hijra and TG people through creating stronger community system, strengthening health system and capacity building initiatives. The evidence-based advocacy efforts have enhanced the capacity of CBOs to address policy and advocacy; generated knowledge and evidence to advocate on HIV issues affecting MSM, Hijra and TG people at local, national and regional level; enhanced technical capacity of healthcare providers to deliver quality and friendly services, sensitized key stakeholders on human rights and sexual orientation and gender identity issues. In Bangladesh, this project mainly focused on Community System Strengthening (CSS), Policy Advocacy & Human Rights and Knowledge management over the course of MSA project implementation.
MAJOR AREAS OF WORK

MSA project is a role model to other community organizations in national and regional level in terms of Community System Strengthening and Policy Advocacy. Despite all the challenges related to socio-cultural perspective in Bangladesh, the project contributed to reduce the vulnerability of HIV/AIDS by introducing different modalities along with national service delivery programs. The project had three major areas of work that include:

1. Policy Advocacy and Human Rights
2. Community System Strengthening
3. Knowledge Management

The project had significant achievements in each major area of work which are described below:

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN POLICY ADVOCACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Policy Advocacy and Human Rights was one of the core components of MSA project. Bandhu conducted series of advocacy events with multi-level stakeholders including Policy Makers, Parliamentarians, influential Government high officials and achieved significant results to enhance the wellbeing of sexual and gender diverse population in Bangladesh. To formulate policies in favor of hijra, Bandhu designed and conducted different consultations, sensitization meetings, orientation programs with various constituencies under this project.

The major achievements under 'Policy Advocacy and Human Rights' component constitutes four thematic areas which are described below:

POLICY LEVEL ADVOCACY

- In Bangladesh, Hijra people had been recognized as separate gender by the Government, influenced by rigorous and continued advocacy and consultation by bilateral and multilateral stakeholders including Bandhu Social Welfare Society.
Hijra, Sex Workers and other gender diverse populations had been included in the first ever National Psychosocial counseling guideline.

As part of advocating for the rights of third gender community, Bandhu worked with National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) to include third gender issues in the national curriculum. A supplementary reading material for class six had been jointly developed and approved by NCTB for Piloting in different schools.

The Election Commission had introduced Third Box in the ballot form and the Department of Immigration and issuing passports to the third gender community as "X" gender category.

Anti-discrimination Act had been drafted by the National Human Rights Commission and Law Commission and it is now under vetting process.

Bangladesh Bank had issued a notice to all scheduled banks to bring Hijras under SME loan.

Sexual and gender diverse issues had been included in 2013 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) with clear statement of overall human rights violation of Gender Diverse Population. In UPR Circle 3, Bandhu submitted three different reports jointly with NHRC, Right Hear Right Now (RHRN) platform and Human Rights Forum of Bangladesh (HRFB).

Hijras have become a part of the Local/City Corporation election now and are contesting with other mainstream population with their "X" identity.

National HIV/AIDS Disclosure Guideline had been developed jointly with AIDS/STD Programme and duly endorsed by the Technical Committee-National AIDS Committee (TC-NAC) in Bangladesh.

Through ToT and other trainings, advocacy and series of consultations with medical college hospitals, Government Health Service Providers are more sensitized and community people are accessing services including Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ARV) from Government Medical College Hospitals;

A study on 'Legal Gender Recognition in Bangladesh: A Legal, Policy and Practice Review' was conducted in partnership with National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to review the current legal status of Hijra to identify the gaps and develop background documents for further strategies. The process engaged a series of consultations with multi-level stakeholders for effective recommendations.
A significant number of National Advocacy Meetings and Round Table discussions on HIV and TG related issues were organized to advocate about the sexual health needs; support, promote and increase investment in scaling up appropriate service provisions; development of appropriate polices; address legal and social barriers. This platform helped to create awareness about Third Gender's needs and concern and push them to formulate relevant policies in favor of Hijra community. Jugantor, Daily Prothom Alo (most circulated Bangla news daily) and Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) including Department of Social Services (DSS) were strategic partners in some of the events.

Bandhu took the responsibility to form a coalition in Bangladesh inspired by Asia Pacific Coalition on Male Sexual Health (APCOM) initiative to ensure a world where all people in Asia and the Pacific, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity can live with dignity, social justice and wellbeing. It was named as Technical Working Group (TWG) for effective advocacy initiatives at national level to create an enabling environment for implementing efficient HIV response for sexual and gender diverse population, particularly MSM and TG. The TWG comprises of 15 external stakeholders from multiple sectors including Government, National Human Rights Commission, judges, media personnel, academicians, Law Enforcement Agencies, NGOs, AIDS/STD Programme (ASP) and community members.

Bandhu conducted continued advocacy with Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) and as a result, it initiated a pilot project for Livelihood of Hijra (7 districts in 2013) and later increased the budget with expanding geographical area (64 districts in 2018) enrolling 2500 hijras. MoSW had also provided BDT 10,000 as small grant to those Hijra to start small scale businesses that have completed vocational training. In addition, Hijra also got educational stipends, elderly allowance under safety net program.

Employment opportunities for Hijra community were created in Denim Expert Limited, Walton Group, NHRC, UNDP, ATN Bangla, Chittagong City Corporation and other private organizations along with Bandhu. Multi-National Companies are now aware about the issue of 3rd gender and creating quota for 3rd gender for job opportunities.

With support of Bandhu, CBOs organized 15 divisional level advocacy consultations with local CBOs, Social Welfare Department, CSOs, NGOs, media, Judiciary, schools and colleges under the MSA project. The main
objective of this consultation was to introduce CBO activities with Government and Non-Government organization and also other stakeholders so that the platform could create an enabling environment to explore scopes for further supports and collaboration.

**Enhancing Knowledge of External Stakeholders**

- Bandhu facilitated capacity development of 4 national level physicians through Training of Trainers (ToT) following the module jointly produced by UNDP and WHO "Time has Come" at regional level to improve HIV service delivery for MSM and TG people intended to reduce stigma and discrimination. Bandhu also facilitated similar five day-long orientation programs with government physicians to create common understanding about gender diverse/ Hijra health need issues and provide necessary assistance to avail proper health services with the support of AIDS/STD Program (ASP) and other Government Medical College Hospitals. Altogether 83 physicians were trained.

- Pilot trainings on ‘Treatment as Prevention’ were organized by Bandhu as follow-up activities of the regional ToT for MSM and TG people. From Bangladesh, two trainers received ToT and after their return, the trainings were mainly designed for health service providers who provide support to PLHIV, PLHIV themselves and care givers. The main focus was to sensitize the PLHIV community people on comprehensive treatment necessity for educating opportunistic infections and advocating regarding HIV treatment and literacy. A total of 80 service providers attended the training session.

- Bandhu arranged capacity building trainings and orientations with Government health service providers. The intended purpose for these activities was to ensure stigma and discrimination free services for community from Government set-ups at local level. More than 500 doctors received trainings and orientations over the years. This capacity building initiative supplemented RCC country program on service delivery.

- As legal aid service providers/organizations and National Human Rights Commission are one of the important stakeholders for ensuring human rights for the community people, consultation meetings were conducted to ensure better services to the community.
The main purpose of these meetings was to realize the importance of collaborative approach to make the social changes, create linkage with other legal service providers and ensure better legal support through linkage with AInAlap-a help line of Bandhu. Altogether 200 participants attended from twenty individual organizations who are currently members of the Human Rights Forum of Bangladesh.

**MEDIA ADVOCACY**

- Bandhu also formed Media Advocacy Forum and currently 20 potential journalists are the core members of this Forum. The convener of the Forum regularly calls meeting with the support of Bandhu and shares the periodic updates in line with recent issues which are directly linked with community people's rights.

- As part of observation of various days, Bandhu celebrated IDAHOT for the first time under MSA grant. The event was organized both at central and divisional levels. The central level activity was focused on Award Giving Ceremony for the noteworthy contribution to gender diverse community. The main focus of this award event was to recognize the contributions of individuals who stand for the community rights and had taken initiatives for the protection of rights through their regular activities. A total of 8 renowned professionals received the award in 8 different categories (i.e. Health, Legal, Literature, Culture, Mass Awareness, Education, Community Empowerment and Community Contribution). Besides Central event, Bandhu celebrated IDAHOT in 8 divisional cities including Dhaka and the final recommendations of 7 consultations were shared in Dhaka. The community needs have been raised through Divisional Level consultation that needs to be addressed through Community Forum of Bangladesh.

- Media Advocacy
  - As media work is a positive force for improving the human rights and health of the vulnerable population, therefore Bandhu collaborated with different media and offered Media Fellowship every year since 2011. So far, 8th media fellowship was organized by Bandhu where a total of 104 media journalists enrolled the fellowship program and produced more than 200 articles for both electronic and print media. The objective of fellowship was to create mass awareness through specific assignments. The fellowship also helped to produce positive articles on Gender Diverse Population thus changing the mass peoples' views and perceptions related to community people's right issues.
**STRENGTHENING LEGAL SUPPORT SYSTEM**

Developing strong linkages and collaboration with National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), National Legal Aid Services Organization (NLASO) and other legal aid service providing organizations was another key milestone of MSA project. Some of the key achievements are as follows:

- **Bandhu established a legal helpline service, AinAlap (Legal Talk)** including case documentation, case referring, legal supports to community survivors with the vision to provide legal support to the sexual and gender diverse population identify nature of violation of rights, provide legal counseling, etc. During the reporting period, 287 written complaints were documented and a total of 3171 phone calls were received through Ain-Alap hotline. Periodic field visits were also made by consultant of AinAlap to investigate the cases and ensure support to the survivors at local level. These field visits were designed based on cases received by Ain-Alap and over the period a total of 28 victims got support. The main focus of these visits was to give legal support to the victims physically and establish network with other stakeholders for local support. In addition, a District Lawyer Panel was formed where 204 lawyers are current members and ensuring legal support to the survivors on spot.

- **Developed strong network and collaboration with National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), National Legal Aid Services Organization (NLASO) and other legal service providing organizations. Bandhu arranged orientation programs with District Judges under NLASO, District Legal Aid Committee (DLAC) members and panel lawyers for their clear understanding about the community.**

- **National Legal Aid Services Organization created a special provision for 3rd Gender committee and announced membership for community in 64 District Legal Aid Committee;**

- **Orientation meetings with District Legal Officers (Senior Assistant Judge) were organized in collaboration with National Legal Aid Service Organization (NLASO) to build a strong rapport between Ain-Alap and NLASO and also to sensitize them on the issues related to harassment and violence of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI). This meeting also aimed to get membership of community people in District Legal Aid Committee (DLAC). At the end of the orientation, they developed an action plan for ensuring committed support to the survivors irrespective of Gender Orientation and Gender Identity.**
PICTORIAL DISPLAY OF ACHIEVEMENTS ON
POLICY ADVOCACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS
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Building capacity of CBOs and strengthening community system was one of the major components of MSA grant. In order to carry out effective and sustainable capacity building trainings, Bandhu initiated the process of identifying the capacity building needs, strength and sustaining ability of individuals, communities and CBOs. Based on the need, Bandhu produced annual capacity building plans in line with previous years training plan and participants. To further strengthen CSS, Bandhu assisted in the formation of different small CBOs and also provided technical support for their sustainability. Key achievements to strengthen community system are described below:

**Strengthening Initiatives of Community Based Organizations (CBOs)**

- Bandhu had started forming CBOs for the first time under this project. Also, to create linkages between CBOs and local government organizations and other stakeholders, Bandhu arranged a number of Divisional Level Consultations in different divisions. The Divisional Commissioners of the respective divisions and other influential stakeholders from different local administration attended the program. Through these meetings, the CBOs got opportunities to highlight their successes and achievements over the years and were assured local level support from all relevant stakeholders.

- Bandhu intensively worked with 31 CBOs and provided technical support for their local level networking, good governance, business plan development, institutional development through knowledge, information and
experience sharing meeting. Bandhu also arranged annual coordination meetings with potential hijra leaders where representatives from all CBOs joined the meeting with specific agenda. This CBO coordination meeting brought together CBOs and NGO-partners to coordinate for policy implementation, review difficulties and challenges and coordinate actions for effective community development and sustainability. The current status of hijra situation was identified through participatory discussion and recommendations were made by them for future plans.

- A total of 86 training programs were implemented for emergent CBOs (those who are growing up CBOs and are implementing their activities at local level) and In-country downstream partners on several issues. The main objectives of these trainings were to strengthen the community people on various issues. More than 2284 participants (direct beneficiaries) received training mainly on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Small and Medium Entrepreneurship (SME), Leadership, Social Norms and Values, Report Writing and Documentation, Safety and Security, Sustainability and Livelihood. After completion of trainings, participants strengthened their knowledge and sustained the CBO properly.

- 7 CBOs received 'khas' land from Government for 99 years on lease and are developing infrastructure with some limited resources.

- Bandhu had developed a strong linkage with Ministry of Social Welfare and 2,500 Hijra received Livelihood training under Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) since 2013;

- Bandhu developed partnership with 24 CBOs for their organizational strengthening, i.e., regular monthly meeting, organize group education sessions, counseling, referrals, attended meetings with Government and NGO entities, implemented business plans, local level advocacy meeting with local stakeholders at local level. As an outcome of this partnership, they developed good rapport with local level stakeholders thus helped them to sustain their business plans after the SFG project period. Nine CBOs had implemented Business Plan as a part of sustainability. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs acknowledged "Joyeeta Award" and WOW Award (Women of the World) under British Council for their contribution in the society;
16 CBOs out of 31 received registration under the Social Welfare Department and the remaining CBOs are under processing for registration;

16 CBOs received Seed Fund Grant (SFG) to conduct Local Level Advocacy and initiate sustainable program through two phases. Phase two was started in 2017 with new dimensions where 5 CBOs received SFG to implement their business plan as a part of their sustainability. An orientation program was organized to provide necessary information and guideline related to implementation.

About 400 community workers are currently working with CBOs/ NGOs who received training on different aspects related to HIV service delivery for MSM, Hijra and TG populations.

About 934 relevant persons attended meetings/events on different aspects related to human rights, HIV service delivery for MSM and TG populations who are currently working with the communities.

Training on mental wellbeing and SRHR issues was arranged for the staff under GF country program and MSA with purpose of building the capacity of staff to explain, analyze and address the mental wellbeing and SRHR issues of MSM, Hijra and their partners dealing acquainted techniques during counseling session. Altogether 31 counselors participated who developed clear understanding and information about counseling and enhanced their confidence to provide effective counseling on this topic. This is also supplementing RCC country program.

Bandhu provided CBOs on-site technical assistance and conducted monitoring visit over the years to selected CBOs to achieve minimum capacity in institutional and technical areas to monitor the progress, provide on-spot technical assistance and on-the-job training for documentation. The objectives of these visits were to review the status of business plan, progress of the implemented programmatic and financial activities, provide Technical Assistance (TA) where necessary, assisting hired finance staff, M&E, refreshing Human Resource guideline and develop 3-year Strategic Plan. CBOs are now better oriented and capacitated about official activities, developed their policy with the support of MSA team, trained to prepare budget and maintain financial records, operate day to day activities, networking, etc.
Pictorial Display of Achievements on Community System Strengthening
Bangladesh Achievements under the MSA: 2011-2018
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**Key Achievements in Knowledge Management**

Knowledge management was another key component of the project. The project had significant achievements under knowledge management component which are highlighted below:

**Development of IEC Materials to Raise Awareness**

- Bandhu produced quarterly Newsletter, 'Spotlight' as a part of IEC material. Spotlight is one of the Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials produced by Bandhu where success and cases of AinAlap were documented. During this period, 10 issue based 'Spotlight' were produced and distributed accordingly. Through this material, the community people and other stakeholders are now more aware about the legal support of Bandhu and its achievements.

- Bandhu produced visual documentaries titled "Alo/Light" on success stories from business plans of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) in Bangladesh (for documentary please visit: www.bandhu-bd.org)

- Bandhu had produced a range of need-based advocacy and empowering information resources and tool kits, and distributed to support reduction of stigma and discrimination in the society. Each material was developed based on evidence-based data and participatory approach was followed engaging community people as a part of development process. In addition, Bandhu produced and published an information brochure titled "Bandhu and SRHR" which enhanced the knowledge level and created better understanding on how Bandhu is working on SRHR among the gender diversified population in Bangladesh. The objective of this material was to share information about SRHR and create awareness amongst young beneficiaries.

- Bandhu conducted advocacy and awareness raising on social media from knowledge management perspectives.
ENHANCING COMMUNITY INTERACTIONS THROUGH - FILM SCREENING, ADDA, DEBATE COMPETITION, ESSAY COMPETITION ETC.

Bandhu had established a "Gender and Sexuality Resource Centre" to empower community people through providing accurate and appropriate information on SRHR in line with Bandhu goals and objectives. The Centre works to provide a safe and affirming space for all and acts as a hub for organizations, resources, services and programs of interest to the Gender Diverse population. The major objective of the resource centre is to increase visibility and to create awareness of issues surrounding SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) gender identity/expression and sexual orientation. This center mainly focuses on the development of new knowledge products, authentic and informative reports along with managing Bandhu’s website (www.bandhu-bd.org) for information dissemination. A total of 1269 resources are available; 7,566 visitors visited the Resources Center.
Return of SUMONA

SUMONA Hijas, 36 years old, is a member of the 'Neteler Hijas Welfare Association', was living in a rented house in Tajpur Bazar in Syedpur for many years. A few days before the incident, Sumona's son Syedur Hijas, came to her house to take part in the training program organized by Tajpur local office of Social Welfare Ministry. After receiving the news, Sumona left her job and came to Syedpur to stay with her son. But, a few days later, the local police informed her that her son had been murdered.

Since her son is an UP member, he complained that the local UP member, who was also the. Tajpur police station, was very supportive and helped her in finding her son. After the murder, Sumona and her family started searching for her son's body. They found him in a vacant house near the Tajpur Police Station. The local police and the Social Welfare Ministry were very helpful in the case.

Since then, Sumona has been living in the rented house with her family. She is very happy with the support she received from the local UP member and the Tajpur police station. She is also very grateful to the Social Welfare Ministry for their help in the case.

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TRAINING PACKAGE

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ZERO discrimination
ZERO HIV infections
ZERO AIDS-related deaths

90% of all
90% of all
90% of all