EDITORIAL

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has aggravated the existing sufferings to an immense level in the livelihood of the Gender Diverse Population (GDP) in Bangladesh. Many have lost their means of income and daily wages leading to acute financial crisis in this pandemic situation. They suffered severely to fulfill their basic needs which includes food, accommodation, medication and others. The majority of transgender and Hijras generally earned their money through day-to-day work and performing traditional activities. Also, they have restricted access to earning choices and opportunities as they are still not socially accepted in workplaces. Besides, gender-diverse people and Hijras are considerably more vulnerable in this pandemic regarding mental health issues, anxiety and depression due to the various and intersecting forms of discrimination and violence they face. This situation can result in adverse economic and health consequences and intensified transphobia in society.

Bandhu is concerned and dedicated to the continued well-being of Gender Diverse Population (GDP) and has taken significant actions to lessen the sufferings of this population in the corona pandemic, such as mobilizing funds to ensure health care support, including mental health, and providing food and cash support along with safety measures and knowledge management across the country.

In this edition of SPANDON, we have highlighted some of the regular attainments of Bandhu, as well as some significant achievements for the gender diverse community during this COVID-19 pandemic, which will inspire you to extend your support to benefit this population.

We thank the writers and editorial team for their tireless work. Also, our sincere thanks to the readers, because they serve as our sole inspiration for the publication.
KEY figures of Bandhu

APR–JUN 2021

HEALTH CARE SERVICES

Received Services

20,239 Project Participants

Participated in Group Education Session (GES)

1,567 Project Participants

Received HIV testing and Counseling (HTC) services and knows their results

3,952 Project Participants

STIs diagnosed, treated and counseled at field Office/ DIC/ SUD-DIC/ Outlet level

1,243 Episodes

Counseling Session (One to one/ group/ via phone)

297 Clients

ADVOCACY PROGRAM

We advocated

289 Stakeholders

53 Youth participants

152 DG, Directors, DD of Department of Youth and Development, Different divisional/district administration, City Corporation, Social Welfare Department, Women Affair, Civil Surgeon office, UNFPA, USAID and other NGOs, members of AIDS/STD Program, public and private educational institutions and Community Based Organization (CBO) members

21 Health Professionals

39 Legal Aid Providers

24 Media Journalists

CAPACITY BUILDING

We trained

221 people

47 Relevant Stakeholders

174 Community Members, youth participants, DIC staffs

LEGAL SUPPORT

106 Calls Received and Provide legal information, counseling and support

14 Cases Documented on Human Rights violation

1,316 Community members received food as relief from Bandhu during COVID-19 pandemic.

13 Books newly enlisted in Gender and Sexuality Resource Centre and developed 2 IEC materials on COVID-19 precaution.
TASK FORCE HAS FORMED TO SUPPORT GDP

Bandhu has formed a Task Force (TF) to support the gender diverse population (GDP) with focus on Health and Human Rights advocacy through knowledge generation, evidence-based advocacy amongst different stakeholders and GOB who defend the human rights of GDP and promoting conducive policy on human rights argument.

The TF intended to work on bringing together the Government, Member(s) of Parliament, UN Officials, Member(s) of Judiciary, academicians, journalists, faith leaders, Community representatives, US agencies, NGOs and CBO partners of Bandhu to align with policy, review challenges and coordinate action. The immediate structure of the TF constituted of 19 members for the first year of its existence.

The first meeting of the task force took place on 30th June 2021 virtually where most of the members were present. The major objectives of the meeting were to modus operandi of TF for coming days, identify strategic approaches and develop plan of action for advancing the health and human rights of GDP in Bangladesh.

Parliamentarian Ms. Aroma Dutta is the Chair of the Task Force. She concluded the meeting by giving thanks to all members for their valuable opinions and suggested betterment of the GDP considering their socio-economic condition and pessimistic aspects in society.

Mr. Shale Ahmed, Executive Director, Bandhu, welcomed the members as host of the Task Force and introduced them that followed by opening remarks in the meeting.
As a community led organization Bandhu always tried to recognize the level of contribution of grass-root community activists and stakeholders. This year Bandhu organized the inspiring 'Human Rights Defender Award' to acknowledge their hard work and volunteering endeavors. Bandhu awarded and recognized the work of transgenders and hijras who worked for five years (2016-2020).

To cope with the new normal brought upon us because of the pandemic, the award ceremony was held online on 30th May, 2021. The application process was open for everyone on an online platform for a fixed period of time. A total of 12 people were awarded in various categories. Dr. Sacha Blumen, First Secretary, Australian High Commission, Bangladesh, Rosalee La Plante, Counsellor Political Affairs, Canadian High Commission, Bangladesh and HE Alexandra Berg von Linde, Ambassador, Embassy of the Sweden, Bangladesh were the honorary guests present in the award giving ceremony.

In the guest remarks - Dr Sacha Blumen, First Secretary, Australian High Commission, Bangladesh, addressed that "Australia believes that all people are entitled to respect, dignity and
legal protection regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The work of civil society organizations and human rights defenders including here in Bangladesh is crucial to protecting the human rights of people on the basis of their sexual orientation.' Professor Dr. Mizanur Rahman, Law Department, DU; Former Chairman, National Human Rights Commission was the key speaker in the event; he talked about the importance of acknowledging these issues and the current law situation in the country regarding the community and their rights. All the awardees felt really encouraged to work more towards these causes and continue their activism as well after receiving the award acknowledgement.

DIVISIONAL MEDIA FELLOWSHIP AWARD GIVING CEREMONY 2020

Bandhu believes in learning, transformation and knowledge generation in capacity building of different communities and stakeholders to create a more favourable environment for the people of the community where they can lead a better quality of life. Following this belief, Bandhu organized the 'Divisional Media Fellowship Award Giving Ceremony’ for the year 2020, on April 5th, 2021. To follow to COVID-19 safety guidelines, the event was held online.

The Bandhu Media Fellowship programme is an ongoing programme that is being offered by Bandhu for 10 years now, and at present, has more than 200 media fellows all around Bangladesh. The objective of this fellowship is to make a bridge between the community and the media in order to cater better understanding between the two and to create a positive attitude towards gender diverse population of the country. This year there was a total participant of 16 fellows from the different districts.

The event started with an opening speech from Shale Ahmed, Executive Director, Bandhu Welfare Society, where he delivered the successful and positive outcomes that has come out of this fellowship. The ceremony followed with a presentation on the Overview and Achievements of the fellowship presented by Md. Moshiur Rahman, Manager, Policy Advocacy, Bandhu.

Followed by remarks from the special guests of the event Iftekhairul Islam, Additional Deputy Police Commissioner (Media & Public relation) Dhaka Metropolitan Police; Huma Khan, Senior Human Rights Advisor with UN resident coordinator in Bangladesh. Slavica
CONSULTATION MEETING FOR YOUTH ACTION ON CPD

Bandhu has organized an online consultation meeting with the gender diverse population (GDP) and relevant stakeholders on 18th April 2021 aligned with Commission on Population & Development (CPD), 54 session were conducted based on different thematic areas. Based on the consultation meeting discussion and recommendations of the young SOGIESC representatives, a policy report, named "Youth Action Point: CPD54" will be shared as a reference in different international and national advocacy-based consultation meetings for the rights of GDP.

In the meeting Samia Afrin, Director of Naripokkho, has shared her experience of the journey and the alignment with the Commission on Population and Development (CPD) with other participants. She has described the process, pros and cons of the conference with CPD. Afterwards, Barrister Abdullah Anwar Anan Titir, Research Specialist of BLAST described a specified concept with a drastic visionary of the state of the community connected with the goals of CPD. Subsequently, Nawmi Naz Chowdhury, Radosevic, Political Process Team Lead, Democracy and Governance office, USAID/Bangladesh emphasized and showed gratitude towards Bandhu for organizing a fellowship like this. In the Chief guest remarks Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul, Editor in Chief of TV Today, said that Bandhu offering a fellowship programme where the journalists are getting to learn so much about the transgender community, is actually helping the media sector a lot. The event ended with Umme Farhana Zarif Kanta, Director, Policy Advocacy & Human Rights, Bandhu Social welfare Society, delivering the closing remarks and thanking everyone.
Program Manager of ARROW has shared her involvement with the process of CPD in past conferences and, also rationalized the way forwards of the movement for the rights of the community people.

The participants have analyzed the following thematic issues in small groups in line with CPD54 session-Capacity Development, SDGs, SRHR and development, Law, and policy. Each group has shared their analysis and recommendations and, on the basis of these analyses and recommendations, the policy report will be developed gradually.

CLOSEOUT EVENT OF GENDER DIVERSE POPULATION ACTIVITY (RGDP)

The Rights for Gender Diverse Population Activity (RGDP) project closeout event was held on 7th June 2021, virtually. Almost 50 participants were present in the event, which included colleagues from USAID & Bandhu, and also included our stakeholders and community members. The objective of this event was to inform the stakeholders and donors about the key achievements, challenges and outcomes of the RDGP project and the impact of the project's longevity. Annanya Banik, represented the CBOs and the entire transgender community and secondary stakeholders Mawlana Mainuddin Sirajee, Principal Mohammadia Fazil Madrasa, attended as a representative of the faith community. Keramoutullah Biplob, Current Affairs Editor, ATN Bangla, and Md Mohiuddin Rubel, Director, Denim Experts LTD, Director BGMEA, talked about the benefits they received from this project and how it has helped them and how they were able to contribute from their side.

'USAID arrives to integrate consideration of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics across its development in humanitarian programs.

Bangladesh does not have a registered NGO that is only assisting the gender diverse population, I see your work as extremely important and critical as ever before to bridge this gap' said Derrick S. Brown, Mission Director, USAID. He also addressed many other issues in Bangladesh including the punitive law and emphasized on daily challenges faced to solve these problems. He applauded the commendable work Bandhu has done with this project and saw this as a new beginning rather than an ending.

Almost 50 participants were present in the event, which included colleagues from USAID & Bandhu, and also included our stakeholders and community members.
আরজিডিপি প্রকল্পের
সফল সমাপনী

৭ জুন ২০২১ তারিখে ২০৭৩ সালের ডিসেম্বরের তাইটারস পপুলেশন
(আরজিডিপি)-প্রকল্পের সফল সমাপনী অনুষ্ঠিত হয়। সরকার
গোষ্ঠী লক্ষ্যবোধের কারণে এই অনুষ্ঠানটি অনলাইনে হয়,
যেখানে প্রায় ৫০ জন অংশগ্রহণকারীর মধ্যে ইউএসএআইডি,
বাংলাদেশ কর্মকর্তা-কর্মীগণ এবং উক প্রকল্প সংশ্লিষ্ট অনুশীলন ছাড়াও
কমিউনিটি প্রতিনিধিগণ উপস্থিত ছিলেন। এই সমাপনী অনুষ্ঠানের
উদ্দেশ্য ছিলো আরজিডিপি প্রকল্পের অনুগ্রহ, চালিয়ে এবং সম্পর্ক
কেন্দ্র সংস্থাগুলির শীর্ষক, দত্ত এবং অংশগ্রহণকারী বাজারের
নিকট থেকে প্রকল্প গ্রহণ করা হয়।

তথ্য সভা অনন্য ব্যক্তি, সিবিবি সুস্থ ও সমস্ত উপলব্ধির
কমিউনিটির প্রতিনিধিত্ব করেন। অন্যান্য অংশগ্রহণ সহস্রে,
মোহাম্মদীয়া ফাতিফা মাজালার অধ্যাপক মাওলানা মহিউদ্দিন
গোরাজী, এটিএ বাংলাদেশ ভার্সার সম্পাদক কেরামুত উদ্দী বিপুর,
ডেনম এক্সপ্যাট লিং ও বিজিইইএইড প্রকল্পকর্মী মোহাম্মদ
কুবের উপস্থিত ছিলেন। তারা তাদের বক্তব্যে আরজিডিপি
প্রকল্পের মাধ্যমে কি ধরনের বুদ্ধিমত্তা প্রয়োজন এবং কিভাবে তারা
তাদের অবস্থান থেকে লিঙ্গ বৈচিত্র্যময় জনগোষ্ঠীর জন্য অবদান
রাখার জন্য সেই বিষয়সমূহ তুলে ধরেন।

প্রকল্প সমাপনী অব্যাহতিবিশেষ অভিজ্ঞ এইউএসএআইডি'র
মিশন ডিজাইনার ডেরিক এস. হ্যাউন বলেন 'ইউএসএআইডি
মানবিক বিষয়ক কর্মসংহিতাতে লিঙ্গ ও যৌন পরিচয়, লিঙ্গিক
প্রক্রিয়া এবং লিঙ্গিক বৈশিষ্ট্যের মধ্যে বিবর্তন করার প্রকল্প
বিচার করেছে বাংলাদেশে একটি নিবন্ধিত এনটি যে কেবলমাত্র লিঙ্গ বৈচিত্র্যময় জনগোষ্ঠীর
জন্য কাজ করে। এই ব্যবস্থার জন্য কাজ আরম্ভ হলে অবশ্য
আমাদের প্রকল্পে এমন কিছু রাখতে অসম্ভব ছিল যা উক
জনগোষ্ঠীর জন্য সহযোগ
হবে এবং বিদ্যমান সমস্যাগুলির দূর করতে
কাজ করবে।' এছাড়াও তিনি উক জনগোষ্ঠীর
সঙ্গে সংশ্লিষ্ট ইউএসএআইডি
অংশগ্রহণকারীদের
থেকে উদ্বাদ করেন এবং
বিদ্যমান সমস্যা
সমাধানের জন্য কাজ
করার বিষয় উপস্থাপন
cরকেন। তিনি তার
বক্তব্যে এই প্রকল্প
বাতাসপ্পাশের জন্য বুদ্ধি
প্রশাসন করেন এবং
এই
বক্তব্য শেষ না বলে, নতুন
একটি সমুদ্র হিসেবে
উল্লেখ করেন।

মেহানে প্রায়
৫০ জন
অংশগ্রহণকারীর
মধ্যে
ইউএসএআইডি, বাংলাদেশ কর্মকর্তা-
কর্মীগণ এবং উক
প্রকল্প সংশ্লিষ্ট
অংশগ্রহণ ছাড়াও
কমিউনিটি
প্রতিনিধিত্বে উপস্থিত
ছিলেন।
Gender diverse community is the most vulnerable community in the country and have faced immense violence only because of their gender identities and sexual orientations. Bandhu has received 120 complaints from its legal cell Ain-Alap helpline from community members around the country from April to June 2021. Ain-Alap received 21 written complaints, which has been resolved through legal process. During this period, 16 gender based violence (GBV) cases have been reported at field offices (DICs) where medical and psychosocial support was provided by health professionals.

Despite having strong community bond, Hijra community members have experienced violence like insults, harassment, physical violence, economical abuse and threats by community leaders. It is reported that sex workers from the community are forcibly doing sex without payment and in addition also face physical abuse from them. Sometimes, they have been raped or sexually abused. They are dropping out from school, isolated from families, neglected by society and some even choose the inevitable path of self-harm and suicide to end their sufferings. In recent years, it has been observed that violence against SOGI population has increased due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic. Young community people are facing their utmost sufferings as they're not able to move out of their homes. It causes long term effects on their mental health which leads to feeling isolated, anxious and often they feel traumatized. These mental health issues are often or never reported or acknowledged in the society.

Bandhu has been supporting the gender diverse community through Ain-Alap (legal support), Porichoy (mental health counselling) and Doctors helpline (physical wellbeing) tirelessly to reduce violence. Yet, there is no alternative than empowering the community about their rights and protecting their dignity.

Ain-Alap received 21 written complaints, which has been resolved through legal process. During this period, 16 gender based violence (GBV)
Bandhu has organized a number of sensitization meeting under the "Prioritized HIV Prevention and Treatment services among the key Population in Bangladesh" project in June 2021. A total of 15 Sensitization meetings were conducted by Bandhu since, with the view to raising awareness among the local key players including health service provider, religious leader, lawyer, journalist, law enforcement agency and CBO representatives about the risk of HIV/AIDS and Human rights/legal rights for gender diverse population. More than three hundred targeted stakeholders attended in these sensitization meetings including respective civil surgeons, representatives of Bangladesh Police, prominent journalists from different national and local media, prominent lawyers, religious leaders and member of CBOs at 15 districts of the country to discuss on how everyone can play role to enable stigma and discrimination free environment for Transgender or Hijra people. The gender diverse population is reluctant to express their identities not only for facing the stigma and discrimination but also their concerns regarding the social security. With their social barriers, COVID-19 causes significant sufferings in their life creating threats on the economic echelon. Highlighting this area, the participants are mainly recommended to enhance the support towards this marginalized community regarding their livelihood and means of life.
DIVISIONAL MEDIA FORUM MEETING

To share about the activities of the media forum members concerning GDP issues and discuss follow-up actions for the effective implementation of GDP-related activities, Bandhu Social Welfare Society organized a virtual media forum meeting with 24 media forum members in Rajshahi and Khulna on April, 2021.

Considering the situation of GDPS during COVID-19, an action plan has been developed for the next 3 months regardless of the continuation of the project.

TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP MEETING

Gender Diverse Population Working Group (GDPWG) organized two virtual meetings with a total of 42 members of GDPWG under RGDP project. At the discussion of this meeting, GDPWG was added with Protection Mainstreaming Focal Points (PMFP) plan - 2021 to work on GDP supported issues and capacity building for humanitarian actors in the camp area. In addition, GDPWG took three basic orientation sessions with Child Protection Sub Sector (CPSS), Child Protection Focal Point (CPFP) and Wash sector. In collaboration with other key actions in CBX, Bandhu will try to celebrate the next IDAHOT 2022 in Cox’s Bazar and Rohingya Camp if the current situation is stable.
A STORY OF ABDUCTION

Recently, a case was brought to the attention of "BANDHU" regarding the abduction of a young girl aged 21, who identified herself as a member of lesbian community. For privacy purposes Bandhu will not disclose her or anyone’s identity related to this case. The Victim (the 21-year-old girl) has been missing since the afternoon of June 01, 2021. The person guilty of this felony is her maternal grandfather, who runs a Mental Hospital and Rehabilitation Center.

Furthermore, the missing girl's parents had an immoral history of torturing her both mentally and physically. When the torments turned out to be excruciating, she vented her concern regarding her safety to her friends who eventually made the complaint at "Ain Alap" after the abduction. Because of all these traumatic incidents happening throughout her life, she decided to elope from home and dream of living an independent life by becoming financially solvent.

After her friends realized that she was missing, they decided to check on her. One of her friend visited her parent's house in Uttara where she was told by them that they had no clue about her whereabouts. They suggested her to contact the maternal grandfather if they wanted to find out anything linked to her. When contacted, the felon threatened to rape, arrest and murder the friend if she tried to get him involved in this case.

The case was sent to "BLAST" by the team of "AIN ALAP" which needs some constructive assistance right now in resolving this sensitive case.

The Victim (the 21-year-old girl) has been missing since the afternoon of June 01, 2021. The person guilty of this felony is her maternal grandfather, who runs a Mental Hospital and Rehabilitation Center.
A new study has found that, nearly 10,000 MSM and bisexual men in New South Wales who took the HIV prevention drug PrEP as part of a three-year trial had a transmission rate 90% lower than otherwise expected.

A research study undertaken by the Kirby Institute between 2016 and 2019 followed 9,709 men who were initially taking the drug for free. The Kirby Institute's Prof Andrew Grulich, who led the study, said that the transmission was about 90% lower than researchers would have expected to see if the men had not been taking PrEP.

"It really was shown in the study that it really did continue to work extremely well. This is a group, historically, we would have expected to have [transmission] rates of about 20 in 1,000 so this is about 90% lower than we would have expected without PrEP. So, really amazingly effective intervention at the population level," Grulich said that men who were diagnosed with HIV during the course of the study were not taking their PrEP pill daily as advised at the time of transmission. "We didn't see any cases of failure of daily PrEP" Grulich said the focus now should be on regional areas, people under the age of 25, and those who stopped taking PrEP, who were more at risk.

'Taking PrEP was empowering for me to know that I am taking responsibility for my own health, regardless of the other person's status,' says Tony Nhan who participated in the NSW PrEP trial.

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President Joe Biden has nominated the first out lesbian to an ambassador-level position in U.S. history. Chantale Wong has been appointed U.S. director of the Asian Development Bank, which works to foster economic growth in the Asia-Pacific Region. If approved by the Senate, she will be the first Gender diverse person of color as well as the first same sex paramour woman with the rank of ambassador.

Chantale Wong has been appointed U.S. director of the Asian Development Bank, which works to foster economic growth in the Asia-Pacific Region.

Wong was previously appointed to the bank’s board of directors by President Bill Clinton and has also served as CFO of the Millennium Challenge Corp., budget director at NASA and acting budget director at the Treasury Department.

On facebook, Wong wrote she was "truly humbled" and honored to be nominated. "If I am confirmed by the US Senate, I will serve with humility and with purpose of advancing US interest at the Asian Development Bank and the region on behalf of my fellow Americans,” she continued.

Wong also thanked her close ones for their "endless support," as well as her mentor, the economist Alice Rivlin, the founding director of the Congressional Budget Office, "who has taught me about doing good and doing it right."

She also mentioned being inspired by the civil rights leader Rep. John Lewis, "who taught me about making good trouble but necessary trouble."
DREAM ON MY GRIP

I'm Sayman also known as Syama Hijra. Since childhood, me and my family faced tremendous poverty since the loss of my father. Due to this situation, I always tried to save money from my daily earnings. While I was growing up, I always felt the need for my own place (home). So, I started searching for properties to buy.

Through my experience I have learned that it is difficult to buy a land especially when you identify as a hijra. Not only that, the prices are unusually high when they see that a hijra is buying the land. There is also a false perception that if the land is bought then the environment around it will be ruined and there will be misfortunes and bad vibes around it. All this discrimination made me feel bad, made me feel like I'm nothing, not considered as a human being but an animal.

Later, I planned to make my brother move in with me and also do all the talking instead of me. As planned, my brother went to the land owners and discussed about the buying process of the land. The owner then gave his word that he will start to arrange the necessary process through the land registrar office. But once again, God has turned away from me and nothing went smoothly. When the landowner found out that the real buyer of the house is me, someone who identified as a hijra and not my brother, he stopped the entire buying process.

I broke down completely. I decided to go to the Bandhu DIC office in Mymensingh seeking help for my situation. The DIC manager was very helpful and he reached out to one of Bandhu's Panel Lawyers to help me. Both of them coordinated and planned to sit with the land owner. When they sat with the land owner, they were able to convince him to sell the land to me. They were able to make him understand that people from the gender diverse community is no different than normal people and that they are not harmful or dangerous in any means.

Finally, I was able to buy the land from the land owner who now doesn't have a negative view about me. He now is an advocate for our community where he sensitizes other people from the society about our community. I'm a truly happy human being right now, and again saving up to build a small house on my land- a house I can call my own house.
'JIBANGOTHON UNNYAN SONGSTHA' BEING REGISTERED FROM SOCIAL WELFARE DEPARTMENT

'Jibangthon Unnyan Songsta' has been working since 2016 to create an enabling space for deprived hijras, intersex and gender diverse people. They are working with community to solve various problem they have face and also to amend, build and socialise the relationship amongst community and mass people in the society. 'Jibangthon' has started registration process on 2019. On 21st July, 2021, under the Ministry of Social Welfare, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh, Department of Social Services, Dhaka they got the registration (Registration number- C-09879). During the registration period, Bandhu Social Welfare Society helped a lot by given various information.

'Jibonghothon' has manifested itself as a non-political, non-communal, humanitarian and development organization. The main objective of this organization is to improve the living standards of the intended people of urban and rural areas by making positive changes in their socio-economic conditions in order to take necessary steps to protect their rights. With emphasis on art, culture and creativity this organization will work to develop health, education, human rights, environmental/ climate justice, social and economic emancipation of gender diverse population and committed to work in line with Sustainable Development Goals and all the policies of the Government of Bangladesh.

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