

Rights, Resources and Representation of Women, Girls and Minority Groups in Working Districts: Realities and Way Forward



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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Form
ADC	Additional Deputy Commissioner
ANC	Antenatal Care
ASI	Assistant Sub-Inspector
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Germany)
BRAC	Building Resources Across Communities
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DV Act	Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010
EPZ	Export Processing Zone
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GO	Government Organization
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HRD	Human Rights Defender
IDI	In-Depth Interview
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
KII	Key Informant Interview
MKP	Manusher Jonno Kendra Partner
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoWCA	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs
NAP	National Action Plan
NETZ	NETZ Partnership for Development and Justice
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission

NWDP	National Women Development Policy
RBA	Rights-Based Approach
RIB	Research Initiatives Bangladesh
RTI	Right to Information
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SMC	School Management Committee
SP	Superintendent of Police
UP	Union Parishad
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

Executive Summary

The HOPE project focuses on strengthening rights, resources and representation through capacity-building, networking, and joint advocacy at both local and national levels. This study, *“Rights, resources and representation of women, girls and minority groups in working districts: realities and way forward”*, seeks to:

- Assess the status and pre-project conditions of rights, resources, and representation.
- Identify structural causes and barriers to equality and inclusion.
- Generate evidence-based recommendations for policy and program improvement

The study adopted a **qualitative and comparative design** to capture nuanced realities of women, girls, and minority groups across selected HOPE project districts. It has combined desk review of relevant laws, policies, and programme documents with field-based qualitative methods, including Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and participatory exercises. A desk review of relevant policy paper and literature formed the foundational step in understanding the existing legal, policy, institutional, and socio-cultural environment in which the HOPE project operates.

The varied nature of the field illustrated differential characteristics of structural barriers to equality and inclusion. In a more urbanized setting, the nature of violence was more visible and starker whereas in remote rural areas strong patriarchal norms dominated and the violence was more disguised as social practice e.g. child marriage or dowry. Education which is an important resource for women and girls was interestingly a growing trend in all areas. Social inclusion was an issue in areas where there was a significant minority as well as marginalized population and during times of political transition as during the July’24 uprising. The advent of the HOPE project in the area created positive impact among the project participants (both school students and CSO representatives). They all admitted to having found confidence and voice as rights claimants, new forms of activism expressed variously through theatre, self-defence, networking, community level mediation and representation in local governance issues.

The recommendations from the study came in the form of both programmatic development as well as policy suggestions. Among the programmatic development, requests were made for further training for self-development, strengthening infrastructural facilities in schools, strengthening and promoting human rights practices, improving interventions of partner NGOs, integrating human rights with economic empowerment and situation analysis through conflict transformation lens. Policy recommendations were made for social inclusion at the local level, addressing women’s economic empowerment, further engagement between CSOs and local authorities, addressing barriers to women’s access to rights, resources and representation in a more extended way.

Purpose and objectives

The HOPE project focuses on strengthening **rights, resources, and representation** through capacity-building, networking, and joint advocacy at both local and national levels. Study objectives include:



Methodology

Study Design

The study adopted a qualitative and comparative design to examine the lived realities of women, girls, and minority groups in selected HOPE project districts. It combined a desk review of relevant laws, policies and program documents with field-based qualitative methods, including Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) and participatory exercises.

Conceptual and Analytical Framework

The study was guided by a Rights-Based Approach (RBA), assessing entitlements under national legislation and international instruments such as CEDAW. The Harvard Gender Analysis Framework was applied to analyze division of labor, access and control over resources, and decision-making power. Findings were informed through triangulation of field evidence with a desk review of key laws and policies, including the Domestic Violence Act 2010, Local Government Act 2009, National Women Development Policy 2011, and the National Women's Commission Report (2025), enabling identification of gaps between policy intent and practice.

Focus Areas

The study focused on awareness of rights, representation in local governance, access to resources and services, gender-based violence (GBV) and protection mechanisms, minority

discrimination, policy and implementation gaps, HRD capacity, and accountability mechanisms. These areas were explored through a combination of policy analysis, KIIs, FGDs, case documentation, and governance tools such as community scorecards.

Desk Review

The desk review covered:

Policy and Legal Frameworks: National laws, policies, and international commitments (CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action, SDGs 5, 10, and 16).

Program Documents: HOPE project proposals, progress reports, and training materials.

Secondary Literature: Studies on women's participation, HRDs, minority marginalization, and local advocacy initiatives.

Qualitative Data Collection

Fieldwork participants included young and adult HRDs, local and district-level public authorities, women, girls, and minority community members. Data collection methods and samples included **15 KIIs** with local authorities, HRDs, NGOs, teachers and SMC members, **12 FGDs (16 sessions)** with young and adult HRDs and student/theatre groups, **6 IDIs** with project staff and selected participants and **1 dissemination workshop** with NETZ staff.

***The detailed methodology is provided in the Annex.*

National policies and laws related to the rights, resources and representation of women, girls and minorities

Bangladesh's legal and policy landscape presents a formal commitment to human rights, gender equality, and social inclusion. Anchored in the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (1972), the country's rights architecture establishes equality before the law (Article 27) and prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex, religion, race, caste, or place of birth (Article 28). The Constitution also mandates that women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of state and public life, empowering the State to take affirmative measures to ensure women's advancement. These provisions form the normative foundation for subsequent national legislation, institutional reforms, and international commitments related to the protection of women, girls, and marginalized communities.

This chapter analyses the major national, international, and donor frameworks that structure the context of the **HOPE Project**, which aims to strengthen the **rights, resources, and representation** of women, girls, and minority groups through the empowerment of Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) and civic-state dialogue mechanisms.

Domestic Legal and Policy Frameworks

Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010

The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010 is a landmark piece of legislation addressing gender-based violence within family and domestic relationships. Section 3 of the Act defines domestic violence broadly, encompassing physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse. Sections 6–14 provide for Protection Orders, Residence Orders, and Compensation Orders, while Section 15 mandates the establishment of Protection Committees at local levels. Section 19 assigns specific responsibilities to law enforcement agencies to assist survivors and enforce court directives.

Despite this comprehensive legal framework, implementation remains uneven. Empirical studies indicate that Protection Committees envisaged under Section 15 are often inactive, and protection orders under Sections 6–14 are underutilized, particularly in rural and marginalized contexts. Social stigma and institutional reluctance continue to frame domestic violence as a private matter rather than a public legal offence.

Relevance to the HOPE Project: The Act directly informs the project's rights pillar by providing a clear statutory basis for advocacy on gender-based violence. Evidence generated through community engagement and Human Rights Defender (HRD) networks enables law-based advocacy for enforcing Sections 6–15, particularly the functionalization of Protection Committees and survivor access to legal remedies.

National Women Development Policy, 2011

The National Women Development Policy (NWDP), 2011 operationalizes constitutional commitments to gender equality across sectors. Clause 7 emphasizes women's participation in political and public decision-making, Clause 8 focuses on protection from violence and discrimination, and Clause 16 highlights women's economic empowerment and access to resources. The Policy also mandates gender mainstreaming across planning, budgeting, and institutional processes.

While the policy aligns with international commitments such as CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action, implementation challenges persist, including weak inter-ministerial coordination and inadequate budgetary prioritization.

Relevance to the HOPE Project: Clauses 7, 8, and 16 provide a cross-cutting policy foundation for the project's rights, resources, and representation pillars. The project's localized evidence supports advocacy to translate these policy commitments into actionable responsibilities at Union Parishad and district levels.

Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009

The Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009 decentralizes governance and promotes participatory local decision-making. Section 38 reserves one-third of Union Parishad seats for women members, while Sections 47–49 mandate the formation of standing committees, including those related to women, children, and social welfare. Sections 4 and 6 institutionalize Ward Shava mechanisms to ensure citizen participation in planning and budgeting processes. Although women's numerical representation has increased, research consistently highlights barriers to substantive participation, including limited authority, patriarchal resistance, and marginalization within committee structures.

Relevance to the HOPE Project: Sections 38, 47–49, and the Ward Shava provisions provide a statutory basis for advocacy on women's meaningful participation in local governance. Civic-state dialogues facilitated by the project enable evidence-based engagement with local authorities to promote gender-responsive planning and decision-making.

Right to Information Act, 2009

The Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2009 establishes access to information as a legal right. Section 4 guarantees citizens' right to information, Section 6 outlines procedures for submitting information requests, and Sections 7 and 9 impose time-bound obligations on designated officers to provide information. Section 29 prescribes penalties for non-compliance or obstruction.

Despite these enforceable provisions, utilization of RTI mechanisms remains limited among marginalized populations due to lack of awareness and fear of reprisal.

Relevance to the HOPE Project: Sections 4, 6, 7, and 29 form the legal backbone of advocacy for transparency and accountability. The project leverages these provisions to support HRDs in monitoring social protection delivery, public service access, and local budget allocations.

National Human Rights Commission Act, 2009

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Act, 2009 established the NHRC in line with the UN Paris Principles. The Act mandates the Commission to investigate human rights violations, make recommendations to the government, and promote human rights awareness. However, limited enforcement authority and resource constraints affect its effectiveness.

Relevance to the HOPE Project: The Act provides an institutional pathway for linking grassroots human rights documentation with national oversight mechanisms. Project-supported HRDs contribute evidence that can be channelled to the NHRC for follow-up and advocacy.

Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act, 2017

The Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act, 2017 sets the legal minimum age of marriage at 18 for women and 21 for men (Section 4). Sections 7–9 criminalize the facilitation of child marriage, including penalties for parents, marriage registrars, and individuals involved in solemnization. However, Section 19 introduces a “special circumstances” provision allowing marriage below the legal age with parental and judicial consent.

Section 19 has been widely criticized for its ambiguity and potential for misuse, undermining the preventive intent of the law and disproportionately affecting girls from poor and marginalized communities.

Relevance to the HOPE Project: Section 19 constitutes a key advocacy entry point for the project’s rights pillar. Community-level evidence and youth HRD engagement enable advocacy for stricter interpretation or reform of this clause, alongside strengthened enforcement of Sections 7–9.

National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2022–2027)

The National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security (2022–2027), adopted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, localizes **UN Security Council Resolution 1325** and subsequent WPS resolutions within the national context. The NAP is structured around four core pillars—**Participation, Protection, Prevention, and Relief and Recovery**—with defined objectives, actions, and responsible institutions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

Under **Pillar I (Participation)**, the NAP commits to increasing women’s meaningful participation and leadership in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and decision-making processes at national and local levels, including community-based dispute resolution mechanisms. **Pillar II (Protection)** emphasizes prevention of and response to gender-based violence, including protection of women and girls in conflict-affected and humanitarian settings. **Pillar III (Prevention)** focuses on integrating gender perspectives into early warning, conflict analysis, and peacebuilding initiatives, while **Pillar IV (Relief and Recovery)** underscores women’s access to justice, services, and recovery mechanisms in post-crisis contexts.

Despite its comprehensive framework, implementation challenges persist. These include weak inter-ministerial coordination across designated lead and supporting agencies, the absence of

a robust results-based monitoring framework, and insufficient budgetary allocation for localization of WPS commitments at district and community levels.

Relevance to the HOPE Project: The NAP particularly **Pillar I (Participation)** and **Pillar II (Protection)** directly inform HOPE’s representation and rights pillars. By strengthening women’s leadership in community conflict resolution, civic–state dialogue, and rights-based advocacy, the project contributes to the realization of NAP objectives at the grassroots level. Training on conflict-sensitive democratic dialogue and engagement with local institutions enables the project to operationalize WPS commitments beyond national policy statements, translating them into inclusive peacebuilding practices within local governance structures.

International and Donor Frameworks

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Bangladesh ratified **CEDAW** in 1984, committing to eliminate discrimination against women in all forms. The state, however, maintains reservations to Articles 2 and 16 concerning equality in family relations and policy obligations (United Nations Treaty Collection, n.d.). The CEDAW Committee has repeatedly recommended withdrawal of these reservations and improved implementation mechanisms.

Relevance to the HOPE Project: CEDAW provides the normative foundation for HOPE’s **rights** and **representation** pillars. The project operationalizes CEDAW’s principles by building local advocacy capacities, empowering women HRDs, and promoting accountability dialogues with public authorities to ensure that domestic laws align with CEDAW commitments.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The **SDGs**, especially Goals 5 (Gender Equality), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), guide Bangladesh’s development agenda. The *Analytical Report on SDG Progress 2024* highlights improvements in gender parity in education but continuing disparities in access to justice and economic participation (Ministry of Finance, 2024).

Relevance to the HOPE Project: HOPE operationalizes SDG principles through measurable community actions on gender equality, inclusion, and civic accountability. By enabling HRDs to monitor SDG-related indicators—such as violence reduction, representation, and access to justice—the project contributes directly to localizing global commitments.

BMZ Feminist Development Policy (2023)

Germany’s **BMZ Feminist Development Policy** (2023) embeds feminist principles in international cooperation, emphasizing transformation through **rights, resources, and representation** (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development [BMZ], 2023). The policy commits that at least 93% of BMZ-funded projects contribute to gender equality and prioritizes intersectional, de-colonial partnerships.

Relevance to the HOPE Project: The BMZ policy provides the strategic foundation for HOPE’s design and objectives. It guides the project’s integrated approach to strengthening HRDs, promoting equitable resource access, and amplifying women’s and minorities’ voices in governance. HOPE embodies BMZ’s feminist vision by institutionalizing rights-based, inclusive, and participatory governance practices across six districts in Bangladesh.

Cross-Cutting Trends and Gaps

Despite an extensive legislative framework, several systemic challenges persist:

1. **Weak enforcement and accountability:** Many progressive laws, such as the DV Act and Child Marriage Restraint Act, face poor implementation due to institutional inertia and social stigma.
2. **Intersectional exclusion:** Women from minority, indigenous, lower caste and disability backgrounds experience compounded barriers to justice and representation.
3. **Limited coordination:** Overlapping mandates and weak horizontal collaboration among ministries create fragmentation in service delivery.
4. **Data and monitoring gaps:** Lack of disaggregated data by gender, ethnicity, and disability impedes effective policy evaluation.

Implications for the HOPE Project

These frameworks collectively form the enabling environment within which the **HOPE Project** operates. They establish both the legal mandates and the practical challenges that justify HOPE’s emphasis on **strengthening HRDs, building civic–state partnerships, and advancing feminist development principles.**

By anchoring its interventions in Bangladesh’s existing policy commitments—while addressing gaps in enforcement, representation, and inclusivity—HOPE acts as a bridge between constitutional rights and lived realities. Its work on capacity building, RTI use, gender-responsive dialogue, and policy advocacy directly contributes to realizing the aspirations of both national frameworks and international conventions.

Realities of women, girls and minorities in working areas

The areas covered in the study constituted both remote rural areas as well as areas near market towns and urban hotspots. The Upazilas like Polashbari and Gobindoganj of Gaibandha fell into the former category while areas in Chirir bondor, Dinajpur constituted a business hub and close to the city. Keshabpur and Manirampur in Jashore falls somewhere in between.

Situation prior to the project

The varied nature of these areas also contributed to the core concern of the project which was access to rights, resources and representation for women and girls. Prior to the HOPE project, these variations were largely unmanaged and unaddressed, with no structured interventions targeting the specific barriers faced by women, girls, and minority groups across different geographical and socio-economic contexts. For example, remote rural areas featured strong patriarchal cultures where early marriage of women and girls were predominant as well as restrictions in their mobility which prevented their easy access to resources and rights to leadership positions. Before the project, such practices were widely accepted as social norms, reinforced through family pressure, poverty, and lack of awareness of legal protections. On the other hand, although areas skirting urbanized townships and markets appeared to be more relaxed in terms of patriarchal norms in public space, they nevertheless demonstrated forms of violence against women that was linked to human and drugs trafficking and political networks. Hot spots for gender-based violence exist in some parts of these locations too (especially in Monirampur). These forms of violence were previously underreported and normalized due to fear, political influence, and weak accountability mechanisms.

Education which is an important resource for women and girls was interestingly a growing trend in all areas. All participants observed that girls' education was on the increase over the years at the primary and secondary level. Even in remote rural areas, 80% of school going girls came from families that were motivated to send their daughters to school. However, before the HOPE project, schooling was often viewed only as basic literacy rather than as a right or a pathway to empowerment, leadership, or economic independence. Although a very low number of girls were found in studying in the coeducation schools seems promising and progressive too.

Another important factor to be considered on the issue of social inclusion was the demographic composition of the areas under the study. Some areas like the Gobindaganj and Polashbari in Gaibandha had majority Muslim population while in other areas minority religious groups were significant like Hindus in some Unions of Chirirbandar and Dalits of Monirampur and Keshabpur areas of Jashore. Historically, minority status intersected with poverty and social stigma, creating structural exclusion from services, protection, and representation. The Social Welfare Officer at the Upazila Office in Chirirbondor in fact earnestly requested that the HOPE Project particularly focus on the religious minorities in the area.

This also has political implications. Since the July uprising last year, Bangladesh has been going through a transitional phase where local governance has been somewhat dismantled and rendered invalid and ineffective thus affecting the security of minority communities in

particular. The weakening of formal governance structures exacerbated pre-existing inequalities, leaving women and minority groups disproportionately vulnerable due to their limited informal power and dependence on local authority systems. In the areas under our study, we found two different kinds of situation. In some areas the local government especially at the Union Parishad remained intact. The reason given by the respondents was that a kind of social cohesion existed within the locality which ensured the consistency and continuity of those in power at the local level. In their words,

“We mostly live in peace with each other, and political divides do not affect us greatly. In many families, brothers belong to different political parties, so it helps to cement political divides if it occurs. Minority communities therefore also feel protected in times of political crises.”

But in areas (again coinciding more with urban sites) where political divisiveness is more visible and local administration undergoes greater discord and rupture; minorities tend to feel less protected. We have also seen that there are issues regarding evaluating the criteria of receiving social safety net support from the local government in the new political scenario that seems creating new tensions and mistrust among the community and the government agencies. This reflects a structural governance challenge where lack of transparency, politicization of service delivery, and weak accountability undermine equitable access to state resources. The policies of social inclusion, which the HOPE project aspires for, is extra challenging to achieve.

Structural causes of violation of rights, lack of resources and lesser representation in social and political platforms

From the above section, we learn how the roots of oppression and discrimination causing violence against women and girls are embedded in the following structural barriers: (a) patriarchal and legal norms, (b) class-based behaviour and (c) social stigma in gender-based stereotypes.

The study located gender-based oppression and discrimination more in patriarchal norms and practices rather than in legal norms. Most of the key informants interviewed said that laws in Bangladesh were rights friendly, but it was in the implementation that they failed to deliver. The structural causes that hampered the implementation was located in patriarchal norms and practices and in social stigma that stemmed from gender-based stereotypes. Among the inequalities that were based on legal principles was women’s inheritance of land and property that was based on religious principles, which was protected by customary law embedded in the Constitution. But even in this case we learned from various students that family practices among Muslim families enabled them to override or reinterpret such discrimination e.g. the allocation of paternal property proportionately to brothers and sisters in accordance with religious principles.

Structural barriers were also created on the basis of equal access to income, livelihood or the possession of means to acquire resources (financial and/or political) like education and health. Hence we see differential access to power or political empowerment on the basis of gender, minority communities, in rural and urbanized locations.

Gender-based stereotypes hindered women in gaining equal recognition to men within the household and as office bearers or labourers even though they put in the same and sometimes more time and effort in their work than men. This has been related to us both through key informants and community members in our findings as depicted in the following section.

Evolving Trends

Respondents described the following trends in their society that was there before the HOPE project came and compared it to the situation after the project.

Voice

Students said how they understood the concept of rights in a deeper way than before. Many mentioned they had first learnt about rights from their book in class three. At that time, they just memorized it without understanding properly, but now after the HOPE project came, they were able to deepen their knowledge. This reflects a structural governance challenge where lack of transparency, politicization of service delivery, and weak accountability undermine equitable access to state resources. They learned how education constituted as a right for everyone, girls and boys, poor and wealthy. They stated,

“If school didn’t exist, we wouldn’t know about laws, politics, or women’s rights. Many girls would face child marriage at an early age. We also wouldn’t have interest in learning or know about money management, history, or society and state laws. School gives us knowledge, awareness, and confidence without it, we’d stay behind in every way. For example, we can choose which subject to study or what dress to wear. We have some freedom in personal choices, and our families respect that. However, for bigger family decisions, usually our parents or elder brothers decide but they also listen to our opinions.”

This indicates partial agency, where structural hierarchies within households continue to limit full decision-making power for girls despite increased awareness.

Even among minority male community members, education became a significant part of living well. They said,

“Many changes have taken place over the years. Previously, minority communities lacked both physical infrastructure and social recognition, reinforcing exclusion from public services and civic participation. The condition of roads and infrastructure has improved, and local government activities have developed. For example, now there is a cremation ground for the Hindu community, which was not available before. In the past, child marriage was very common, but now it has significantly decreased. People are more aware of human rights, especially women’s rights and child protection. Community members now know about government services and where to go for help. They also understand how to prevent child marriage and raise awareness in society.”

Boys mention that child marriage and sexual harassment are still big social problems. Many people in the community still support child marriage because of poverty and lack of education. These practices are structurally driven by economic insecurity, gender norms, and social

expectations around marriage as protection for girls. Female students mentioned the benefit of learning self-defence in their schools.

“Our classmates don’t harass us because both teachers and students are more aware now. Before the HOPE project, harassment within and outside school was often endured silently due to fear, shame, and lack of institutional response. People fear doing anything wrong inside the school premises.”

One of them shared a personal incident and said that she would not have the confidence to do that before.

“One day I was a bit late while going home. I saw some boys standing, and they started to harass me by hurling insult at me, taking my pictures. I remembered my training of self-defence from MKP, and I told them not to do that, and told them to move away. They got scared and moved away.”

Case Study: Umme Khadija, class 9, Gobindoganj, Gaibandha, Theatre group participant

I am a student of class nine who has actively participated in stage dramas at her school. My performances have focused on social issues such as education, child marriage, and women’s rights. My family was very supportive and encouraged me to take part in the drama. They appreciated the fact that I was doing something meaningful about education and child marriage. However, now they tell me to focus more on my studies, as they think it is important for my future. The main problem for women begins from their families. Many families don’t allow girls to continue their education after a certain age. They believe girls should marry early and take care of household responsibilities. As a result, girls often face pressure to get married instead of studying. Many women don’t have the freedom to make their own decisions. They are often expected to follow what their parents or husbands say. Very few girls are able to continue their studies and go for higher education. The percentage is very low, which keeps women behind in every sector.

In my family women are included in the family property. But in many other families, that doesn’t happen. In most cases, men control the property, and women don’t get an equal share. I think more awareness is needed about women’s rights to inheritance. It is mostly men who make the decision to divorce. Women rarely have that right or voice. If a man decides to end the marriage, the woman has to accept it. In some cases, the mother is allowed to keep the children, but it depends on the family’s situation. Generally, women have very limited rights in this matter, and society also doesn’t support them much if they are divorced.

Our drama group has performed several dramas on topics like child marriage, women’s rights, and education. We want people to think differently — to understand that girls should have equal chances in education and life. Through drama, we try to send a strong message to the community about these problems. The main focus was child marriage, but we also added parts about women’s rights, property inheritance, and divorce. We wanted to show how these problems are connected — how early marriage can affect women’s education, freedom, and even their rights in family matters.

The local government has been supportive. Some of their representatives attended our drama shows and appreciated our work. They said these kinds of programs are important for raising awareness in society. They also invited us to perform again in other events, which made us feel encouraged and motivated.

Training is important, but it’s not enough by itself. What we really need is more awareness — starting from the family level. Parents should understand the value of girls’ education and equality. Society also needs to change its mindset about women. If both families and communities become more aware, real change will happen.

“Another incident was related to us by a young student. A girl in our class was married off, before the HOPE project came to our school. She was in class seven like us. She told us that her family is putting so much pressure on her, and she was kind of tired resisting. We were really sad because we didn’t have any way to stop the marriage. Then we heard after some day of their marriage that her husband broke up with her. She was sent to a garments factory in EPZ. After some month, she again came to join school. She was again pressurized by her parents to get married off to another person. She came to us and asked for our support. We were then in class 9. We told her how to get out of it and made plan with her. She followed it with her grandmother’s help. The marriage got called off. We then talked with her parents directly not to follow through with the marriage anymore. We told them straight forward, after she reached 18 years, if she then wants, by law she can get married.”

Male community members said that compared to before, child marriage has reduced a lot. One shared,

“We have worked for this issue; our organization has also worked for it. We received training and learned that child marriage is harmful for both boys and girls. As people are becoming more aware, the rate has reduced.”

Activism

“We have faced certain kind of discrimination, harassment and other problematic situation before. But after the Hope project we have organized some meetings regarding these incidents, with the help of teachers and our Hope partners we learned how to deal with them.”

This was shared by a school student. Earlier, fear of backlash, social stigma, and lack of support systems prevented collective action or reporting of abuses. They also said before we could not think of taking any definite action out of fear, but now we have learned many things from theatre and self-defence training. Before self-defence, we always thought that we did not have much option except to move away quietly when faced with harassment. But by taking self –defence classes we became stronger and more aware of situations like these.

In general violence has also reduced. Dowry was one of the main reasons for violence. Now dowry is restricted, but it is still practiced. When a family is poor and they get a good proposal for their daughter even if she is still a child, they prefer to give dowry. Even for adult marriages, dowry is still given. They think it is beneficial to get a good family. However, when the full dowry amount is not provided, it leads to violence. Village women said,

“We didn’t know what rights we had before this, neither were we aware of them. Now we do, and now we fight against things as child marriage, where the rights of the girl are being violated.”

At times the boy is also too young to make a sound decision for himself, so that’s going against his rights as well. Even parents, since most of them are uneducated, are not making decisions

based on facts, so if their daughter was older, she could have been married off to a better house, would have had more dignity. They are losing out on that. Their right to a better, prestigious life is also being violated. This reflects structural information asymmetry, where women's exclusion from education and public spaces limited their awareness and ability to claim rights.

During a FGD HRD female group in Gaibandha one participant mentioned,

“We now know how to handle such situations. If needed, we can go to the local police station or call a local policeman. There are no severe cases regarding violence against women in our area, which need immediate legal help. Small cases of domestic unrest are mitigated by us. Violence against women can be of many types: it could be by the in-laws, it could be the husband, the wife herself could be abusive against her family. We usually try to mitigate them by talking things out. There is also the concept of dowry, which is still a persistent issue in all the areas surrounding us.”

In Jashore, minority Dalit women admitted to facing problems. Caste-based discrimination compounded gender and religious marginalization, creating layered barriers to accessing services and justice. During an FGD one participant mentioned,

“Earlier, when we went to take government services, we didn't feel safe. As we are from the Hindu minority community, some people looked down on us or gave threats. We often felt discriminated against, so we preferred to stay at home and not go out to offices or public places. But after joining this project, we became more confident and started learning how to communicate and claim our rights.”

Leadership

The participants noted several positive changes brought by the project on issues of representation and leadership roles.

- They became more aware of local government offices and learned how to access information and services.
- They can now visit the Union Parishad (UP) office to request information or support when needed.
- The project raised awareness about local issues such as water management, drainage problems, and climate change impacts like drought.

Before the HOPE project, women and marginalized groups rarely engaged with formal governance structures due to fear, lack of confidence, and entrenched beliefs that leadership spaces belonged to men and elites. Key Informants responded that women represented in official posts in the Union Parishad were strong and vocal. But in some areas respondents say that they did not have much of a role to play in decisions such as distributions of rice. But they played a part in local level arbitration of cases of violence against women, dowry and early marriage. This reflects tokenistic representation, where formal inclusion does not always translate into substantive decision-making power. In Jashore, they mentioned that they used to

think that only law enforcement/police could handle legal matters. One FGD participant reported that,

“The fact that mediation can be done verbally, and we ourselves can do it, is something we’ve learned from this project.”

Access to rights, resources and representation: challenges and achievements

Rights

Students in all the project schools have been made well aware of rights through the Students Forum and other activities such as the Theatre Forum and Self Defence classes. The participants expressed a clear understanding of human rights. They said that from birth, every person has certain rights, such as access to food, education, healthcare, and protection under the law. They also emphasized women’s rights, highlighting that women should not face violence and have equal access to justice. They acknowledged that human rights cover all individuals regardless of gender, age, or social status. They stated,

“We used to fear speaking up or asking questions.” This fear was rooted in structural power imbalances within families, schools, and communities, where questioning authority—especially by girls—was discouraged. Now, we have learned that we can ask questions and express our opinions. Every person has a need to express themselves. This is what we know as “Freedom of Speech”. Rights also mean the right to have food and shelter.”

Case Study: Md. Monirul Hasan, Class 8, Khansama, Dinajpur, Project Participant

I have been in the project for 1 year since the project started. I have learnt about human rights and specifically about women’s rights. Women and girls face many challenges. Some of the main ones are: Discrimination because they are female. Poverty, which makes their families prioritize boys’ education and opportunities over girls’. Many families consider girls a burden and neglect their rights, especially in education and property.

Generally speaking, laws are based on equality, but in some laws like inheritance, women do not enjoy equal rights to property for many communities. Both men and women in society must be aware of equality and rights. Fathers, husbands, and male family members must understand that women have equal rights to education, property, and services. Society’s mindset needs to change to respect women. Awareness programs, along with enforcement of laws, are important to protect women’s rights.

Sometimes students were reluctant to participate or join activities outside the school group. To overcome this, we implemented various programs, such as: Celebrating Women’s Day, awareness campaigns to prevent child marriage, programs on women’s rights, activities to encourage students to participate actively.

I have two sisters and they are good friends. So far they have not faced any discrimination either within the family or at school. In order to achieve equal gender rights, society and government need to change their mindset about women and gender equality so that laws are actually followed. Whether boys or girls, no one is completely secure. But women face more challenges and hence require extra safety measures. They are more vulnerable in society, so awareness, protection, and social support are very important.

Resources

The perception of women having access to resources was restricted by social norms and practices. Control over land, income, and assets remains structurally concentrated in male

hands due to inheritance customs, religious interpretations, and patriarchal family systems. The perception that women should have equal access to land and income was not significantly registered in the minds of the respondents. In terms of land, many found it difficult to even conceive. However, one student did say that in her observation women did have rights to land because she saw her aunts living in her father's property. Her right to an income was made by women CSO members who appealed to the researchers that they need to be included in the programme. This has been elaborated in the recommendations. Access to education and also health received the most significant attention. Most girls thought that attending a school is an education which is a resource for them in later lives. They said,

“If our parents didn’t send us here, we would have lost our chance to be educated, thus failing to secure our rights to education.”

Education and health emerged as entry points for rights awareness because they are socially acceptable domains for women's participation, unlike land or income control. There are also rights to health care. It is absolutely necessary for any human being to get access to health care and medicine and operation should they need it. Every person has the basic need of having healthcare, regardless of their position. It is necessary to address the question of having more female doctors available in the healthcare facilities. Participants have organized awareness campaigns through community advocacy and group meetings. School-based sessions for students, Engagement with parents, neighbours, and guardians towards achieving their goals.

Boys in their discussions brought out that girls need to participate equally with boys in different training sessions: Self-protection, education, health, the right to speak, food, and accommodation. On the other hand, they also mentioned that also needed training in self-defence as they also need to defend themselves when attacked. Sometimes they get targeted in fights with local gangs and feel insecure. Boys are also exposed to drugs like Yaba or weed more than girls, which affect their motivation to study and incite them in anti-social behaviour. Adult males also brought out an important point. They said,

“We send our sons to work as child labourers, depriving them of education because of our financial crises.”

This is also a rights issue. This highlights structural poverty as a driver of rights violations affecting both boys and girls, reinforcing intergenerational cycles of deprivation. Key informants thought that local authorities should play a role in preventing this. They said,

“If Union Parishad members or the Chairman do not take legal actions, we cannot stop these issues. They also expressed their concern about child marriage in the same way. It has long term repercussions on the health and future fortune of the family. It causes mental pressure on children. After marriage, the child becomes pregnant. The mother faces both physical and mental stress, and the husband faces financial pressure—often selling land or assets like

cows. The child born from this situation may not be healthy or intelligent, as the mother is not physically developed.”

Representation

Participants visited government offices to access widow allowances, disability benefits, and birth certificates. They also received training on RTI (Right to Information), which improved their understanding of legal rights and how to claim them. Prior to the project, lack of procedural knowledge and fear of authority prevented communities from engaging with bureaucratic systems. Meetings with UP members were conducted when community issues arose, such as child marriage or violence against women. Participants reported that UP members were supportive and often helped resolve disputes or refer cases to the appropriate authorities. CSO members have presented issues such as poor road conditions during meetings and dialogue.

“The UP are also distributing agricultural products—like wheat (20 kg), mustard seeds (1 kg), and fertilizer (20 kg)—but we are often deprived of these rights.”

“If I go to the Chairman and ask about their budget as a common person, they won’t tell me. They ask, “Who are you?” and refuse to share information. But if we approach through the Social Welfare Department, they listen to us. They have provided us with a channel so that when we approach the Chairman following that format, he is bound to respond.”

This was shared by a CSO member and it demonstrates structural barriers to transparency, where power and information are controlled through institutional gatekeeping. The male CSO member also related how they sought accountability of the local authorities through this process.

“We conducted a dialogue with the Upazila Health Centre under the Ministry of Mother and Child Affairs. We discussed service delivery, distribution of medicines, and the status of the medicine box. The Chairman was present. After the dialogue, the medicine box was opened in front of the chairman, CSO members, and Union Parishad officials. We questioned why they were giving out only half of the medicines, as that was a common practice.”

They also talked of their security in handling sensitive issues. Persistent fear reflects weak protection mechanisms for grassroots activists, especially women and minorities, within local power structures.

“We have not been attacked, but the fear is there. If we try to stop someone, they might harm us at night. Because of insecurity, we cannot directly intervene in many cases. Sometimes, when we try to stop a child marriage, the girl’s father or influential people question us about who we are to interfere. In such cases, we first inform the chairman, and then the law enforcement handles it. We have successfully stopped two or three cases, but later the families conducted the marriage secretly. They changed the date of birth in the voter ID card and continued with the marriage.”

Some women in FGD said that there are some local people from communities who suggested them to wear 'Borkha' to escape violence in the public space. Also some young girls at school mentioned that they wear hijab/ borkha not only for religious belief but also to remain safe on their way to school. A female CSO member said,

“There was a family dispute between a husband and wife. We visited and talked to both sides—the in-laws said the wife was at fault, while the husband denied wrongdoing. After discussion, we convinced the family not to separate. We try to resolve such conflicts in the village. The village court arbitration is very effective. We call all parties, talk, and settle the issues so they don't worsen. Many families trust us and follow our decisions.”

Overall, the findings reveal that violations of rights, lack of access to resources, and limited representation are not isolated issues but structurally produced through intersecting factors of patriarchy, poverty, minority status, weak governance, and social norms. The HOPE project's interventions have begun to disrupt these structures by building awareness, collective agency, and institutional engagement, though deeply rooted inequalities continue to pose challenges. Prior to the project, access to rights, resources, and representation was uneven and largely determined by geography, socio-economic conditions, and entrenched social norms that normalized child marriage, gender-based violence, exclusion from decision-making, and silence in the face of injustice. The HOPE project has made meaningful progress in disrupting these patterns by strengthening awareness of rights, fostering voice and collective action through education, theatre, self-defence, and CSO engagement, and improving interaction with local governance and service delivery mechanisms. Increased confidence among girls, women and minority groups to speak out, mediate disputes, prevent child marriage and claim entitlements reflects important gains in agency and social recognition. However, the findings also underscore that these gains remain fragile. Persistent patriarchal norms, economic insecurity, politicization of services, tokenistic representation and fear of backlash continue to limit the translation of awareness into full control over resources and sustained political power. Overall, the HOPE project has laid critical foundations for social change by challenging silence and exclusion, but achieving lasting gender justice and inclusive governance will require continued structural engagement with families, communities and institutions to address the root causes of inequality and ensure that rights, resources and representation are not only recognized but fully realized.

Recommendations

The recommendations below are evidence-based and meant for both programme and policy improvement.

Programme

The recommendations for programme improvement came mostly as demands for training voiced by students and teachers of school programmes. Some demands for training came from Key Informant Interviewees who were in both government as well as non-government posts. Those recommendations ensuing from the school programme were the following.

Recommendations had to do with issues concerning the situation they were passing through such as adolescence. Students, both girls and boys admitted to being confused at this stage of life and needed guidance. One girl stated,

“When I am at home, I kind of feel a bit trapped and lonely. But when I am at school, the environment mixed with nature makes me feel more at ease.”

Training programmes for self-development in schools:

- a) Further learning about human trafficking, child trafficking and kidnapping. These trainings should be aligned with the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh (Articles 27 and 28) and Bangladesh’s obligations under CEDAW to protect women and girls from exploitation and trafficking.
- b) Ways to protect themselves against cyber bullying. At some schools, they were exposed to these protective measures but not everywhere. More information could be provided by using the mobile more appropriately for students. One student said “Social media harassment is a big problem now. I think if schools and institutions give proper training and awareness sessions about online safety, it will help a lot. Girls will learn how to protect themselves, how to report abuse, and how to behave responsibly online. Education and awareness are the best ways to reduce these issues. This supports Clause 8 of the National Women Development Policy (2011), which focuses on protection from violence and discrimination.
- c) Students received training on RTI Act, but more practical hands-on methods need to be added to training e.g. practice how to fill up forms for accountability of public institutions related to their human rights agenda. This directly operationalizes the Right to Information Act, 2009—particularly Sections 4, 6, and 7.
- d) Developing future programs focusing on financial empowerment, health, and climate resilience need for future programs focusing on financial empowerment, gender, health (specifically mentioned HIV) and climate resilience, laws and acts related to the Human Rights Agenda. Knowledge on the Constitution and the country’s culture was considered essential. These topics could be included in the Debating activities. These recommendations align with Clause 16 of the National Women Development Policy (2011) and SDGs 5 and 10.

It was also suggested that boys also receive self-defence training for it would help them tackle attacks against them from gang members as well as their capacity to defend their female class friends when threatened. The first reason was especially important as much of the ragging of young men and boys cantered around chauvinistic masculine values (such as teasing girls as a form of male chauvinistic impulse). Such training contributes to community-level violence prevention envisaged under the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010.

Strengthening the infrastructural facilities of the school

- a) Most schools already have a library, but it could include more books about the lives of important people who could inspire us in our journey. This supports human rights awareness objectives under the National Human Rights Commission Act, 2009.
- b) Employ a teacher or training on English language. It would help them access human rights materials in English. This enhances access to international human rights instruments such as CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action.
- c) Gender equality in sports activities should be promoted at all schools. Some schools gave opportunity for girls to play football and cricket, others didn't. This aligns with Article 28 of the Constitution, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender.
- d) Educational resources. Going to private tuition is time consuming and costly. Support from the family, or school would help. More computers and technical resources at school in general would benefit the students in general as well as help in their activities as HRD. This contributes to reducing inequality in access to education in line with SDG 10.
- e) Students can be mobilized for contributing to decisions related to improved schooling e.g. starting a Commerce section in addition to Arts and Science. This reflects participatory governance principles under the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009.

Transmit knowledge and practice of human rights to others.

- a) Knowledge on ways to help others gain knowledge about scholarships, about widow allowances, and how to access these benefits as well as child trafficking, child marriage and school dropouts. This supports advocacy for transparent delivery of social protection services under the Right to Information Act, 2009.
- b) Safe roads for girls through mapping exercise could be taught to others (neighbours and neighbouring schools as part of Human Rights Defending Activities). This contributes to protection commitments under the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2022–2027), Pillar II.
- c) The audience for activities such as theatre, impromptu speech, recitation can be widened. Some students don't know which number to call during an emergency or what steps to follow in such situations. These topics should be included in the project activities so that more students can be more aware and prepared. Also, schools can be encouraged to organize events like cultural programmes, annual shows where both girls and boys can perform jointly/individually which will increase the visibility of girls in

common platform with boys. Such activities align with social norm change objectives under the Beijing Platform for Action.

- d) Everyone needs to be aware of the dangers of child marriage and sexual harassment. Families, schools, and local leaders should work together. A joint committee including students, teachers, and community members to prevent child marriage and sexual harassment at community level should be introduced. This directly links to enforcement of the Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act, 2017 especially Sections 7–9—and advocacy concerning Section 19.
- e) Every school should have an online platform or webpage where students can access educational materials, documentaries, and development information. This would help them learn and stay informed in a positive way. This supports digital access to information and rights awareness under the RTI Act, 2009.

Strengthening Human Rights practices

- f) Results based advocacy techniques need to be learned. This enables evidence-based advocacy under the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010.
- g) Informed advocacy work and training on strategies for creating change can be imparted to the Students Forum. This supports constitutional guarantees of equality under Articles 27 and 28.
- h) Financial support for students from poor families can be encouraged among students' activities. This addresses inequality concerns under SDG 10.
- i) Skill training programs can be initiated, and support from legal services is essential. For scaling up, we need project or organization-based support, infrastructure (community centres or buildings), and publicity tools like social media. This aligns with Clause 16 of the National Women Development Policy (2011).

It was recommended by students and teachers that NGO activities should be more frequent and cover a wider range of people. Where there are 400 students in a school only a small number are directly involved in such programmes, while others are not. Although the selected students promote what they learn, direct involvement of more students would be more effective. This supports the awareness mandate of the National Human Rights Commission Act, 2009.

Improving programmatic interventions

Project or organizational support, infrastructure for community activities, and better access to legal and justice services are needed in the locality. Publicity through social media or local campaigns should also help reach more people.

- a) The project should expand its coverage across all Upazilas. Training should include gender and women's empowerment, child and women safeguarding, and self-defence. Parents should teach children about good and bad touch and monitor their safety at school and during commutes.

Integrating human rights with economic empowerment

- a) There was overall demand for skill training that would increase income earning for women. Men also like the idea saying if the income of the household was increased then the whole household would benefit and men would gladly agree to it. It was suggested that women in the locality who had business connections or were trained in a particular craft (like making dolls for export) could help to impart this training to other women in the group.

A Conflict Transformation Approach needs to be integrated

CSOs in many areas have successfully resolved conflict over resources in villages, but conflict remains due to power configurations. A long-term conflict transformation method can be integrated into the program through rigorous training programme so that CSOs and HRDs in the area can practice it in daily lives. According to Jinat Ara, member of the Conflict Transformation Platform, “The Conflict Transformation approach is quite different. It demonstrates that there can be a middle way. It talks of solutions not only at the individual or societal level, but somewhere in between or in the interface of both individual and society.”

Policy

Social Inclusion

- a) Policy at local and national level should focus more on engaging people from marginalized backgrounds and bridging the gap with those who are more solvent. Creating a link between these two groups would be very beneficial. This reflects constitutional guarantees under Articles 27 and 28 and Bangladesh’s commitments under CEDAW. Inclusion of marginalized women in the project design is essential but integrating livelihood support, legal awareness, and skill development is crucial to create sustainable change. This supports the National Women Development Policy (2011).

Women’s economic empowerment

- a) Adult women also need financial and livelihood support to fully benefit. Introducing women-friendly microcredit programs and skill-based training would strengthen their economic independence and empower them to assert their rights. Given the current economic scenario, it has been seen that for minority women and girls, human rights education is valuable, but livelihood support, skill development, and stronger engagement with government services are equally essential. This can be done through generating or mobilising internal resources in the area and not necessarily by external funds. This aligns with Clause 16 of the National Women Development Policy (2011) and SDG 5.
- b) Technical training, such as sewing, taking care of domestic animals, fisheries training, and various other activities like legal services may be jointly organized by local government and CSOs. This is consistent with the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009.
- c) A mapping of internal resources may be undertaken by all CSOs in the area so that they can find alternative sources of income and organize skills training to enhance

their income earning capacities. They may also advocate to local authorities for further support on the basis of evidence provided by their exercise. This evidence can support RTI-based advocacy under the Right to Information Act, 2009.

Role of CSOs as perceived by GO

- a) CSOs can play an important role in awareness building. For example, some applicants for maternity allowance might not have the necessary papers. CSOs can support them by guiding them through the process if they are selected. If they can make these groups capable and well-informed, it can be very effective. They can help identify and support the people who truly need it. This supports effective implementation of social safety net policies and RTI obligations.
- b) NGOs and government programs can work together because they share common goals. Collaboration can include organizing events, awareness campaigns, and joint community programs, ensuring better outreach and effectiveness. This aligns with SDG 17 on partnerships.
- c) The amount of social safety net allowances received especially for the widows or the disabled people should be increased. This supports constitutional obligations to social justice.
- d) Although some coordination already exists, it can be strengthened further. Their communication with local government representatives can be more proactive, including regular consultation on their activities and seeking input on ways to improve them.. CSOs should also discuss with local Government how they can work more effectively in the same communities where they operate. This reflects participatory governance principles under the Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009.

Role of GOs as perceived by CSOs

- a) There should be more active officials for addressing situations that is usually faced by CSOs. For this there should be more awareness session in educational institutes and conferences for creating awareness. Local government and NGOs should collaborate to organize regular public information sessions and help desks to guide citizens through application processes. This supports enforcement of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010.
- b) CSOs need to further engage national-level policymakers in their initiatives. According to a local NGO staff, “We need to engage officials from the DC office, Justice Court, SP office, and other key government departments.” For example, forensic doctors need better training and equipment to handle post-mortem or rape-related cases properly. District-level monitoring committees, chaired by the District Judge and ADC (General), exist but are inactive. As a result, survivors often wait for medical reports for days, even months or years. Delays in medical reports prevent the preparation of charge sheets, allowing perpetrators to go unpunished. This aligns with accountability objectives under SDG 16.
- c) It would be very helpful if legal aid officers could be deployed here in all the project operation areas to help with the cases that needs to be taken up by the local

authorities. This supports access to justice commitments under national legal aid frameworks.

- d) Cases involving minors should be handled more sensitively. Various stakeholders, such as the Social Welfare Officer, police, and others must come forward together to protect children more efficiently and with compassion. This directly links to the Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act, 2017.
- e) Women who work night or roster-based jobs need strong safety measures to prevent harassment. There should be a proper support system in place for such situations. This aligns with protection objectives under the National Women Development Policy (2011).

Addressing barriers to women's access to rights resources and representation

- a) The project area could be extended so that more beneficiaries can be included. There are many extremely poor families who cannot afford education costs or health services. This supports SDGs 5 and 10.
- b) Support for the elderly and child welfare should be increased by the Social Welfare Parishad. This aligns with national social protection frameworks.
- c) Awareness and legal aid training are very important — especially for remote areas. Many poor villagers face problems but can't afford to go to court. Legal aid organizations like BRAC or Grameen Bank sometimes provide help, but access is still limited. Such help should be consolidated. This supports the National Human Rights Commission Act, 2009 and SDG 16.

Conclusion

The HOPE project, which aims to create human rights defenders (HRD) for strengthening and enabling access to rights, resources and representation for women and girls, has had a good beginning in the study areas. The concept of rights has been internalised both in the schools as well as communities. An interesting outcome had been that rights has been perceived in both circles not only in terms of equality and inclusion but also as birth rights in socio economic terms such as right to education, health and also as right to food and wellbeing for all hence translating such rights as universal rights. This has been possible by the hands-on approach taken by the project partners and the context and social background in which they are working.

The method of imparting knowledge of rights was only minimally instructive and largely based on problem-solving situations that arise from the realities of their living conditions. It was these situations that led the community CSO members as well as students to link up their own self-development to the larger wellbeing of the community, from mere knowledge of rights to working for economic empowerment and welfare. In other words, the HRDs are already feeling the need to embrace human rights in all its entirety: political, civil, social and economic rights. The future challenge of the HOPE project partners is to keep up with these expectations and channelise them to a greater degree of realization. Some of the ways in which this could be achieved have been set out in the recommendations above. In the words of Sultana Kamal, Chair of the Conflict Transformation Platform " The way forward is long term education, which aim at transformation of the mind."

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