



# CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY: BREAKING THE BIAS

## GENDER EQUALITY TODAY FOR A SUSTAINABLE TOMORROW



Brahmanbaria DPF holds Discussion Meeting event for International Women's Day on 8 March 2022

Preventing gender bias and discrimination requires a collective effort to address gender-based inequalities and actively break stereotypes. For International Women's Day (IWD) this year, the universal theme was Breaking the Bias, where participants were encouraged to "Imagine a gender equal world. A world free of bias, stereotypes, and discrimination. A world that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive. A world where difference is valued and celebrated. Together we can forge women's equality. Collectively we can all #BreakTheBias" (IWD Website). In Bangladesh, the government promoted a similar theme, however, focused more on gender equality with the slogan, "gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow."

In Bangladesh, gender inequality and lack of representation are major development challenges. There are many stereotypes rooted in traditional gender roles, discrimination against women and girls is common in educational institutions and workplaces, and child marriage is still affecting girls more than anyone. According to UN Women statistics, women hold only 10.75% of managerial positions in the country. This is due not only to educational barriers for girls, but also because 51.4% of women aged 20-24 were married or in a union before age 18, and 15.5% of women aged 20-24 were married or in a union before the age of 15. At the government level, despite significant progress over the past decades, women represent only 23.32% of elected seats at the local level, and 20.86% of seats in the national parliament. These numbers are not meant to shock, but they are indicative of a greater problem in the country- one that shows overt gender bias against women and girls.



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Platforms for Dialogue (P4D) has primarily been working to promote the social accountability tools (SATs) to citizens and government officials in our project districts. In this process, however, it has become apparent that despite our efforts, reaching and engaging women and girls is a challenge. We have worked hard to address gender equality in representation, and one of our key goals is to improve gender balance in our work both in-person and online. To this end, many of P4D's District Policy Forums (DPFs) held rallies or discussion meetings to promote awareness of gender-related issues in honour of IWD.

Events were held in Bagerhat, Bandarban, Brahmanbaria, Jamalpur, Kishoreganj, Kushtia, Moulvibazar, Munshiganj, Natore, Panchagarh, and Patuakhali. Most DPFs hosted only discussion meetings, however, some also engaged the greater community with a cultural event or rally. During the discussion meetings, many important local government representatives were in attendance, including District Commissioners, District

Administrators, representatives from the Department of Women's Affairs, Deputy Directors of Local Government offices, and even local Members of Parliament. Other participants included students, journalists, teachers, activists, CSO representatives, lawyers, and more. Together, these communities addressed important gender issues including access to technology for women and girls, inclusion and diverse representation, employment opportunities for women, stopping child marriage, and breaking gender-based stereotypes. The DPF's also presented a keynote paper and presented recommendations like ensuring women's safety in the workplace, taking proper initiatives to stop child marriage, implementing laws to prevent violence against women, and taking the necessary steps to increase female participation in democratic processes.

Participation was spontaneous throughout the events, and the level of commitment and passion that speakers showed for women's rights and gender equality during the discussions was impressive.



Participants at Moulvibazar DPF Discussion Meeting pose for a photo.



Jamalpur DPF holds a Discussion Meeting on International Women's Day.





Bagerhat DPF President, Babul Sardar, said, “gender equality is not being ensured enough. We should start this initiative in our family, in educational institutions, workplaces, in society etc.” Chief Guest and female MP from Patuakhali at the local IWD celebration, Kazi Kaniz Sultana, spoke about how much progress has already been made and said,

“the present government has been implementing massive programmes to prevent all kinds of violence against women, along with establishing women’s rights, promoting education for them, and empowering women to establish gender equality.”

Many DPF discussions led to community pledges, including being more mindful of and respecting women’s perspectives both at home and in the workplace, stopping child marriage, providing better education for girls, giving equal opportunity in workplaces, and providing safe spaces for women in the workplace including rooms for breastfeeding and female-only washrooms. These timely discussions are not only bringing up important issues related to gender equality, but they are motivating leaders and community members to act on their statements. The DPF discussion platforms provide a valuable space for change-makers to gather, share ideas, and plan their next steps, and it is clear that they are committed to advancing gender equality.



Women participants joined the Panchagar IWD discussion meeting, which was held both in person and over video.

## IWD Celebrations



11 DPF groups honoured IWD with Discussion Meetings



726 individuals joined both in person and online events, 52% of whom were women



Two DPFs held additional celebrations in the form of a rally or cultural event

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