



Strengthening Human Rights Defenders

ANNUAL
REPORT
2013

Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK)

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PREFACE

ASK, along with many other human rights organisations, in 2013 had to remain busy attending to various human rights violation cases at various levels as the year witnessed unprecedented events of conflicts and violence at an unprecedented scale. Bangladesh, over the past few years has been able to register quite commendable success in the socio-economic and cultural rights and infrastructural development no doubt but unfortunately its record in political and civil rights has generally been not only disappointing but alarming. Reacting to the progress of trial of the war criminals and the emergence of 'Gonojagoron Mancho' demanding to expedite the trial of the war criminals, the anti-liberation political forces created havoc in the lives of the ordinary citizens by using extreme violent means of attack ranging from indefinite blockade and snapping of roads and communications, indiscriminate physical assaults, arson and destruction of properties which the state organs failed to control effectively. Political conflicts over the issue of holding the national election under a Caretaker Government also contributed to further deteriorate the situation. Not only that, the police and law enforcing agencies fell prey to their attack practically without any resistance. Deaths and injuries continued to dominate the headlines of the dailies. The climax was the rally by Hefazat e Islam causing undesired casualties. But the worst was the collapse of Rana Plaza which took a death toll of more than 1135 workers at work in the building at the time of the collapse. The state either failed to demonstrate adequate capacity to deal with the matter efficiently or the willingness to do so.

Under the circumstances, with its vision to create a society established based on the principles of equality, justice, rule of law and above all on the principles of democracy, ASK had to vigorously engage itself in accomplishing the tasks it had planned for itself at the beginning of the project "Strengthening Human rights Defenders" by its commitment to capacity building of individual human rights defenders as well as by endeavouring to improve the capabilities of the institutions through conducting its activities with the identified individuals, groups as well as partner organisations. It remained ever vigilant in preventing and protesting violence against women, children and the vulnerable communities like the religious and ethnic minorities, the indigenous peoples in the hills as well as of the plains through mediation, litigation, public interest suits, research and investigation, legal advocacy, training, community activism and last but not the least, continued to provide psycho-social counseling as needed. Its publications and documentations along with the media and international advocacy kept the society and the international community informed and alert of the situation on the ground. All the activities ASK undertook have been described in the Report in detail. One of the tasks that ASK takes very seriously is to enhance its own capacity to serve as human rights resource center which is dealt with in the final chapter of the Report.

I gratefully acknowledge the contributions and cooperation of all my colleagues in the process of preparation of the Report. My special thanks to Ms. Sultana Alam for taking the hard task of writing the Report for us and, most importantly, the guidance provided by the members of ASK. Our donor partners also deserve to be thankfully mentioned for extending their cooperation in our efforts to reach the stated goal.

I wish everyone all very best for the coming year.
Executive Director
Sultana Kamal

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ACRONYMS

ALRD	Association for Land Reform and Development, Bangladesh.
ANNI	Asian NGO Network on National Human Rights Institutions. Headquartered in Bangkok.
BELA	Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association.
BINAD	Biddya Nattya Dal (School Theatre Team).
BLAST	Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust.
BNWLA	Bangladesh National Women Lawyer's Association.
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979.
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989.
HR	Human Rights.
HRDF	Human Rights Defenders Forums. Organized and trained by ASK's Investigation Unit to monitor, investigate and report on and HR violations in their area. Members are journalists, lawyers, professors, teachers, elected representatives of local government, university students.
HRDO	Human Rights Defenders Organisations. A generic reference to a group or organisation committed to promoting HR awareness and protection. Human Rights Defenders Forums, trained and supported by ASK's Investigation Unit, This are examples of HRDOs.
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh.
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution. Generic term to refer to national human rights watch points.
PIL	Public Interest Litigation or Public Interest Lawsuit.
TOT	Training of Trainers.
VAW	Violence against Women.

GLOSSARY

Fatwa: Arabic for opinion of a person knowledgeable in Shariah. In Bangladesh villages, it is decreed by people who have no legal authority.

Heba: An intervening marriage. There is widespread misconception that in order to remarry an immediately preceding ex-spouse, a woman is required to undergo a marriage with another man. Asserted to prevent a man or a woman from hasty, poorly thought-out decisions to divorce.

Kormojibi Nari: *Working Women*, NGO in Bangladesh.

Mohila Parishad: *Women's Organisation*. A leading national organisation committed to women's rights and human rights.

Manobodhikar Nattya Parishad: *Human Rights Drama Associations* formed among youth in the districts. Referred to simply as "Youth Theatre Group" in this report, they receive training in HR, acting and theatre techniques from ASK's HR Awareness Unit.

Manobodhikar Nari Samaj: *Women's Human Rights Associations*. All-women organisations for promoting and protecting human rights. They have emerged in 10 districts in Bangladesh with encouragement from ASK and local NGOs working in partnership. ASK provides support through extensive training to not only members of these associations but also staff of partner NGOs.

Manobodhikar Songrokhon Parishad: *Human Rights Defenders' Committee*. Members comprise women and men. Organisations are trained and supported by ASK's Gender Justice Programme Unit (GSJP) concerned to and defend HR. They run parallel to *Manobodhikar Nari Samajes*, which are all-women formations. See immediately above.

Naripakha: *Pro Woman*. Feminist organisation.

Nijera Kori: *We Do it Ourselves*. NGO with strong feminist and human rights commitments.

OC: Officer-in-Charge of a police station located at each *thana*.

PNGO: *Partner NGO* or NGOs working in formal partnership with ASK on programme implementation.

Shalish: An informal, traditional system of mediation used to settle marital and land disputes outside the court.

Shalishkar: Mediators who conduct shalish. Generally, local elected representatives, school teachers, NGO workers, religious leaders, etc.

SP: Superintendent of Police. Responsible for overseeing law enforcement at district level.

Thana: Police Station

TNO: *Thana Nirbahi Officer* or Thana Security Officer. Government official responsible for ensuring and monitoring law and order at the Thana level.

Union: The lowest unit of administration in Bangladesh.

UNO: *Union Nirbahi Officer (Union Security Officer)*. Government official charged with ensuring and monitoring law and order at the administrative level just below the *Thana*.

INTRODUCTION

Commitment to Capacity Building

ASK's vision commits it to bring about a wholesale systems change in a society's *capacity* to understand, value, maintain and protect human rights (HR) at three levels: institutions, the individual and in the society.

Without laws and procedures, which meet HR standards, the demands by individuals and civil society fall on deaf ears. Conversely, the most enlightened body of laws and legal procedures become redundant when individual citizens are unaware of their rights and fail to claim them. Where the culture of a given society considers women, ethnic and religious groups as inferior, condones violence and retaliation in social relations, or accepts corruption in law enforcement and the judiciary as “givens” in human nature, the most intelligent individual is constrained from developing a robust sense of her/his own rights and the most cultured and scientifically advanced society is severed from notions of the equality and dignity of all citizens and the rule of law.

Secondly, after 27 years, ASK is able to survey a number of building blocks it has placed at institutional, individual and societal levels on which to anchor its endeavours in the coming years. This it owes to its insistence from its very inception, that it remains deeply rooted in the lives of people and in addressing some of their immediate needs. Even

Daunting and overwhelming as ASK's task is, as the year draws to a close the organization is able to draw sustenance from two factors. Firstly, ASK recognizes that change is not additive. Rather, it is the exponential outcome of the efforts of many individuals and many centres of activism whose influence potentially radiates far beyond their immediate targets. This notion is reflected in an old adage:

“Educate a mother, and you educate a nation”.

A former child worker, who received an education through ASK, echoes the notion:

“If I can help ten children to have hope, and plan for a better future, they can convince 100 other children, and they can.....Soon we will have reached 1,000 children”.

when it acts as the Secretariat for reporting on the HR situation in Bangladesh to international bodies, or is called upon by regional networks to assess the performance of the National Human Rights Commission, or comment on draft legislation proposed by the Government, its day-to-day insights into what is needed to create a HR based society are shaped by its first-hand experiences from 30 districts of Bangladesh through its many programmes. Experience and daily interactions with ordinary people and their problems amply prepare ASK, and its dedicated staff of 238 members, of whom 172 are women and, 66 men, to appreciate the difficulty and immensity of the challenge it has shouldered.

Thirdly, the same embedness in the lives of ordinary people has helped ASK to develop a solid respect for the built-in resistance offered by society to any attempts to remould it. Society, after all, is a living organism with a life and momentum of its own. While forever mutating and prone to assuming new forms on its own, it is, at the same time, indelibly resistant to external attempts to transform it. Ever seeking to maintain its integrity, a social system uses subversion to mock efforts to impose change. Try to emancipate women from the confinement of the home and the “shadow economy” of home-based, socially under-valued economic production, and old forms of gender

oppression metamorphose to assume new forms—stalking, which leads some women to suicide, sexual harassment at the workplace that prevent women from taking the initiative in suggesting innovation, or the segregation of women into positions with low decision-making powers and remuneration in august firms and gleaming corporations. Stop child labour and soon girl children find themselves driven into the sex industry. Introduce new technologies in hopes of opening up new portals to vast stores of knowledge and information for children, and society seizes the same technology to spawn child pornography and addictive video games. As an organisation, ASK is well aware of the inherent resistance to change society embodies, and understands the crucial need to balance its optimism with pragmatism, patience and persistence.

Structure of the Annual Report

This report provides a picture of ASK's key achievements in capacity building in 2013. Capacity building for HR promotion involves many activities at each of the levels (institutions, the individual, and the society). The activities are complex and time-consuming and do not necessarily come to fruition in convenient twelve month cycles that define each successive year. As such, this Annual Report focuses on a *selection* of activities, which had matured into “achievements” by the end of 2013. Besides reporting on ASK's achievements in enhancing capacities at the levels of institution, individual, and society, a fourth area of capacity building has been added: improving the capacity of ASK itself to function as a centre for providing information, ideas about strategies, and tools relevant to HR protection and their defence.

STRUCTURE OF ANNUAL REPORT

Section: I Institutions (for administering justice)	1. Advocating Legal Reform: 2. Engendering Accountability: A. Using Public Interest Litigation to Urge Responsibility B. Using Investigation to Demand Answerability 3. Strengthening Human Rights Watch Points
Section: II The Individual (for asserting and defending HR)	4. Transforming Women: A. Impelling Agency B. Propelling Leadership 5. Empowering Children to Claim a Better Future
Section: III Society (for organised activism)	6. Supporting the Development of Organisation in/among: A. Secondary schools. C. Low-income urban neighbourhoods. E. Women in the districts. B. Out-of-school youth. D. HR-oriented professional groups in the districts. F. Mixed-gender groups in the districts
Section: IV ASK (as a centre for HR information, strategies and tools)	7. Strengthening Units in & Alliance-Building by ASK: A. Documentation C. ASK Website E. Achievement of Phycho-social Counselling B. Publication D. Training F. Coalition-Building

SECTION I

IMPROVING INSTITUTIONS

- Chapter 1 Advocating Legal Reform
- Chapter 2 Engendering Accountability
 - A. Using Public Interest Litigation to Urge Responsibility
 - B. Using Investigation to Demand Answerability
- Chapter 3 Strengthening Human Rights Watch Points

CHAPTER 1

ADVOCATING LEGAL REFORM

Although the Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equality and justice between women and men, and between religious communities, outdated laws severely compromise both the spirit and the letter of this foundational document. Laws still on the book reinforce and perpetuate inequalities between women and men, and between religious communities. Inheritance laws, e.g., entitle Muslim women to inherit only half the share of family property that falls to their brothers. In the case of Hindu women, such laws deny all rights to inheritance to women.

The *urgency* to reform domestic laws has greatly increased since the early 1980s when Bangladesh began to accede to, or became a signatory to, a number of UN-sponsored HR treaties, many of the concepts of which resonate with those contained in the Constitution. The treaties are binding and obligate the government to bring domestic laws, the judiciary and law enforcement into line with HR standards.

The UN regularly monitors the performance of signatory countries with regard to their commitments under various conventions. The protocols set up by the UN for monitoring compliance with HR Covenants have opened up expanded opportunities for civil society groups and rights activists to mobilise public opinion and bring pressure on the government for legal reform. The protocols do so by inviting “shadow” or parallel reports from civil society groups, which help balance official reports



submitted to the UN by governments. Civil society representatives are also invited to participate in international forums organised to assess a country's performance with regard to international treaties espousing the rights of women, the child, migrant workers etc. ASK plays a leading role in such exercises and currently serves as the NGO Secretariat for the Universal Periodic Review process, which is facilitated by the Human Rights Council of the UN.

The task of monitoring and pressing the government is by no means easy. The requirement to revise laws under various treaty obligations is not immediate. Also, the treaties do not obligate governments to charge a specific ministry or department to undertake or oversee the process of reform. As such, advocacy for reform tends to be time-consuming, and fraught with frustration, especially in a country like Bangladesh with its proverbial lack of coordination between different ministries and departments, and its predilection for top-heavy decision-making.

ASK's Role in Advocacy for Improvement of Laws

ASK is one of several HR organizations and citizens' groups that have advocated legal reform. The main HR Organisations in Bangladesh with which ASK works closely are:

1. ALRD
2. BELA
3. BLAST
4. BNWLA
5. Kormojibi Nari
6. Bangladesh Mahila Parishad
7. Naripakha
8. Nijera Kori

What is "Human Rights" (HR)?	Core International HR Treaties
<p>Human rights are notional rights that are not codified into any body of laws. Formulated internationally, the concepts of HR are evocative of earlier concepts of Natural Rights and, like them, attribute innate, intrinsic rights to every person by virtue of her/his inherent characterization as a human being. However, the concept of HR is not entirely alien to Bangladesh. Many resonate with Constitutional rights, echoed by the National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh, and include the Right to Life, Right to Liberty, Right to Equality and Right to Dignity.</p> <p>Although definitions of HR remain general and vague, they nevertheless provide powerful standards or ideals, against which to measure the intent and efficacy of laws and the administration of justice. The impulse to do so has greatly increased in recent decades with</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) (1965). 2. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1965). 3. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (1966). 4. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979). 5. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) (1984). 6. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989). 7. International Convention on Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICMRW) (1990).

One conduit for ASK's advocacy for legal reform is through an *exchange in public forums*, both domestic and international. This form of advocacy involves participating in discussions pertaining to HR issues and legal reform. Participation is through seminars, roundtable discussions, articles and books, proposing and drafting improved laws, commenting on new laws or amendments drafted by the government or proposed by other organizations, class actions monitoring HR violations, disseminating reports on the HR situation, and appeals for support from domestic and international HR defenders to protect specific victims of HR violations.

the development of a number of international HR covenants to which Bangladesh has acceded, thereby binding itself to change domestic laws so as to bring them into line with its treaty obligations.

The protocols set up by the UN for monitoring compliance with HR Covenants have opened up new opportunities for civil society groups and rights activists to mobilise public opinion and bring pressure on the government for legal reform. The protocols do so by inviting “shadow” reports on HR situations from civil society groups and calling on them to participate in international forums organised to assess a country's performance with regard to international treaties.

2013: Achievements of ASK's Advocacy for Legal Reform

In 2013 ASK's advocacy for legal reform brought success in three areas:

- (a) Laws for protecting women against domestic violence.
- (b) Laws for protecting Hindu married women.
- (c) Laws affecting the rights of children

(a) Amendment to Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010

Domestic violence accounts for a sizeable proportion of reported incidents of violence against women (VAW). Newspapers are able to capture only the tip of the ice-berg and, except for dowry-related violence against women (VAW), do not distinguish between VAW perpetrated by family members and others not related to a woman.

Even so, the dailies provide a chilling picture of the fear and threats under which women live within the “safety” of the home. According to data compiled by ASK from fourteen dailies, in the first six months of 2013, dowry-related violence alone accounted for slightly more than one-fifth of a total of 1251 incidents of VAW. Of the 265 women subject to dowry-related violence during the six month period, one-fifth subsequently died — 47 as a result of their injuries and another five by committing suicide.

Horrible as the consequences of domestic violence have been, until 2010, domestic violence perpetrated by husbands, in-laws, parents, siblings and other family members was considered “normal” and “expected”. It was not until the much celebrated Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010, came into being that such violence has been moved to the sphere of public acts and criminalised.

From the beginning, ASK had played a key role in advocating laws to place domestic violence on a par

Trends in Under-Reporting of Crimes against Women & Children

In 2013, ASK compared data from police records with newspaper accounts of crimes in Gainbandha District. The comparison shows that there is systematic under-reporting of violence of all types in the press but that the tendency is particularly noticeable in cases that involve violence against women, and children. Out of:

- 63 murders recorded by the police, only 34 were reported in newspapers.
- 316 incidents of VAW, only 48 made it into the press.
- 9 incidents of violence against children, newspapers reported none.

Source: ASK Website February 24, 2013

with other acts of violence that are considered as “crimes”. As such, it was with great enthusiasm that it hailed the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010 but the euphoria proved short-lived.

Much to ASK’s disappointment, the new Act was not followed immediately by Rules that would prescribe procedures and complaint formats. As a result, the Amendment to Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010, languished in disuse. While it was still possible to use existing criminal laws to file a complaint against VAW perpetrated by family members, given the conservative attitudes towards women among some judges, the prospects of success were not very hopeful.

For its part, ASK stepped forward to press for an amendment of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010. The amendment of 2013 now provides a book of procedures specifying channels for registering complaints and the responsibilities of the police and their need to be trained, and sample forms.

(b) Enactment of the Hindu Marriage Registration Act (2012) – Rules, 2013

In a similar scenario, the Hindu Marriage Registration Act of 2012 was passed but without accompanying rules. A major flaw in the new law was that it required marriage in the Hindu community to be registered at each union in rural areas, and each ward in *pourashavas*, but the requirement was optional. ASK had been among several organisations, which had strongly advocated a “Hindu Marriage Law” that would deal with divorce, polygamy, marriage registration and maintenance, and was disappointed that the new law had failed to make registration mandatory.

Hindu marriage laws, based on religious norms, make no provision for divorce but allow polygamy. Should a husband take on other wives, or choose to abandon or neglect a wife, the wife has no recourse. Since there is no divorce, by definition, the concept of maintenance for the wife or support for her children is void.

A Case Study

Torulata Rani, 24, is having a difficult time raising her six-year-old son by herself in Dokshin Chowra village in northern Nilphamari district, 350km from Dhaka. Her husband Sreepodo deserted the young family six years ago. The reason, according to Rani, was that her mother was unable to meet a demand for increased dowry. In 2006, he husband married another woman.

Without a marriage registration, she cannot seek divorce or obtain compensation from her estranged husband. A new law adopted on September 18th could ease the suffering of Hindu women in her situation.

Because she is a Hindu, there is not much the state can do for Rani. The minority Hindu community in Bangladesh follows the centuries-old Dayabhaga Law. According to that code, Rani does not have the right to divorce Sreepodo until he dies.

"I have to pass my whole life as his wife no matter whether he looks after me and my son or not," Rani told *Khabar South Asia*. "I have no right to object to my husband's decision. He can marry as many women as he wishes."

With no other recourse, Rani recently filed a case with local police under the Women and Children Repression (Prevention) Act, which covers violent abuse. Rani claims her husband continues to assault both her and her mother.

While India enacted legislation on marriage registration and divorce in 1955, Bangladesh (remained) ambivalent on the issue, fearing a backlash from its Hindu minority.

<Khabarsouthasia.com/en-GB/articles/features/2012/09/features-01>

Marriage registration offers a promising escape from the impasse. If a marriage is registered, a Hindu woman is able to avail herself of other laws in the country that make it possible for an abandoned or neglected wife to claim some form of support from a husband. Nonetheless, fearing a backlash from the Hindu minority, lawmakers have been reluctant to change Hindu marriage laws and have sought escape by making marriage registration optional.

Even though the Hindu Marriage Act, 2012 failed to make registration mandatory, ASK welcomed it as a tentative step forward. With all its shortcomings, the law

makes it possible for rights activists to make communities aware about the problems of women and to persuade new couples to register their marriage.

Imperfect as the Hindu Marriage Act, 2012, was the new law came with two additional flaws. Firstly, as in the case of the Domestic Violence Act, lawmakers had failed to formulate the rules needed to make it operational. Secondly, the government had failed to appoint Hindu marriage registrars in every union and ward as required by the Hindu Marriage Registration Act, 2012.

The Enactment – Rules in 2013 removes these shortcomings and now makes Hindu marriage registration possible for couples who are willing. Meantime, ASK is forging ahead with advocacy for making Hindu marriage registration mandatory. It forms a priority in its advocacy efforts in 2014.



(c) Labour Act of 2006

Which defines a child as being under 14 years of age, thus preventing efforts to the right to workplace safety of adolescents.

(d) The Child's Rights Act of 2013

The Child Rights Act of 2013 rewards lobbying by ASK. The new act, which sets 18 years of age as the cut-off point for defining a child, concludes years of collaboration between ASK's Child Rights Unit and its Advocacy Programme to improve laws to protect young people against child labour. A total of seven of out eight ordinances in Bangladesh need to be revised in light of the 2013 Child Rights Act.

Ordinances Re: Age Below Which a Person is Deemed a Child in Bangladesh

The Majority Act, 1875 18 years

The Mines Act, 1923 15 years

The Children (Pledging of Labour) Act, 1933 15 years

The Employment of Children Act, 1938 12 and 15 years
(according to specified occupations)

The Tea Plantations Labour Ordinance, 1962 15 years

The Factories Act, 1965 14 years

The Shops and Establishment Act, 1965 12 years

The Children Act, 1974 16 years

CHAPTER 2

ENGENDERING ACCOUNTABILITY

In addition to exchanges in public forums, ASK is able to use Public Interest Litigation (PIL) as part of its HR advocacy. This form of litigation is invaluable for urging reform of existing laws and procedures because they allow for arguments on grounds that such laws and procedures violate legal and constitutional rights. In Bangladesh, PILs are particularly important for protesting HR violations; and demanding and actualizing greater accountability from government agencies responsible for protecting HR.

A. Using Public Interest Litigation (PIL) to Urge Responsibility

What is Public Interest Litigation? Public Interest Litigation (PIL), known as public interest lawsuits elsewhere, are lawsuits that are filed to trigger social change through court-ordered decrees that reform legal rules, call for enforcing existing laws, and articulate public norms.

Such changes can lead to the liberalization of laws, and restructuring important State institutions, including prisons, law enforcement organizations, ministries responsible for the welfare of migrant workers employed overseas, schools, hospitals, state run enterprises and large corporations.

Achievements of ASK's PILs

In 2013, the High Court returned five PILs in favour of AS:

Protecting Religious Minorities.

The ongoing trials of several prominent leaders of the Jamat-i-Islam for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the 1971 Liberation War, have stoked anti-secularist sentiments among conservative Muslim groups to new levels. In February 2013, when the International Crimes Tribunal pronounced the death sentence against Delwar Hossain Saydee, a prominent leader of Jamat-i-Islam, a wave of violent protest spread across the country. According to one estimate, 72 people and 8 policemen lost their lives in ensuing chaos.

Worst affected were members of the Hindu communities who suffered looting, arson, and killing. Reports from five dailies, Prothom Alo, Sangbad, Samakal, Ittefaq and Bhorer

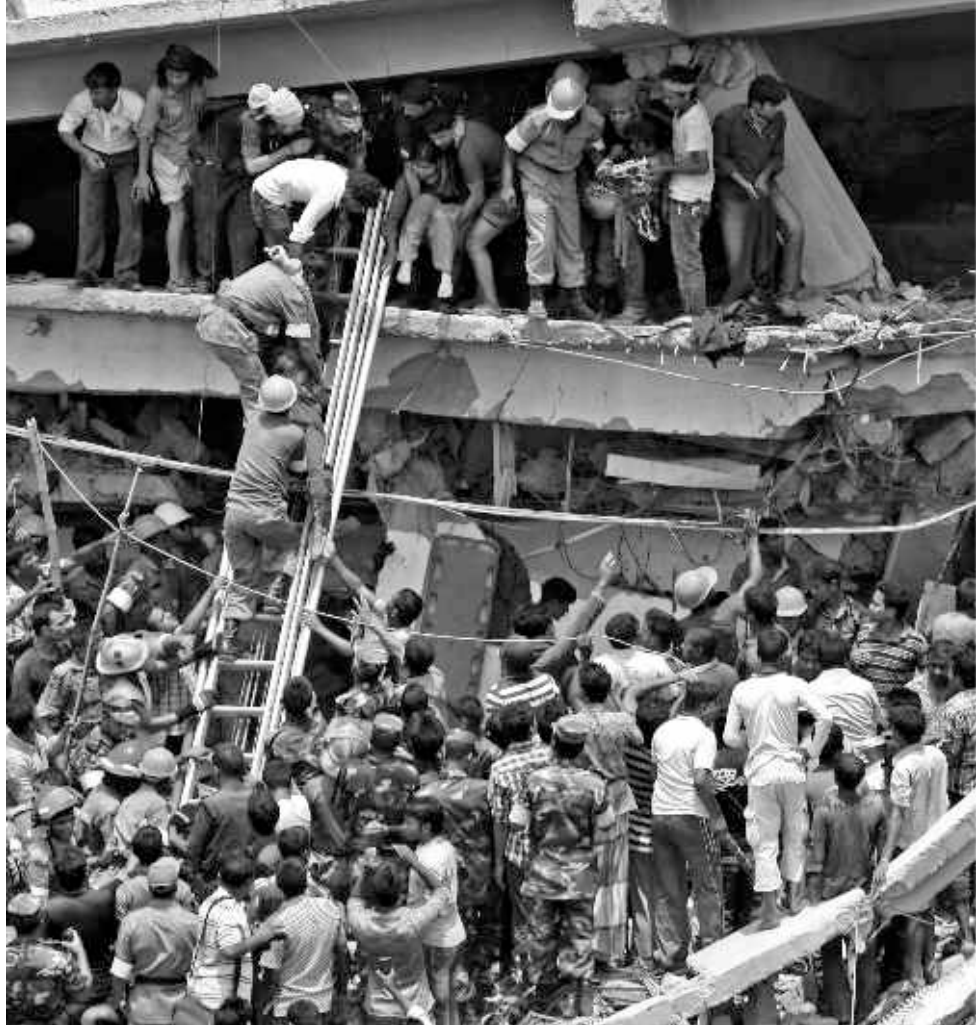


PHOTO: ASK

Aftermath of Attacks on Hindu Community in Pabna 2013.

Demanding Work Place Safety.

On 24 April of 2013, the world witnessed one of the worst industrial disasters in history when a large public mall, housing several garment factories, collapsed into a heap near Savar Bazar on the outskirts of the capital city of Dhaka. The catastrophe left a total of 1,134 people dead, and about 2,000 injured. The number of those permanently disabled and those whose bodies were never recovered still remain unknown. The horrendous tragedy brought out the best and the worst in our society, juxtaposing images of unforgivable greed on the part of the business establishments involved, and the callous indifference of authorities to their responsibilities for developing and maintaining building and zoning codes,



Rescue and Recovery at Site of Rana Plaza Collapse-2013.

Kagoj, recorded attacks by arson, vandalism and looting against 32 Hindu temples and one Buddhist temple, 50 homes belonging to members of the Hindu community, wholesale attacks on four Hindu settlements, and 46 shops and business establishments owned by Hindus.

Joining forces with BLAST, ALRD, Samprodayikota O Jangibad Birodhi Mancha and three individuals, on 3 April 2013, ASK filed a PIL against the government, charging it with failure to protect the persons and properties of its citizens, particularly Hindus.

In response, the Court directed the government to appoint a committee to investigate the incidents related to the attacks cited by ASK. In addition, it set 30 April 2013 as the deadline for receiving a report on what the government had done to protect the victims involved in the incidents. The government, though, failed to comply with the directive. (Writ Petition 3561, 2013.)

on the one hand; and the superhuman effort by hundreds of ordinary people who rushed to rescue strangers, on the other. The collapse was attributed to the reckless location and operation of heavy industrial machinery in a physical facility meant for ordinary commercial use, and clearly unsuited not only to the weight of the equipment but also the vibrations created when machinery was in full operations. For 24 full days the nation watched television footage of the accident and its aftermath with horror and anguish while, at the same time, marvelling at the small shop keepers, vendors and rickshaw-pullers, who depend on their earnings by day to eat at night, abandon their work, to risk life and limb, to crawl through narrow spaces between slabs of heavy concrete piled up on each other to rescue survivors and retrieve lifeless bodies.

Together with BLAST, ASK rushed to file a lawsuit to galvanize the government to become involved in investigating the causes of the accident and hold those responsible accountable.



ASK Executive Director at Rana Plaza

Enabling a 8-Year-Old Girl Find a Place at School. When Anika Alam Promee sought admission to the Scholars Home School in Sylhet in January 2013, she was refused because her family could not afford to pay the steep costs charged by the school. Contrary to government regulations, in addition to the regular school fee, Scholars Home charged extra cost for tuition as well as the development of the school itself.

ASK came to the rescue with a public interest lawsuit, which resulted in the High Court ordering the school to admit Anika Alam. She is now happily attending the school of her choice. (Writ Petition 1257, 2013).

Reuniting 500 Migrant Workers with their Families & Home. In January 2013, 500 migrant workers were able to return home and reunite with their families in Bangladesh. Some of the workers had been languishing in jail in Saudi Arabia for over two years because their work permits had expired or due to illegal migration. Although the Saudi Government was willing to have them repatriate them, the Government of Bangladesh had not made any effort to arrange for their return. In 2011, ASK filed a petition, citing neglect against the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (Writ Petition 8523/2011.)

In January 2013, the court responded by ordering the Government to report its progress in bringing the migrant workers back home.

Defending the Rights of Sex Workers to Life, Liberty, and Equality before the law... In April 2013, ASK and BLAST joined forces with the Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh to stand by the side of 500 sex workers from Madaripur Brothel. Although the sex industry is legal in Bangladesh, the women were besieged by unknown community groups and individuals who threatened them with eviction if they continued their trade. Large bill-boards were placed at the premises of the brothel that prohibited clients from entering the brothel between sunset and sunrise. Clients were harassed in front of the brothel and, although called upon to provide protection to the women, the police added to the tensions by conducting several raids on the brothel.



Madaripur Brothel Contempt Notice Rule Issued - 19 November 2013

The Contempt Notice was sent to those who failed to take action during the illegal eviction on 27 August 2013. ASK had applied for an extension for the sex workers to continue to earn their living, the sudden eviction has left the women

unable to fulfil their basic monetary needs. ASK are currently advocating a case against the vested interests of ... [Read online.](#)

ASK Website Post

ASK and BLAST filed a petition, on 11 April 2013, citing that the actions of the community violated the sex workers' rights to life and liberty, to the protection of the law and equality before the law. The High Court ruled in favour of the complainants and harassment stopped temporarily. Four months later, the brothel was again besieged and the sex workers forced to flee. (Writ Petition 3841, 2013.)

- ASK and BLAST promptly swung into action to file another lawsuit, arguing that the eviction of the sex workers was contempt of court. Judgment on the second petition is still pending. (Writ Petition 4390, 2013)

B. Using Investigation to Demand Answerability

The struggle for HR is never fully won. Even in societies that are able to boast of zealous HR watch points, the most enlightened laws and meticulous law-enforcement systems; there is always the need for vigilance. Hence, the need for national HR protection organizations to investigate hidden instances of rights violations, expose the little-known and bring pressure on governments for accountability.

Between January and November 2013 ASK's Investigation Unit probed 86 incidents of HR violations. The methodology consists of visits to victims; interviews with their families, neighbours and witnesses, and observation of the site where violation occurred. Intake is from information garnered through ASK's daily scan of 14 dailies, and alerts called in by a large network of allies in the districts. This network comprises, besides people ASK has befriended over 25 years in the field, 18 district based Human Rights Defence Forums (HRDFs) in the districts and remote areas of Bangladesh. The forums are products of encouragement and training provided through ASK's Investigation Unit.

ASK INVESTIGATIONS 2013

Types of Violence	No.
State Violence	38
Death in Crossfire (RAB/ Police)	15
Custodial Death (RAB/Police)	7
Physical Torture (RAB/Police)	5
Missing and Presumed Dead	6
Missing /Abducted	5
Institutional Violence	13
Garments Industry	8
Medical Negligence	2
Violence against Journalists	3
Attacks on Minorities	12
• Hindu community	12
VAW	5
Physical torture, rape	5
Children	2
Unnatural death of domestic maid	1
Torture & Death	1
Others: Violence arising from political clashes, mob actions, slum eviction drives etc.	16
TOTAL	86



Attack on Hindu Minority: ASK's Investigation Unit Takes Testimony from Community

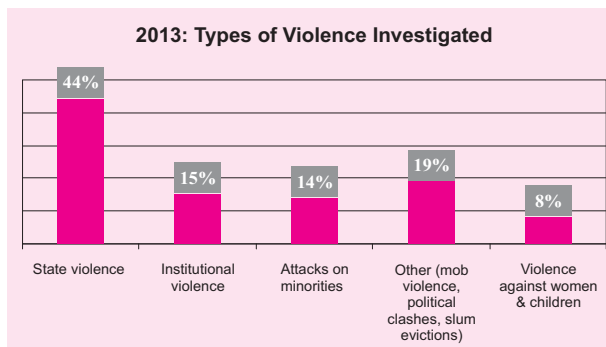
While ASK concentrates on rights violations against women and children through its free legal aid programme (Litigation Unit) and multi-faceted Child Rights programme (Child Rights Unit, its investigations are designed to focus on violence caused by *public actors*.

As such, ASK's investigation prioritise violations committed by the State and large institutions, such as the garment industry and the medical establishment; and by large collectives such dominant religious/cultural groups, political parties, mobs, and socio-political interests opposed to the rights of populations living in slums.

In 2013, the organization conducted a total of 86 investigations of which 92 per cent were accounted for by rights violations stemming from such sources as law enforcement agencies, the garment industries and medical establishment, attacks on minorities, and violence caused by mobs, clashes between political factions, and interests opposed to slums.



Investigation Staff interviews family of a victim



2013: Achievements of Investigation

The ultimate aim of ASK's investigations is to create and increase pressure on public institutions to initiate action against HR violations and prevent their occurrence in the future.

- (a) In 2013, ASK's Investigation Unit sent out 145 letters of appeal HRVs based on 86 incidents investigated. The appeals were addressed to Advisors, Secretaries and Directors of relevant ministries; the Inspector General of Police; District Commissioners; Police Superintendents; and Officers-in-Charge of police stations.

Follow-up is not limited to making appeals but also includes initiating legal action in lower courts and through PILs in the High Court. Publicity in the media is also applied. In 2013,

Ratio: Follow-Up Measures to Investigation

State Violence	2.1
Institutional Violence	2.1
Attacks On Minorities	2.7
Others	2.4
VAW	2.2
Children	4.0
Total	2.4

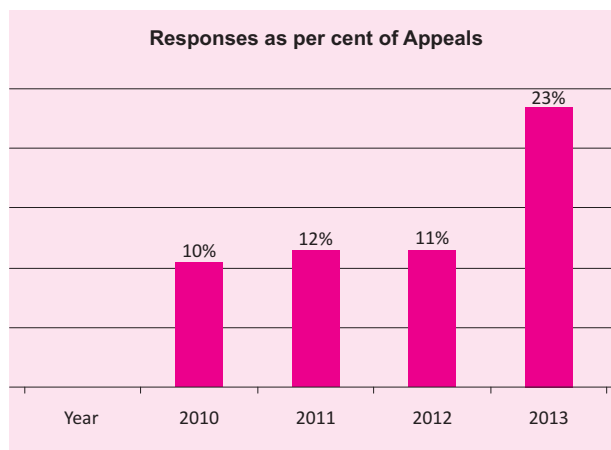
the results from 18 investigations were referred to ASK's Legal Aid Unit for action in district courts, 35 investigations were referred to the Advocacy Unit for filing PIL, while ten investigations were used to publish articles in the print media.

On average, for each investigation completed, ASK applied two types of follow-up, the ratio between the number of follow-up measures per investigation initiated by ASK being 2.4: (See P-19).

The government reacted to the 145 appeals from ASK with 29 letters of response—a response rate of 20 per cent. Moreover, the responses tend to be bland and provide little information other than to acknowledge the receipt of an appeal and intentions to forward it to the “appropriate” authorities or that, having already done so; no information about the matter could be unearthed.

This might be considered disappointing but, nonetheless, the HR organisation embraces it in hopes of a gradual erosion of a culture of indifference to accountability on the part of the State. In previous years, the response rate was much lower (see Table 2, P-22).

(b) Impressionistic evidence also suggests that, since 2010, the responses from the government has been improving not only in terms of quantity, but also quality. The following narrative is admittedly exceptional but holds hope of a more positive future.



An Investigation by ASK

November 2, 2013. Areas in Ataikola Thana, in Pabna District, suffered massive, organized attacks on the minority Hindu community, which has characterized Bangladesh in 2013. A team of ASK investigators left immediately by bus for Ataikola Thana.

November 3, 2013. The team began work early morning and ascertained that the violence against Hindus had erupted around 12.30 P.M. on the previous day and had lasted until around 4 P.M. The neighbourhoods affected were Purbopara (Shahapara); Ghoshpara near the Kumargari Road, and Bonogram Bazar. Their observations and numerous interviews with victims of the assault, local people and journalists confirmed that:

- As a result of the attacks, a total of 38 families had suffered damage to their homes. Idols, walls and fences belonging to five temples had been badly damaged and several shops and business establishments, belonging to Hindu proprietors in Bonogram Bazar, looted and smashed.
- Locals had made calls for help to officials in local administration, the Superintendent of the Police and Officers-in-Charge of various local police stations. While police arrived to contain the situation in Bonogram Bazar, they took an inordinately long time to arrive in the villages under attack. Gangs, numbering up to 50 men, had already left. Consequently, members of the Hindu communities in the villages were deeply disappointed with the response of the police.

Moving to Pabna town, ASK met several officials to request strong action to redress the situation of the victims and to ensure that such incidents do not recur. It also wrote a letter of appeal to the District Magistrate of Pabna who reverted back with a lengthy account of measures the authorities had taken to compensate victims and to create a foundation for a more inclusive society.



The Government's Response

The District Magistrate of Pabna wrote a lengthy letter, dated 11 November 2013, reporting that:

Subsequent to receiving ASK's appeal, the police & RAB had visited the area to quickly bring the situation under control & to:

- Assess the damages caused to housing, temples, & property.
- Set up a 3-person investigative committee. (The committee was set up by Superintendent of Police & the head of the district security department.).
- At noon on November 3, representatives of the district administration, the department of police, elected representatives, local opinion leaders & journalists had attended a large inter-faith meeting (Buddhist, Christian, Hindu & Muslim), to talk about the need to transcend religious boundaries & unite for the common good. The meeting was held near the main mosque in Bonogram,
- On November 6, another meeting was held in Bonogram, which was attended by the Minister of Relief, Minister Rural Development & Cooperatives, & Minister Home.
- The official estimate of damage to property was Taka 5,267,000

In addition, the District Magistrate, added, a concerted effort had been made to compensate the victims. His response detailed that the:

The District Administration, had distributed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 750 kg of rice to 25 households, each receiving 25 kg. • 5 metric tons of rice to 5 temples. • Taka 3,000 each to 23 households. Total: Taka 69,000. • 2 bundles of roofing tin each to 12 households @ Taka 5,000 = Taka 120,000. • Sari & lungi to 28 households
The District Parishad had distributed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taka 10,000 each to 23 households.

Table 1: FOLLOW-UP ON INVESTIGATIONS, 2013

	Total Investigations	Referred to ASK lawyers for action in:		Appeals to Govt	Prepare Reports for Media
		Legal Aid Unit	Advocacy Unit		
State Violence	38	6	13	58	2
Institutional Violence	13	2	5	17	4
Attacks On Minorities	12	5	9	18	3
VAW	5	2	1	9	0
Children	2	1	1	5	0
Others	16	2	6	38	1
TOTAL	85	18	35	145	10

Table: 2. APPEALS & RESPONSES

Year	No. of Appeals to Govt.	Responses from Govt.
2010	163	17
2011	165	19
2012	148	17
2013	145	34
Total	621	87

CHAPTER 3

STRENGTHENING HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH POINTS

In the late 1990s, ASK joined forces with several organizations in Bangladesh to demand the creation of HR watch point in Bangladesh. Their advocacy resulted in the formation of the National Human Rights Commission as a statutory body in 2009. Such institutions, known generically as national HR institutions (NHRIs), potentially play a very positive role in advancing the HR agenda. NHRIs are responsible for monitoring the HR situation in a country, and protecting Constitutional rights and legal rights. In addition, NHRIs are charged with monitoring the compliance of governments with their obligations under international HR treaties to which they have acceded. As such, these institutions are able to apply pressure on national governments to reform laws and procedures in order to meet a country's treaty obligations.

Once established, NHRIs need constant strengthening. Products of the very social systems that they are supposed to transform, the HR orientations of the members and staff of NHRIs cannot be taken for granted. The same holds true of the governments, which sponsor their establishment and plan their accommodation into an array of ministries and departments competing for power and resources. ASK seeks to strengthen the capabilities of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of Bangladesh to function act independently, and protect HR.

Achievements in Efforts to Strengthen the National HR Watch Point

There is growing evidence that the level of public confidence in ASK's HR training processes and knowledge management has grown over the years.

(a) Contributions of ASK's Training

In 2013, it fielded two requests from the NHRC to provide training to organizations and individuals associated with its activities.

- The first request was to provide training to Human Rights Defenders Organisations (HRDOs). The latter are new formations whose function is to create HR awareness and mobilise society to demand remedial action when their HR are violated. The HRDOs, recruited by the NHRC are seven NGOs and three universities from seven Divisions in Bangladesh. Trainees were grouped into four batches. ASK provided HR TOT training and followed up with refresher training to each batch.
- The second request to ASK was for training in investigative techniques to 172 activists, from 42 districts, which are associated with the NHRC. Seventy four of the participants were women. Most of the participants were lawyers but the training was also attended by college teachers, local elected representatives, journalists, students, and a handful of staff from NGOs and younger members of established HR organisations such as BLAST, BMWLA, Mohila Parishad. Participants were divided into seven groups, each group receiving three days of training. Feed-

Why HRDOs?

A survey by UNDP, in 2011, showed that only 18 per cent of the population is familiar with the term "human rights". Of those familiar with the term, only 30 per cent *understood* its meaning, making continuous efforts to raise awareness necessary. The concern shifts to set up HRDOs, which can prepare students and members of civil society to act as "multipliers" of HR knowledge and attitudes.

back from trainees indicates they found the training extremely helpful, particularly because one day of the programme was dedicated to practical experience in the locality to investigate a recent case of a HR violation



Workshop on Investigative Techniques for NHRC HR Defenders

(b) Contributions of Critiques and Commentary by ASK

ASK also completed a constructive assessment of the NHRC that, if heeded, stands to make a significant difference in NHRC's autonomy and effectiveness. The assessment was prepared as a chapter for the Annual Report of the Asian NGO Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI). However, due to the quality of information and incisiveness of insights contained in the assessment, it is easily able to stand on its own merits. The report highlights a number of factors that, if remedied, could enable the NHRC to become more effective. Among others, the NHRC:

- *Lacks sufficient autonomy.* A major constraint is that the NHRC lacks a Secretariat. Consequently, although it is able to formulate necessary rules for itself, it is dependent on the Ministry of Law and Parliamentary Affairs for approval of its proposed rules from the President.
- *Is inadequately funded.* The funds it receives from the Government are sufficient to staff salaries but not activities. Over-reliance on international donors skews the activities the NHRC can undertake to safe, promotional activities, i.e., raising awareness in the general population

through conferences and workshops, providing introductory training to activists and HRDO field workers new to HR concepts, and training more seasoned activists in investigative techniques. Consequently, the NHRC is prevented from becoming an assertive agency that directly investigates HR violations, initiates research, and feels confident enough to become involved in HR problems when they occur.

- *Has an organizational culture that conflicts with core HR values.* Evidence provided is well documented. Examples provided are: in response to a report published by Human Rights Watch, an international HR organization, a senior member of the NHRC issued a statement that anyone purporting to report on the HR situation in Bangladesh needs prior consultation with the NHRC. In another instance, another senior staff member of the commission was called to account by the High Court for providing “false, misleading, defamatory information” about an individual who was a client of the NHRC. Other evidence cited is the lack of transparency and insufficient concern to achieve efficiency on the part of the NHRC. The lack of transparency is particularly apparent in the watch point’s recruitment and hiring practices, which has resulted in widespread criticism from HR organizations and an avoidable weakening of public trust. As for NHRC’s *laissez faire* attitude, the report by ASK notes, it results in the failure to pay attention to a key requirement for the institution to become fully operational – the need to formulate rules and procedures for the very operations of the NHRC itself. The report points out that this recently led the High Court to formally berate the NHRC. While these observations suggest remedial actions that are complex, time- and resource-consuming, the value of the report by ASK is that it goes on to suggest a series of smaller, practical measures that the NRHC can undertake without additional funding and without delays.



Annual Report to the Asian NGO Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI)



Launching of Regional ANNI Report 2013 at APF Conference in Qatar

In Interactions with the Media:		Aim for Sustainability:
Use press releases and press conferences to inform and educate.	Explain why NHRC chose to respond to a particular complaint.	Parlay ad-hoc solutions that work for one individual into rules that benefit many.
<p>Go beyond reporting events & numbers (workshops, solidarity visits, number of individual appeals received and handled).</p> <p>Focus more on the <i>whys</i>. Why the <u>topic</u> of workshop is important, why the visit is important. Whose rights are being violated...through what processes? Why? By whom? Do laws exist to protect rights/people involved? Is law enforcement and judiciary doing enough?</p>	<p>Was it because of the kind of human right being violated or because of the kind of person victimized (a disabled person, a minority person, a woman, foreigner, a prisoner)</p> <p>What was the reason for choosing a particular line of action?</p> <p>What more could have been done and why was it not considered?</p>	<p>The NHRC scored success in convincing a bank to hire a woman who is blind.</p> <p>ASK suggests that NHRC could have done much more to increase impact and ensure sustainability if it had gone on to press the government for specific policies and guidelines to protect persons with disabilities in the future.</p>

SECTION II

ENABLING THE INDIVIDUAL

- Chapter 4 Transforming Women
 - A. Impelling Agency
 - B. Propelling Leadership
- Chapter 5 Empowering Children to Claim a Better Future

CHAPTER 4

TRANSFORMING WOMEN

ASK's objective to create a society that *demand*s HR entails persuading people on the ground about their own value to society and the contributions they make, and awaken them to a sense of their own rights, entitlements and power. To attempt to do so in a country like Bangladesh is no small feat.

While HR defenders talk about every individual's *intrinsic* right to life, *inherent* right to dignity, and *innate* right to equality and to equal treatment under the law, the everyday experiences of ordinary people give daily evidence of the *inborn* gaps that undeniably exist between men and women, rich and poor, electors and elected, populace and *proshashon* (government), child and adult, majority Bangladeshi and minority Bangladeshi, which leave them feeling empty and powerless. While HR activists proclaim the benefits of free speech and a free press in society, the vast majority are too occupied with simply having enough to eat and ensuring a somewhat better life for their children.

As in the past, in 2013, ASK used a number of channels through which to direct efforts to empower people to recognize their self-worth and HR. The avenues used include: ASK's Legal Aid clinics, Child Rights programme, Counselling program, Training Unit programmes, Theatre programmes for school children and youth groups, and the Gender Justice Programme.

The goals of empowerment vary. Some aim at supporting individuals to come into their own as *agents* fully aware of their rights and entitlements and capable of acting on their own behalf; while others seek to go beyond and support them to develop into becoming leaders. Each year, ASK is able to witness numerous successes. Unfortunately, though, these achievements are hard to capture. Any attempt to do so is unrealistic ---unless, of course, the organization is able to contemplate spawning a well-staffed, costly department to track and record a myriad metamorphoses.

The tools required for empowering individual to develop agency range from face-to-face discussion and persuasion, training workshops on gender issues and the like, psychological counselling, to providing more "material" support, e.g., legal aid, refuge, social-psychological counselling, and vocational training. Where the objective is empowerment of the individual for leadership roles, the tools include a variety of training in skills for organising and campaigning, and continuous opportunities to apply newly acquired skills.

Below, are three examples of the changes in individuals typical of ASK. The first two pertain to changes brought about to the individual to develop agency; the third, to develop social leadership.

A: Impelling Agency

Case Study 1: An Unframed Sky. Jhorna, age 40, was married off when she was only 13 ½ years old. She is now the mother of two, both boys, 20 and 17 years old, who will have nothing to do with her.



DRAWING: NABILA IKRUM

When Jhorna first came to ASK's legal aid clinic on 26 June 2013, she was agitated, confused. She said she was fearful for her life and bore knife wounds on her arms and had bruises on her body that had not yet healed. The clinic staff gathered this much: Jhorna was frequently beaten up by her husband, and that the violence was followed by being tied up and kept locked up in a separate room. Her sons provided little emotional support during these episodes. After hearing her out, the clinic staff quickly arranged medical treatment for her (pain killers and antibiotics) and immediately placed her in the Halfway Home, which ASK maintains for women who face risk of violence.

ASK realised that before it could contemplate any legal action to protect her, it would have to pour all its energies into bringing Jhorna back to herself. The staff at the Halfway Home found her withdrawn. She did not interact with the other inmates and talked little. When she did, it was more to herself and it was difficult to follow what she had to say. She often had spells of restlessness. When this happened, the Supervisor at the Halfway Home placed herself at her side, listening, encouraging Jhorna to talk. But Jhorna was distracted and she rambled to herself rather than talk with the Supervisor. Her rambling was about how nothing in this world really mattered. *This life* was full of hatred, selfishness, and evil-doing. Ugly. *This life* had no meaning. What mattered was the After Life.

In addition to psycho-social counselling at the Halfway Home, ASK arranged special counselling sessions for Jhorna at its main office. Staff from the Halfway Home travelled with her by rickshaw. Session after session at the counselling office passed with more distracted philosophical homilies from Jhorna about how irrelevant *this life* was, how unable to hurt or harm because of its insignificance.

Eventually, she began to talk less about her world views and more about herself. What emerged was heart-breaking. Her husband, a businessman, used to ask her to help out with his ventures by becoming close to his business associates and clients with whom he was trying to negotiate a deal. Jhorna's role was to talk with them at gatherings and parties, and make them feel important.

Every now and then, however, her role would change. It would switch from being the cooperative wife of a successful businessman to being a “bad woman”. When this happened, she was accused of being promiscuous, beaten, bruised, slashed with knives, bound with rope and shut up in a separate room. When they were young, her sons used to rush in to be with her or to hand her a glass of water when she complained of thirst. Her husband put a stop to this by placing a lock on the door. As the sons grew, he devised a more effective lock by convincing them that their mother was a “bad woman”. With time, even her mother fell within the orbit of this belief and was convinced that Jhorna was “bad” or “mad”, or both.

Visits from the family inevitably left Jhorna agitated. Whenever they came to see her at ASK’s main office, they pressed her to return home with them. She was bad... ill... mad... She brought shame to family and those who knew her. There was no one willing to take care of her but them. When she declined their help, her husband would offer that she could move into a separate house and have her sons live with her. When she refused even this, the tone would revert to her being bad... mad... a shame to the family, setting off Jhorna into becoming upset and frantic. This is when she needed a trained counsellor most, and ASK had come to expect such moments and began to schedule her regular sessions with the Psycho-Social Counselling Unit to coincide with the aftermath of the visits. What she needed most after these family visits was to hear, and was told by the Counsellor: “You are good person... a good woman... You did the best you could”.

As time went by, Jhorna gained enough perspective to conclude that she needed a divorce. Her mother was outraged at the suggestion because a divorced woman brought shame and disgrace to her family. There had never been a divorce in their family.

Two months after she entered the Halfway Home, Jhorna started taking training programmes offered by ASK. One was a 3-day programme on gender relations and women’s rights, and three offering vocational training – tailoring, block-printing and making accessories (bags, purses, decorative boxes etc), respectively.

Shortly after she completed the gender and women’s rights training workshop, and just over three months since entering the Halfway Home, Jhorna filed for divorce on 8 September 2013. She then proceeded with vocational skills training.

On 23 November, a little less than five months after her arrival at ASK, Jhorna joined ten other women living at the Halfway Home in a picnic at Ramna Park. Together with the others, she spent two hours simply exploring the trees, flowers, and a pond in the park. She paused, amused, to look at one of the women devour the sky with her eyes – it was the same woman who had earlier insisted that the one thing she wanted most out of the picnic was to get a view of the sky that was not framed by a window. Jhorna took a turn on a swing with her housemates. After “Chinese” for lunch, she sat on sheets spread out on the ground and listened to her housemates recite poems. All the while, four children who, at the time, lived at the Halfway Home took up what had become their customary positions the past few weeks: the younger two perched on Jhorna’s lap and the other two flanking her as they sat on the ground. The children rose when their mothers got up to dance. Jhorna joined in.

When it came time to go back to the Safe House, like the others Jhorna protested: *Do we have to? Can’t we stay another hour?*

On ten December 2013, Jhorna went to a bank to cash in a DPS (savings plan). ASK provided escort. The two returned to the office where, with help from the staff, she was on the phone trying to find a room to rent. She was going to move out of the Halfway Home and the money she had just picked up was to start up some kind of business. As a starter she was thinking of making snacks to sell outside schools. Sewing came naturally to her but her heart was really in making accessories or sewing clothes. Maybe that is what she would eventually end up selling.



Protest against 10 Points Demand by Hefazat

Case Study 2: Towards that First Protest Rally. Shushmi, around 20 to 22 years of age, arrived at one of ASK's legal clinics in Dhaka, a broken woman. She needed help with what turned out to be a divorce.

When offered a choice between court proceedings and mediation, Shushmi was adamant in her refusal of the former. Courts were public places and would expose her to public ridicule. According to her, a divorce meant ultimate failure for a woman. In her case, the shame was even more acute because it was not her but *her husband* who wanted to end the marriage.

Shushmi could neither understand nor reconcile herself to her rejection by her husband. When she got married her vision of life had been living as a contented wife and loving mother. When she became pregnant, she felt that life was everything it should be. But three months into her pregnancy she discovered that her husband was having an affair and her world came shattering down around her.

Then began months of torment. Her husband stayed away from home long into the night and on weekends. Conversation ceased between them. Occasionally, when they talked they quarrelled and her husband beat her.

Devastated as she was, Shushmi could not even *think* of a divorce and chose to close her eyes instead. She kept them shut until the day her husband announced that he wanted to divorce her.

Not knowing what to do, Shushmi eventually arrived at an ASK clinic and began to gain some clarity about her situation. Yes, whether she wanted it or not, she would have to accept that divorce



was inevitable. Yes, even though she could not bear to think of leaving her marriage, it was important to keep calm and make sure that she made arrangements for her husband to pay for child support and the *kabin* (dower) promised her when she got married.

ASK sent a written notice to the husband to invite him to come for mediation but he did not respond. When they phoned him, he balked and stopped picking up the phone. In the end, ASK was forced to contact his employers and seek their cooperation in ending the stalemate.

The employers obliged, the mediation took place, and the husband agreed to pay the dower in full, and provide an amount for child support each month.

In late April of 2013, Shushmi happened to drop-in at ASK when she overheard staff talking about preparations for a mass rally and immediately announced she wanted to join. The rally was being organised by women's groups to protest an announcement by Hefazat Islam that it sought the repeal of the National Women's Policy, which affirms women's rights to education and employment.

On 1 May 2013, Shushmi joined hundreds of women in front the Press Club in Dhaka. She watched some women as they stood under an 18 foot banner calmly declaring:

We Want a Non-Communal, Democratic Bangladesh that Can Ensure Equality of Men and Women.

Shushmi has now started work at a commercial bank and earns enough to be able to bring up her child by herself.

B: Propelling Leadership

Case Study 3: Testimony of Arju Huq Raja, Chairperson, Manobodhikar Songrokhon Parishad (Human Rights Defenders Committee) Kirtipur, Naogaon.

I am an ordinary woman. Never in my life did I think I would one day have a *porichoi* – an identity – among thousands of people and gain so much respect. And that too, among people outside my district! For this, my thanks go first to my husband. It was he who first brought me into politics in 2002. After that began my journey along a new path. In 2003 I first ran for member of the Union Parishad. I lost by two votes and shrunk into myself. Added to that, I had missed the HSC exams because of the elections. So, I spent a long time after that feeling bad and doing nothing.

Then, one day, I got a letter from the Manobodhikar Songrokhon Parishad (Human Rights Defenders Committee supported by ASK) inviting me to attend a meeting. I didn't give the invitation much thought at the time but went to the meeting anyhow. I began to attend the other meetings that followed. Every time I did so, I became more interested in HR, and wanted to know more. People around me laughed and snickered: *What's the use of going to these meetings? They accomplish nothing!*





I have grown and developed a lot from my experiences in working with the Songrokhon. Before, I could not hold forth in front of even five people. Now I can. I don't know who in ASK sent me that first letter. To them, my countless thanks. Since I joined the Shongrokhon I again ran for elections and this time won by a huge majority. The reason is I am now known to many people as someone who is a HR worker. Now I act as a mediator in many *shalishes*. In many places I am even able to run a *shalish* without the Chairman (of the Union Parishad) being present.

In June 2013 I tried to stop a child marriage. I phoned the UNO (Union Security Officer) to report that a young girl was being married off. He told me to get in touch with the OC (Officer-in-Charge of Police). When I did so, the OC told me to go back to the UNO. I became angry and told him: *When its time to talk, you people do a lot of talking but when it's time to act, all you do is point us in the direction of each other. Where are we ordinary people to go?*

After this, though, a policeman went and visited the girl's house and stopped the marriage. But this was only a temporary stay because the girl was whisked off to another area and married off. Then the pressures on me started--- pressures from the community, political pressures, pressures from neighbours, and even colleagues at work. They accuse me of being a marriage-breaker. However, I think that what I did was the right thing to do. This confidence I owe to the Songrokhon.

Now I am sufficiently confident to talk to the Chairman of the Union Parishad and its members. They cannot brush me off. I know how far my rights extend. For example, this past July (2013) I sat at a meeting along with the OC. The meeting was about how to bring drug use under control. I sat there and told the OC that it was not enough to raise awareness among local people only. Powerful people in politics and the civil service are involved. They get money from helping drug dealers. Stop them first and our youth won't die (from drug use), our country will thrive.

This is BIG TALK. I owe my ability to talk this way because of the Songrokhon.

CHAPTER 5

EMPOWERING CHILDREN TO CLAIM A BETTER FUTURE



Former Child Beggars on an Organised Excursion to a Park

In principle, ASK is opposed to child labour and looks forward to the day when poverty no longer makes it necessary for families to rely on income earned by children to make ends meet. Barring that, to oppose child labour is to expose working children to more insidious forms of exploitation in poorly regulated factories, sweatshops, brothels and other sites of employment. Accordingly, rather than turn its back on child labour through outright rejection, ASK assumes a proactive role that seeks to ferret out patterns of abuse of child labour; change the attitudes and behaviours of law-makers, employers, parents and the larger community; and enable working children to acquire an education even as they toil in a variety of trades to support their parents and siblings.



Child Labour in Construction



Child Labour in Transport

ASK maintains a separate Child Rights Programme to highlight the precarious situation of children in Bangladesh.

444,000 children in Bangladesh live on the street.

3,180,000 children are engaged in work for pay.

Of these child workers:

- 1, 290,000 are exposed to hazardous conditions at the workplace in small industries, transport, trash-picking and begging.
- 400,000 are engaged as domestic servants in private homes where they are vulnerable to physical and mental violence and abuse.

Neither employment in non-domestic work nor in domestic service work is safe. Newspapers succeed in capturing only a miniscule proportion of the violence directed against working children. Reports compiled from nine dailies for the first half of 2013 expose a disheartening picture.

Statistics on Violence against Domestic Workers (January -December, 2013)

Types of Violence	Age			Total
	7-12	13-18	No mention	
Physical torture	19	5	2	26
Rape	1	1	2	4
Death following physical torture	3	6		9
Death cause unknown	2	18	2	22
Death following rape		1		1
Missing	1		1	2
Suicide	1	4	1	6
Sexual abuse			2	2
Attempted suicide		1	1	2

Source: Prothom Alo, Bhorer Kagoj, Sangbad, Ittefaq, Janakantha, Jugantor, Inqilab, Dinkal, Banglabazar, Daily Star, New Age, Sangram and Samakal.

There were 75 reported cases of violence against domestic workers. Of these, children (under 18 years of age) accounted for 85 per cent of victims of physical torture, 50 per cent of victims of rape, 100 per cent of victims of unnatural death, and 92 per cent of deaths due to physical torture. In addition, child domestic workers were more likely to be killed following rape, accounting for 100 per cent of such cases. They also account 83 per cent of suicides and 50 per cent of attempted suicide.

ASK responds to the needs of children who work for a living by advocating for their education, lobbying for occupational health and personal safety, and changing the social attitudes of employers and potential employers. ASK:

- Provides for the education of child domestic workers through six Socialization Centres that offer literacy classes to domestic service workers under the age of 18. Each centre is staffed by one teacher, one community Liaison Officer for monitoring HR violations, and aware- raising among employers and employees.
- Has created a neighbourhood watch system, and system for registering child domestic workers with police stations and local authorities to ensure the safety of child domestic workers.
- Operates six Drop-in learning Centres for children who work in other sectors. Children drop in when they can to learn to read, write, maths, understand the world around them, drawing, painting, singing, dancing, scripting and performing plays.
 - For older children, the centres arrange vocation training. ASK itself provides vocational training in tailoring, cooking and employment at beauty parlours.
 - The drop-in centres assist children who are interested and capable, to find place in mainstream government schools.
 - ASK finds sponsors to cover the costs of education for students who transfer to mainstream schools and colleges.
- Since 2007, ASK has launched a course, aimed at changing attitudes towards child domestic workers. The course is taught at schools attended by children from middle class families. 20 schools in Dhaka city now offer the course as an optional subject.

Achievements in 2013

(a) In 2013, ASK's Child Rights Unit could claim that it had:

- Provided an education to 6,735 child domestic workers through its community based Socialisation Centres.
- Registered 4,100 new children at the Drop-In Centres. This means that since 1995, ASK has exposed a total of 35,000 working children to educational opportunities they would otherwise not have.
- Added 675 children to its list of Drop-In Centre children mainstreamed into formal schools. The total since 1995 is 4,520.
- Found six new sponsors to underwrite the costs of schooling for children, bringing the number of total sponsors it has negotiated since 1995, to 252.



Preparing for an Art Show



Clipping News Stories to Assemble their Own Newspaper

- Created access to vocational training opportunities for 1,480 children, bringing up the total since 1995 to 4,292.
- Sensitized 20,000 students attending schools in Dhaka city to the rights of domestic child workers, raising the total since 2008 to 2013.

(b) Several working children, and former working children, had successfully progressed on a life path that had once been out of their horizon. All acknowledge that their discovery of that path was through the encouragement received at ASK's Drop-In Centres to trust their innate abilities to learn and to evolve into contributory members of their family, community, and larger society. Interviews with Drop-In Centre alumni expose a remarkable pattern: a uniform tendency to mention the gift of hope, born of faith in their own abilities, as the foremost of ASK's contributions to their lives. This, they invariably attribute to the spirit of egalitarianism and inherent respect for each and every individual, regardless of age and status, characteristic of the teachers at the centres.



Encouraging Opinion, Urging Expression

2013: WHERE DROP-IN CENTRE ALUMNI ARE NOW

Tanya, age 15, attends Class VIII at a regular school and lives at home with her father and his two co-wives. Her father used to pull a rickshaw but is now too weak and disabled to work. Despite the hardships, relations in her home are warm. The daughter of the younger wife, Tanya talks affectionately about her *Boro Ma* (senior mother) is how supportive she is of her own mother and older sister, who was married off at an early age.

Tanya joined a ASK Drop-in Centre in 2010 when she was in Class VI. She was attracted by the art lessons—classes in singing, dancing and drama offered by the Centre. However, she admits that the Drop-In Centre has taken her by surprise. She had expected to have fun but had had no idea that she also



would learn so much about things normally taught in regular schools. She is especially surprised that the centre has taught her so much about science and now dreams of parlaying that into becoming a medical doctor.

She says that the centre has brought about immense changes for her. Not only did it find someone to sponsor her education at the school she attends but it has given

her things that elude most schools. It has given her joy and the confidence to hope—to EXPECT that she can get out of life what she wants. What she wants now is to become a doctor and earn enough to pry her family out of poverty.

Thanks to the many meetings and workshops her mothers have attended, they too have also moved on. They see Tanya differently now. They used to think a daughter was a burden and constantly talk about marrying her off as they had done with her older sister when she was still a child. Now, her mothers do not mention marriage to Tanya. Instead, they tell others how, one day, when Tanya becomes a doctor, there will be such a difference for the way the family lives.



Rahmatullah, age 24, has finished his bachelor degree in business administration & plans to study for a M.B.A degree. Meantime he supports himself by teaching classes in formal schools on HR of child domestic workers. Before, he used to do private tutoring to earn money but prefers to teach the course, designed by ASK for 20 formal schools, which offer it as an optional course.

He credits ASK with enabling him to dream of a better future. The teachers, whom he refers to as *Apas* (older sisters) and *Bhais* (older brothers) at the Centre, he says, made him believe that “I could do something with my life”. They always talked ‘nicely’, made it “fun” to learn, and took extra interest in getting children to get an education. He used to work as a helper in a vegetable shop in

the *bazar*. The teachers visited his employers and convinced them to let him off for a couple of hours each day so he could attend the Drop-In Centre in Goran (Dhaka city). After he joined, the teachers "used to have workshops for employers" of the children there.

Rahmatullah found a sponsor himself but acknowledges that had ASK not helped him to find a place in

Class VI in a government school, he would not have thought to go to one. He has received leadership training from the British Council and the Hunger Project, training in social entrepreneurship from Democracy Watch, and computer skills training from Life Style. ASK referred him to these training programmes.

He finds it important to give

back some of the help he got from ASK. He does so by volunteering time, at ASK's Drop-In Centre; to encourage children to take education seriously, stay strong and use all that ASK has to offer them.

"If I can help ten children to have hope and plan for a better future, they can convince 100, and they can.....Soon we will reach 1,000 children".

Sajeda, age 19, is in the first year of a B.A. Honours degree at a college in Dhaka. She is interested in her courses in accounting because her ambition is to get a job at a bank when she graduates. She lives at home with her parents, both disabled, where the only source of support is her older sister. A divorcee with one child, the sister works in three different houses as a maid.

Sajeda started attending a ASK Drop-In Centre when she was seven or eight years old and credits it with creating a deep longing for an education and all the things her family could never give her. Not only because they could not dream of affording the costs but because they saw no value in them. Things like art, acting in plays, and singing. Above all, singing was and continues to be her passion! However, given her realities, she accepts that

she needs to concentrate getting a mainstream job.

She says she has received a lot from ASK. Foremost among them is "courage, hope, and enthusiasm". Also, the teachers at the Drop-In Centre used to tell her how important getting an education was. "If you have *lekha, pora* (writing, reading) you can go places", the staff at the centre used to say. "My family could never give me a B.A. degree", Sajeda concludes, "but ASK can". While she has yet to get that B.A. degree, she is able to list the other promises ASK has been able to already meet. "I have reached places beyond my dreams", she accounts. She takes pride in having taken "part in a drama" for which she received a certificate of excellence from the National Public Library. She has the certificate on display in her house and proudly shows it to friends and visitors.



Not promised but received from ASK is yet another gift. Her mother used to want to marry her off. Now she has other ideas. "My daughter is going to study, see new places, and get a good job", the mother says. Sajeda adds that her mother "does not oppose my wishes any more. She sees value in what I want".



Monir, age 23, is a second year student at Siddeshwari College, in Dhaka. He is studying for a bachelor degree (Hons.) in business administration and tutors children to support himself and credits ASK for getting him where he is today. He used to attend the drop-in centre in Goran (Dhaka) and was able to move into Class III at a formal school. ASK negotiated his admission and also found him a sponsor to pay his books, supplies and school fees.

His oldest brother sells vegetables in the market; the

second brother is a driver; his youngest brother paints sign boards. His sister's husband is also a driver. However, he wants more out of life. His goal is to work in bank. Monir wants to earn enough to support his family and, one day, become a donor to ASK. He reflects:

"ASK is very far ahead of the rest of us. ...I am among the disinherited and they showed me the road. I hope, one day, I can become like the people in ASK. I would like to donate money to ASK's programmes for children."

Nazrul, age 23, is studying for a Bachelor of Social Science degree at the Open University in Dhaka. He is a third year student. Supports himself, his mother and two younger brothers by tutoring school students.

He used to work as a *tempo* (transport) helper when he started attending a Drop-In Centre in Goran in 1998, and went on to attend a formal school with help from ASK. ASK found a sponsor to pay for his education.

His ambition now is to become an IT technician. He

learned about computers while working for a small shop, and went on to take a two month course in computerised graphic. Meantime, he works at a store that produces computerised graphics for banners, posters, and covers for books and magazines. ASK orders banners from his shop whenever it has a rally or a workshop.

Says: *"Without ASK, I would not be where I am today. They put me on a road I did not dream existed"*. He is too busy to give time to his



old drop-in centre but says: *"When I have a real job, I want to start helping ASK"*.

SECTION III

CATALYSING ORGANISATION IN SOCIETY

Organisation-Building for Protecting Human Rights:

- A. In Secondary Schools
- B. Among Youth
- C. In Urban Neighbourhoods
- D. Among Professional Groups in the Districts
- E. Among Women in the Districts
- F. In Mixed -Gender Settings in the Districts

CHAPTER 6

ORGANISATION-BUILDING FOR HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION

ASK supports communities to develop organization so as to gain profile for their demands for HR and justice, strengthen their actions for social change.

Why an Organization?

An organization comp. rises many individuals and is able to make use of a wider variety of skills and talents than is available to a single individual.

It is also able to distribute work among many so as to create more manageable workloads and achieve efficiency.

The interactions among members create *synergy*, raise morale and sustain enthusiasm. As a result, the capabilities, efficiencies and holding powers attained by an organisation are greater than what is possible for its parts.

The mission of an organization helps individuals to maintain focus and keep their activities on track.

Because of the large number of people in an organization, it is able to raise the *profile*, *legitimacy* and *power* of the changes demanded by individual members.

Finally, an organisation acts as an **ADDRESS** that is able to attract individuals who share its vision.

A number of units in ASK are involved in facilitating the development of organizations among different types of people and at various levels of society.

- A. Students and teachers in secondary schools.
- B. Youth in post-secondary education and in the community.
- C. People in lower-income urban neighbourhoods.
- D. HR-oriented professionals in medicine, law, teaching, and among university students at upazilla and district
- E. Exclusively women in villages, union, upazilla, and district levels.
- F. Heterogeneous groups comprising men and women, who are opinion leaders at union, upazilla, and district levels.

A. The School Theatre Groups (*Biddyalay Nattya Dal*)

ASK's HRAwareness programme encourages the formation of organizations:

- In schools. The organisations are called *Biddyalay Nattya Dal* (BNAD) (hereafter "School Theatre Group).
- Among out-of-school youth. Organisations are called the Manobodhikar Nattya Parishad) (MNP) (hereafter "Youth Theatre Group).

Role & Functions

The role of these organisations is to internalise HR perspectives and to raise HR awareness in their immediate surroundings by performing plays that deal with problematic situations created by HR violations. School Theatre Groups are limited to performing for audiences in schools while Youth Theatre Groups perform plays in the community. The latter usually perform their plays near markets and open spaces. In addition to plays, Youth Theatre groups also organise rallies and community events to commemorate major national and international days relevant to HR.

Both types of group receive training on various HR issues and develop original scripts. Plays are open-ended so as to allow for interaction and dialogue with the audience once the performance is over. ASK role is to provide both subject matter training, and training in script and plot development acting and staging.

2013: Achievements of School Theatre Groups

(a) Evidence suggests that the school theatre groups have developed greater self-awareness and that their members have become sufficiently enthused as to urge *action* to change practices and arrangements in schools themselves. Participating in the theatre programme makes for improvements in children's interest in their studies and creates more self-



Play Against Child Marriage

reliance. Parents who initially had doubts about the theatre programme now encourage their peers to allow their children to take the theatre class --- an optional offering in schools.

Students have become more aware of HR issues in their own lives, and the lives of their friends and class-mates. While their youth and lack of experience deprives them of authority, they are now able to turn for help to the "Guide Teachers" who supervise their activities in the theatre programme. This has enabled the students to set up a chain of help that has begun to intervene in situations where HR violations stem, not from the young, but parents and elders in the community.

(b) 2013 brought also evidence of more initiatives from Guide Teachers and the beginnings of a sense of camaraderie among teachers scattered over several schools. They now urge students to apply HR concepts to their interpretation of textbooks on literature, history and the social sciences. Also, they are now to be found pressing school administration to change policies that affect girls. The shift is all the more remarkable because many Guide Teachers were initially indifferent to the themes of the theatre classes.

In 2013, a 13 year old girl in Class 7, appealed for help to a student enrolled in the theatre programme. Her issue? Her parents had arranged to marry her off & she lacked the authority to oppose them.

The students of the theatre programme, in Jahanara Memorial High School, immediately rallied to her support. They went straight to their Guide Teacher who, in turn, turned to the Head Teacher.

Soon, the Head Teacher set out for the hapless girl's house. There, he talked the girl's parents out of the marriage because, among other things, the law forbade child marriage.

As a result, the girl was allowed to go on with her studies. In 2014, she will be getting ready for the Junior School Certificate tests in hopes of going on to High School and beyond.

GUIDE TEACHERS TAKE THE HELM

Teachers at four schools have become particularly concerned to point out pervasive gender bias in textbooks (literature, history, and the social sciences). It is ironic that didactic poetry, aimed at teaching constructive social values, is just as riddled with such bias.

Witness, for example:

If we do not awake, Oh Mother, how can Morning come?

*Only when your **SONS** awake, Oh Mother, Will the night be gone.*

Or

*When will our country see the **SON**,*

Whose actions are bigger than his words?

The same teachers also find themselves having to prod school administration into paying more attention to the needs of girls. Many public institutions, including government schools, fail to provide separate toilet facilities for women and girls. Water Aid* reports that, typically, schools have only one toilet, and that is reserved for teachers exclusively. Where two toilets are provided, one is reserved for teachers and the other, de facto allocated to boys.

Because of persistent pressure from one of the teachers, Ajim Uddin High School in Kishoreganj, now boasts of separate toilets for girls!

The teachers are: Abu Masud Kikdar (Sirajganj), Swapan Barman (Kishoreganj), Toma Roy (Netrokona), and Anjali Rani (Gaibanda).

Teachers in a majority of schools have successfully lobbied school administration to convert HR theatre class into a regular weekly activity. Out of a total of 52 schools that have accepted the HR theatre programme, 45 now run the class on a weekly schedule.

Four schools have created a special fund for the theatre programme.

* <http://www.theguardian.com/journalismcompetition/sanitation-schoolgirls-in-the-developing-world>

B. Youth HR Theatre Groups (Manobodhikar Nattya Parishad)

There are 60 groups of out-of-school in the districts, which script and perform plays on HR themes. The plays are about the negative effects on HR of gender inequalities, VAW, discrimination against ethnic and religious groups, child marriage, demands for dowry, religious fundamentalism, etc.

The youth groups also regularly sponsor rallies to commemorate Victory Day, Independence Day, International Women's Day and the like. While some of the themes of their plays tend to question and challenge a community's assumptions and attitudes, the celebrations they sponsor help foster a sense of unity and common ground among disparate people – an essential requirement for a society based on HR. For, it is to the extent that we identify with others, are able to view the “other” as the same as, or similar to, the “self”, that it becomes possible to accept that the “other” also has rights similar to our own.



Youth Against Sectarianism



International Women's Day Rallies are Common in Districts like Serajganj.

2013: Achievements of Youth Theatre Groups

- (a) Members of Youth Theatre Groups consider the challenge of winning over communities to HR perspectives and issues to be incomplete unless they are able to win over elected representatives who serve in union *parishads*. Only when members of local government give their nod of approval is an effort at change likely to have a lasting impact. Yet, both their relative youth and the unconventional nature of the issues they promote, such as gender equality, prove to work against the theatre groups.

The year 2013, however, signalled a significant change when elected representatives from a number of localities began to show an interest in adding observation of International Women's Day to their roster of annual celebrations. Usually, the roster is limited to commemorating more traditional events such as *Pohela Baishak* (Bangla New Year) and national Independence Day.

CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY: YOUTH THEATRE GROUPS WIN OVER UNION PARISHADS IN:

In Shombhujganj Union (Mymensingh Sadar Upazilla)	Sritar Union (Mymensingh Sadar Upazilla)
<p>For the first time in their history, elected representatives belonging to the <i>Shombhujganj</i> Union Parishad, joined the March 8 International Women's Day rally, organised by the Youth Theatre Group of the area).</p> <p>The group takes this as a significant step forward because International Women's Day is not considered indigenous to Bangladesh and local representatives have given the Youth Theatre Group's annual March 8 rallies short shrift. However, in 2013, Shombhujganj Union Parishad members not only marched alongside the Youth Theatre Group but also provided space rent-free and bore some the costs for snacks.</p> <p>The young men can recall the days when many elders in the community looked askance at their plays on gender equality, and some of the more conservative families used to object to girls and women performing side by side with men in open spaces. Now, no eye brows are raised. The crowds are larger than ever before. As before, plays continue to be performed in open spaces.</p>	<p>The example set by representatives of Shombhujganj Union Parishad has stirred the interests of their counterparts in Sritar Union, which adjoins it. Members of the Sritar Union Parishad have expressed interest in joining the rally and festivities for the next International Women's Day that the theatre group plans to organise in Sritar in 2014.</p> <p>So far, the union has been limited to only holding public celebrations for events that are conventional to Bangladesh such as <i>Pohela Boishak</i>, (Bengali New Year).</p>

College Students Join Youth Theatre Group

Shombhujganj has also spurred college students into joining the youth theatre troupe in the area. Five students from local colleges have added their names to the troupe after the International Women's Day rally.

This is the first time for college students in the Union to join the Youth Theatre programme.

- (b) Another achievement in 2013 was the response by external performing groups in the country to the National Theatre Festival, which the Youth Theatre Groups sponsor annually in Dhaka. First launched in 1999, the festival is designed to encourage mainstream performing groups and organisations to take more interest in HR themes when they develop new plays.

The 2013 National Theatre Festival was unique in that, for the first time, a *majority* of the outside drama troupes, participating in the event, chose to stage original

2013 National Theatre Festival: Boosts *Manobodhikar Nattya Parishad's* Sense of Mission



plays based on HR themes. Moreover, these troupes are among the leading drama groups in the country. A total of six independent theatre groups from Dhaka, Chittagong, and Jahangirnagar took part in the festival. Among these was Aronoyak, one of the most celebrated theatre companies in Bangladesh. Of note is that Aronoyak had crafted and presented an original play on a HR theme.

Consequently, members of the Youth Theatre Groups returned home elated from attending the festival in Dhaka. The experience helped to reinforce the importance of their mission to raise HR awareness. It also helped to solidify relations among them.



Youth Theatre Performance at the National HR Theatre Festival-2013.

C. Urban Neighbourhood Organisations (Dhaka City)

The Child Rights Unit facilitates the formation of neighbourhood organizations, comprising parents, elected members of local government, employers of working children, opinion leaders. The organisations donate space for ASK's drop-in learning centres for working children, help the centres with logistical and other forms of support for holding meetings, exhibitions, events, and celebrations, and take responsibility for scheduling routine meetings of their organisation. They also help maintain ASK's neighbourhood watch systems and systems for registering under-age domestic workers with police stations and Ward Commissioners.

2013: Achievements of Urban Neighbourhood Organisations

ASK invests considerable resources to provide training in HR, child rights, rights to workplace safety, positive parenting and reinforcement and the like through workshops. It also organises rallies and celebrations that spur interaction among parents, employers and community leaders. Consequently:



Meeting of Community Leaders, 2013.

- (a) These neighbourhood organisations have become viable entities, which have goals that help unite members and invest them with a common vision:
 - Urban neighbourhood organisations have evolved into becoming pro-active enablers for children in their neighbourhood, and evince a strong sense of shared identity and mission.
 - The sense of camaraderie is reinforced by the loyalty of former students of ASK's drop-in centres who continue to live, work and start small businesses in their old neighbourhoods when they reach adulthood. Many of these alumni volunteer time to mentor children at the drop-in centres and help out with events and celebrations. Some harbour



Community Watch Group Meeting, 2013.

- thoughts of being able to, one day, contribute financially to the education and development of area children.
- The neighbourhood organisations increasingly partner with ASK in efforts to help children from the drop-in centres find admission into formal schools and vocational training programmes, and receive free health care services from area hospitals and clinics.
 - Evidence suggests that neighbourhood committees have become accustomed to the notion of supporting the development of their locality as an end in itself and individual members of these committees now spontaneously extend a helping hand to aid children and women in the neighbourhood ---regardless of whether they are affiliated with ASK's programmes or not. In doing so, such members often act on their own and do not expect help from their organisation.
- (b) The neighbourhood organisations command sufficient trust as to be able spur autonomous action by individual members to assist children in their area to meet their personal, educational and social needs.



Alumni Pitch in to help young learners at a Drop-In Centre, 2013.

In 2013 (in Dhaka City):

- A member of the Mohammedpur Housing Committee began sponsoring the education of a child attending a formal school.
- Neighbourhood committees in Mohammedpur and Shantibagh organised and financed a rally to observe Child Rights Week (29 Sept-5 Oct).
- In Shantibagh and Goran, some members of neighbourhood committees supplied books, paper, pencils and bags to working children.
- Shahana Shahid helped four children from drop-in centres find admission into vocational training programmes. (Mohammedpur)
- Jhuma Khan, Billal Hossain and Arifa Begum members referred four women to ASK's Legal Aid Clinic. (Mohammedpur)
- Jhuma Khan, Billal Hossain and Arifa Begum also helped four children get into ASK's drop-in-centres.
- Jhuma Khan, Billal Hossain and Arifa Begum also helped four children get into ASK's drop-in-centres.
- Humayun Kabir, Secretary, Mohammedpur neighbourhood committee, made arrangements for several children to get Hepatitis-B shots free of cost.
- Former Ward Commissioner, Nasima Mannan, referred several women to ASK's Legal Clinic.
- Hassan-uz-Zaman, Secretary of the Zakir Hossain Road neighbourhood committee, raised help and funds for the marriage of a former child domestic worker. At the time of her marriage, she was past 18 years of age.

D. Professional Groups in the Districts

ASK's Investigation Unit organises Human Rights Defenders Forums (HRDF) in the districts monitoring the local HR situation, community mobilisation, and exerting pressure on public institutions to take remedial against the abuse of rights. In January 2013, there were 15 HRDFs in operation. In the course of the year, another three were added, bringing up the year-end total to 18 HRDFs.

Members of the forums are social activists from among lawyers, doctors, teachers, journalists, commissioners of Union Parishads, NGO staff and students from colleges and universities. Already interested in social and political issues, members of HRDFs have evolved a sense of distinct identity that grows from the perception that they participate in, and contribute to, something significant. The HRDFs monitor local HR situations, and have been trained by ASK to directly undertake investigations. Most of the investigations by HRDFs pertain to VAW, violence against children, and attacks on minorities. However, HRDFs have begun to investigate incidents of violence by the State. The latter mostly pertain to physical assault by police when they encounter or pick up people suspected of crime.



They play an important role in facilitating coverage of local incidents of HR violations by the national media, and mobilising authorities to address such violations. HRDFs contact the national press and broadcast media to request coverage, and liaise with senior officials in public administration, the police and elected representatives to urge redress.

The forums are important for raising awareness in the community by organising protests through forming human chains, marches and demonstrations; and are important for providing emergency support to victims in need of medical treatment or legal remedy.

E & F. Women & Mixed Gender Groups in the Districts

Exclusively women HR Protection Societies (Manobodhikar Nari Samaj), and the mixed-gender HR protection committees (Manobodhikar Songrokhon Parishads), operate in the districts. They are distinct from each other—exude different personalities—yet, at the same time, inextricably linked by function, specialisation, orientation and history.

ASK partners with ten local NGOs, called Partner NGOs (PNGOs), to mobilise communities in ten unions in ten districts to create 40 CBOs. The CBOs are provided continuous support to enable them to come into their own. Organisation-building is through extensive training and a plethora of activities.

- Training provided is on HR, gender analysis; women's rights under existing Family Laws; laws pertaining to shalishes; and continuing training in the interpretation of current trends and emerging threats such as corruption in social safety net distribution systems; the emergence of religious fundamentalism etc.
- Activities sponsored are participating and mediating in shalishes; holding regular organisational meetings at local and higher levels, special discussion sessions on emerging national issues such as the War Crimes Trial, the Thirteen-point demand of Hefazat Islam; organising and attending rallies to commemorate numerous national and days.

2013: Achievements of Human Rights Defenders' Forums

In 2013, the Forums Investigated 61 Incidents of Violence in Ten Districts

The HRDF of Larmonihat District: Provided invaluable support to members of Hindu communities when they came under attack in Sadar Upazila and Patgram Upazila in Nov. 2013. Members of the area HDRF alerted ASK, provided documentation & photographs.

Visited the affected localities, took testimonies from local people, mobilised the police and administration, assisted them with forms and papers needed for initiating complaints to the police, appeals to authority, and action through courts.

The HRDF of Cox Bazar District: Had provided similar assistance when members of the Buddhist community in Ramu Upazila and Mukhia Upazila were attacked in late Oct. 2012. They also visited the affected areas to stand by & provide support to the communities. Liaised with police & other authorities to arrange security and help.

In 2013, the HRDF continued to provide support through follow-up on status of cases filed by the community, and commitments by the government to ensure the security of their community.

BACKGROUNDS

Manobodhikar Nari Samaj (hereafter “Women CBOs”), started in 2003¹, are exclusively women's organisations. They began to be formed four years after the mixed-gender **Manobodhikar Songrokhon Parishads** (hereafter Mixed-Gender CBOs) had been established (in 1999).

The reason for creating separate all-women CBOs is that women in the Mixed-Gender HR CBOs used to complain about feeling constrained in mixed gender situations. They argued that efforts to draw more women to HR promotion demanded that women be given a separate space where they could more easily develop their social confidence, and skills for assertion and social activism. A second reason cited for all-women CBOs was that it would make it easier to appeal to women in villages, who are most in need of social justice and HR awareness.

While Mixed-Gender CBOs operate at Union, Upazila and District levels, Women CBOs have added another level to their operations: the village.

In 2013, there were 1,200 members in the Women CBOs.

1. In 2003, Manobodhikar Nari Samaj were formed in the first five of ten districts; in 2004, in four more districts; and in 2007, the remaining district of the ten districts in which they exist.

The sheer pace set by training events and activities generates enthusiasm, camaraderie, and consolidates sense of purpose and shared identity. Because many of the training and organizational activities call for joint participation by the two types of CBOs, Manobodhikar Nari Samaj or Women's HR Committees and Manobodhikar Songrokhon Parishad or Mixed-Gender HR Committees, exist as two sides of the same coin.

The main function of the two types of CBOs is to: (a) raise HR awareness and knowledge about protections provided through existing laws; (b) ensure that local institutions for the administration of justice observe proper procedures, are fair, and remain neutral; and (c) mobilise local communities to demand justice.

Women CBOs

Orientations of Women CBOs

The greater affiliation of Women CBOs with villages means they are more immersed in, and concerned about, rural realities and rural institutions that affect rights violations. This is reinforced by prevailing patterns for gender gaps, which means members of Women CBOs are likely to be less educated, less exposed, and less familiar with work ethos and routines associated with working in the professions (administration, legal, medicine, teaching, engineering), than is the average member in counterpart Mixed-Gender CBOs.

2013: Achievements of Women CBOs

- (a) Several women have made the transition from being *participants* in shalishes to serving as *shalishkars*. Moreover:
- People usually perceive women *shalishkars* to be fairer. Especially women and the poor are grateful for their role because, traditionally, shalishes are dominated by men and women's viewpoints and needs tend to get ignored.
 - Some women *shalishkars* have won sufficient trust to be requested by Chairman of Union Parishads to take their place when they are able to attend shalish.
 - In some areas, women *shalishkars* have become sufficiently confident that they have the authority to call a shalish on their own.
 - Some women shalishkars now mediate disputes over land.
 - Women *shalishkars* receive threats from parties who feel they have lost or may lose in a shalish but none of the women *shalishkars* interviewed by ASK admit to being intimidated.
- (b) Once, anxious to have separate social space and a separate CBO for themselves, women now claim space in mixed-gender settings, even contesting elections for public office:
- Women from the CBOs now contest elections to local governing bodies. Some are members of Union Parishads, the elected body closest to the village. Their presence is said to bolster trust from the community and to stoke hopes for less corruption, and improved governance.
- (c) Once afraid to talk in mixed-gender settings, members of the Women CBOs now contribute to collective myth making.
- The Women CBOs have begun to make a transition to an entirely new plane. One suspects that they were first formed, the CBOs tended to attract the more socially conscious and assertive women. Women like Nargis Rahman, e.g. who discovered her inclination to stand up and resist HR violations when she was only ten years old and happened to witness village elders cut off the hair of a teenager because she was in love with a young man in the village. Nargis promised herself then and there that she would grow up to resist unfairness and social injustice. The stories of other Nargises help create the notion that other members of the CBO are similarly endowed with courage and a passion for justice.

Measures of Progress for Women CBOs

As such, the measure of success for Women CBOs is the extent to which they cohere, are able to unite to protect the rights of women, produce leadership that is able to leave customary boundaries, which prevent women from asserting themselves in the public arena both as individual and as social actors. Since a key activity for new members of Women CBOs is to monitor and be involved in *shalishes*, in practical terms, this means the progress of women:

- From abstaining from *shalishes* or public mediation sessions, to participating as an observer whose opinions are allowed and
- From participating as observer in a *shalish* to functioning as a *shalishkar* or mediator, whose opinions influence decisions. And,
- As a *shalishkar*, from acting as *shalishkar* in *shalishes* called by others to being able to call a *shalish* on one's own.
- As a *shalishkar*, from being concerned mainly about family disputes (abandonment, divorce, polygamy, domestic violence), to also being interested in remedying violations involving land, economic rights, political rights etc.
- From limiting activities to routine activities of CBOs (attending meetings, training sessions, *shalishes*, and legal camps) to taking spontaneous action to resist HR violations in the community.



A Member of a Women's Group Stands Firm: She Wants a Full Answer.

Inputs into Organisational Myth Making:

With the support of Partner NGOs, the Women CBOs and the Mixed Gender CBOs have started to publish a book annually. In these books, members and staff of the PNGOs write about their experiences and their thoughts on HR issues. These publications serve to intensify collective self-awareness & raise the profile of the CBOs in the identity of their members. Members of Women CBOs contribute articles and to the process of organisational myth making that is so vital to long-term sustainability.



2013 Jani, Alo Ashbei

In the most recent issue of *Jani, Alo Ashbei* (I Know the Light Will Come), out of 23 articles, women contributed nearly one-third. Of the seven articles by women, members of Women CBOs contributed six articles, two of these six women, two have overlapping memberships in both types of CBOs. Women's contribution to the poems featured in the book is much higher—they account for seven out of 15 poems. Of these, six poems are written by members who belong to Women CBOs.

F. Mixed-Gender HR CBOs

Manobodhikar Songrokhon Parishads (hereafter “Mixed-Gender CBOs), trace their beginnings to 1999. There tend to be more men in these CBOs. Given current gender gaps, this means that the average educational level of Mixed-Gender CBOs is higher. Members are teachers, doctors, lawyers, bankers, agricultural block supervisors, college students, *shalishkars*, social workers, social registrars, business persons, marriage registers and opinion leaders.

This type of CBO conducts mediations at their offices *and*, when needed, link up victims with HR-oriented lawyers, who have also been organized by ASK into Human Rights Lawyers’ Committees (Manobodhikar Ainjibi Parishad). Parishads). Organizations of lawyers access government funds for providing free legal assistance to those unable to afford legal fees and court costs.

Orientations of Mixed Gender CBOs

In rural areas, the main types of rights violations that occupy the average citizen, who is a man, are those caused by gender gaps, and disputes over land.

Measures of Success of Mixed Gender CBOs

The measure for success in the case of Mixed-Gender HR CBOs, then remains the extent to which they cohere, are able to respond to women’s issues, and identify with the issues of poorer households and landholding groups *and* diversify into arenas of violations that affect economic rights, democratic rights and environmental, e.g., rights affecting a citizen’s rights to know, to live in a corruption-free social order that ensures the rule of law.



2013- Mixed Gender CBOs Protest Violence Against Minorities (Serajganj)

2013: Achievements of Mixed-Gender CBOs

(a) Mixed Gender CBOs have provided space for women to grow and develop as social activists.

- One woman has headed a Mixed Gender for several years. In 2013, another woman entered the election for a new president of a second such CBO.
- With women becoming more assertive in Mixed-Gender HR CBOs there is an inevitable rise in tensions in some of these organisations. However, men in most of the CBOs accept the tensions as normal to democratic processes and working relations between women & men, Women CBOs, and Mixed Gender CBO, in which men predominate remain close.
- Consequently: women continue to value male *shalishkars* as being just and open to the problems of women, and confident about women's skills as *shalishkars*. Also, and relations between the two types of CBOs are closer and more viable than ever.
- In 2013, 159 members from the Women CBO and 188 members from Mixed-Gender HR CBOs jointly attended a lengthy training workshop on incorporating HR concepts in *shalishes*. The workshop lasted 21 days. This kind of intensive and prolonged exposure to working together helps to break social barriers. Post-workshop evaluation indicates that, as a
- Result of attending the workshop women felt more confident about serving as *shalishkar*. In turn, men reported that the training had deepened their understanding of women's issues, and their empathy for victims of VAW had grown. According to the men, the workshop helped them to develop more trust for women's capabilities as *shalishkars* and actors in public processes.
- In 2013, the two types of CBOs jointly published *Jani, Alo Ashbei*. This is the third such annual publication since 2011. The research and publications is coordinated by a Taskforce set up among members.
- In the local communities, the two types of CBOs are seen as being inextricably linked. They are seen as twins who share in a joint reputation for being reliable social spaces that people can turn to for help when their rights are threatened and they want justice.
- By public perception they are seen as acting together so that :
 - By the end of 2013, the two CBOs handled 173 recorded incidents of VAW through *shalishes*, and dealt with 270 additional cases of VAW by taking victims to the *thana*, hospitals, lawyers and courts.
 - Every year, the two CBOs help local communities to come together as citizens of Bangladesh who also celebrate Victory Day, Independence Day, International Women's Day.



First Woman Elected as President of a Mixed Gender HR CBO.

(b) HR Situation Reports for Ten Districts

Since 2010, the Mixed-Gender HR CBOs have become more involved with HR issues in the public arena such as monitoring HR in the districts, and the implementation of new acts that affect social safety programmes.

In 2005, a number of local NGOs, including PNGOs or NGOs that partner with ASK, joined forces to establish Human Rights Forums in each of the ten district where ASK operates. Starting 2010, the district Human Rights Forums have begun to publish annual HR situation reports for which Mixed Gender CBOs take responsibility for collecting and analysing data, and undertaking write-up. The exercise now includes such CBOs in all ten districts in which ASK operated. In 2013, the HR Situation Reports were launched with District Commissioners; Superintendents of Police; Mayors, Civil Surgeons; heads of the departments of education, public works, and agriculture; and several journalists. The reports were widely acclaimed for their quality and usefulness.

Feedback about HR Situation Reports from heads of District Administration and Government Departments:

- *"This report will help planners to get a clear picture of trends in the districts".*
- *"The report is a sign of progress and will help us to see things with greater perceptiveness".*
- *"The document is worth preserving."*
- *"This publication gives strength to local people."*
- *"The publication of the report should be continued.."*

(c) Actualising the Right to Information

The ten Mixed-Gender HR CBOs also set up a taskforce, which is focused on making the new Right to Information Act (RTI) of 2009 operational. The Taskforce sought information from government bodies and agencies such as hospitals, department of health, local government etc. and used their experiences to publish a useful set of observations, which suggest improvements that would make the RTI functional:

- No specific person has been designated by Govt agencies to provide information to the public.
- Where such a person is designated, the appointee is not fully aware of the RTI act and her/his responsibilities under it.
- The government has not initiated any activity to promote the RTI or to make the public aware.

(d) Resisting Corruption in Social Safety Net Systems.

In 2013, the Mixed-Gender CBO in Badiakhali Union, Gaibandha District, introduced a new area of work for its counterparts in other areas -- ensuring the integrity of social safety net programmes by challenging lists of beneficiaries compiled by local officials. They successfully questioned the list that had been compiled for their Union by an elected representative. As a result, the list was voided and replaced with a new one.

- Responsibility for compiling the new list was entrusted, by the Union Parishad, to the Mixed-Gender CBO in Badiakhali Union.



Members of Women CBOs and Mixed Gender CBOs at a Joint Training Workshop - 2013.

Malfunctions in Safety Net Programmes: How & Why

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) writes: "The Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) program aiming to ensure food security of the poor in Gaibandha district failed to reach the actual beneficiary. Out of thirteen villages in Monohorpur Union, Palasbari sub-district, 1,000 families from seven villages only are on the list of the beneficiaries whereas six villages are excluded. In addition, it is alleged that the political leaders have taken the VGF cards of 600 families who are in the beneficiary list but never received the food subsidy. Some of the cardholders receive three kilograms of rice instead of the 15 kilograms earmarked for them." <http://www.humanrights.asia/news/hunger-alerts/AHRC-HAG-004-2011>

SECTION IV

AUGMENTING ASK'S CAPABILITIES TO SERVE AS A HUMAN RIGHTS RESOURCE CENTRE

- A. Documentation Raises Its Efficiency Through Digitalisation
- B. Publication: Expanding Reach, Expanding Intake
- C. Website: ASK Joins the Digital Revolution
- D. Enlarging Capacity for Providing Training
- E. ASK Gains Credibility as a Source for New Tools: Contribution of Psycho-Social Counselling
- F. Reinforcing Coalitions, Alliances & Networks to Multiply Impact

CHAPTER 7

AUGMENTING ASK'S CAPABILITIES TO SERVE AS A HUMAN RIGHTS RESOURCE CENTRE

A. Documentation Raises its Efficiency through Digitalisation

Although low-keyed, the Documentation Unit of ASK is vital to the functioning of the organization. Each day begins with an Action Meeting with heads of the 17 units responsible for implementing ASK's programmes. The purpose of meeting is to review media reports scanned by the Documentation Unit to identify incidents of HR violation nation-wide. The scan covers twelve national dailies, three weeklies, and two quarterlies.

It is from this Action Meeting that ASK collectively decides on which HR violations outside the ones that clients directly bring to the Legal Aid Clinics, it ought to address. Follow-up is through investigation, litigation, advocacy, and appeals to government for remedial action.

Other functions of the Documentation Unit is to compile newspaper-based statistics on HR violations; maintain a library of books, documents, and videos; develop bibliographies on request by ASK staff, HR activists, journalists, students and researchers; and distribute the *Bulletin* and other ASK publications. Every month, Documentation also screens a video to create consensus and consolidate a common HR culture among ASK staff.

Achievements in 2013

In 2013, Documentation gained in efficiency by digitalizing news clippings. Moreover, digitalizing now enables it to daily update its compilation of statistics on HR violations, which the unit is responsible for maintaining. Until 2012, the Unit was limited to producing only quarterly compilation of such statistics.

Accession of:	Acquired In 2013	Cumulative Total (year end 2013)
Books & documents	416	9,735
Videos	12	512

B. Publications: Expanding Reach, Expanding Intake

The Publications Unit is critical to ASK's performance as a clearing house of information, ideas and strategies promoting HR in Bangladesh. Ever concerned to maintain a balance in favour of *acting* to protect HR---rather than dialoguing about it, the organisation's Publication Unit is small but has become an invaluable resource on which HR oriented activists, organisations, members of the legal and law enforcement professions have come to rely.

ASK publishes books, a quarterly journal entitled the *Bulletin*, and contributes articles for publication in mainstream newspapers. The *Bulletin* is published exclusively in Bangla and is considered particularly relevant to HR activism because it covers and provides commentary on implications for HR protection of current events, socio-economic trends, and new laws, court judgements and official declarations.



Books Published by ASK in 2013



Four Issues of ASK Bulletin, 2013

2013: Achievements by Publications Unit

In 2013, the Publications Unit responded strategically to counter two conflicting challenges confronting it: (a) increased demand from readers and (b) a decline in the number of authors willing to write original material.

(a) The problem posed by increased demand from readers is relatively easy to solve. In 2013, the Publications Unit raised the number of copies printed per issue of the *Bulletin* from 6,000 in 2012 to 7,000. As before, while catering to regular subscribers, the unit continued to prioritise distribution to agencies and professions important for HR protection. These include members of the Supreme Court; individual lawyers and the Bar Associations of higher and district courts; selected Ministries and Secretaries of Government Departments; political parties; embassies; NGOs; libraries, professors and students of law schools; law enforcement officers; journalists, and Press Clubs.

(b) However, the problem created by a decline in the number of authors interested in writing for ASK's publications proves to much more difficult to



2013 Workshop with law students in Dhaka

In 2013, the Publications Unit added a third prong to its effort to widen access to authors:

Sourcing Authors from ASK Staff

In a bid to increase access to authors, the Publications Unit inaugurated a monthly Study Circle at the main office of ASK. Each meeting of the Study Circle is led by one of the many units in ASK. The responsible unit distributes a list of reading materials ahead of time among staff so that participants come prepared for a meaningful and in-depth exchange.

Because of its novelty, the first of the 12 meetings envisioned had to be by-passed. Each of the subsequent 11 meetings was attended by, on average, 18 participants.

The experiment proves very useful because it creates an opening for the Publications Unit to negotiate original articles from staff working for ASK. Also, since the inception of the Study Circle, three or four of ASK staff have committed themselves to writing articles and other materials for ASK's publications.

resolve. Based on impressionist evidence, the Publications Unit attributes this decline to the rising popularity of, and preoccupation with, the internet. Whether it is that the internet provides a more interesting platform for authors seeking to be published, or whether preoccupation with reading the vast stores of information available on the internet detracts from interest in writing is open to question. What is obvious is that the Publications Unit has been left with fewer authors volunteering to contribute original material for print.

TABLES OF THE PUBLICATIONS UNIT

TABLE 1: List of New Books in 2013

Title & Edition	Contents
<i>The Culture of Impunity</i> (in English). 1 st edition.	On-going War Crimes Trials in Bangladesh.
<i>Dharshon porobarti Ainy Lorai</i> . 2 nd edition. (Previous edition, 1999.)	Rape & legal measures available to victims seeking justice.
<i>Paribarik Aine Bangladesher Nari</i> . 3 rd edition. (Previous editions, 2010 & 2013.)	Rights of women under updated family laws.
<i>Hindu Paribarik Ain</i> . 3 rd edition. (Previous editions, 2010 & 2013.)	Rights of Hindu women under updated Hindu Family laws
<i>Ain-e Shishu Prasanga</i> . 3 rd edition. (Previous editions, 2011.)	Children under updated laws and policies..
<i>Shalishi</i> . 3 rd edition. (Previous editions, 2004 & 2013.)	Laws regulating <i>shalish</i> or mediation.

TABLE 2: Cover Stories in the Bulletin in 2013

- March issue: Ongoing War Crimes Trials.
- June Issue: Collapse of the Rana Plaza.
- September Issue: Judgment against Golam Azam, the leader of Jamat-i-Islam, by the War Crimes Trial.
- December Issue: A retrospective on HR trends and events in 2013.

TABLE 3: Articles by ASK Published in Newspapers in 2013

Newspaper	No. of articles
Prothom Alo	5
Janakantha	14
Sangbad	2
Total	21

TABLE 4: Reviews and Analyses of New Laws & Declarations in the Bulletin in 2013

New Laws

- The Children Act, 2013 (Act no. 24 of 2013).
- The Torture and Custodial Death (Prohibition) Act, 2013.
- The Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Act, 2013.

Commentaries on Judgements & Declarations.

- Judgment on BDR Mutiny Case (20th October 2013).
- High Court Divisions Order on DNA Test in rape cases (29th January 2013).
- Declaration by Cabinet of Ministers on transgender as third gender (11th November 2013)

Over the last seven years or so, ASK has responded to the problem through a two-pronged approach.

- Firstly, its Publications Unit has increased its engagement with the internet by posting articles on ASK's own website, a stratagem that results in external users now calling in to inquire whether the unit is interested in receiving writings on similar topics from them. Greater engagement with the internet by ASK has also prompted the unit to monitor on-line newspapers and magazines for ideas about new topics, and to leads about promising new authors with a grasp on HR perspectives.
- Secondly, starting in 2007, the Publications Unit started sponsoring two annual workshops, which are designed to stimulate interest in writing HR-oriented articles and chapters among journalists, lawyers, and the faculty and students of law schools. In 2013, the workshops, held in Chittagong and Dhaka cities, respectively attracted between 23 to 24 participants each. The year also marked the first time that the workshops reached out to three new universities for the participation of teachers and students from their law schools. The new institutions were the Premier University, and the University of Technology and Science in Chittagong; and Eastern University in Dhaka.

C. Website: ASK Joins the Digital Revolution

2013 was significant turning point for the ASK website. Although the website was originally created in 2008, in 2013 the Media and International Advocacy Unit of the organization launched a concerted effort to convert the medium not only to share information but to also encourage action.

Innovations

This has been accomplished through:

1. Providing more *immediate* information about *ongoing* events and processes involving human rights violations. The shift has involved focusing on information about initial investigative reports, ASK press statements, recent court actions and judgments.
2. Posting appeals for letter-writing campaigns to protest or request corrective action to counter rights violation in process.
3. Presenting HR statistics compiled by ASK's Documentation Unit on a more frequent basis and in more engaging formats. In 2013, the website moved from updating HR statistics on a weekly basis rather than monthly. Also, while formerly all types of HR violations were compiled into a single table, it began to separate different types of violations and organizing them into thematic areas such as State violence, violence against minorities, domestic violence, VAW, border killings, denial of rights to workers, children and the like. The new format also enhances the accessibility of data through interesting graphics.



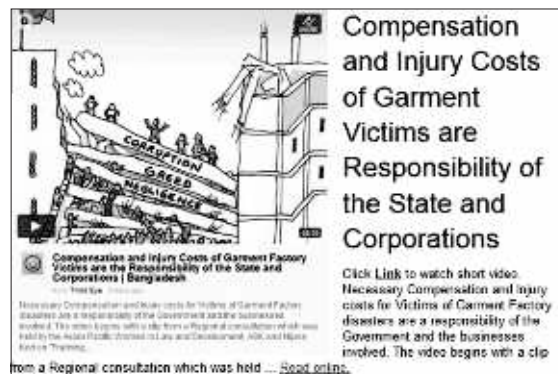
POLITICAL VIOLENCE JANUARY – 12 DECEMBER 2013



433 PEOPLE DIED
754 INCIDENTS
21,024 INJURED

4. Finally, in an effort to create more vivid awareness, in 2013 the ASK website added video advocacy by posting video clips documenting rights violations. Among these is:

- A short video on the problems garment workers, victimized by a huge fire at Tazreen Fashions and the collapse of Rana Plaza, faced in attempting to claim compensation.
- A video of a conference in Dhaka where a HR activist explains the legal hurdles confronting victims of industrial accidents in the ready-made garments sector over the past two decades.



From the Video

Achievements

All these innovations have led to a dramatic increase in the number of visits and hits recorded for the ASK website. Between December 2012 and December 2013 the number of visits rose exponentially from 550 per month to an impressive 18,195. Similarly there has been

an increase in the number of hits at the website. A user now searches for more information by moving from, say, a statistical update about Violence against minorities, to VAW against minority women, to information about how much progress victims of the Rana Plaza collapse have made in their bid for compensation. Hits increased by 67 per cent alone between October and December in 2013.

Summary by Month										
Month	Daily Avg				Monthly Totals					
	Hits	Files	Pages	Visits	Sites	KBytes	Visits	Pages	Files	Hits
Feb 2014	14402	10993	1956	579	7165	48981814	8698	29341	164902	216034
Jan 2014	11442	8645	1890	564	9380	82947494	17492	58590	268007	354719
Dec 2013	12400	8106	2158	586	9812	75991503	18195	66923	251291	384407
Nov 2013	9441	6874	1733	419	8172	11851417	12581	52001	206235	283259
Oct 2013	7410	5526	1521	385	6665	9658217	11951	47172	171336	229716
Sep 2013	6715	5001	1184	332	6007	8942351	9976	35525	150051	201450
Aug 2013	4685	3801	985	285	5175	7975675	8849	30537	117861	145258
Jul 2013	4807	3969	1162	293	4889	7869855	9092	36037	123061	149031
Jun 2013	5366	4136	1111	296	5138	7561387	8893	33338	124101	160989
May 2013	4920	3868	1034	273	2142	2784548	3003	11374	42554	54124
Totals						264564261	108730	400838	1619399	2178987

Expanding Reach beyond the Website

Simultaneously with improvements to the website, ASK broached yet another initiative to expand reach to HR activists over the internet: enhancing the relevance and appeal of its E Bulletin. Published monthly and distributed without charge, the bulletin is used for disseminating information from fact finding reports, statistics, ASK Press Statements, ASK's investigative reports, information on legal proceedings, new publications or events from around the different units in ASK. E Bulletins are sent through email. Plans for 2014 call for expanding the database of subscribers.


Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK)
 A Legal Aid & Human Rights Organization

e-newsletter
 SPRING NEWSLETTER 2013






Latest Legal Action

Writ Petition Filed | Insufficient Measures Taken by Government to Protect Minorities



Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK), BLAST, Samprodayikota O Jongibad Birodhi Moncho (Platform against fundamentalism and terrorism), Hindu Budhdho Christian Oikko Porishad (Coalition of Hindu Boddho Christian), Bangladesh Puja Udjapon Porishad (Puja celebration committee), ALRD and Ziauddin Tarique jointly filed a writ petition in the Divisional Bench of High Court Division comprised of Justice Naima Haider and Justice Zafar Ahmed.

[Read Further](#)

D. Enlarging Capacity for Providing Training

ASK places extraordinary importance on training as a tool for capacity building. It equates capacity building less with technical skills and more with a *culture* of peace in its fullest sense. Peace, for ASK, is not a negative concept defined by the absence of violence, but an embracing of positive values of respect for others, equality, fairness, and non-violence.

The organisation requires all incoming staff to undergo intensive training through two foundation courses, which expose new staff to its goal, programmes, values, work processes, work relations, and financial procedures. According to its Training Unit, the goal of staff training is to “integrate new staff into the *culture* of ASK”. The training programme for professional staff lasts three days; and for support staff, one day.



It is therefore not surprising that ASK equates success in capacity building in larger society with the ability of its Training Unit to develop and deliver training on:

- (a) A range of emerging topics relevant to protecting HR and legal rights.
- (b) Using methodologies that make for effective *internalisation* of concepts and skills.

2013: No. of Training Courses & Trainees: ASK Training Unit

Courses		Participants		
Category	No:	Women	Men	Total
Pre-Planned	52	695	456	1151
On Request	26	392	183	575
All Courses	78	1,087	639	1,726

Achievements in 2013:

2013 was a landmark year for ASK's training programme.

- (a) ASK gained made significant gains in credibility as a *national* resource centre for providing training for HR activism. For the first time, the organisation fielded requests for training from the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) while continuing to respond to requests from more usual quarters such as the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, and BLAST, a leading HR organisation.
- (b) As a result of the requests, the Training Unit was able to develop and add five new training modules to its holding of courses. These are relatively easy to adaptated to meet the needs of a variety of clients in the future.

2013: List of New Training Modules:

1. Raising HR awareness among people in local communities (for members HRDOs, associated with the NHRC).
2. Raising HR awareness among urban poor (for HRDOs associated with NHRC)
3. Raising HR awareness among community volunteers (for HRDOs associated with NHRC).
4. Laws relating to VAW (for Government Officials associated with the Ministry of Women's & Children's Affairs).
5. Gender, HR, Legal issues (for staff of BLAST, a leading HR organisation).

E. ASK Gains Credibility as a Source for New Tools: Contribution of Psycho-social Counselling

Psycho-Social Counselling, introduced into Bangladesh by ASK in 1997 is still regarded with some suspicion in the country. It is stigmatised because it involves airing “dirty laundry”—the personal shortcomings of one’s elders and one’s close ones. It demeans the self by exposing one’s own weaknesses. As a consequence, until very recently, future practitioners of counselling have had to turn to training abroad.

As it turns out, the risk ASK took in advocating counselling as a means to support victims of rape, domestic violence and state violence has been well worth the returns. Since 1997, its Counselling Unit has exposed 1,000 individuals from government organizations, NGOs, educational institutes and hospitals to various levels of training in counselling skills.



Transactional Analysis Training for National Hospitals & Universities

Today, it is able to gain a measure of satisfaction from the growth of a handful of hospitals, and private practitioners in Dhaka that offer counselling services to clients. More significantly, counselling has gained a place in institutions of higher learning.

- Dhaka University, the foremost government university in Bangladesh recently established counselling as an autonomous academic discipline. Faculty members of the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, founded in 2011, continue to acknowledge ASK’s extremely enabling role in the establishment of the department and continues to play by organizing training workshops for its students on demand.
- BRAC University, a leading private university, does not offer academic courses in counselling but has established a counselling unit that provides counselling to students, enrolled at the university, as they struggle to adjust to their academic environment and plan for a future in a complex, changing world. Five counsellors of the unit are graduates of the Dhaka University, who turn to ASK for further training to hone their skills.

2013: Achievements

(a) When the Rana Plaza in Savar collapsed in Savar on 24 April of 2013, leaving 1,134 people dead and about 2,000 injured, key members of staff from ASK's Counselling Unit were busy conducting a training programme at BRAC University. Caught short, they put their heads together with a staff member from BRAC University's Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, to rapidly develop a plan to rush over to Savar to provide psychological first aid to survivors of the accident. The staff from BRAC had originally received training from ASK's Counselling Unit.

In all, 15 trained counsellors from ASK, both from the Counselling Unit itself and from other units, sped over to help survivors admitted in to two area hospitals where they worked for seven days on end. There was a natural sense of unease. This was the first time they were called upon to provide trauma counselling on such a large scale. The challenge of dealing with the flash-backs, panic attacks, debilitating anxiety and fear in survivors was made all the more difficult as rescuers themselves turned up seeking help.

What helped sustain members of ASK's Counselling Unit was that twenty other counsellors - --many trained by ASK itself ---worked alongside, as one.

After survivors were moved to specialized orthopaedic hospitals, ASK continued to provide counselling to survivors for an entire month.

(b) What People Say about ASK

Mithun, Age 22. A Survivor of Rana Plaza collapse:

They (counsellors from ASK) came to see me at the hospital. They did so much for me. I will always pray for them. May Allah bless them. They helped me a lot. They listened. They were so caring. So calm. They comforted me and gave me hope. I have never met people like them. May Allah bless them.

I broke bones in many places in my body. I still can't use my left arm and don't know when I can start working again. But I bless them. I wish them well. (December, 2013)

Khondokar Abdul Jalil, Fire Service & Civil Defence, Postagola. Re Experiences at Rana Plaza:

I never dreamt that trauma victims would get this kind of attention in Bangladesh! That was the first time that this kind of help came forward here. If we get this kind of response in the future, it will mean going forward.

They (counsellors from ASK) helped me. Said things that calmed me. It helped.... helped a lot. Since the disaster at Rana Plaza, *I still can't sleep.*

It would be very good if the fire department were trained in dealing with trauma. Every garment factory should have a trained counsellor to help people when accidents happen. It (counselling) is very *upokari* (helpful) (December, 2013)

Dr. Shaheen Islam. Founding member of the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, the first of its kind in Bangladesh, at Dhaka University.

"ASK has played a strong supportive role in the founding of the department in that the four faculty members who took the initiative for establishing it, received their first exposure to, and training in counselling approaches from ASK.

The new department at Dhaka University continues to rely on ASK for continuous professional development. Each year it enrolls 20 freshmen. It has produced some 48 graduates who are successfully serving as counsellors at different institutions. (December, 2013)

- Of late, a television channel too has become more aware about the benefits of counselling and often requests staff from ASK's Counselling Unit to serve as resource persons on live talk shows.
- As a result of these call-in television programmes, ASK has had to start intake for clients outside its internal referral channels, e.g., its the Legal Aid Clinics and Halfway Homes.
- However, perhaps the most compelling evidence of the need and usefulness of ASK's pioneering efforts to introduce counselling in Bangladesh is how it helped many workers in the aftermath of the collapse of the Rana Plaza. The account below is remarkable for illustrating not only the benefits of counselling as a tool for supporting victims of HR negligence and abuse, but also ASK's capacity for creating networks that gain inspiration from close, congenial, collaborative relationships among institutions and their individual members.

F. Reinforcing Coalition, Alliances & Networks to Multiply Impact

ASK collaborates with a number of coalitions and organisations to access information and support for its activities, and relies on them to amplify the impacts it creates.

In 2013, numerous activities undertaken in concert with coalition partners, allies and members of various networks contributed to the ongoing efforts of ASK as a whole and the numerous units it encompasses, to deepen commitment to shared goals and strengthen working relationships with other organisations both within Bangladesh and beyond its borders.

LIST OF COALITIONS, ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS WITH WHICH ASK PARTNERS

ASK Unit	Coalition/ Organisation	Name of Coalition/Organisation
MIA	Coalition	Human Rights Bangladesh Forum (HRFB)
MIA	Coalition (International)	The Asian NGO Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI)
MIA	Coalition	Citizens' Initiatives on CEDAW, Bangladesh (CIC, BD)
MIA	Coalition (International)	Asian for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
MIA	National Organisation	Action Aid Bangladesh (AAB)
MIA	National Organisation	Action on Disability and Development (ADD)
GSJP, MIA	District Organisation	Ancholic Polli Unnayan Sangtha (APUS), Naogaon.
Psycho Social Counselling	International Organisation	Asha Counselling & Training Services, Coimbatore, India
Advocacy	National Organisation	Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD)
Legal Aid Outreach	District Organisation	AVAS
MIA	National Organisation	Awaj Foundation
Advocacy, MIA	National Organisation	Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA)
MIA	National Organisation	Bangladesh Institute of Labor Studies (BILS)
Advocacy, MIA	National Organisation	Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST)

ASK Unit	Coalition/ Organisation	Name of Coalition/Organisation
Advocacy, MIA	National Organisation	Bangladesh Mahila Parishad
MIA	National Organisation	Bangladesh Nari Progati Shanga (BNPS)
MIA	National Organisation	Bangladesh Nari Sangbadik Kendro (BNSK)
Advocacy, MIA	National Organisation	Bangladesh National Women Lawyer's Association (BNWLA)
MIA	National Organisation	Bangladesh Protibondhi Kallyan Somity (BPKS)
MIA	National Organisation	Bangladesh Women's Health Coalition (BWHC)
MIA	National Organisation	Bangladeshi Ovibasi Mohila Sramik Association, (BOMSA)
MIA	National Organisation	BARCIK Bangladesh Resource Centre for Indigenous Knowledge
Legal Aid Outreach	District Organisation	Barendra Unnayan Prochesta
MIA	National Organisation	BRAC
MIA	National Organisation	BROTEE
MIA	National Organisation	Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE)
Psycho Social Counselling	National Organisation	Church of Bangladesh Social Development Program (CBSDP)
MIA	National Organisation	Dushtha Shasthya Kendra (DSK)
Psycho Social Counselling	National Organisation	Education & Counselling Department, Dhaka University
Psycho Social Counselling	National Organisation	EKOTA,
MIA	District Organisation	Family Planning Association of Bangladesh (FPAB)
GSJ	National Organisation	Gana Unnayan Kendra(GUK), Gaibandha
MIA	District Organisation	Gender In Media (GIMF)
Legal Aid Outreach	National Organisation	Hobigonj Unnayan Sangsta (HUS)
MIA	National Organisation	Institute for Environment and Development (IED)
MIA	National Organisation	International Organization for Migration (IOM)
MIA	National Organisation	Karmajibi Nari
Advocacy	National Organisation	Kormojibi Nari
MIA	District Organisation	Manusher Jonno foundation (MJF)
GSJ, MIA	District Organisation	<i>Mohila Shanghati Parishad (MSP), Rajshahi</i>

ASK Unit	Coalition/ Organisation	Name of Coalition/Organisation
GSJ	National Organisation	<i>Mukti Nari- O-Shishu Unnayan Sangstha, Kushtia</i>
Advocacy	National Organisation	Nari Pokkho
MIA	National Organisation	National Organizations Working with the Disabled (NFOWD)
MIA	District Organisation	National Alliance of Disabled Peoples' Organizations (NADPO)
MIA, GSJ	National Organisation	National Development Council (NDC), Joypurhat
Advocacy	District Organisation	Nijera Kori
Legal Aid Outreach	National Organisation	OWDEB (Organization for Women's Development in Bangladesh)
MIA	District Organisation	Oxfam GB
MIA, GSJ	District Organisation	<i>Pabna Protishruti, Pabna</i>
MIA, GSJ	District Organisation	Peoples Oriented Program Implementation (POPI)
Legal Aid Outreach	National Organisation	PESD
MIA	National Organisation	Population Services and Training Center (PSTC)
MIA	National Organisation	PRIP Trust
MIA	District Organisation	Research Initiative Bangladesh (RIB)
Legal Aid Outreach	National Organisation	Rural Poor Development Organization
MIA, GSJ	District Organisation	Sabalombi Unnayan Samity (SUS), Netrokona
MIA, GSJ	District Organisation	Sirajgonj Uttaran Mahila Sangstha (SUMS), Sirajganj
MIA, GSJ	District Organisation	Social Association for Rural Advancement (SARA), Mymensing
Legal Aid Outreach	District Organisation	SoDESH
MIA	National Organisation	Sommilito Samajik Aandolon
MIA	National Organisation	Steps Towards Development
Psycho Social Counselling	National Organisation	Teachers Training College, Dhaka,
MIA	National Organisation	The International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B)
MIA	National Organisation	United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)
Psycho Social Counselling	National Organisation	Victim Support Centre
GSJ, MIA	District Organisation	Welfare Efforts(WE), Jhenaida
MIA	National Organisation	Women For Women (WFW)

ASK: PROGRAMS AND UNITS

Introduction

ASK was registered with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies Bangladesh under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 in 1986 and with the NGO Affairs Bureau under Foreign Donation Regulation Ordinance, 1978 in 1993. It was accorded special consultative status with UNECOSOC in 1998.

Strategies carried out by different Units of ASK and their area of work are as follows:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Rights Awareness (HRA) • Gender & Social Justice (GSJ) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigation(INV) • Documentation(DOC) • Publication and communication • Legal Advocacy and Policy Reform(LAPRU) • Media and International Advocacy(MIA)
Awareness raising and strengthening organizational structures	Advocacy and Networking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training (TRU) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Rights (CRU)
Capacity building of Human Rights Actors	Protection of Children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mediation and Rapid Response (MRRU) • Litigation • Outreach • Support Services and Half Way Home (SS&HH) • Psycho-social Counseling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration (ADMIN) • Accounts and Finance (ACFIN) • Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (PME)
Legal aid and other support services	Institutional Development

ANNEX: II

ASK: SUPPORT SYSTEM

Biddalaya Nattya Dal (BNAD): 52

Dhaka: Saint Joseph Higher Secondary School, Rayer Bazar High School, Lalmatia Girl's School, Ali Hossain High School.

Gazipur: Harinal High School, Mofizuddin High School, Razia Sultana Girls High School, Gazipur Umeda Begum Girls High School.

Gaibandha: Sadhinotar Rojot Joyonti Girls High School, Rebeka Habib Girls High School, Tulshighat Kashinath High School, Modern N.H. High School.

Jheinaidah: Shisukunja School & College, Jheinaidah S.P. Secondary School, Shaheed Smrity Bidyapith Jheinaidah Wazir Ali High School.

Joypurhat: Khanjanpur Mission Girls High School, Khanjanpur, Joypurhat Girls High School, Dogachhi High School, Kasiabari High School.

Kishoreganj: Arjot Atorjan High School, Ajimuddin High School, Kishoreganj Girls High School, Jela Shoroni Girls High School.

Kushtia: Kolokakoli Secondary School, Mohini Mohon Biddyapith, Milpara Secondary School, Kushtia High School.

Mymensingh: Mymensing Laboratory High School, Premier Ideal School, The Edward Institution, Police Line High School.

Netrokona: Jahanara Smrity High School, Rajur Bazar Collegiate School, Netrokona Adorsho Girls High School, Krisnogobindo High School.

Naogaon: Central Girls High School, P.M. Girls High School, Chok Enayet High School, Jonokollan Model High School.

Pabna: Jannat Bibi Jubily Girls High School, Central Girls High School, Selim Najir High School, Shaheed Fazlul Haque Pouro High School.

Sirajganj: Victoria High School, Sabuj Kanon High School, Koumi Jute Mill High School, Hoimobala Girls School.

Tangail: Tangail Shibnath High School, Bibekananda High School and College, Tangail Girls School, Dighulia Shaheed Mizanur Rahman High School.

Manobadhikar Nattaya Parishad (MNP): (13) Manobadhikar Songrokkhan Parishad (MSP): (10) Manobadhikar Nari Samaj (MNS): (10) Manobadhikar Ainjibi Parishad (MAP): (10) Human Rights Defenders Forum: (15) Lawyers Forum: (7)

Partner NGOs: 21

Barisal: Association of Voluntary Action for Society (AVAS).

Bogra: Program for Eco-Social Development (PESD).

Chittagong: Organisation for Women's Development in Bangladesh (OWDEB).

Dhaka: Shakham Sessashebee Sangstha (SSS).

Gaibandha Sadar: Gana Unnayan Kendra (GUK).

Hobigonj: Hobigonj Unnayan Sangsta (HUS).

Jhenaidah Sadar: Welfare Efforts (WE).

Joypurhat Sadar: National Development Council (NDC).

Kushtia Sadar: Mukti Nari o Shishu Unnayan Shangstha.

Kishoregonj: Peoples Oriented Program Implementation (POPI).

Kurigram: Solidarity.

Mymensing Sadar: Social Association for Rural Advancement (SARA).

Naogaon Sadar: Ancholic Palli Unnayan Sangstha (APUS).

Netrakona Sadar: Shabolomby Unnayan Samity (SUS).

Pabna Sadar: Pabna Prostisruti (PP).

Rajshahi: Barendra Unnayan Prochesta (BUP).

Rajshahi: Mohila Sanghati Parishad (MSP).

Sirajganj Sadar: Sirajganj Uttaran Mohila Shangstha (SUMS).

Sathkhira: Society for Development and Education of Small Household (SoDESH).

Tangail: Rural Poor Development Organisation (RPDO).

Donor Partners: 8

Donor Consortium

The Royal Norwegian Embassy, Dhaka

The Swedish Embassy, Dhaka

NETZ-Germany

Danish Embassy

Embassy of Switzerland

Individual Donor

Save the Children International

ICCO Cooperation

Zubaan

Legal Aid Clinics in Dhaka: 11

Mirpur
Johnson Road
Goran
Kamrangichar
Keraniganj
Dhalpur at Jatrabari
Victim Support Centre (VSC) at Tejgaon
Hemayetpur (Savar)
Gazipur with Department of Women Affairs Shelter Home.
Berri Bandh at Mohammadpur
Talbag (BILLS) at Savar

CENTRES FOR PROVIDING SUPPORT TO CHILDREN: (122)

Type of Centre	In Dhaka	Outside Dhaka
Drop in Centres	6	-
Community based Learning Centre	35	65
Socialization Centre	6	10
Creative Learning Centre	1	

National Networks

Bangladesh Shishu Odhikar Forum (BSAF): 170 member organizations to campaign for the implementation of the Child Rights Convention.

Beijing plus Five for Women's Rights: a coalition of women's organizations to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, adopted by the Government of Bangladesh.

Coalition for the Urban Poor (CUP): coordinates campaigns for the right to shelter of slum dwellers and mobilizes them to demand their rights.

Citizen's Initiative on CEDAW: a network of 38 organizations formed in 2007 to prepare reports for the UN CEDAW Committee and to campaign for implementation of CEDAW.

Citizen's Initiatives to Address Domestic Violence: a network of 40 organizations formed in 2007 for advocacy on legislation for Domestic Violence.

Child Rights Governance Assembly (CRGA): A civil society advocacy network of 17 organizations including children and youth organizations.

Sramik Nirapotta Forum: a network of 14 organizations concerned with safety at the workplace and workers' health. Formed after the collapse of the Spectrum Sweater Industries building in Polashbari, Savar it has campaigned for workers' safety through the media, and filed PILs to establish corporate responsibility for workers' deaths and injuries.

Samajik Protirodh Committee: a network of 52 women's groups formed to resist violence against women by both state and non-state actors, to campaign for participation of women in public decision-making and to resist the rise of religious extremism. The Secretariat is located in the Bangladesh Mahila Porishod.

Human Rights Forum Bangladesh (HRFB): a coalition of 19 human rights and development organizations of Bangladesh which submit joint report for stakeholders' on the UPR to the Human Rights Council.

International Networks

Asia Pacific Forum for Women, Law and Development (APWLD): formed after the Nairobi Conference. Based in Chiang Mai, Thailand, APWLD networks with legal and women's rights organisations across Asia and the Pacific to campaign for women's rights, to create awareness of rights and to draft recommendations for legal reform.

Asian NGO Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI): a network of human rights NGOs in Asia engaged with NHRIs to strengthen domestic human rights protection mechanisms in accordance with international human rights standards.

End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT International): works against commercial sexual exploitation of children. Member NGOs in 70 countries and the secretariat is in Bangkok.

Forum Asia (FA): promotes human rights through training, education and awareness of international standards for different constituencies. Secretariat based in Bangkok.

International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP): promotes women's rights under CEDAW and other UN Conventions. It supports and trains organisations to prepare shadow reports for treaty bodies. Secretariat located in Kuala Lumpur.

Migrants' Forum in Asia (MFA): raises awareness about migrant workers' rights and fair working conditions and creates structures of support. Secretariat located in Manila.

South Asians for Human Rights (SAHR): a network of human rights defenders and organizations based in South Asia. The secretariat is in Colombo.

South Asia Forum for Human Rights (SAFHR): A regional public forum for the promotion of respect for universal values of human rights, the independence of rights and the invisibility of rights based in Kathmandu.

We Can End Violence against Women: an international campaign against domestic violence. Holds meetings, seminars, workshops and publishes materials on violence against women and personal and collective measures to prevent gender based violence. ASK is currently Chair of the national committee.

Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML): an international solidarity network that engages with problems faced by women under Islamic laws.

ANNEX: III

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) Statement of Financial Position As at 31 December 2013

Particulars	Amount in Taka	
	2013	2012
Assets:		
Non-current Assets:		
Property, Plant & Equipments	50,236,086	51,182,502
Current Assets:		
Advance Security Deposit	840,020	700,000
Membership Subscription	2,000	1,700
Stock of Stationeries	543,542	671,244
Fund Receivable	46,858,358	23,803,305
Program Advance	484,853	-
Cash & Bank Equivalents	91,942,828	93,849,098
	140,671,601	119,025,347
Total	190,907,687	170,207,849
Equity & Liabilities:		
Capital Fund	157,455,103	140,629,764
Gratuity Fund	32,165,206	29,256,332
	189,620,309	169,886,096
Non-current liabilities:		
Current Liabilities:		
Liability for Expenses	1,284,278	319,953
Advance Membership Fees	3,100	1,800
	1,287,378	321,753
Total	190,907,687	170,207,849

ASK MEMBERS

Founder Members

Late Mr. Aminul Haq
Late Barrister Salma Sobhan
Late Justice K. M. Subhan
Late Advocate Abdul Khaleque
Sir Fazle Hasan Abed
Dr. Hameeda Hossain
Ms. Khursheed Erfan Ahmed
Ms. Taherunnessa Abdullah
Barrister Amirul Islam

Executive Committee Members

Dr. Hameeda Hossain (Chairperson)
Advocate Z I Khan Panna (Secretary General)
Ms. Roushan Jahan (Treasurer)
Dr. Meghna Guha Thakurta (Member)
Fatema Rashid Hasan (Member)
Tahmina Rahman (Member)
Sultana Kamal (Ex-Officio) (Member)
Mr. Md. Nur Khan (Member)
Dr. Faustina Pereira (Member)

General Members

Afsana Wahab
Dilruba Shahana
Dr. Faustina Pereira
Fatema Rashid Hasan
Isaac Robinson
Khurshid Alam
Karunamoy Chakma
Dr. Meghna Guha Thakurta
Md. Asaduzzaman
Md. Nur Khan
Barrister Nihad Kabir
Neela Matin
Roushan Jahan Parvin
Rokshana Khondokar
Roushan Jahan
Sultana Kamal
Barrister Sara Hossain
Shameem Akhtar
Syed Mahbubar Rahman
Tahmina Rahman
Tanzina Huq Tiru
Advocate Z.I. Khan Panna
Zaved Hasan Mahmood

ANNEX: V

ASK TEAM

Executive Director

Sultana Kamal

Directors

Md. Nur Khan, Investigation and Documentation

Md. Shah Newaz, Admin & Programme Support

Human Rights Awareness Unit: Motahar Uddin Akand (Sr. Deputy Director), Md. Jahedul Alam (Sr. Coordinator), Jaganmoy Paul, Mst Sheuli Khatun, Solnara Aktar, Rokhshana Pervin, Burhan Uddin, Mahmuda Akter Munni, Rakibul Hassan, Nirjhar Adhikari.

Gender and Social Justice Unit: Md. Mozahidul Islam, Sanaiyya Faheem Ansari (Sr. Deputy Director), Sitara Shamim, Taufiq Al Mannan (Sr. Coordinator), Mahbubul Alam, Apurba Kumar Das, Dil Afroz Akter, Ashik Iqbal, Sharif Hossain Chowdhury.

Mediation & Rapid Response Unit: Asma Khanom Ruba, Kuheli Sultana, Nina Goswami (Sr. Deputy Director), Nahid Shams, Selina Akhter (Sr. Coordinator), Shithi Rani Das, Shilpi Saha, Shamsun Nahar, Sumita Bagchi, Mirana Sabir, Mahmuda Khatun Maya, Parul Akhter, Dil Afroz Islam, Shirina Akhter, Suraiya Parvin, Dilara Momtaj Moni, Shanta Ahmed, Ayesha Begum, Mahmuda Shahrin.

Litigation Unit: Salma Jabin (Deputy Director), Abdur Rashid, Farhana Afroj, Mizanur Rahman, Momtaj Begum, Monira Akter, Nasrin Akter, Snigdha Saha, Topan Kumar Sarker, Ataullah Nurul Kabir, Maksuel Chakma, Kaniz Sharmin.

Outreach Unit: Dilip Kumar Paul (Deputy Director), Rehana Sultana, Md. Shahinuzzaman, Abdul Alim, Mostafizur Rahman, Mohamed Hossain, Moshir Rahman, Suborna Dhar, Mithun Kumar Das, Sultan Mahmud Milon.

Support Service and Half Way Home Unit: Arpita Rani Das (Sr. Coordinator), Syeda Parvez Khanam, Ayesha Islam (Field Worker), Ayesha Begum, Rokeya Begum, Maleka Begum, Mary Baroi, Morzina Akhter Beauty, Mollica Bhattacharya.

Child Rights Unit (Consortium): Gita Chakraborty (Sr. Deputy Director), Nargis Akhter (Coordinator), Meheraj Jahan, Jahan Ara Pervin, Mina Sanyal, Shamsun Nahar Shewly, Ali Akram Tarafder, Kamrun Nessa, Atia Afrin, Rehana Pervin, Nargis Akter Mafia, Nazma Akter, Shammi Akter, Shahana Sultana, Ferdousi, Lutfunnessa, Nahida Sultana Pali, Hasina Nazneen Sathi, Rehana Pervin, Sayeda Nupur, Umme Kulsum Akter Parvin.

Child Rights Unit (SC Project): Ambica Roy (Coordinator), Rita Parven (Asstt. Coordinator), Rasheda Akter (Coordinator), Luna Sarkar, Pervin Akter Baby, Shaheen Mahbub, Selina Akter Seli, Farzana Khanam, Mohsena Begum, Reshma, Akhter, Shahana Akhter, Rabeya Akter Himu, Humaira Khanum, Padmabati Debi, Nahid Sultana Runi, Nayon Shaha, Jebun Nahar, Nabila Iqram, Mizanur Rahman, Lutfu Begum, Farhana Nazir, Monika Rani Dey, Rokeya Begum, Maksuda Khan, Rafiza Akter, Pushpa Rani, Mirza Shammi Akter, Nargis Akter, Shamima Yasmin,

Umme Kulsum Rekha, Fariya Biplobi, Selina Jahan, Selina Akter, Parvin Akter, Anisa Akhter, Rashida Akter Rozi, Sufia Akter Sufi, Farhana Momtaj Liza, Md. Mostafizur Rahman, Sumona Haque, Mahmuda Akter Laboni, Nusrat Jahan Khairunnessa, Kaniz Sharifa, Shahanaj Akter Bithi, Shamima Akter, Sabina Yesmin.

Child Rights Unit (PBP Project): Asadujjaman (Coordinator), Salma Ikram, Hosne Ara Hoque, Rashida Begum, Megdaline Tripura, Monira Khatun, Nilufa Ahmed, Mabia Akter.

Psycho-Social Counseling (Component): Nasima Akter (Counsellor), Shaheen Islam (Advisor), Runa Khandakar, Sheikh Zadi Rezina Parvin, Sunzida Islam (Counselor).

Investigation Unit: Abu Ahmed Faijul Kabir, Anirban Saha, John Asit Das, Mohammed Tipu Sultan (Sr. Deputy Director), Topote Bhattacharjee, Md. Mahabub Alam, Md. Khorshed Alam, Md. Liakat Ali.

Documentation Unit: Fahmida Zaman, Fatema Zannati, Jharna Khanam, Nargis Akhter, Zafreen Sattar (Sr. Coordinator).

Publication & Communication Unit: Kaniz Khadija Surovy, Shaheen Akhtar (Sr. Editor), Mubrook Mohammed, Nuran Chowdhury, Amrin Khan,

Media & International Advocacy Unit: Takia Sultana, Md. Billah Hossain Ibne Rahman. Md. Ashik Ahmed, Tamanna Hoq Riti, Aklima Ferdows Lisa, Nafeesa Shamsuddin, Kamrujjahan Flora, Md. Amanatullah, Shariful Islam Selim, Ishrat Ashtary.

Research Unit: Lubana Rashid, Sabetun Nahar, Md. Billal Hossain.

Legal Advocacy and Policy Reform Unit: Abu Obaidur Rahman (Sr. Deputy Director), Abantee Nurul. Mahjabin Rabbani, Md. Samiul Alam Sarker, Nurul Islam, Shamima Nasrin.

Training Unit: Tanvia Roselin Sultana, Momy Monzury Chowdhury, Tasmin Akter, Mst. Wahida Begum, Ayesha Akter, Md. Yeasin Arafath, Md. Sajjid Ahmed, Moshfec Ara, Anjuman Hossain, Mousumi Megdalena Chisim, M. Monsur Ali.

Administration Unit: Md. Moqsud Maleque (Deputy Director) Md. Abu Musa, Abedul Moula, Amena Begum, Anil Chandra Mandal, Fazila Begum, Fatema Begum, Laila Begum, Laily Begum, Md. Haider Ali, Khokon Gomez, Mahmuda Sultana, Mariam Begum, Mintu Barua, Majeda Begum, Mahbub Alam, Mosharaf Hossain, Md. Moshin Ali, Nur E. Alam, Nurun Nahar Rekha, Rizwanul Haq, Sabina Yeasmin, Shirin Aktar, Tahsina Ahmed, Zahera Begum, Md. Sekander Ali, Angoli Baroi, Mst. Nilufa, Md. Helal Uddin Shohan, Md. Mosharaf Hossain, Md. Rakibul Hasan, Md. Farukur Rahman, Ms. Rina Khatun, Nazmul Hossain.

Accounts & Finance Unit: Ishtiak Ahmed, Md. Shahidullah (Sr. Deputy Director), Tahera Begum, Philip Arnold, Tamanna Nasrin, Shahana Akhter, Paymelia Saha, A.K.M Rezaur Rahman, Shamim Hossain.

Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit: A M Rasheduzzaman Khan (Sr. Coordinator), Fatema Mahmuda (Sr. Deputy Director), Sadia Sultana (Monitoring Organizer).

ANNEX: VI

SPONSORS OF WORKING CHILDREN: 2013

Name of Children	Name of Sponsor
Sorna, Nasrin Shorif Sonia Farzana Shanaz, Khadiza	Trade Vision
Rehena Shathi Al-Amin	Zahirul Islam
Shanta Maksuda Zakir Suborna	Patrizia
Amir Hossain Rupa Rani Ghosh Shathi Sajeda Moti	Somoy News Channel
Fahima	Dia Chakraborty
Sathi	Duncan
Suma Rani Ghosh Rubina Laboni Halim Mia Sojib Alam	Vivek Group
Bipasha Rani Ghosh Ruma Rani Ghosh Anamika Rani Ghosh	Z. Tariq Ali
Mahmuda Labone Bristi Tania Fahima, Akhi	Jahanara Mridha
Asma	Dr. Hameeda Hossain
Rubel	Zafreen Sattar
Md. Hanif	Khairul Islam
Md. Matiur Rahman	Shahed Enam
Dolly, Taniya	Emma Martingee
Sathi	Zumni
Alamtaj	Rashida Begum
Lucky Akter Nadia Akter	Dr. Sumon



ASK's vision is to create:

A society established based
on the principles of human rights,
gender equality, equity, secularism,
rule of law, social justice and democracy.