



WORLD DAY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE 2021

THE CHAMPIONS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

SUCCESS STORIES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS





This publication was prepared in honour of World Day of Social Justice 2021. It tells the stories of a few selected P4D civil society partners and how each of them has advocated for social justice and change in their communities. These incredible stories outline the challenges that these organisations faced and how, with the help of P4D, they became champions of good governance.

Platforms for Dialogue (P4D), a European Union-funded project in partnership with the Cabinet Division, is working to improve good governance and engage civil society organisations (CSOs) and citizens in government accountability mechanisms.

With our partners, Platforms for Dialogue is increasing awareness of citizen rights, promoting democratic ownership, and supporting government officials to improve accountability and responsiveness. Implemented by the British Council, the multi-year, 13-million Euro project is a unique initiative that is working directly with both citizens and CSOs as well as the government to address reforms.

At the local level, the project supports discussions on policy issues in 21 districts. At the national level, P4D supports government institutions to deliver on ambitions set out in the 7th Five Year Plan. The project focuses on social accountability tools, including the National Integrity Strategy, the Right to Information Act 2009, the Grievance Redress System, and the Citizens'



Parvin Akter with Union Parishad officials discussing social issues in their district. She has included local leaders in her campaigns to fight gender inequality in her locality

IN NATORE, CSO SHOPNO SHOMAJ UNNOYON SHONGSTHA CHANGES LIVES FOR YOUNG WOMEN

Bangladesh is ranked 4th in the world for highest child marriage rates, and nearly 4.5 million girls are married before the age of 18, according to a 2017 UNICEF study. Despite government efforts to ban marriage before the age of 18, roughly 22% of girls find themselves married before they turn 18 with a fifth being married off before turning 15. A victim of child marriage herself, Parvin Akter of Natore wanted to give girls in her community a voice to fight this social malpractice and a means to stand on their own feet. *“I was married off when I was in the 6th grade. I don’t want any other girl to have the same fate,”* said Akter in a recent conversation.

Now, her organisation, Shopno Shomaj Unnoyon Shongstha, is renowned not only in Natore, but across the country thanks to the Platforms for Dialogue (P4D) project. The European Union-funded P4D initiative, which is implemented by the British Council in partnership with the government’s Cabinet Division, has helped Parvin Akter grow her organisation to reach the greater community in Natore district.

In 1999, Parvin Akter founded Shopno Shomaj to curb violence against women and reduce child marriage, when it became a registered organisation with the government’s youth development and social service departments. *“The beginning was not so easy, and I was lucky to have a supportive husband who stood beside me in all my endeavours,”* says Akter.

Initially, Parvin Akter was running bamboo handicraft projects. Later, she began working with a tree plantation and opened a sewing school to help young women provide for themselves. Through these training opportunities, Shopno has created job opportunities for many people. *“I want people to stand on their own feet; especially girls. They don’t necessarily have to get a job somewhere, but I want to help them create their own source of income,”* says a hopeful Parvin Akter. To date, the total number of beneficiaries of Shopno exceeds 7,000.

Besides preventing child marriage, Parvin Akter also runs a free school for underprivileged children named Shopno Shidhu Bikash Kendro. *“No one has to pay a single penny. We provide them with books, backpacks and stationery.”* Shopno runs on membership fees, government funding, individual donations, and of course the hard work of volunteers.

One of P4D’s initiatives is to help local organisations collaborate with other local leaders to engage their communities in Social Action Projects (SAPs). SAPs are designed to address the most pressing issues in a community, and in partnership with P4D, Shopno is focusing on three major topics– child marriage prevention, drug control, and land rights. *“When it comes to ending child marriage”,* Akter said *“first, we have to convince the elders about how it affects young girls before we hope to succeed.”*

Parvin Akter says that the British Council has helped them have a voice among local people.



With this experience, Parvin Akter hopes to build a one-stop service centre under the name Shopno Shomaj Unnoyon Shongstha, where the people in her community can receive all social services in one place.



itation communiti
on & technology welfare
education & rural development
tation, environmental pollution
ral development
on social conscious
ay Celebration
social recreation Thanks.

MEG **PERSON**
an Songstha
her our society
No: Kishore-0847
ujadia Janata B



E-mail: meg
oc

SAP volunteers meet at Meghbarshon Samaj Kallyan Shangstha to learn about Social Accountability Tools including right to information

Ensuring Rights for All: Kishoreganj CSO Teaches Citizens How to Curb Corruption

Civil Society Organisation (CSO) Meghborshon Samaj Kallyan Shangstha has been advocating for social welfare since its inception in 2009. The youth organisation, led by Aminul Huqe Manik, has been especially active in its efforts to eradicate child labour in Karimganj, a sub district of Kishoreganj.

“One of our first projects was to eradicate child labour. We scouted every commercial operation in the union and found 200 child labourers. We enrolled all the children in the local pre-school, and we threatened their employers with legal action,” says Manik. The young CSO leader with other members of Meghborshon Samaj Kallyan Shangstha have virtually stopped child labour in Karimganj Upazila. Their vigilance has had astounding results. ***“Go visit the market. You will not see a single child working there. People know us for that.”***

The organisation has also previously worked with The Hunger Project to fight against malnutrition in Kishoreganj, and they regularly arrange free health camps for locals in partnership with doctors and philanthropists. The organisation also has a relief fund, which they use to distribute free blankets to those in need during the winter.

In addition to their work protecting children’s rights, reducing malnutrition, and supporting the underprivileged, Meghborshon Samaj Kallyan Shangstha has been enlisted as a strategic partner for the EU-funded P4D programme, which is being implemented by the British Council in partnership with the government’s Cabinet Division. As part of the CSO’s Social Action Projects (SAPs) with P4D, the youth group has conducted anti-drug campaigns in schools, held local authorities accountable for the lack of basic services, and coordinated with community clinics to ensure better healthcare.

“As a result of the SAP on government accountability, 150 households were able to talk to the Union Chairman directly and express their concerns,” says Md Abu Bahar, who led the project. He added that people were not even aware of what the responsibilities of the Union Council were. ***“The citizens were***

able to discuss the condition of the roads, pavements and water supply, and the chairman promised that these problems would be solved.”

Another SAP volunteer, Mazarul Islam, mentioned that the social action projects have helped the organisation educate many local people on policy tools that can assist them to access their rights and public services.

“While conducting the anti-drug campaign in schools, we taught hundreds of students how to file Right to Information (RTI) applications. I told them that having access to public information would help curb corruption in the community.”

Mazarul also pointed out that people were eager to change the system, but they did not know-how. Equipped with an understanding of RTI and other social accountability tools, they now have the resources to stay engaged with local leaders and decision-makers. Manik, the CSO leader, added that the P4D SAPs have helped his organisation reach more people, and as a result, community members are learning about policy instruments and using them to establish good governance.

Manik said that local youth created the organisation so that they can contribute to building a better community.



“We were just a voluntary organisation. Now both the beneficiaries and the volunteers are aware of the policy instruments because of P4D’s initiatives. This will help us all in the long run.”



Jholoi Bazar is the oldest marketplace of Magura Union in Panchagarh Sadar. New Star Club started a social action project as the corruption was slowly crossing the limit

Corruption at Markets: How one SAP brought the community together to improve accountability for all

“There was no Citizen’s Charter or price list at Jholoi Bazar – the biggest market in the locality, and this allowed various types of price irregularities,” said Social Action Project (SAP) leader, Md. Moktar Rahman, of Aima Jhulai New Star Club, a Civil Society Organization (CSO) working with P4D in Panchagarh. The vendors would charge exorbitant amounts claiming they were following government regulations and including government taxes; however, the taxes would be four or five times higher than the actual rates. Correcting this price gouging is now being addressed by the Aima Jhulai New Star Club SAP, as well as many civil society organisations working with British Council’s project, Platforms for Dialogue (P4D), a project funded by the European Union (EU) and supported by the Cabinet Division of the Government of Bangladesh.

“Jholoi Bazar is the oldest marketplace of Magura Union in Panchagarh Sadar. However, quarrels are an everyday occurrence at the bazaar due to the absence of a Citizen’s Charter or price list,” said Moklesur Rahman, President of New Star Club.

SAP leader Moktar says, *“We started this SAP as the corruption at Jholoi Bazar was slowly crossing the limit. The corruption was hurting almost all stakeholders.”*

Md. Kamruzzaman, P4D District Facilitator of Panchagarh said, *“When they started working on the project, they became really demotivated because nobody cooperated. Many of them felt that bringing clarity to trade at Jholoi Bazar would hurt them financially. However, the volunteers did not lose heart and conducted 3-4 meetings at the market premises with all the stakeholders. They were able to convince many of the buyers, sellers, and lessees that ending this corruption would benefit everyone. And so, the work began.”*

Club president Moklesur Rahman says, *“After three large group meetings, the volunteers went to Upazilla Nirbahi Officer (UNO), Shahina Shabnam, for data collection. They returned with large stacks of papers and started sorting them out.”*

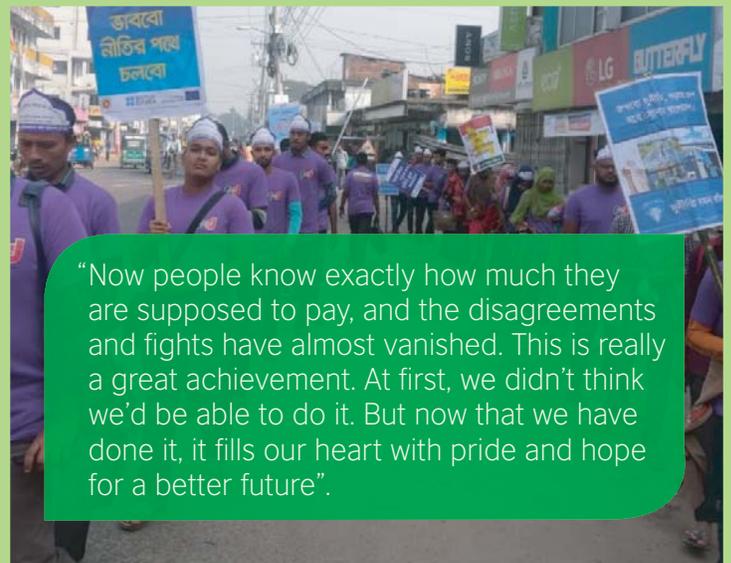
They then conducted several meetings with the UP (sub-district council), local elites, lessees and UNO. These meetings were major steps on the path to installing an official price list at Jholoi Bazaar. After all the hard work, members of New Star Club gathered all the stakeholders at the market and installed a large price list which included all the details of all kinds of goods at Jholoi Bazar.

“We handed out small leaflets to the people at the hearing too. Everyone was very happy with what we had done,” said SAP leader Moktar.

Moktar also added, *“before we installed the price list, the middlemen would charge the buyers/sellers anywhere between Tk 150-200 as a ‘tax’ for a goat or a bicycle which is four or five times the actual rate. When locals received the price list, they were surprised to learn that they only have to pay Tk 20 for a cycle and Tk 40 for a goat. This put a bright smile on everyone’s faces and people thanked us for installing the price list,”*.

DF Kamruzzaman said, *“As far as I know, this is probably the very first time that such a price list has been installed at a market. This is a great achievement for Aima Jhulai New Star Club and also for P4D.”*

SAP leader Moktar said,



“Now people know exactly how much they are supposed to pay, and the disagreements and fights have almost vanished. This is really a great achievement. At first, we didn’t think we’d be able to do it. But now that we have done it, it fills our heart with pride and hope for a better future”.