ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

APF  Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions
ASK  Ain O Salish Kendra
CBOs Community Based Organizations
CHT  Chittagong Hill Tracts
CID  Criminal Investigation Department
CSOs  Civil Society Organizations
DANIDA Danish International Development Agency
DSA  Digital Security Act
DTS  Detective Training School
GBV  Gender Based Violence
HRs  Human Rights
HRP  Human Rights Programme
HRDs  Human Rights Defenders
LEA  Law Enforcement Agency
LGIs  Local Government Institutions
LNOB  Leave No One Behind
NHRC  National Human Rights Commission
NHRI  National Human Rights Institutions
NLASO  National Legal Aid Services Organization
PIC  Programme Implementation Committee
PSC  Police Staff College
PPE  Personal Protective Equipment
RAB  Rapid Action Battalion
SDC  Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDGs Sustainable Development Goals
SIDA  Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
TVC  Television Commercial
UNDAF  United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP  United Nations Development Programme
UNGP  United Nations Guiding Principles
WSPP  Women Safety in Public Places
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1. THE HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAMME (HRP) AT A GLANCE

Development and implementation of improved social policies and programmes focusing on good governance, reduction of structural inequalities and advancement of vulnerable individuals and groups are priorities for Bangladesh. In line with this, the HRP was designed to contribute towards strengthening the human rights architecture of Bangladesh. The five-year Programme (extension approved for a further one year from 1 January 2021) aims to encourage and support human rights and justice institutions with a special focus on the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), as well as other relevant stakeholders, to approach policy development, service delivery and decision-making from a proactive human rights perspective. HRP has a particular focus on working with vulnerable and marginalized groups, including women and girls, children, and young people, ethnic and excluded minorities, people with disabilities, Dalit, and other minorities.

The Programme is built around five outputs:

✔ Strengthened capacity of the NHRC to deliver on its mandate
✔ Enhanced capacity of civil society and community-based organizations to engage in human rights advocacy and awareness raising
✔ Enhanced capacity of law enforcement agencies, in particular police, on human rights issues
✔ Strengthened capacity of national stakeholders to better protect and promote women’s rights
✔ Strengthened capacity of national stakeholders to better protect and promote the rights of ethnic minorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country:</th>
<th>Bangladesh</th>
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<tr>
<td>Project Title:</td>
<td>Human Rights Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implementing Agency:</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development Partners:</td>
<td>DANIDA (until 2017), SIDA, SDC</td>
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<td>Project Duration:</td>
<td>April 2016 – December 2020 January -December 2021 (Extension)</td>
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<td>Project Budget:</td>
<td>USD 10,597,570.00</td>
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<td>UNDP portfolio:</td>
<td>Democratic Governance</td>
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<td>UNDAF/CPD Outcome</td>
<td>UNDAF Outcome 1.2: Justice and human rights institutions are strengthened to better serve and protect the rights of all citizens, including women and vulnerable groups.</td>
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<td>Strategic Plan Outcome</td>
<td>Applicable Output(s) from the UNDP Strategic Plan (2018-2021): Output 2.2.3 (Governance) Capacities, functions, and financing of rule of law and NHRIs and systems strengthened to expand access to justice and combat discrimination, with a focus on women and other marginalized groups and Output 2.6.1 (Gender) Capacities strengthened to raise awareness on and undertake legal, policy and institutional reforms to fight structural barriers to women’s empowerment</td>
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## 2. AT A GLANCE: 2020 IN BANGLADESH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>2,827,000</strong></th>
<th><strong>197 of 268</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>individuals increase of awareness of women’s rights and prevention of GBV</td>
<td>youths (i.e., 73.5%) from marginalized communities who were trained raised awareness of</td>
<td>CSO coalitions under the Challenge Fund helped enhance human rights awareness of</td>
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<td><strong>950</strong></td>
<td><strong>8,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>340,983</strong></td>
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<td>Sets PPE provided Human Rights Defenders and journalists in 10 priority districts.</td>
<td>community people on Human Rights and COVID-19 preventive measures at grassroots</td>
<td>of the most vulnerable and marginalized people</td>
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<td><strong>7,850</strong></td>
<td><strong>182</strong></td>
<td>The solidarity food support enabled the</td>
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<td>face masks distributed among the CSOs, HRDs, Journalist and youth leaders</td>
<td>(M=173, F=9) frontline police officials which strengthened their conceptual understanding and enhanced their sensitization to fundamental human rights and gender related concerns.</td>
<td><strong>21,267</strong></td>
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<td><strong>1,026</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,377</strong></td>
<td>households to meet their survival needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judges, lawyers, courts officials were trained on the MyCourt system</td>
<td><strong>10,523</strong></td>
<td><strong>15,685</strong></td>
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<td><strong>42,894</strong></td>
<td>Students were received Human Rights and COVID-19 information.</td>
<td>calls were received and addressed with legal aid and information.</td>
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<td>bail applications received</td>
<td>persons, released on bail</td>
<td><strong>21,267</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>10,523</strong></td>
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<td>households to meet their survival needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.</td>
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3. INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 was not at all a happy one, not just for Bangladesh but for the whole world. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic posed a serious threat to the lives and livelihoods of the public, accelerating vulnerabilities, exposing pre-existing social and economic inequalities, and narrowing social services. A WHO report revealed that as of 27 December 2020, there were over 79.2 million cases and over 1.7 million deaths reported since the beginning of the pandemic globally.¹ On the other hand, from 8 March to 27 December 2020, there were 509,148 confirmed cases in Bangladesh while 7,452 people died related to COVID-19.² While countries around the world work to contain and limit the spread of COVID-19, certain human rights concerns and violations have emerged. Protecting human rights amid this unprecedented circumstance was a serious challenge for a country like Bangladesh and included threats to freedoms and rights such as freedom of movement, freedom of expression, access to justice, the right to information, the rights to food, health, education, work, the rights of migrants’ workers, and above all, the right to life in the form of domestic violence.

Bangladesh has been experiencing economic success continuously in recent years. There has been steady progress in terms of economic growth, poverty reduction, literacy rates, life expectancy and per capita food production. Nevertheless, 30 percent of the country’s population still live below the national poverty line, which poses a great challenge.³ Moreover, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic will continue to exacerbate challenges as will a reduction in exports, reduced private investment, and increasing unemployment. Long-term planning is, therefore, necessary to overcome the challenges including the threats of COVID-19. As noted by Human Rights Watch, while there were some positive aspects to human rights compliance, arbitrary arrests of government critics, media censorship, misuse of the abusive Digital Security Act and impunity of the state forces, enforced disappearance and extrajudicial killings were common phenomena in 2020⁴. Freedom of expression was a major human rights concern in the country in 2020 while the Digital Security Act (was subject to frequent censure by the international community as well as by journalists and civil society in Bangladesh due to its misuse in curtailing freedom of speech. The situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic was, to an extent, used as a pretext to limit freedom of speech and freedom of the media, while critics faced different types of retribution for criticizing the government’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Healthcare workers who commented on the inadequacy of PPEs or resources were also victimized. The activities of government officials in social media were regulated and online media portals were suffocated, and arbitrary arrest of critics who spoke out publicly against the government’s approach or were critical of the ruling party, occurred. Enforced disappearance and extrajudicial killings continued with impunity,

⁴ World Report 2020 Book with cover (hrw.org)
despite concerns raised by different rights-based organizations.\textsuperscript{5} The following chart indicates the situation of human rights violations in 2020 in Bangladesh.

\textbf{GROSS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN 2020}

\begin{itemize}
  \item People Charged under DSA
  \item Journalists assaulted and harassed by state and non-state actors
  \item Journalists killed
  \item People died in Extra Judicial Killings
  \item People died in custody after arrest
  \item People died from torture before arrest
  \item People Shot dead by LEAs
  \item People died in prison due to sickness and other reasons
  \item Idols, Puja decors and temples of minorities destroyed
\end{itemize}

Source: ASK Report, 2020\textsuperscript{6}

There were some positive aspects of human rights compliance too. This included the conviction by a court of three policemen for custodial death under the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act, 2013. This has paved the way for investigation and accountability measures for acts of torture by the security forces. The Government also released and granted bail to 23,000 individuals convicted of minor crimes and held in pretrial detention, so as to reduce crowding and prevent the spread of COVID-19 in prison. Also, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly 500 children were granted bail from Juvenile detention centers, while around 1,000 children remained in pretrial detention and given custodial sentenced for pretty crimes.\textsuperscript{7}

The NLASO reactivated its 24/7 hotline (dial: 16430) and worked during lockdown to register complaints and to provide necessary legal aid support including for GBV cases. From April to December 2020, a total of 15,685 calls were received and addressed (among those, 4,114 caller and service recipients were women, 11,433 men, 132 children, and six third gender people).

\textsuperscript{5}ASK Report, 2020.
\textsuperscript{7}https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/bangladesh
It should be noted that Bangladesh has been recognized as global role model for women empowerment. According to the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report 2020, Bangladesh has been the top scorer in South Asia for the last three consecutive reports and was positioned 50 out of 153 countries in that report. The Gender Inequality Index of UNDP’s Human Development Report 2020 revealed Bangladesh’s position as 133\(^8\) out of 189 countries. However, the escalation of gender-based violence was critical in 2020. It was already at an alarming level before the outbreak of COVID-19, and the pandemic only served to significantly increase the occurrence of GBV and adversely affect the lives of women and adolescent girls.

According to ASK reports, a total of 1,627 women were raped in 2020 of whom 317 suffered gang rape; 367 women were killed due to physical torture in domestic violence; 554 women were victims of domestic violence; 218 women were tortured in dowry related violence; and 201 women experienced sexual harassment and molestation.\(^9\) It may also be mentioned that in 2018, there were 732 rape cases reported in Bangladesh while cases almost doubled to 1,413 in 2019. The data clearly shows a sharp rise despite having specific legislation to combat GBV in Bangladesh. The COVID-19 Bangladesh Rapid Gender Analysis (RGA) report by UN Women reveals that 49.2% of women and girls felt that safety and security was an issue due to the lockdown and loss of livelihoods and 33% of women did not know where to call for help if they experienced violence.\(^10\)

The following chart demonstrates the human rights situation of women and children in 2020.

Source: ASK Report, 2020

4. KEY RESULTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

In 2020, HRP made all out efforts to achieve its desired results. HRP contributed to strengthening the capacity of national institutions and key national stakeholders including the NHRC, CSOs, CSO Coalitions, Academic Institutions, Law Enforcement Agencies (Police), HRDs, youth leaders, Bangladesh Betar and Community Radios in promoting and protecting human rights. HRP also made a significant contribution in advancing people’s access to justice and legal aid services amid the COVID-19 pandemic situation in partnership with the EI IP Project and a2i Programme of UNDP. The extended partnership resulted in the establishment of a virtual court platform named “MyCourt” that increased the number of virtual court hearings and assured people’s access to justice delivery systems in times of restricted movement due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The key results achieved in 2020 are highlighted below:

4.1 NHRC’s capacity to interact, advocate and monitor human rights situation increased

- A three-day high-level virtual dialogue organized jointly by HRP and Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions APF resulted in the newly appointed Commissioners being acquainted with human rights discussions in an international human rights forum.
- A monitoring tool developed with the support from HRP enabled NHRC to better monitor the human rights situation during the COVID-19 pandemic and maintain a database on human rights violations.
- 20 weekly bulletins were generated highlighting the trends on human rights violations which were widely circulated every week. This enabled NHRC to analyze the human rights situation and to take appropriate and timely steps to address them.
- HRP supported NHRC in developing a tool and an action plan to better monitor the achievement of SDGs from a human rights lens translating all the 17 SDG goals into meaningful actions enabling NHRC to proactively monitor the human rights situation leading to effective Suo-moto or complaint handling of human rights violations.
- With the support of HRP, NHRC began development of the *Integrated Office Management Systems* at the end of 2020. The digitalized complaint handling system will enable NHRC to handle human rights violations complaints more efficiently, effectively, and smoothly resulting in improved client satisfaction; to better address human rights violations; and to improve monitoring of human rights in combination with SDG monitoring tools.

4.2 Youths and HRDs capacity development to promote human rights

- A total of 197 of 268 youths (i.e. 73.5%) from marginalized communities who were trained raised awareness of 8,000 community people on human rights and COVID-19 preventive measures at grassroots levels and enabled approximately 700 ethnic and excluded minority people to get access to LGI services.
- A rights-based education program developed by HRP’s trained youth leaders in ethnic/local language was broadcasted by national radio and community radios which resulted in increased awareness of approximately 1.7 million listeners.
- UNDP’s training strengthened the capacity of 39 (Female-20) Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) on monitoring and reporting which resulted in developing seven reports on human rights violations in seven districts during the year. HRDs further submitted 45 reports during the COVID-19 pandemic which contributed to producing 20 weekly human rights violation factsheets, jointly by NHRC and HRP. Based on the factsheets, NHRC provided 20 recommendation letters to different government authorities, seeking human rights-based COVID-19 responses to address relevant issues.
4.3 Enhance capacity through partnership with LEAs in particular the Police

- HRP contributed to building the capacity of Law Enforcement Agency (LEA), in particular, the Detective Training School DTS under Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Bangladesh Police by providing training to a total of 182 (M=173, F=9) frontline police officials. This strengthened their conceptual understanding and enhanced their sensitization to fundamental human rights and gender related concerns. 96% of 182 police officials who participated in UNDP’s trainings now have a better understanding of human rights, including gender-based violence. As a result of improved knowledge of the human rights-based approach, the trained police officials have been enthusiastically joining in rights dialogues organized by district level CSO coalition to contribute necessary support as and when required.

- HRP partnership with the Police Staff College PSC facilitated the commissioning of three research projects and in holding thematic seminars engaging mid and senior-level police officials in human rights discussions. These resulted in a greater understanding of human rights initiatives, an exploration of practical human rights compliant solutions in police engagement and sharing of best practices.

4.4 Brave Men campaign changed the perceptions and attitudes of Adolescents

- Perceptions and attitudes of 3,125 students aged between 11 and 15 years, and 50 teachers in 50 schools across three districts (Gaibandha, Sirajganj, Cox’s Bazar Districts) substantially changed as a result of interactive and empathy sessions on women and girls’ rights, including prevention of violence against women and girls under Brave Men campaign of HRP. The understanding of 82.5% of students on human rights and women’s rights increased compared to a baseline of 48.8%. The campaign resulted in transformation from toxic to positive masculinity among 92.8% of adolescent boys compared to a baseline of 41.1%. In addition, mass awareness campaigns conducted in schools for students aged 10 to 18 years reached 10,182 students in HRP working areas. As a result of this campaign project, an online course on human rights was developed for adolescent school students and submitted to NHRC for rollout across the country.

4.5 Increased awareness on women rights and gender equality

- HRP contributed to increasing people’s understanding and knowledge on gender-based violence, women and girls’ rights, child marriage and enhanced the gender mainstreaming approach to ensure a gender perspective in every initiative. Use of virtual platforms such as virtual events, webinars, TV Talk shows, newspaper publication, TVC broadcasting on women’s rights and prevention of GBV resulted in increase of awareness of 2,827,000 individuals. Continuing reports of GBV in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic led to the NHRC taking a milestone decision to conduct a National Inquiry on Violence against women with a focus on rape. As part of that initiative, the NHRC formed a National Inquiry Committee which will engage relevant CSOs, academics and subject matter experts.

- Capacity development training to youth groups on gender, diversity and GBV resulted in the development and launch of a youth-led campaign on Women Safety in Public Places (WSPP).
Ten youth organizations of Young Bangla Platform and youth from Jubo Bangla online network began implementing the campaign in 10 areas in tandem with a nationwide online campaign.

4.6 Challenge Fund enabled CSOs to address thematic issues at grassroots level

- Together with capacity development, low-value grants provided to 14 CSO coalitions (i.e., 14 lead CSOs and 52 CBOs as coalition members) under the Challenge Fund helped enhance human rights awareness of 340,983 of the most vulnerable and marginalized people (M: 203,249, F: 136,055 and TG: 1,679) in 11 districts. HRP’s partnership with 14 CSOs helped to address specific human rights problems and challenges through rights-based actions and advocacy initiatives at the grassroots level. The Challenge Fund explored space for grassroots CSOs and CBOs to connect with national and local human rights platforms and to convene interactive dialogues that contributed to developing a strong foundation for advancing grassroots community voices.

4.7 HRP also responded to the emergency crisis arising from the Covid-19 pandemic

- A total of 21,267 households (i.e., 1,852 persons with disabilities, 1,000 transgender, 7,493 ethnic minorities, 5,400 Dalits, 5,522 most vulnerable Char land households) located in 38 Upazilas of 13 selected districts received solidarity food support. All households belonged to the LNOB category of the population with a majority of those benefitting from the solidarity food packages being female. The solidarity food support helped 21,267 households to meet their survival needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 22 CSOs and 29 youth leaders were actively engaged in the selection of the most vulnerable households and distribution of food packages in collaboration with local administration in the selected areas.

- HRP provided PPE sets to 950 Human Rights Defenders and journalists in 10 priority districts of Bangladesh. A total of 7,850 face masks were distributed among the CSOs, HRDs, Journalist and youth leaders, who were engaged with actively transforming their leadership role at grassroots level.

- HRP supported the NHRC to develop a guideline for LEAs emphasizing the human rights protection responsibilities of LEA officials during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic in conformity with international human rights obligations. The guideline also emphasized the need to strictly follow a professional code of conduct and human rights standards while discharging their duties. The guidelines provided for adhering to rules and laws relevant to proportionate use of force during crowd management and maintaining public order to contain the COVID-19 outbreak.

- HRP supported NHRC’s advocacy initiatives with the Ministry of Home Affairs urging the release of prisoners given custodial sentences for petty and bailable crimes, persons with disabilities, the elderly and those who were about to complete their term of imprisonment.

- HRP supported the Thematic Committees of NHRC including, a. Committee on Violence against Women and Children, b. Committee on Migrant Workers Rights & Anti-trafficking, and c. Committee on Economic, Social, Cultural, Civil and Political Rights. HRP also facilitated virtual
Committee meetings to assist their work. As a result of deliberations and findings on relevant issues brought before the Committees, more than 20 letters of recommendations were sent by the NHRC to the government recommending necessary actions to uphold human rights standards.

- Inter-project collaboration within UNDP Bangladesh spearheaded the development and launching of a virtual court platform to continue judicial service delivery to citizens across the country during the nationwide lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the support from HRP, a total of 275 lower Courts were included within the MyCourt system from across the country and in subordinate courts and high courts which allowed for online submission of applications and virtual hearings. From 11 May to 10 August 2020, a total of 1,026 Judges, lawyers, courts officials were trained on the MyCourt system, a total of 42,894 bail applications were received, 14,911 virtual hearing were held, and 10,523 persons, including women inmates, were released on bail, setting a record in the history of Bangladesh, and most importantly reducing the prison population by 11.95% in just in three months, thus reducing the risks of COVID-19 outbreaks in already overcrowded prisons.

- With the support of HRP, the National Legal Aid Helpline (call center number 16430) under the NLASO successfully resumed its 24/7 services, including during the Public Holidays, amidst the COVID-19 outbreak, with five call agents assigned to the Hotline. From April to December 2020, a total of 15,685 calls were received and addressed with legal aid and information. Among those callers and service recipients, 4,114 were women, 11,433 men, 132 children, and six from third gender.

4.8 HRP supported the work of the UNDP Regional Project on Business and Human Rights

- With the support of HRP, the UNDP regional Business and Human Rights in Asia Project (B+HR Asia) has been adopting activities and programmes in Bangladesh to raise awareness on the formulation and implementation of a National Action Plan (NAP) and to incorporate United Nations Guiding Principles UNGP in the national regulatory framework. The COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown significantly affected the implementation of the B+HR Asia work plan for Bangladesh in 2020. However, the objective of awareness-raising on B&HR and UNGPs has been initiated through research activities within UNDP’s Low-Value Grant (LVG). These activities have also been affected to some extent by the pandemic, for which the project period had to be extended beyond 2020.

- HRP, in support of UN Women and Unilever, completed a needs assessment entitled ‘Situation Analysis of Human Rights and Gender Issue in Tea Sector: A Qualitative Study on Lived Experience of Tea Leaf Pluckers in Bangladesh’. The key objective of the research was to develop a detailed understanding of human rights and gender concerns, and to assess the living and working conditions of tea plantation workers with a special focus on women. The report identified priority actions to maximize the industry’s contribution to sustainable development and to encourage compliance with international ethical sourcing standards.

- Among the three other research activities, the research conducted by the Awaz Foundation focused on strengthening grievance mechanisms and collective bargaining skills at the factory
level. The second study included development of a Baseline Assessment Report for initiating NAP process in Bangladesh. Under the third activity, B+HR Asia conducted a survey to understand how garment factories and workers have been impacted during the pandemic along with a qualitative study to comprehend how international apparel brands have reacted to the pandemic. These researches conducted in 2020 will significantly contribute to advocacy and capacity building work of the Country Office.

- The Country Office prepared materials for future advocacy including translation and printing of UNGPs during the year under review. The Casebook: Gender dimensions of Business and Human Rights is relevant in Bangladesh as it represents a gender lens to the UNGPs and draws on real-life examples of good case practices led by companies. The Needs Assessment of NHRIs on Business and Human Rights includes the assessment of 12 NHRIs including the NHRC of Bangladesh is expected to contribute by creating tailor-made development plans in the future.

5. BUDGET PLANNING

Budget planning is crucial to HRP. This was carried out according to relevant guidelines and with the benefit of lessons learned. Over the course of the HRP, budgets have progressively been able to:

- Reduce tendencies to over or under budget
- Take contingencies into account when preparing budgets
- Pay heed to local context and emergency needs/responses
- Foresee factors during the organizing of events which may have a budget constraint or implication
- Take “value for money” into account

Involvement of key stakeholders in planning and implementing Programme activities was helpful in budget planning. There were several consultations with project beneficiaries as well as with stakeholders to identify key issues, formulate appropriate action plans, and crystalize budget planning so that realistic budget allocations could be ensured. Further, the annual budget was reviewed and finalized by the Project Advisory Board (PAB) on 9th July 2020.

6. CONFLICT ANALYSIS

6.1. Country Context

Historically in Bangladesh, political violence centering on elections is a phenomenon in which opposing political parties engage in violent clashes. During such violence, simmering social, ethnic, and religious tensions tend to surface. Over the past decade, violence against minorities, women, labour rights and
human rights activists has increased, as has religious extremism, and hate speech, particularly through online social media platforms. With a majority population of Bengali Muslims, there is a harmonious socio-cultural relationship across the history and a strong notion of nationalism. Whereas Bangladeshis are a largely homogenous people where ethnic conflict has not been a common feature, religion can play a role in politics and the formation of national identity as “the foundation myth of the nation”. In these circumstances, homogeneity can break down in which one group resorts to religion and another group resorts to ethnicity and language in forming competing nationalist ideologies. Such factions grew since independence and, since 2010, became increasingly polarized. Religion has become a dominant phenomenon in Bangladesh, manifested by different types of religion-based language and dress codes. While the 1972 constitution was based on secularism and a Bengali nationalist identity, following the 1977 coup, Bangladeshi nationalism based on religion was introduced. Moreover, in 1988, Islam was declared a state religion which excluded more than 12% of the Hindu minority from the notion of a “Nation-State”. Despite restoration of secularism, in 2011 through constitutional amendment, Islam remained as the state religion, and militant extremism continued to increase.

Bangladesh has an estimated population of 166.30 million (2021) and is a country of cultural and ethnic diversity with over 54 indigenous peoples speaking at least 35 languages, along with the majority Bengali population. 98% of the population are ethnic Bengalis while 2% are Biharis and ethnic minorities; and whereas 89.1% of the population in Bangladesh are Muslims, 10% are Hindus and 0.9% are Buddhist or Christian. As per the 2011 Census, approximately 1.8% of the population belongs to indigenous peoples amounting to 1.6 million overall, though the actual population is claimed to be some 5 million. A majority of the indigenous peoples live in the plains of the north and southeast, as well as in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. By virtue of the 15th amendment of the Constitution, adopted in 2011, ethnic minorities were recognized highlighting the cultural aspects of their identity.

Religious minorities in Bangladesh have declined from 23.1% in 1971 to 9.6% today in which the Hindu population stands at 8.5%, Buddhist at 0.6% and Christians at 0.3%. Since 1947, the Hindu community in Bangladesh has been persecuted, particularly during the liberation war in 1971. The Hindu population declined markedly from 22% in 1951 to 8.5% in 2011, with many leaving to go to India. The current parliament has 14 Hindu members (or 4% of seats) compared to six in 1991, five in 1996, three in 2001 and ten in 2008. However, despite increasing numbers of representatives from religious minorities, the overall human rights situation for Hindu and Buddhist communities in 2020 remained largely unchanged. In 2020, a total 67 idols, Puja decor and Hindu and Buddhist temples were attacked and set on fire in different places around the country. In addition, 11 Hindu community houses and three business centers were attacked with 71 Hindus and Buddhists being injured during those incidents.

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19 https://minorityrights.org/country/bangladesh/
20 https://minorityrights.org/minorities/hindus/
21 https://minorityrights.org/minorities/hindus/
Similar to the situation of religious minorities, the human rights situation of indigenous peoples or ethnic minorities is concerning. On 14 December 2020, the banana garden of a Garo indigenous woman was destroyed by the Forest Department in Modhupur, Tangail. The banana garden was her only source of livelihood and the land had been used by her family for generations. Similarly, a 15-year-old indigenous girl was abducted, converted, and forcefully married before she was killed in 2020. The indigenous peoples of the CHT region have been facing different types of human rights violations for a long time with their situation being depicted as an issue of law and order rather than in political terms.

The CHT Accord of 1997 was a constructive agreement between indigenous peoples and the Government of Bangladesh intended to decentralize political power along with a special administrative system in the region. But until now, the major issues of the Accord, including making the CHT Land Commission functional; orchestrating a devolution of power and functions to the CHT’s institutions; preserving tribal area characteristics of the CHT region; demilitarization; and, rehabilitation of internally displaced people, all remain unsettled.

6.2. Some Underlying problems and Issue identified by HRP

Through different consultations with ethnic minority and religious leaders, HRP has defined several underlying problems that are contributing to ongoing tension, stress, and conflicts in society. Factors which lead to tension and conflict include: land grabbing by vested interest groups; misinterpretation of religion, religious norms and values of other religions; increase in mistrust among ethnic and religious minorities towards state authority and the majority population; intolerance of different opinions, values and beliefs; increase in the sense of insecurity; intentional rumour-mongering and hate speech using social media, (e.g. Facebook postings); social fragmentation and inter-religious conflicts due to expansion of religious fundamentalism; expansion of drug use and the drug trade; an increase in family disputes (related to dowry); social instability and lack of a visible application of enforcement of law. In 2020, there was no substantial change observed in existing tensions, stress, and conflict within and among minorities in Bangladesh; however, it is important to note that land and forestry, which are the main sources of life and livelihoods for a large section of ethnic, indigenous and religious minorities in Bangladesh continue to be taken over by powerful actors.

6.3. Actors (Conflict Analysis) Mapping:

HRP has been interacting with diverse institutions and actors for better promotion and protection of Human Rights in Bangladesh. The key institutions and actors are as follows:

- National institution: NHRC, LEA (police), NLASO, Bangladesh Betar, Justice sector institutions, LGIs
- National and local stakeholders/actors:
  - CSOs
  - Human Rights Defenders

- Interfaith leaders
- Journalists
- Youth leaders (from ethnic and excluded groups/communities)

The relationships between institutions and actors depend on their exercise of power dynamics and accessible services to people in the HRP priority districts. The state of this relationship between the people and authorized institutions and actors depends on flexibility, acceptance and mutual trust and understanding. The power-driven functions of national and local institutions and actors mostly create a conflict situation that often results in land grabbing, violence, and discriminatory practices in the society.

As an international organization, UNDP also has an influential role in trust building and resolution of conflicts. As a national institution, NHRC has the mandate, authority, and influence to address human rights concerns and violations and to mitigate conflicts and tension. Ethnic minorities, Dalits, religious minorities, excluded minorities, youths, CSOs and HRDs are less powerful, however, and remain marginalized as well as vulnerable in the context of conflict.

The graphic demonstrates that LEAs, the NHRC and local level political leaders have a close relationship with state agencies while the relationship between minority groups and state agencies is weak, informal, and with only intermittent links. Also, gaps exist between LEAs and minority groups and HRDs. Communal violence and land related disputes are linked with land grabbing and religious fundamentalism. Additionally, there is constant discord and disagreements between ethnic, excluded, and religious minorities and land grabbers and religious fundamentalists, whereas land grabbers are
often linked with political leaders and political parties. Although HRDs, youths, CSOs and minorities do not have power, they have close affiliations with each other as well as with the NHRC and UNDP. Lastly, violence against women is often associated with land grabbing and land disputes.

**Figure: Actors (Conflict Analysis) Mapping: The Rights of Minorities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible symbols used in conflict mapping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Circle</strong> = parties involved in the situation. The size of the circle symbolized the power of the conflict party in relation to the conflict. The name is written in the circle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arrow</strong> = predominant direction of influence or activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Straight line</strong> = close relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zig zag line</strong> = discord, conflicting relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Double line</strong> = Very good relationship, alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Crossed out line</strong> = broken relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dotted line</strong> = weak, informal or intermittent links</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Half circles or quarter circle</strong> = external parties, third parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rectangular boxes</strong> = issues, topics or things other than people and organizations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6.4. Interventions of HRP in Conflict Mitigation

HRP continued working with multiple institutions and actors in addressing the root causes of stress and conflict in Bangladeshi society, and HRP continued its interventions in support of institutional capacity building of the NHRC and LEAs. HRP also connected CSOs through a collaborative joint-working approach under the Challenge Fund to support the rights of ethnic and excluded minorities in specific areas of Bangladesh.

In 2019-2020, HRP provided small grant support to six CSOs coalitions working in Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Cox’s Bazar, Jessore, Mymensingh, and Khulna districts to raise human rights awareness and to advocate for the promotion and protection of the rights of ethnic, Dalits and excluded minorities. CSOs' work with ethnic, Dalits and other excluded minorities helped them claim their rights which also resulted in 31 (Male=20 and Female=11) ethnic and excluded minorities participating in LGI standing committees thus increasing participation in local decision making.

A partnership with national radio, Bangladesh Betar, enabled UNDP to engage ethnic minority youth leaders in ethnic language-based human rights education programming. Awareness raising through
ethnic/local language-based rights education programmes of a national radio and community radios developed by 119 youth leaders reached approximately 1.7 million people.

Also, in 2020, HRP provided capacity training to multi-ethnic/religious/social leaders involving a total of 46 participants in Sirajganj, Dinajpur, Mymensingh, Habiganj and Khulna to promote peace, tolerance, and harmony in the local communities. HRP also provided various types of support to youth leaders from ethnic and excluded minorities in terms of capacity building and awareness raising. With the continuous support of HRP, 197 of 268 youths who trained and raised awareness of 8,000 community people (from ethnic, Dalits and other excluded communities) at grassroots levels that enabled people to claim their rights and access to local services.

The following table itemizes a range of Connectors and Dividers that are present in Bangladeshi society. During the year, HRP supported and promoted Connectors while seeking to reduce (the risk of) Dividers.

Table 1: Do NO Harm Analysis: Connectors & Dividers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connectors</th>
<th>Dividers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capacity building</td>
<td>Systems &amp; Institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal &amp; Policy Reforms</td>
<td>Impunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>Corruption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>Discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion equality &amp; non-discrimination</td>
<td>Inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>Nepotism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal recognitions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion of secularism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building coordination and collaboration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common nationalist ideology (Nationalism)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decentralization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmative actions</td>
<td>Attitudes &amp; Actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive discrimination</td>
<td>Commercial Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering youths &amp; women</td>
<td>Violent Extremism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>Threats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Values &amp; Interests</td>
<td>Displacement of ethnic &amp; religious minorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marginalization of ethnic &amp; religious minorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exclusion of Minorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious Conversion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Centralization of political power and economic resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common heritage</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports &amp; National Festivals</td>
<td>Gap between state authority and minorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural events</td>
<td>Rivalry among religious, ethnic &amp; linguistic groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Anthem</td>
<td>Symbols &amp; Occasions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic values</td>
<td>Coup d’Etat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Flag</td>
<td>Authoritarian/Non-Democratic regimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monuments</td>
<td>Assassination</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. Gender analysis

Since its inception, HRP has been following a gender mainstreaming strategy. Integrating the gender dimension is fundamental in every initiative taken under all outputs. In addition, to give more emphasis to gender, the Programme has a specific output on gender equality and women empowerment. At the outcome level, out of 10 indicators, two are gender focused and amongst 25 output level indicators, four are gender focused. HRP maintains and reports sex disaggregated data. In 2020, 28% of the total budget was allocated to gender related activities. HRP ranks GEN2 (Project Promote Gender Equality as Significant Objective) under UNDP’s gender marker tool. The COVID-19 rapid response activities under HRP in 2020 had a substantial focus on GBV, and indeed HRP’s substantive efforts have been reported and recognized in the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker by UNDP and UN Women. HRP also engaged intensively in developing the Immediate Socio-Economic Response Plan (ISERP) to COVID-19 including the GBV sub-group of pillars 5 under the overall guidance of United Nations Country Team (UNCT).

In 2020, NHRC was active in responding to women’s rights and GBV concerns taking into account the impact COVID-19 pandemic, with its Women’s Rights committee taking more timely initiatives compared to any previous years. One example being the Head of Women’s Rights committee leading the groundbreaking initiative to conduct a National Inquiry on Violence Against Women with particular focus on Rape which is planned to publish a report at the end of 2021.

This year, in spite of difficulties in implementing activities on the ground due to the COVID-19 pandemic, partner CSOs adopted alternative methods of work in order to respond to women’s rights issues, particularly those which have increased during the pandemic. Such engagement has resulted in an increased level of awareness and greater outreach among beneficiaries at community level.

During the reporting period LEAs - particularly the police – took multiple measures to respond to GBV cases including setting up a new Cyber Support for Women unit. The high prevalence of GBV occurrences also motivated women police officials to reappraise their roles to accelerate and improve response mechanisms. In 2020, a core focus of HRP’s was to address gender and GBV concerns emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic. With utmost priority, HRP took appropriate measures to support all counterparts, partner CSOs, and youth to respond to gender and GBV issues including providing solidarity food packages to a number of women belonging to marginalized groups. The effort included mass awareness raising using mainstream and social media platforms to disseminate gender sensitive messages that reached 2,827,000 people in 2020.

HRP continually practices social inclusion in addition to adopting a gender mainstreaming approach to leaving no one behind. Hence, women representing marginalized groups were given due focus in HRP

26 https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/
efforts with ethnic and excluded minorities communities. To empower these marginalized women who are doubly discriminated, HRP actively engaged them in every initiative. For instance, in 2020 a total of 268 underprivileged youths joined with Jubo Bangla platform including 29 females. Similarly of the 39 newly trained HRDs, 20 were women and of 46 newly trained faith leaders, 11 were female.

8. ANTI-CORRUPTION

HRP has a robust management system in place to support implementation of its activities. It operates under the Direct Execution (DEX) modality in close consultation with the NHRC and other counterparts in executing the Programme to ensure efficiency and transparency. All policies and procedures, including UNDP financial rules and regulations as well as the internal control frameworks, are applied for the implementation of the Programme (e.g., the procurement of goods and services, recruitment of project personnel etc.).

The Advisory Board - the highest-level policy and oversight body for the Programme, co-chaired by the UNDP and the NHRC with members from relevant Ministries as well as CSOs - provides policy guidelines, reviews progress against targeted results, and ensures coordination with other national initiatives and development projects. There is also a Programme Implementation Committee (PIC) that supports high quality implementation of the Programme. The PIC focuses on ensuring provision of necessary and critical support and services from various stakeholders and development partners to ensure effective implementation of the Programme. The Programme has also engaged other partners to promote human rights in Bangladesh as and when necessary, including, NGOs/CBOs, civil society, law enforcement agencies, local government institutions, women’s networks, and ethnic minority communities. A Challenge Fund Board was created to administer funding grants supporting CSO coalitions at the grassroots, divisional and national level to foster innovative human rights initiatives. Funding is granted following and according to UNDP processes, policies, and regulations.

Being a core partner, the NHRC has strong decision-making powers while also providing guidance to the Programme. In addition, for each output, UNDP consults the relevant institution for planning, implementation, and approval purposes. Such coordinating and management systems are important measures to prevent corruption and to ensure efficiency, transparency, and successful execution of the Programme.
9. LESSONS LEARNED AND WAY FORWARD

9.1. Lessons learned

- Consultation and inclusion of multiple stakeholders, such as the NHRC, local administration, partner CSOs, youth leaders in planning, implementing, and monitoring activities particularly in COVID-19 responses promoted transparency and accountability and increased cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination.
- Inter-project collaboration generated synergy in developing the virtual court application system and overcame a lack of technological knowledge on the part of officials within the judiciary. Though inter-project collaboration served as an opportunity for innovation, at times it was difficult to maintain and manage due to differently aligned priorities.
- The challenge fund is a successful tool to bring rural CSOs to the policy table and linking them with the NHRC. Mapping of good practices of CSOs guides HRP in taking a tailor-made approach in designing activities following consistent with an HRBA.
- The partnership with Bangladesh Betar and three community radios (Radio Sarabela at Gaibandha, Radio Nalta at Satkhira and Radio Naf at Cox’s Bazar) has allowed HRP-supported project activities and messages to reach a much greater number of beneficiaries.
- Youth engagement in community-based awareness initiatives and networking has generated interest among youth groups to engage in human rights dialogues.
- Involvement of HRDs in human rights monitoring and reporting was useful in generating factsheets on human rights situation as well as in undertaking advocacy with government authorities.

9.2. Way forward

- The COVID-19 pandemic has human rights implications in the civil, economic, political, social and cultural spheres. As such, HRP will undertake inclusive and effective responses to the pandemic while future recovery will be consistent with international human rights standards addressing the key concerns. HRP will put human rights at the heart of all actions during the continuing crisis.
- The HRP will undertake interventions in 2021 to reinforce and consolidate an inclusive, rights-based and gender sensitive approach at all levels of engagement including institutional services and remedies to address the challenges and concerns arising out of the pandemic. The extension is also intended to complete planned activities as per targets set by the Programme and to reach goals successfully.
- HRP will continue its support to the NHRC to promote its work on international platforms, including UN Human Rights mechanisms.
- HRP will continue efforts and support to strengthen links, coordination, and networks between CSOs at the national and grassroots level and national stakeholders engaged in human rights sector, specifically including the NHRC, which has only four offices in Bangladesh.
- Geographical coverage under the Challenge Fund should be increased.
● Develop strategies to involve relevant actors, such as the NLASO, Supreme Court, Nari O Shishu Tribunal, in HRP engagement on Justice issues.
● HRP will continue and extend its support to Bangladesh Betar and Community Radios to maintain and increase its outreach to beneficiaries
● HRP shall focus on amplifying youth engagement in human rights awareness raising initiatives at community level and increasing human rights monitoring and reporting by HRDs at grassroots level.

10. Statement of expenditures and delivery (January 2020 to December 2020)

A certified financial report will be sent after 30 June 2021.