

Country in focus: Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a small and densely populated country of over 150 million people. It is striving to become a middle-income country through economic growth, and although there is an upward economic trend around half of the population is still living in poverty.

There are also problems with political stability, poor infrastructure, governance and insufficient power supplies. This developing country is also vulnerable to natural disasters. Although not a significant contributor in terms of emitting greenhouse gases, Bangladesh has become a 'victim' country to global climate change. Environment pollution due to growing industrialization is further worsening the situation.

The society has deeply rooted patriarchy, with male domination in every sphere of society and this has resulted in unequal power distribution among the sexes. Women are facing ruthless sexual violence and exploitation in the name of tradition and social custom. Their economic powerlessness often makes them further vulnerable and dependent on male members. Men are also subject to stereotyped expectations, including a belief of their supremacy over women.

Gender inequality is therefore one of the major obstacles to sustainable social, economical and political development in Bangladesh. The HIV epidemic is also of great concern, as are problems related to the inadequate protection and promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Bangladesh is part of Diakonia's work in the South Asia sub-region, and our work here is influenced by both the country and sub-regional contexts. The major thematic areas for Diakonia's and our partners' work in Bangladesh are: gender equality, human rights, democracy and access to social and economic resources. In Bangladesh, Diakonia and its partners consider gender inequality as one of the major problems to sustainable social, economical and political development in Bangladesh.



How we and our partners work

Soon after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, Diakonia started with a relief and rehabilitation programme in 1972. Gradually, this program changed to a rights-based approach to development. Currently, Diakonia's focus is working on partnership with national non-governmental organisations with a strategy centred on three areas: knowledge-awareness, mobilisation-organisation and action-influence through mainstreaming gender.

Diakonia provides funds to partners for implementing projects and plays an important role as a bridge builder between partners in the sub-region by organising opportunities for different organisations to share and learn from each other. Through these processes, information is also fed into the advocacy work that Diakonia conducts at the international level.

Our partners mostly work in various rural districts, with a special focus on women and young people. Rights holders in these areas are poor, marginalised and oppressed communities. The work conducted in Bangladesh also involves community leaders and actors in civil society, local government, media and law enforcement agencies.

Together with partners and rights holders, Diakonia is working to raise awareness about the unequal structures in society that uphold poverty and injustice, and what can be done to change these. We are working to support actors working for democracy so that:

- community-based and community support organisations are strengthened
- gender equality is attained
- awareness and respect for human rights is increased
- access to social and economic resources through mainstreaming gender and environmental issues is improved.

Diakonia and its partners are proud of making journeys with poor men and women to understand the intrinsic values inherent in gender equality, facing the challenges and shaping the pathways for achieving culturally sensitive gender-based development.

Case study: Improving gender equality

Our partner organisations in Bangladesh help communities to organise to raise their voices against gender-based violence and discrimination, where women are subject to economic, political and social discrimination. Increasing gender equality is achieved by involving community leaders, civil society, local government, media and law enforcement agencies. Our partner organisation, PARTNER, facilitates the formation and empowerment of community groups including Gender Development Forums (GDFs), Social Entrepreneur Groups, Women Entrepreneur Groups, Adolescent Entrepreneur Groups and Student Volunteer Groups. These groups were formed with both women and men, and now serve as watchdogs to combat violence against women and uphold people's rights to access social services.



A member of a GDF in Rajshahi discovered that a 13-year-old child named Beauty was to marry and informed other members who decided to take action. They did so by trying to persuade Beauty's father of the negative consequences of early marriage. He refused to listen so the members of the GDF informed her school teachers, but they were also unable to stop the marriage.

On the day of the wedding, the GDF arranged for the police force to intervene, and in this way, the wedding was stopped. Beauty's father gave an undertaking to the effect that he would let her reach full maturity and sought pardon from all concerned. This powerful example shows how GDF members together with school teachers and law enforcement agencies save a child from early marriage, a tool of child repression.

Country partners

Location	Partner	Year
Mymensingh and Netrokona	Social Association for Rural Advancement (SARA)	1985
Rajshahi and Naogaon	PARTNER	1995
Savar, Dhaka	Association of Development for Economic and Social Help (ADESH)	1996
Thakurgaon, Dinajpur and Panchagarh	Manab Kallyan Parishad (MKP)	1997
Chittagong	Organisation for Women's Development in Bangladesh (OWDEB)	2005
Across the country (based in Dhaka)	Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST)	2008
Across the country (based in Dhaka)	Bangladesh Resource Centre for Indigenous Knowledge (BARCIK)	2011
Bandarban	Bolipara Nari Kalyan Somity (BNKS)	2011
Chittagong	Unite Theatre for Social Action (UTSA)	2011
Nilphamari	Udayankur Seba Sangstha (USS)	2011

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About Diakonia

Diakonia is a Christian development organisation working together with local partners for a sustainable change for the most vulnerable people in the world.

We support more than 400 partner organisations in over 30 countries – in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East.

Diakonia believes in a 'strategy for change', which focuses on socially sustainable development. We believe that our partners can solve problems and identify opportunities by adopting a holistic, rights-based approach.