

“WE CAN”  
CAMPAIGN  
BANGLADESH  
Annual Report 2009



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**Published by**

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# Perspectives

The crudeness of daily violence makes the impression that it will not possible to stop violence against women by enforcing law only. Particularly when women face violence at their own family, she cannot protest due to fear of being stigmatized in the family as well as in the society. After losing her position in family women feel insecure and vulnerable in the existing system of the society. In these situation in Bangladesh to identify the behavior and attitude that lead discrimination and violence in families and make it visible to greater people is challenging at the same time taking a stand personally or collectively against this attitude is not an easy job. And to do this challenging work a South Asian campaign “WE CAN end all violence against women” has been working by the support of Oxfam GB since 2004.

The first step of WE CAN was to rectify personal attitude which support domestic violence instead of pointing out any one as perpetrator. Besides, it encourages the practice of non discriminatory and nonviolent attitude to make a visible collective stand against domestic violence. As the objective of WE CAN is to change of person's belief and attitude.

It is not the responsibilities of few people or organizations to change the established attitude in one fine morning. A popular social movement is essential to change the discriminatory attitude. In view of that we have expanded the area day by day, involve different range of people and organisation. As we mentioned before domestic violence is not a problem of an individual. We have formed WE CAN Alliance with like minded people who believe in equal rights of women. The alliances are formed at both national and district level. Every alliance is formed spontaneously from the sense of responsibility.

However, the Change makers are the main force of WE CAN, as their small initiative has made a huge change among others. The strength of WE CAN of Bangladesh is the linkage among Change maker, institutions and alliance. All the Change makers are associated with different committee, alliance and programmes. So the initiative of individual makes the big change and the big change depends on small action.

WE CAN is contributing to formulate the law against domestic violence as well as making the law popular Change makers can play a big role. In the last five years WE CAN campaign has reached at 52 districts in Bangladesh. About 60,00,00 number of people have enrolled as Change maker. I would like to express my gratitude to all the grass root organization, alliance organizations and the Change makers. Thanks also to all our well wishers who encouraged throughout the journey to resolve the challenges.

I expect our join effort will be continued till we achieve our goal of ending violence against women.



**Sultana Kamal**

Chair person

WE CAN alliance to end domestic violence

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# Introduction

## 'We Can' Campaign

Despite various women's empowerment programmes running for three decades in Bangladesh, gender relations between women and men remain largely unchanged. This is why an initiative called 'We Can' was launched in late 2004 with the aim of ending domestic violence against women. "We Can" is the concise version of **We Can End Domestic Violence against Women**.

## Background

According to research findings, in Bangladesh 60% women are violated inside their families. Against this backdrop, the 'We Can' Campaign was launched in late 2004, as a six-year campaign across six South Asian countries aiming to stop violence against women. The Campaign, running in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, aims to raise people's awareness of this issue, to help them raise a voice against it and actively contribute to stopping all forms of violence against women.

In Bangladesh, and also in neighbouring India, Nepal and Sri Lanka as well as many other developing countries, domestic violence against women is rampant but it is still mostly seen as a "domestic issue". Yet, acts of violence against

women have serious and long term negative impacts on both society and the state. In Bangladesh, various agencies, both government and non-government, local and global, have been working for three decades to elevate women's position in society through a wide range of programmes and projects designed for women's empowerment. However, the total impact of these projects and programme show that though many women are now involved in income generating activities and have found a degree of mobility and "economic freedom", and though there are basic health care, credit facilities and basic education available for a considerable percentage of women, many of them marginalized and underprivileged, the fact remains that women's position in the family has remained basically unchanged. More importantly, despite all of these improvements, violence against women and girls is on the rise.

The 'We Can' Campaign was launched to tackle this deep-rooted discrimination against women. In Bangladesh, after seeing the success and the importance of the campaign, the 'We Can' Alliance is now planning to extend the campaign for a longer period beyond the original time-line, which was September 2004 - September 2010.



## Goal of 'We Can' Campaign

The campaign is based on the belief that women are of equal value to men and violence against them is a violation of their basic human rights and thus there is a need to end all violence against women. The goal of 'We Can' is to achieve a fundamental shift in social attitudes and beliefs that support and normalise violence against women across South Asia.

## Two General Principles of the Campaign are:

Isolated attempts at challenging and changing entrenched attitudes are risky and so the broad-based campaign alliance is there to link individuals into a wider process of social change.

Community Ownership' of change: Individuals and groups within communities determine the pace of change and alternative behaviours or preventive actions for themselves. Such an approach engenders less defensiveness as well as less reaction.

## The Distinctive Approach of 'We Can'

'We Can' is different from projects or programmes run by NGOs because it allows an open platform from which different organisations, as well as individuals from the grassroots level, can address the issue. From its very inception, the campaign aimed at creating a serious shift in a people's values and attitudes; it aimed at changing the way societies see gender relations, where women have been subjected to discrimination and violence for centuries, regardless of class or social status. 'We Can' aims at creating change by working with a broad base of people and institutions. At both grassroots and institutional levels, this campaign aims at shifting society's attitude towards women and begin positioning them as people of equal value with significant social contributions to make, deserving of equal opportunities.



# We Can End Domestic Violence against Women



# Chapter 1

## Why is this Campaign necessary in Bangladesh?

### Gender Fact File - Bangladesh

(source: [www.wecanendvaw.org/gender-fact-file/bangladesh](http://www.wecanendvaw.org/gender-fact-file/bangladesh))

- According to a study (Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey, 2007) conducted by National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT) 60% women in Bangladesh face physical violence in their marital life by their husbands.
- According to another research by International Center for Diarrheal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR) June 2006, between 50 and 60 percent of women in Bangladesh experience some form of domestic violence.
- One Stop Crisis Centre, a Bangladesh-based NGO that supports women victims of violence, reveals that almost 70 percent of sexual abuse suffered by women occurs within their own homes.
- According to the WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women (2005), less than one percent of physically abused women report the matter.

### 'We Can' Campaign -

#### Counterbalancing 50 Million Missing Women

The facts related above in the Gender Fact Files paint a dark picture of gender relations in Bangladesh. One in two women in Bangladesh is victim of violence, often perpetrated by member/s of her family, according to research findings. A considerable percentage of these women (among many of whom are young girls) meet untimely deaths. This maltreatment is rampant throughout South East Asia where 50 million women are estimated to be "missing," according to Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen. This figure is based on studies of the male - female ratio in this part of the world and a determination that a considerable percentage (6% - 11%) of women are missing from the total population. These untimely deaths are due to malnourishment, lack of health care (including pre-natal and post natal health care as well as unsafe abortions), physical and sexual abuse and acid killing. In Bangladesh, dowry related violence

is most common and these mostly occur inside the family. These crimes against women and girls are widely seen as domestic issues, regarded by society - both women and men - as "private" matters. Sporadic attempts have been made by the state and institutions to stop these crimes against half of the population, but the fact remains that violence against women has only gone up with each new decade.



## ‘Individual Change Makers: the Centre of the “We Can” Campaign’

‘Laws, programmes and policies can be easily undermined if they are not accepted and supported by the community. In societies where class, caste, and religious dictates overrule other laws, women’s rights are lost in the larger goal of community rights. The key to change, then, is to influence a shift in popular opinion.’ (Campaign Briefing Paper)

Based on this analysis, ‘We Can’ is in the process of working towards encouraging individuals to understand the issue, violence against women, and then enable them to work as the main catalysts to create a violence-free society for women, which would benefit not only the women but entire families and societies. Each individual who is brought into the network contributes to this change according to his/her capacity, the same way each institution integrates the campaign goal according to its own capacity. It is not a rigidly structured, top down process where the individual or institution is expected to fulfil a work-plan. The philosophy behind this approach is that people will want to change themselves and their own environment once the horrific reality of violence against women is exposed to them, and the change that they bring will be sustainable once this process of change is owned by the people and institutions of a society.

## ‘We Can’ aims to Treat a Sick Society and make it Healthy

That is why ‘We Can’ aims to not only reduce the instances of the crimes against women in Bangladesh, it aims to change the mind-set of the ordinary people who perpetrate and/or accept such atrocities as part of their daily life. Ultimately, ‘We Can’ aims to place women side by side with their male partners in society, because a society free of violence is possible only when an equal partnership exists between husband and wife.

The objective of this Campaign is to “treat” the families suffering from any of the diseases and turn them into “healthy” families, as well as treat societies that perpetrate and/or accept abusive behaviours towards women and girls. To achieve these objectives ‘We Can’ is designed to be an open platform owned by both individuals and institutions who will believe in the statement that Change is Possible and will carry forward the pledge to end all violence against women.







## The Journey of the ‘We Can’ Campaign in Bangladesh

Changing the mind-set of a people is a complicated process which happens over a long period with penetration at different levels. The ‘WE CAN’ Campaign was designed to work in four phases, covering the following areas of work:

**Phase One:** Raising Awareness (2004 onwards)

**Phase Two:** Building Networks (2006 onwards)

**Phase Three:** Integrating Action (2006 onwards)

**Phase Four:** Consolidating Efforts (yet to start)

However, as the Campaign began operation, the linear journey became a more organic process where the phases often overlapped. Although since the beginning of 2006 the Campaign has launched Phase II and III, elements of the other phase are still taking place simultaneously. This is strength rather than a weakness, keeping the campaign flexible and capable of tackling unforeseeable challenges.



# Chapter 2

## Campaign Strategy

### Alliance Forming

'We Can' Campaign's particular strength lies in the fact that it is not owned by one organisation, rather it is designed as an alliance-led campaign. Initially, however, only partner NGOs of Oxfam formed the alliance. The Campaign started with like minded people, who believe that domestic violence is a violation of human rights. The idea behind making it an alliance-led campaign was to involve a diverse range of individuals, from a much wider spectrum, and to give them the ownership to ensure sustainability beyond the six-year time-span of the campaign. Oxfam initiated the campaign, but since 2007 it has been the Alliance that is leading it, and all major decisions are taken by the Alliance. NGOs, the Civil Society, Lawyers associations, Teachers, Journalists, Writers and prominent individuals who are progressive and pro-woman form the Alliance at both the National Level as well as the District Levels.

### Alliance working at Two Levels:

**National Level Alliance:** This National Alliance, working at the central level, consists of a core group that is supported by the 'We Can' secretariat. It plays the most important role of providing with strategic directions to 'We Can', co-ordinate with the District Level Alliance and ensure sustenance of the campaign.

**District Level Alliance:** In 38 districts of Bangladesh the campaign's district level alliance is at work, as of end 2009. The main responsibility of the Alliance is to provide with guidance to Change Makers at the district level or in their regions and enabling them to carry forward the campaign at the grassroots level. Also, their steady input and guidance ensure sustainability of the campaign, and they provide Change Makers with strategic directions and co-ordinate with the National Level Alliance on a regular basis.

In 2009, the National Alliance focused on strengthening the District Alliances so that they have better coverage of activities at the district level and can enable district alliances to share their views, limitations and challenges with the National Alliance to help carry forward its activities and make better strategies for future according to the realities.

### Involvement of Media

Alongside the strong support from Alliance, 'We Can' is maintaining a steady liaisons with the media, because, 'We Can' strongly believes, media plays a major role in changing perspectives of the mass with the way it portrays the power relation between men and women. Here media, both print and electronic, is not only helping the campaign with publicity but is becoming a gender-sensitive partner for the campaign that can help achieve the goal of the campaign by highlighting





issues of domestic violence and sensitizing the public about it. Toward this end, 'We Can' is working at all levels, i.e. 'We Can' is working with feature writers, reporters, editors and producers, so that all of them place 'domestic violence' high in their agenda. "*Amedar Golpo*", a TV serial that features 13 drama-based talk-show was telecasted on the national channel, Bangladesh Television (BTV) where women's subordinate position in family and discrimination against women were highlighted followed by analysis by discussants.

### Communication Materials for Change Makers:

'We Can' Communication Strategy clearly indicates that change needs to happen at the level of the individual and at the level of the community, so campaign communications are directed at both. Most of the Case Studies, in the next section, show how simple illustrated

materials can successfully "educate" individuals and groups and, in many cases, help stop violence against women.

The campaign organisers believe that changing beliefs and practice is a long process and needs repeated engagement, through events, discussions, materials and actions, at both individual and community level.

The campaign communication strategy thus recognises that individuals and communities will be willing to change if they feel that -

- ▶ Change is possible
- ▶ Change is positive

The communication strategy that 'We Can' adheres to is rights-based, and it recognising that:

- ▶ Domestic violence affects everyone- women, men and children.
- ▶ Women and men are equally entitled to dignity, respect, freedom and safety.

- ▶ Society needs to recognise violence against women as a violation of women's basic rights.

All the booklets and posters repeat these messages, in very simple & effective forms.

In 2009, the campaign has brought out "1000 Events Booklet", two posters, one sticker, yearly desk calendar and two leaflets to enable Change Makers to increase their conceptual understanding and motivate their stance against domestic violence.





# Chapter 3

## Change Makers

CASE  
STUDY

### Kamrun

an exemplary Change Maker at the grassroots level

The 'We Can' campaign works with individuals at grassroots levels. Once these individuals, the Change Makers, internalize the basic idea of the campaign, they

- ▶ First, change themselves
- ▶ Then, change their immediate environment/ their families
- ▶ And lastly, bring in change in their society to make it a violence free society

#### Campaign's Central Strategy:

"The 'We Can' campaign seeks to trigger a person-to-person chain-reaction of change in attitudes and behaviour, on a scale sufficient to generate a mass social movement to end violence against women.

People change when they recognise something as their own problem, and when they feel that another way of living is possible and that they themselves are capable of taking it... Someone who has been through the same reflection and is making his/her own change can offer the best support and example along the path." And here comes the Change Makers.

The central idea here is that power resides, not just at the top, but at the grassroots, in people themselves, and that change at this level is the most powerful.

(Campaign's Strategy Paper)

A victim of dowry-related violence in a patriarchal society

survives,  
finds freedom &  
an identity in society as  
a leader who help other women  
change their lives.

A poor farmer's daughter, Kamrun was married off at 16.

Her father failed to give her husband the dowry he had promised...

And then began the inhuman torture. When the torture got too much for her to bear and she tried to run away back to her father's family, they not only refused to give her shelter but beat her up and sent her unconscious body on a riskshaw van to her in-laws house, where they said she "belonged," dead or alive. And the dark phase of her life continued for months...

But, Kamrun was able to survive.

She managed to get a divorce with the help of her brother & mother...

The three of them had to run away to the nearest town to get legal aid, and had to stay under cover, for months under dire circumstances...

And then, her journey into a better life began in 2005 when a partner NGO of 'We Can' campaign approached Kamrun.

Today, Kamrun is the most successful Change Maker in her community because she had gone through a most distressful experience of violence against women, herself, and fought her way out of it.

Today, Kamrun is seen as a leader in her community - showing other women how to find a life free of abuse and domestic violence. (see Annex for elaborate version of this Case Study)

The Case Studies, in Annex 1, will show the wide variety of men and women, boys and girls, who have become Change Makers. It will also show how they are bringing in small to major changes in one or a number of areas around them. Each change, no matter how big or small, is significant for this movement; each one contributes to the larger picture of ending domestic violence in Bangladesh.

## The Change Makers' Pledge

- Not to tolerate or perpetuate violence against women under any circumstances
- To motivate at least 10 people to help prevent and end gender discrimination and violence against women

### Also, Change Makers will:

- Realise that violence against women is a serious social issue, not just a personal matter.
- Believe that violence against women is not acceptable
- Believe that a change in the current attitudes and practices is both essential and possible
- Recognise that men and women's roles in society vary from culture to culture but believe that these roles can and must change with time
- Actively try to influence others to change their attitudes towards the issue
- Play a crucial role in ending discrimination and violence against women



## The Plan: One Million Change Makers in Bangladesh, by 2011

From the very beginning, the 'We Can' campaign has been working with individuals, who are the main change agents. The Case Studies in Annex 1 will show how the campaign is being carried forward by Change Makers at grass-roots levels, and how their direct and indirect actions, whether big or small, are highly valuable to the campaign to stop violence against women in their family and in their surroundings. It is the individuals and their networks, supported by institutions and policy makers that will ultimately create pressure on society and on government to bring in a total shift in gender relations.

The aim of the campaign in Bangladesh is to have one million Change Makers by 2011. Ultimately, 'We Can' aims to create 5 million Change Makers in the 6 countries of South Asia. Each Change Maker will transmit his/her knowledge of violence against women to at least 10 more people and help them change their lives and their surroundings by the end of 2011 was the initial plan of the 'We Can' campaign. The resulting 50 million Change Makers then will be equal to the estimated number of the "missing women" from this region. Though the number is symbolic, the effect of creating 50 million Change Makers dedicated to ending VAW is expected to be real and momentous.



## Current Scenario of Change Makers in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, by end 2009, the total number of Change Makers stands at 600,000. Among whom, 3,24,000 are women and 2,76,000 are men. There is a high percentage of youths among these Change Makers, and their age ranges between 14 to 25, and, the total number of them stands at 3,48,000, as of end 2009. In contrast to this, Change Makers of the ages between 26 to 45 are 2,16,000. Older Change Makers (age 45+) are 36,000. In 2009, a data-base of 'We Can' has been established through which all the information (name, age, sex, mother's name, father's name, profession, place, year of enrolment) of Change Makers are made available, directly. 'We Can' Alliance at district levels are encouraged to use this information according to their needs, with a view to enabling them to maintain steady communication with the Change Makers of their districts and providing them with better guidance where needed.



## Committees of Change Makers

Committees are formed at different levels (such as, Ward, Union, Upazilla), and these Committees ensure equal participation of men and women, and women's involvement at leadership positions etc. The structure of the committees is not always homogeneous, also overlaps are not uncommon, such as a representative of Union Committee can also be the representative of nearby Upazilla Committee. But the common factor is that these committees enable the Change Makers to feel that they are working not in isolation but in groups and thus, ensures better performance. Toward this end, committees organise events, meetings, and maintain steady relations with District Alliances and lead organisations.

In Bangladesh, as of end 2009, there are:

- 3,000 Ward Committee,
- 576 Union Committee,
- 126 Upazilla committee.

## Connector Change Makers

In 2009, the concept of “Connector Change Makers” has been initiated. Connector Change Makers take more responsibility onto themselves, acting as the link between the allies on one level, and other



change makers, on the other. Once Change Makers are successful in achieving their personal goals and show the capacity to go beyond the personal, they are encouraged to become Connector Change Makers, who will reach out to others and work as a catalyst to sustain the change of existing change makers. Some District Alliances have made phone index of Connector Change Makers that will enable other Change Makers to communicate with the Connector Change Maker of their district/region.

## Case Studies in the next section:

The following Case Study will show how a young boy of 18 has kept himself engaged in new initiatives to support the 'We Can' campaign even after his primary goal as a Change Maker were reached. Joney uses the flexibility of the process as well as his own innovativeness and community involvement to help realize the goals of the campaign, because he believes in the necessity of changing the 'system' and turning it into an enabling one for all women and girls of the enormous population of Bangladesh.





## CASE STUDY

# Nazrul Islam Joney

Connector Change Maker

The youth who not only changed his father's violent & abusive treatment towards his mother.

...He has gone beyond the personal.

.....Today, Joney is re-engaged in continuous and multiple activities for a wider social change

Today he is a much respected youth leader in his community working for creating a violence free Ideal Village.

A young man of 18, Joney, is a brilliant example of how “We Can” campaign has been penetrating the conscious mind of young boys/men who have not only been able to make their own families free of violence against women but who are also reaching out to his peers and other men in innovative ways for creating a safe and enabling society for women and girls. Joney's case study also shows how simple messages and illustrations on posters, and dedicated people from the alliance working at the grassroots levels to provide continuous guidance and support to Change Makers, make people realise that violence against women is a violation of human rights, and that it can be stopped.

In June 2007, Joney saw a poster illustrating two families: one showed a wife being abused by her husband in a household where terror reigned while on the other side a picture of a couple in perfect harmony was depicted. The fifteen year old boy instantly felt a compelling urge to change the picture of his own family where terror and abuse had dominated the household as long as he could recall.

A local partner NGO of 'We Can' came to Joney's aid as Joney approached them for help. Ultimately this adolescent boy was able to turn around the picture of their once distressed family into a happy and harmonious one. This was the end of Joney's personal journey to make his immediate family violence-free. But Joney did not stop at his personal success. His pledge to stop violence against women is taking him further - because he sees a huge need in his community and sees that he can make a difference. Today Joney is a most successful Connector Change Maker who is constantly working to spread the messages of 'We Can' to his peers and older men by initiating various activities.

*(see Annex I for elaborate version of this Case Study)*

# Chapter 4

## Structure of the Campaign

### Reengagement of Change Makers & Deepening of Change

The Campaign's 5 years' experience, between 2004-2009, shows that Change Makers can be classified in two types. One type seeks more information, wants to understand more, gets more Change Makers involved in the Campaign, and is in touch with allies. The other type is active internally, and may be talking to their peers and family and making changes in their own sphere, but is not visible to the Campaign itself. It is the large number of 'invisible' Change Makers that staff and allies wish to re-engage so that the change process triggered off initially continues to grow within each individual and beyond into society.

As the book 'We Can the Story So Far'\* explains: The momentum of the Campaign depends upon not only on recruiting new Change Makers, but ensuring that, after Phase 2, a majority of the change makes are contacted and encouraged to continue deepening their own change and engage with others around them to extend their individual change to collective change. This re-engagement of Change Makers is essential to the success of the Campaign, as it moves from awareness raising to greater influence and wider social impact in the third phase.

### Structure of Major Events: Three Times a Year

'We Can' follows a structure regarding for the re-engagement of Change Makers: it takes place three times a year (March, July and November, insert graph) 'We Can's core organizers plan while Change Makes, through their committees, implement the events on a large scale across the country. In 2009, among the events were press conferences, rallies, human chain formation, door to door campaign, street theatre, folk shows, experience sharing meeting, street meeting, banner campaigns,

silent protests, van rallies, observation of important days (such as, International Women's Day, International Day for the Elimination of VAW, Begum Rokeya Day, International Human Rights Day etc.) Through these events, in 2009, Change Makers played an effective role in raising their voice to local elected government representatives. Before the 9th National Parliament Election (Dec. 2008) and 3rd Upazilla Election (Feb. 2009) took place, the district level Alliances met with the candidates to share the demands of 'We Can' campaign. After the two elections took place, Change Makers tried to involve the elected representatives and Govt. officials to highlight the campaign's issues (i.e. the issue of Domestic Violence) in their own field of work. Apart from this major activity, throughout the rest of the year the Change Makers initiated and organised events at a smaller scale to reach out to their peers and community, and they carry forward their work at their own pace and convenience. It enabled the Change Makers to stay active and keep the campaign vibrant.



\* Published on May 2009. Written by Allison Aldred and Suzanne Williams



## Mobile Van Campaign: an example of Re-engagement of Change Makers in 2009

The campaign went into action in late 2004, and soon after people who took the pledge of Change Makers started working towards turning their immediate environment into a violence-free one for women. But the campaign organisers were aware that keeping momentum is vital for a successful campaign. To this end, in 2009 the campaign's most important focus has been on Reengagement of Change Makers with a view to keeping the Campaign alive through ongoing events organised by Change Makers at the grassroots level. And, Mobile Van Campaign, which started in November 2009, became a big success in its attempt to re-engage change makers. By December 2009, Mobile Van campaign reached 48 districts, and has enrolled 80,000 Change Makers. The Mobile Vans go from region to region, village to village, as per plan to have the Change Makers of an area come together and carry forward their mission of working for ending violence against women. Toward this end, Connector Change Makers receive the schedule of Mobile Vans which would be visiting their regions; they receive the news at their regular meeting or through newsletters that are distributed from the 'We Can' Secretariat. At these events Change Makers of a region gather together and distribute materials (booklets, posters etc.) among people who have not been sensitized yet. These events are also marked by audio shows/video shows or cultural events designed to attract local people. Not only the initiation of new Change Makers takes place at these events, but these events also serve to revitalize the old Change Makers as they get a chance to exchange their experiences and come up with solutions for the challenges that they might have experienced. But mainly, it serves to increase visibility of the campaign as well as offer existing change makers with an opportunity to celebrate their successes.



## Thousand Events: an example of re-engagement of Change Makers

“Thousand Events” was designed as a mechanism of keeping the Change Makers re-engaged and deepening the change by encouraging Change Makers to initiate voluntary events/interactions within their community, family and work areas - all of which would add up to 1000 events per district. Change Makers of a district, individually or as a group, initiate “1000 Events” within their sphere of influence. The idea is to involve a wider audience, deepen the understanding of the Change Makers about issues related to violence against women, sustain change and mobilize new change makers.

In 2009, “Thousand Events” carried out by Change Makers mark as an important process to re-engaged Change Makers. By these events, 'We Can' Alliance tried to track the activities of the Change Makers which they carried out throughout the year, and simultaneously increased the enrolment of Change Makers. Change Makers across the country carried out courtyard campaign, door to door campaign, poster distribution, courtyard meeting, tea-stall meeting, hut campaign, discussion with students etc. and shared a one page report with district alliances. In 38 districts it was carried out, and the total number of activities as recorded was 38,000.

thousandevents

## Deepening of the Change

People from all walks of life have been integrated in the process to ensure penetration at every level of society. There are students, housewives, NGO workers, shop-keepers and small businessmen, farmers and rickshaw-pullers, nurses and police officials. There are rural and urban dwellers and people of all ages and education levels. These Change Makers are constantly interacting with people in their own spheres and are engaged in spreading the message, detecting cases of violence in their community and are encouraging to prevent to the people concerned. But to carry forward the mission, one needs clear understanding of VAW and its many manifestations & implications.

Influencing and changing others requires both knowledge and skill. Knowledge of the issues concerned and effective communication skills to help people look at actions and attitudes that have become an accepted part of their culture in a new way: as a crime or as violation of human rights (such as, dowry practice, and the usual following repercussion- verbal abuse and inflicting numerous torture to bring in promised dowry from a bride's father). While dealing with these matters, Change Makers from all walks of life, who are ordinary people with little education in most cases, face difficulty in carrying forward their mission to stop violence against women (VAW) because the Change Makers themselves might have gaps in their own understanding of the concepts since VAW and counter-balancing it are not simple issues. For people of Bangladesh it is more difficult because they have long been exposed to it and accepted it an everyday affair. That is why it is a crucial factor for the organisers to ensure deepening of people's knowledge & deepening of the change that "We Can" campaign is bringing in their lives.





## Change Makers at the Book Fair: an example Deepening of the Change

The Book Fair Campaign started in 2007, and students from different districts of Bangladesh, who have turned into Change Makers, are participating for ten to fifteen days at the Ekushey Book Fair held in February to commemorate the International Language Day for this purpose. The students come with their materials and in their distinctive red T-shirts they stand in pairs to distribute the booklets on Violence Against Women (VAW), and try to discuss the issues with people at the fair. It is not an easy way of reaching out to people, especially because most adults consider these 15 to 25 year olds too young to be discussing marital relationships and violence against women; but when the youths gather together, scattered all across the fair, there is a feeling of fellowship that adds to the momentum of the campaign. This is just one example of Deepening of Change.

In 2009, 100 students from 23 districts participated at the Ekushey bookfair for 10 days and reached 29,427 people. The student Change Makers face a lot of difficult questions about the campaign, and about domestic violence and violence against women at such occasions. Sometimes they find it difficult to answer certain queries, so the challenge for them is to prepare themselves for the queries. But core organizers of 'We Can' sees this process of disseminating messages of VAW at book-fairs as a means to fill out the young Change Makers' own conceptual gaps and getting an opportunity to deepen their understanding. It is not only the direct support of the Alliance at such occasions that enable the young Change Makers to fill out the gaps in their understanding; such occasion offer them with an opportunity to analyse the issues themselves and come up with possible solutions. This is the most crucial significance of young Change Makers' participation at such occasions.



## Change Makers' news-letter Mukho Mukhi: another example of Deepening of Change

In 2009, Change Makers news-letter Mukho Mukhi (or, Face to Face) was developed as a means to connect the Change Makers with the 'We Can' Secretariat directly. This new-letter was distributed from the 'We Can' Secretariat to the Change Makers in 2009. Through this magazine the Change Makers shared their views, challenges and success stories with the Secretariat. In future, 'We Can' alliance plans to use its data-base to distribute this newsletter to all Change Makers which will increase their knowledge and continue to deepen their change.

# Chapter 5

## Institutionalization

### Ultimate Goal of the Campaign: Change the System

It is always stressed in the 'We Can' campaign that the individual is not responsible for violence against women, but the system is. And the 'system' has to change. Individuals from all segments of society, together, can contribute to bringing in that change in the system.

Since 2008 "We Can" Campaign has moved into strengthening community and organisational capacity to prevent violence against women. It started developing and institutionalising mechanisms to advocate women's needs and rights within the community. 'We Can' Campaign has been using the 'The Stages of Change Theory' which recognises that change is a process, often cyclical, that starts from Raising Awareness, and moves into Building Networks, then to Integrated Action and finally requires Consolidated Efforts to sustain the change. "We Can" involves individuals at all the stages, but for sustaining the change it has to be institutionalised. And, that is why the organisers have approached High Schools (Girls, Boys & Co-ed), Lawyers' Association, Hospitals, Nursing Institutes and the Police at Thana levels, among others. Once the main issues of the campaign is internalised by people/staff of these institutions, and once they integrate the agenda of the campaign, i.e. to ensure prevention of violence against women through their own spheres of influence, the campaign's success is ensured to a great degree.



1. The Stages of Change Theory was developed by psychologists to explain how an individual changes in 1982 and further refined in 1992. Raising Voices further adapted the theory to understand how communities change their value systems and practices (diagram taken from their resource guide 'Mobilising Communities to Prevent Domestic Violence' by Lori Michau and Dipak Naker.

**For ensuring institutionalisation of 'We Can' the emphasis is on the following:**

- ▶ Change will happen if mechanisms to enforce change are put in place
- ▶ Regular inputs are required to sustain the process of change
- ▶ Non-violence benefits everyone in society
- ▶ Everyone must recognise violence against women to be an issue essentially of justice and women's human rights
- ▶ Women stand to gain in every sphere of life if violence against them ends
- ▶ Recognise and celebrate pro-women practices

The 'We Can' communication strategy aims to engage individuals and communities in personal and collective processes of reflection and critical thinking to inspire, encourage and enable positive change in attitudes and behaviour.

Since institutionalization or institutional change is the focus of the campaign for the last two years (2008-2009), schools, the police, nursing institutes as well as the media were brought into the process. For example, Rajnagar Girls High School, in the far north-west district of Bangladesh, has been brought under 'We Can' Campaign. All the teachers including the Head Teacher see the existence of VAW and understand the necessity of ending violence against women, The students of class 9 and 10 organized seminars, gave booklets and posters, to other students.



**Nazma Akhtar and her class friends (Rajnagar Girls' High School in Panchagar)**

A student of 10th grade, at Rajnagar Girls' High School in Panchagar, Nazma is first in her class. She has not only become a Change Maker and changed her mother's life dramatically; she has also turned her once abusive father into a Change Maker. The school she attends is one of 20 with which Bikash Bangladesh, a partner NGO of We Can, has started its work since 2006. The Head Teacher and his colleagues think that a campaign like 'We Can' is extremely important for adolescents, both boys and girls.



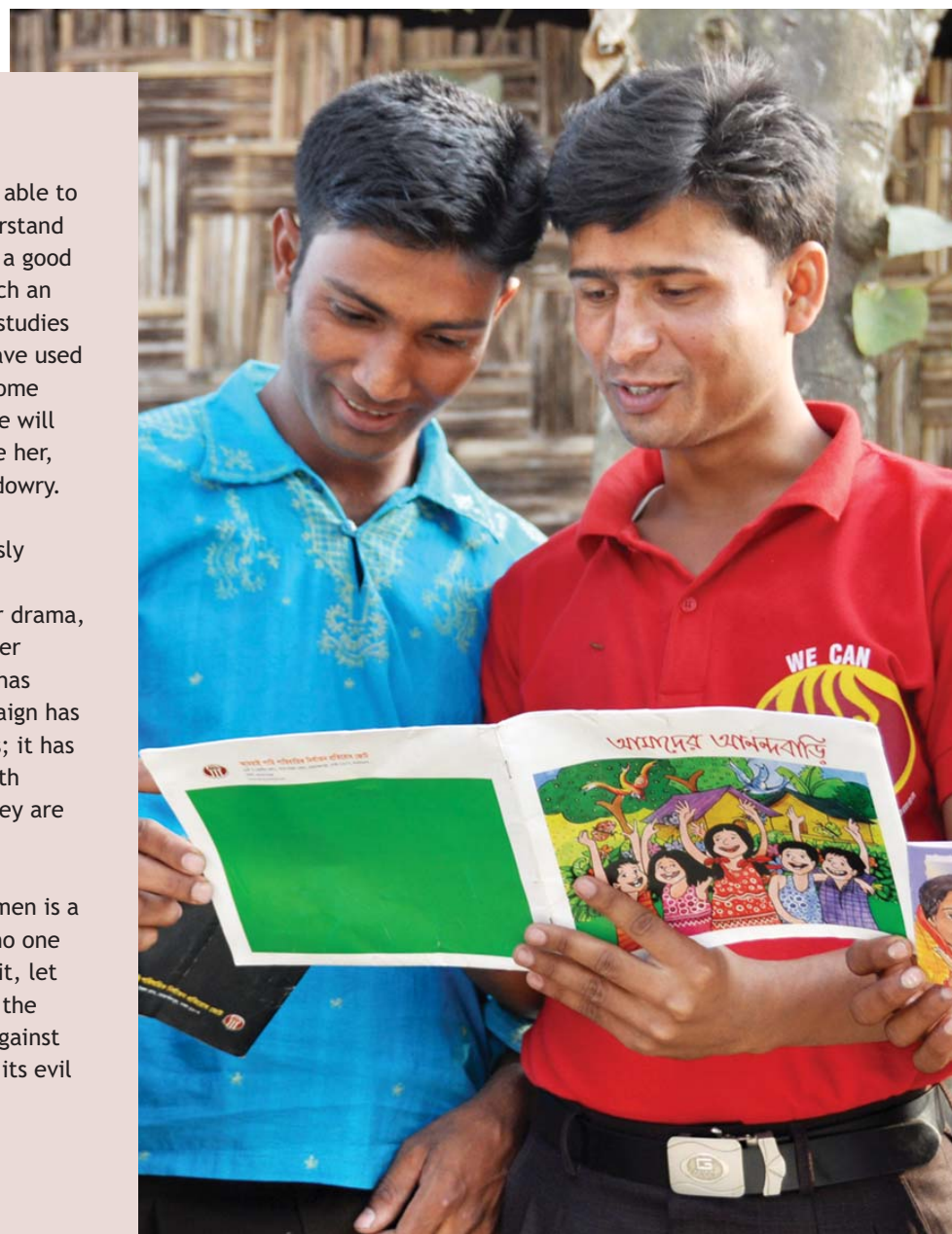
For as far back as Nazma could recall, her father's treatment toward her mother was always extremely abusive. Whenever he found the slightest reason, he would flare up at his wife. He would hurl insults at her, throw away the food that she had prepared if he didn't like it, scream at her, and then get physically abusive. She was the mother of his five children, yet she lived in constant terror of him for years.

Nazma, third of the five siblings, did not know what could be done to change the situation. Then she happened to attend a seminar organised by Bikash Bangladesh, where the topic was violence against women. The booklets Nazma saw there had a huge impact on her and the discussion helped even further. Now, it was not anymore a closet issue, and Nazma and her friends and classmates Panna Akhtar and Azima Akhtar felt comfortable discussing their problems. Their problems regarding VAW differed, but they found common ground for their discussions. Azima's case was different: when she first got introduced to VAW and tried to discuss it with elders, no one listened to her. But after attending the seminar, reading the booklets she received and joining in the District Rally, she felt much more confident. This in turn has helped her talk to elders, and reduce VAW in her circle. The other girl was able

to stop her own early marriage. She was able to talk to her parents and make them understand that pressure from their society was not a good excuse to marry their daughter off at such an early age. She promised to carry on her studies with the money that her father would have used to pay the bride-groom, pledging to become educated and have a career, one day. She will marry someone who respect her and love her, not someone who wanted an attractive dowry.

Teachers at the school are now consciously including topics related to VAW in their curriculum, such as for essay writing, for drama, for debate competition. The Head Teacher confessed that this campaign, 'We Can', has done something else for him. This Campaign has brought him closer to the other teachers; it has pulled down the barrier he so far had with them, and because if it now they feel they are all working as a team, for a cause.

There is a purpose, Violence Against Women is a reality that everyone was aware of but no one ever thought that they could talk about it, let alone change it. Now, this issue is out in the open, and now they can together fight against this monster and free their society from its evil clutches.



# Chapter 6

## Ownership and Sustainability

### How this campaign is “different” from other programmes/projects

The 'We Can' campaign works through a network of existing projects and programmes in like-minded organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, but the main strength lies in individuals who form a network of Change Makers. Change Makers go through a process of internal change, and begin working as catalysts for change. 'We Can' is owned by these individuals, who are brought into the network. Change Makers are men, women, boys and girls from both rural and urban settings, primarily from disadvantaged groups, who contribute actively to bring sustainable change into their surroundings - through events, peer group discussions, courtyard meetings. Their involvement in networks enables them to receive resources such as booklets, materials etc. - but more importantly - these networks provide the Change Makers with the moral strength to fight against evils of a system. It is these networks, both amongst themselves and with the allies, that ensure sustainability of the movement of the campaign.

There is a list that shows how, in 2009, 'We Can' has reinforced its ownership and sustainability at various levels:

### Youth Involvement Increased

In 2009 the campaign has seen vigorous youth involvement. Youth Change Makers consists of half of the total number of Change Makers in Bangladesh, and



in 2009 in every event they played a vital role. Youth Change Makers have made Readers' Forum and Change Maker' Forum by their own initiatives. They have made connections between domestic violence issues and other social issues like eve-teasing, sexual harassment, male domination in social forums, effectively. There are many examples of the initiatives taken by youth Change Makers against domestic violence (DV) this year. (see Annex 1.)

### **People more willing to Share Issues of Domestic Violence**

In 2009, Alliance organisations received sufficient number of complaints of domestic violence (DV). In the previous years people were less willing to break the silence about this issue. But this year, people shared their concerns, came to the organisers/partners of 'We Can' for advice and many couples came for counselling. Now, many organisations, agencies and donors have shown an increased interest to work against DV, and this has encouraged Change Makers all over Bangladesh as they no longer feel isolated in their efforts to end domestic violence.

### **Men as Active Agents of the campaign**

Another major achievement of 2009 is men's effective involvement in the campaign. In our patriarchal society men are usually more prone to discuss the issue of DV just the way they discuss other issues with little end-result. But this year, intensive plans of Change Makers enabled men to be more actively engaged to work against domestic violence. (see Annex 1.)

### **Women in Key Positions**

Women Change Makers were in leading position in 2009. In every alliance, the chair or co-chair are now women. In every Change Makers' committee women Change Makers are now more active in leading the campaign. In the last Upazilla Election, in Feb. 2009, 25 Women Change Makers were elected as Vice Chair of different Upazillas.

### **Education Institutes Integrating Messages of 'We Can'**

A total of 1000 education institutes have started taking forward the 'We Can' campaign since early 2009. And some of the institutions have taken the leading role in mobilising other institutes to work against VAW. These education institutes are currently taking initiatives to protest against Eve-teasing and are working to stop child marriages.

### **Better Communication between Change Makers and Connector Change Makers**

In 2009, coordination between Change Makers and Connector Change Makers has strengthened. As a result, communication between Change Makers groups and committees has become more active, and this has enabled Change Makers to find solutions in their day to day work for the campaign.

### **Coalition with other Organisations Increased:**

In 2009, 'We Can' campaign started to work formally with other coalitions. This coalition

process that has started, is bringing together institutes like ICDDR, B, BLAST, Marie Stopes and Population Council, In 2009 the above mentioned organisations together with 'We Can' have formed a coalition led by ICDDR\_B, and this coalition will start a programme as well as will carry out a research on "Safeguarding Consent, Combating Coercion: Securing Young Women's Rights to Health and Freedom from Violence in Bangladesh". These will start in 2010.

### **A book of Case Studies of Change Makers Published**

The ground work was done in 2009 for publishing a book of case studies ("Bhalobashar Rong Chena O Onyanno Golpo") of Change Makers that has been published jointly by 'We Can' and Ittadi (a local Publishing House) in June 2010. It was compiled by a journalist who collected 50 cases from 8 districts of Bangladesh, out of which 16 were selected for publication.

### **Regional Change Assessment Research started**

A regional assessment research is ongoing for assessing the change of Change Makers that will cover the 5 countries (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka). Toward this end, information will be collected from 422 Change Makers from Bangladesh. Two districts were selected for this purpose by random sampling; these are Gaibangha (where 'We Can' campaign has been on-going for 5 years) and Mymensingh (where the campaign has been on-going for two years).



# Chapter 7

## Achievements, so far...

- ▶ 'We Can' Campaign in Bangladesh has expanded to 52 districts.
- ▶ 5 more District Level Alliances have been formed in 2009, and the total number of District Level Alliances now stands at 38.
- ▶ Number of local level Change Makers' committees increased to 3,000 at ward level, 576 at union level, 126 at Upazilla level
- ▶ By end 2009, the total number of organisations have increased to 500 who are part of the 'We Can' Alliance. Organisations from across civil society, educational institutes, cultural groups, clubs and professional groups (like lawyers, teachers, journalists etc.) are among these.
- ▶ 25% of Change Makers' committees have been active in 4 areas, which are the following:
  - creation of informal safety nets for survivors;
  - creation of pressure groups to advocate for changes in the area of VAW;
  - development of support groups for Change Makers
  - identification and utilization of resources (material, economic, social, intellectual etc.) from the community to end VAW
- ▶ Increased reporting on Domestic Violence (DV) in the media was seen this year. An increased number of news about DV issues has been published in national dailies and magazines and the Change Maker journalists developed most of the reports and articles. The coverage of DV issues by electronic media was highly impressive. Among a number of TV channels (both private and nation ones), Bangladesh National Television (BTV) focused the issue of domestic violence through their own programmes more widely.
- ▶ Alliance members got involved in CEDAW committee and Beijing +5 committee, both of which committees are working for monitoring the process of CEDEW implementation in Bangladesh.
- ▶ We Can' actively participated in the formulation of the Domestic Violence Act for the government of Bangladesh.
- ▶ In the last parliament election of Bangladesh, in 2009, 'We Can' alliance has shown a clear stance.
- ▶ We Can' Alliance celebrated 8th March (International Women's Day) and 25 November (International Day of Elimination of Violence against Women) with the government, all over Bangladesh. Government's ministries and 'We Can' alliance jointly organised these events.
- ▶ During 2009, basic messages of 'We Can' campaign have been disseminated to 15 million individuals through regular social mobilisation programmes by partners & alliances, periodic campaign events, different BCC (Behavioural Change Communication) materials and massive transmission through radio and TV channels. Existing Change Makers and alliance members played a vital role to disseminate the messages of 'We Can' in their own locality, while partner organisations facilitated the whole process.

2. Print BCC materials are: posters, booklets, leaflets, stickers, billboards etc.
3. Electronic BCC materials are: radio jingles, soap opera, live documentary, talk show, TV spots etc.

## Challenges

- ▶ 'We Can' attempts to bring in change by enabling individuals to change their own behaviours, first. However, behavioural change is not something that happens easily or overnight. Also, because people have grown up with certain types of mind-sets and set behavioural patterns in this patriarchal society for a very long time, it is difficult to assess which behaviour should be labelled as abusive or and which not so. That is why it is imperative to keep oneself attached to the campaign in a steady way so that one can become sensitized and practice treating women/others with more sensitivity. So, the challenge is to keep all these 600,000 Change Makers integrated in this campaign in a steady manner.
- ▶ This campaign's one of the main strategies is to create new Change Makers through existing Change Makers. But often this process ensures only a quantitative increase, and not a qualitative increase, of Change Makers.
- ▶ In 2009, the newsletter Mukhomukhi was launched through the Mobile Van Campaign, which in itself was a new initiative designed to re-engage Change makers. But the first issue of newsletter did not find popularity. The reason behind this could be the different style of writing and different types of images used in the magazine.
- ▶ 'We Can' attempts to bring in behavioural change in individuals. But assessing behavioural change has proved to be challenging for the campaign, so far.
- ▶ For District level Alliances and the National Alliance it was difficult to sustain the qualitative level of Change Makers this year because the number of Change Makers has gone up significantly.
- ▶ Forming alliances and having representatives from across the society are very important aspects of 'We Can'. However, experiences has shown that a much higher number of representatives from civil society got involved in the District Alliance, and the number of ordinary people from the grassroots is still rather low in comparison to that.
- ▶ The expansion of this campaign among general people has increased the demand for Domestic Violence Act on the government. And as a result of this campaign, there is an increased interest and demand for Rectifying the Inheritance Law, Implementation of CEDAW and the National Women's Advancement Policy to the full capacity, which fall under the government's area of work. So, there is a significant increase of people's expectation from the campaign. This is both a positive aspect as well as a challenge for the campaign.

## Conclusion

In Bangladesh, 2009 has been a very significant year for the 'We Can' campaign, because the government extended its support for similar issues that the campaign has been working for - namely - to establish women's rights and end domestic violence against women.

However, the campaign believes, only laws or one institution cannot change the situation without changing the all pervasive discriminatory attitude towards woman that spreads through all institutions - be it family, community, state, or religion. That is why the 'We Can' campaign has been attempting both to reach out at a scale and also to a variety of audience, and 2009 has seen only more vigorous attempts toward this end. During 2009, the campaign focused on Change Makers (i.e. family and community) who were not expected to become activists, but instead through extending their own quiet and small changes, internal as well as visible, into their own informal collectives they were expected to be able to contribute in widening and deepening the shift in attitudes and practices in their particular segments of this society. This, in turn, would contribute to the overall aim of the campaign, which is to reduce social acceptance of violence against women at all level.

So now, at the end of 2009, 'We Can' is stepping forward to tackle the innumerable challenges that lie ahead. At the same time, it sees itself as part of a larger social movement that has already started at a different level.

# Annex 1

## More Case Studies:

In its 'Guiding Principles', We Can states that change is the responsibility of the individual, and is in the power of the individual; change begins with this internal process of active response, and then moves to influence others. It moves from the private spheres to the public spheres. By activating change within these personal spheres, 'We Can' has already seen the messages taken out again into the public sphere, breaking the silence on violence against women, and evoking collective responsibility at community and state levels.

When we look at the series of case studies in this section- we get a glimpse of what 'We Can' has already achieved...



### 1. Kamrun (Panchagar):

A victim of dowry-related violence in a patriarchal society  
...survives,  
.....finds freedom  
.....& an identity in society, through her work as a Connector Change Maker.

A poor farmer's daughter, Kamrun was married off at 16. Her father failed to give her husband the dowry he had promised. And then began the inhuman torture. When the torture got too much for her to bear and she tried to run away back to her father's family, they not only refused to give her shelter but beat her and sent her unconscious body on a riskshaw van to her in-laws in the next village, where they said she now "belongs", dead or alive. And, her life continued as one of torture and abuse...

Kamrun represents many young women in this subcontinent, who become victims of the worst case of dowry practice.

But the difference is that Kamrun got lucky: she had the courage to fight back and not only survive but turn her fate around. Fortunately, her mother and brother helped her get a divorce. It was not easy: all three had to run away to the nearest town to get legal aid and her brother and mother had to hide with her for months, with very little money... before the divorce was final.

Burns, bruises and cut mark on her body provided Kamrun with ample proof for her to win the case at court, but they could never return to their own village. Even in the 21st century, they were seen as transgressors by their people. They have paid a high price, forced to become outcasts.



But then, her journey into a better life began in 2005. Polli Sri, a partner organisation of 'We Can', approached Kamrun and she joined the campaign. This once destitute young woman not only received a loan to start vegetable cultivation and buy goats and cows; in addition, Kamrun educated herself on violence against women issues and she found a voice to take a strong stand against it.

Today, Kamrun is the most successful Change Maker in her community because she herself had endured violence and came out as a survivor.

Kamrun is now not only a successful Change Maker who has changed her own life (she owns a number of goats and cows, has savings in her bank, offers financial support to her sister's family with whom she still lives). She now helps other women of her village to fight back domestic violence. Also, she has established herself as the most respected and progressive woman of her village who is invited to programmes organised by government officials like the TNO (important government official at Thana level ) to give "talks" to an audience who shower her with respect and awe.

Her eyes still reflect the horror and inhuman suffering she had been through. She still holds a grudge against the male dominion of her society. But Kamrun, the survivor, draws quiet satisfaction from being able to help other women find their way forward to a better fairer world. Kamrun, a leader in her community, is now seen showing other women how to fight back the evils of a patriarchal society, how to live a life free of abuse and violence and find a respectable place in society.



## 2. Nazrul Islam Joney: Connector Change Maker from Tular Danga, Panchogar

The youth who not only changed his father's violent & abusive treatment towards his mother...

He has gone beyond the personal... Today, Joney is re-engaged in continuous and multiple activities for a wider social change and is a much respected youth leader in his community.

In June 2007, Joney saw a poster illustrating two families: one in which the wife is abused by the husband and the children are sad and scared, and the other in which mutual respect, love and sharing sets the tone between the husband and wife. The fifteen year old boy instantly felt a compelling urge to change the picture of his own family where terror and abuse had dominated the household as long as he could recall. The four brothers and a sister grew up in constant terror in a family where an abusive father dominated the scene and the mother had no alternative but to accept it in silence.

Bikash Bangladesh, the local NGO that integrated the "We Can" campaign in their existing programmes, came to Joney's aid. The NGO's dedicated staff shared strategies with Joney that could be applied to change the older man's abusive behaviour towards his wife. But soon the adolescent boy realised that the given strategies would have no effect on his ill tempered father, so he came up with a new strategy. Joney approached his youngest sister, then a second grade student, and it was her pleading with their father to stop hurting and verbally abusing their mother that worked. It took time, but ultimately Joney's father's once senseless rage cooled down. Today Joney's mother has a respectable position not only in her family but in the village as well. She is now the elected chair person of the Women's Club of the village. Today, when asked about Joney's contribution, she says, "If you have children, they should be like my Joney." This was the end of Joney's journey to make his immediate family violence-free.

But Joney did not stop at his personal success. His pledge to stop violence against women is taking him further - because he sees a huge need in his community and sees that he can make a difference.

Joney, persistent at creating positive change, kept himself re-engaged with initiatives on a continuous basis. One good example is the evening school that he opened for adult education with 26 students, all adult women. He has managed to open this school with the little money he and his peers saved up over a couple of years. But Joney plans to enrol men in his school with a vision to not segregate men and women in the conventional way; he will make sure that they sit side by side in his class. This is a way to break down barriers between the sexes, it is a way to enable them to see one other as peers and partners, a vital necessity for a gender sensitive society, Joney realises.

Another example of Joney's Re-engagement as change maker is that Joney went on a mission to sensitize boys and men about the central issues of 'We Can' campaign, and he has become the Connector Change Maker. Together with two of his friends, Joney has already succeeded in sensitizing 350 young men so far who have taken the oath to become Change Makers. Next, Joney's dream is to turn his entire village into an Ideal Village. Together with the other Change Makers, he is now working on this.

We see more examples of how Joney has kept the momentum by initiating and organising events every few months with his comrades. The Friendship Change Maker Badminton Tournament was one such event where 17 teams from the village took part in the competition. The boys basically came for the competition, but at the end they got introduced to the campaign's main agenda and many of them became sensitized. A third example: Joney and his friends offered their services when a religious event (Waz Mahfil) took place in their village. Many men from all around came, and many had bicycles. Cycles were stolen from a similar event the previous year, so Joney came up with this brilliant but simple idea of making a Safe Stand for Cycles, where he and his friends would tie down the Cycles and guard those for the length of the event,

free of cost. At the end of the event, all the men, many of them elderly and conservative patriarchs, thanked Joney's group for their service. This is how he approaches different groups believing that in the end some of the people will be converted into Change Makers.

This is how Joney is reaching out to the men and boys from different sections of society, because he knows that not only the women, but men at the grassroots have to recognise that there is violence against women in our society and that it can and must be stopped. He realises that unless most men, as well as women internalise this fact, the change that he and his peers are working for will not be sustainable.

The changes that Joney is able to bring are sometimes momentous, sometimes small. But they all contribute to the larger picture to help end violence against women. Today, all the people from villages around know and respect Joney. They all recognise the value of his mission. Joney now dreams of buying a computer. That will be the first computer in his village. Who knows what he will be able to achieve through the new technology? Whatever it is, it definitely will be something significant.



### 3. Rashida Begum:

house wife; education level: 5th grade; previous work experience:  
field worker, Health Programme, BRAC

We met her with a group of women and men at the Naree Moitree Office, in a congested neighbourhood in Dhaka. A housewife with two children, Rashida is a little better off than the other women in that group and social strata because she was fortunate to have received a primary school education (till grade five), and one year's work experience with a leading NGO's health care programme.

At home, however, Rashida had to play the role of a traditional housewife. Her husband, a rickshaw puller, did not have an easy life providing for the family. Among his vices was heavy smoking, and Rashida, being well aware of health hazards of tobacco, made him quit smoking at one point. But then the arguments started. It was not clear at the time, but these arguments got worse as the husband remained irritable after quitting smoking. Often Rashida was abused not only verbally but also physically by the short-tempered husband. Things were going from bad to worse. Then came a day when Rashida almost accidentally found the booklets at the school where her then three year old daughter used to go to. Rashida saw a booklet, Bithi's Story, that depicted the picture of an ideal family and that picture made her realise that her relationship with her husband far from what it should be.

Rashida read the booklet and soon understood that she needed to communicate with her husband more. Discussion leads to solutions and that was how Rashida was able to change her own life as a Change Maker. She found out that it is strategic communication, negotiation, and patience that wins the day, and not raw argument. This is how Rashida turned her unhappy family life into a happy and healthy one, and that is what she tries to communicate to other women and men.

For two years now Rashida has been working as a change Maker in her community, where everyone now respects her and looks up to her for support.

Rashida points out another very important aspect of bringing about change: networking. Networking, meetings and discussions with other women helped her come out of her misery. It helped her stop the violence that had been going on for a long time in her marriage. Because of the communication materials, the organisational support, the networking and the safe meeting space, Rashida could learn new lessons, educate herself, and finally attain empowerment. She has also used the word "freedom", or "shadhinota" in Bangla, to describe her present position. And, she has achieved this freedom through the proper application of skills & her understanding of human rights issues.

Is Rashida's husband a happier man today? Yes, he is. He has been sensitized and educated and he too has gained handsomely from this process. A happy and healthy family life nurtures not only the children but also the parents. Today, with the newfound strength that only comes from personal happiness, Rashida is supporting her husband in maintaining their family both emotionally and financially. Being in the networks and being part of the income generating activities provided by the NGO has enabled Rashida to buy a second rickshaw for her husband. They have gained respect for each other. They have gained respect from the society. Today, the Commissioner of Ward #26 invites Rashida, an otherwise ordinary woman, to important events.

This is a story of a woman, a Change Maker, who has turned her life around with her understanding of what an ideal family should be like.





## 4. Imran Hossain Tushar: Madrasa student

A student of Madrasa (education based on Islamic dictates/ teachings) grows up fatherless... sees his mother's financial struggle... and as a Change Maker, convinces the religious leader & elders on Women's Right's Issues, from the Islamic stand point

Imran's father died when he was four and his mother had to struggle to bring up her three sons and a daughter. The elder boys could not go to school, for they too had to struggle to earn money from a very early age. Imran, the youngest, was sent to a madrasa (in footnote: a special system of school where the emphasis is on teaching Arabic and reading the religious doctrines in Islam), where the emphasis is on Islamic education according to Quraan and Hadith.

In 2004 Imran started participating as a Youth Organiser (Shishu Shangathak) at the National Book Fair called Ekushey Book Fair, held every year in February in Bangladesh to mark the Language Movement of 1952. (This language movement culminated in the liberation war of '71 and consequently gave birth to the nation of Bangladesh).

In February 2008, Imran first came across the booklet called "Shojeeber Bodhodoy" (The Realization of Shojeeb). It is about a boy of 10 or 12 who sees that arguments between parents affect children in the household. This illustrated booklet opened a world of knowledge to him, knowledge that can save children from growing up distressed, and even disabled to act as healthy human beings. Imran was so moved by the contents of the booklet that he contacted the organisation that published it. The address was printed on the back cover, and Imran found the office by himself. He went to the office, and met up with Nahid Apa, of Naree Noitree, and very soon he took the pledge to become a Change Maker - to end all violence against women.

Imran never saw his mother being tortured or abused, but he saw her economic suffering since she was windowed at a very early age and had to bring up 4 children all by herself. A Change Maker since 2008, Imran focuses on women's property rights as described in the Holy Quran. Imran voices his opinions not only to his friends and peers but also to the Imam at the local Mosque. The topic is "Denmohor" (assets or money secured for the woman at the time of marriage). Imran then came up with the practical idea of opening an insurance policy for women at their weddings, so that the future of a bride is secured significantly at the very moment of her marriage. This is an innovative idea, one that shows how deeply Imran is concerned for the women of his society.

Of course, many of the religious leaders and elderly people of the community protested against Imran's idea when he first started discussing them in the Mosque. Instead of giving up or getting angry Imran strategically deals with the situation: he cites from the Holy Quraan and convinces the main Khatib/Maulana that what he is saying falls within the dictates of the holy guidelines for Muslims around the world. Once he succeeds in doing that, the rest is smooth sailing for Imran. Now everyone acknowledges the positive changes Imran has been able to bring through this own experience for numerous women in his community.



## 5. Shahnaz Begum: house-wife

She comes from the poorer sections of the city, called Goran, where one day she walked into a meeting at her neighbour's courtyard. It was a women's organisation's meeting, and these women were associated with a local NGO working for women's empowerment and education. The booklet that attracted Shahnaz's attention was "Mayna O Akashe's Shonshar" (The family of Moyna and Akash). This booklet shows a couple in a perfectly harmonious relationship, where three years into the marriage they discuss every single issue, and find the best solution. Against this scenario are seen other couples, and the husbands have no respect for their wives, and where there is constant fights, disagreements. The pictures and messages of this book worked like a mirror for Shahnaz, who found a reflection of her unhappy marriage in the unhappy couple's lives as depicted in the book.

Shahnaz' husband used to be a drug addict. He was ill tempered and suffered from acute jealousy. Shahnaz was not allowed to go out of her house. Many women in a Bangladeshi society live and die in similar situation. This society in general has been rigid and closed about it so much that not only the men but also women grow up thinking it normal for women to be restricted, shackled down, to be treated this way by the husbands, in-laws, and sometimes even parents.

But Shahnaz was able to change her relationship with her husband. She made him see that going out to meet with other women was not a vice. She showed him the booklets and posters that depicted happy families and showed how an abusive husband could distort the relationship between husband and wife, and how that affects the children. Shahnaz's husband slowly understood the messages. And today, when Shahnaz has to ride a rickshaw with a man, her husband is no longer consumed with jealousy. His outlook has changed to a great deal, though he has not become a Change Maker himself yet. But Shahnaz now has a healthy marriage. She is also hopeful that one day her husband will turn into a Change Maker, internally as well as officially.



## 6. Change Maker: Md. Shahiduddin (small business owner, Maya Jewellers)

A few years into his marriage he started drifting away. Then, the Campaign found him, but he was too rigid at first to listen & to change  
...Today, Shahiduddin is not only a change maker who has turned his own family-life around, but, he is a vital link between the core group of the campaign and people in need.

When we visited his store on a narrow lane of Dhaka's poorer neighbourhood, this young man greeted us with a huge warm smile. He is a Connector Change Maker, and one who takes pride in what he does in between his dealings with customers and chats with friends, mostly from his small jewellery shop when people from the neighbourhood came to buy gold ornaments, check out the jewellery or simply to chat with him.

Shahiduddin has been married for just over 7 years. For the first 5 years he and his wife had almost no problem in their marriage. They were a happy couple; he used to spend time at home with his wife then. But during this period the children arrived, and he and his wife started drifting apart without even realizing that it was happening. He started spending more and more time with the young men in the neighbourhood, and his treatment towards his wife turned more and more callous, even rough, at times. He did not realise what was causing it, neither did he realise that he was the one who was contributing to that change that was about to ruin their marriage.

Shahiduddin was having ugly arguments at home over small matters. He and his wife were hardly communicating. Shahiduddin confessed that he was contemplating ending their marriage, but at that point in time he was approached by someone from "Naree



## 7. Harun Sardar: Connector Change Maker (Comilla)

Moitree”. His initial reaction was, “How dare they try to interfere in my personal affairs”. The booklets, the posters that sketched the contrasting pictures of a happy and an unhappy family worked like a mirror, showing Shahiduddi an image of himself quarrelling with his wife over trifling matters at home and failing to treat her as his equal partner worthy of consideration and love. And, the process of change started from within.

Shahiduddin, who was angry and rude with the “Naree Moitree” staff at first, soon recognized the problems within his marriage. It took several visits from that woman from “Naree Moitree”, and after looking at the contents of the booklets with illustrations it was not difficult for him to realise that it was he who had grown apart from his wife when he began staying out with his male friends. His change was the root cause of all the unhappiness at home. Once he realized it, Shahiduddin decided to turn around his bitter marriage that was on the brink of a divorce. He became a Change Maker. He consciously started spending more time at home and once again became a loving husband and a responsible father and soon his marriage was saved, resulting in positive change for him, his wife and their children.

Now, a Connector Change Maker, Shahiduddin is actively involved in his role to stop violence against women and create Change Makers around him. He recognizes that women in his society suffer from neglect and abuse at home, and this situation should be and can be altered. He goes out of his way to show his friends and customers what a healthy marriage is all about and what a good husband does for his wife. He explains that being a good and loving partner is very important for a man, and involves spending quality time with his wife, sharing some of the workload at home, and discussing serious matters like decisions about the children's education and savings. These steps can change your family life; today this is no news for the people who get in touch with Shahiduddin.

He was the local leader, but he was just like the other men in his village who dominated his wife and occasionally it lead to not only verbal or physical abuse. But once this hard headed man was initiated to the issues that We Can deals with - his whole perception of the existing gender relations of our society went under a major change.

He now says, with an unexpected smile- that the two of them, his wife and him, treat each other like they would treat a saint, a “Peer”. They respect each other's opinions, share their thoughts and decided on family matter together as a team. Harun, the alpha male, is now dedicated to saving families and helping men respect their women.



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