



Paying Tax with Little Benefit



“After buying the basic necessities and paying house rent, electricity, gas and water bills, there remains hardly anything from my monthly wage of Tk 8,000”, these are the words of Fatema Begum, a garment worker who presented her petition in front of the juries of Citizens’ Tax Tribunal this November. In her petition for securing her fundamental rights she deserves being a tax payer, she exclaimed how she has been burdened with indirect taxes such as value-added tax (VAT), which has further increased her monthly expenditure.

The tribunal was set up by ActionAid Bangladesh (AAB) at Nawab Ali Chowdhury Senate Bhaban auditorium at the University of Dhaka in the capital.

AAB has been advocating for tax justice since 2014. In Bangladesh, like most developing countries, taxation is a critical internal source of revenue. While VAT is the key contributor to the country’s revenue contributing about 35 percent of total, VAT is also seen as a major way-out as only a small fraction of companies registered for VAT actually pay it. A 2015 ActionAid Bangladesh study shows that the overall estimated revenue foregone for the entire economy in FY 2012-2013 was BDT 251,188 million or 23% of the total tax revenue collected by the NBR due to various tax incentives. Evidence suggests that large corporations can avoid paying taxes through treaties while the burden is borne by the medium and small companies and salaried workers creating inequality

within the state.

As part of its Tax Justice campaign AAB came up with the idea of setting up the Citizens’ Tax Tribunal to challenge these issues and demand progressive tax policies that will reduce the burden on the poor. With the active participation of people from all parts, the event mobilized people around the issues of VAT burden on poor, corporate tax avoidance, responsible corporate tax behavior. It also initiated a dialogue among stakeholders for progressive tax policies.

Plaintiffs from different sectors including garment worker, student, slum dweller and others having one thing in common- limited income with increasing expenditure.

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#Femitoon

One single image can have stronger impact on people's mind than mere plain words or data. Using cartoon and satire as a tool to protest and criticize any issue or event has been an age-old practice. Realizing the strength of cartoon and visual art, ActionAid Bangladesh has come up with its fresh and intrinsic idea to launch #Femitoon at the commencement of observing this year's 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence.

ActionAid Bangladesh and Unmad jointly organised the three-day cartoon exhibition on November 26, featuring different forms of violence against women including sexual and reproductive rights violation, child marriage, dowry, rape, unpaid care work, acid attacks, eve teasing, sexual harassment and a plethora of others. This exhibition brought 53 pieces of cartoons and visual artworks by country's 25 prominent and young cartoonists addressing gender-based violence issues.

As this event successfully attracted a good number of visitors, many people, specially the young, connected themselves with the issue of violence against women and girls through the showcased cartoons.

While the exhibition, which also took place in Cox's Bazar, was a stepping stone to inspire dialogue among the mass people on ending gender-based violence, AAB intervened a number of initiatives during the 16 days of activism both in national and local level. Among these initiatives, AAB and JNNPF published a research report titled 'Spotlight on Violence Against Women in Bangladesh: Trends and Solutions', organized round table discussion with country's two leading national daily the Prothom Alo and the Daily Star, arranged a road show for safe workplace for women, national consultation programme on violence and resilience, women entrepreneurship fair and many others.



Some of the #FemiToon cartoons at a glance





An Afternoon at Happy Home with Icche Dana

Happy Home children are always enthusiastic about learning new things, new skills. This December, the children enjoyed a cheerful afternoon with the team of Jol Pore Pata Nore, a monthly children's magazine. During the programme "Icche Dana" at

Happy Home, the children learned clay crafting and paper crafting while magic show stunned them with surprise. The children also performed dancing, singing, story-telling and poem reciting.



Preventing VAW During Disasters

According to different statistics of Bangladesh, many women here faces violence in one way or other. During disasters, women become more vulnerable to violence. For this, to prevent violence against women during disasters and ensure proper response to the victims of violence, ActionAid Bangladesh, with the support of UNFPA arranged a training workshop in Barishal, Jamalpur, Gaibandha, Sylhet and Khulna.

From 30 September to 6 December 2018, about 121 representatives from 83 organization in 18 districts received the skill development training. While preparing future operational plans, these participants also determined to include the issue of violence against women in their disaster management plan.





Developing Community, Leading the Change

Empowering women and young people through ensuring their leadership has been one of the key working areas of ActionAid Bangladesh. Last year, Angikar Samaj Unnayan Sangstha (ASUS), with the support of ActionAid Bangladesh, involved 150 young people through establishing a youth digital club at Panchagarh. Through this initiative 27 young girls came into leadership and initiated different advocacy.

This December, Maleka Yeasmin, The Executive Director of ASUS, a BFI Partner of AAB in Panchagarh received 'Joyeeta award' for her contribution in the community development in the former enclaves in the district.

Ms. Belly Begum, President of Gazaria Union Federation, Ms. Zenthi Begum, Treasurer of Gondoraj Nari Dal from Gaibandha and Ms. Santona Rani, President of Rajpur Union Federation from Lalmonirhat, who are AAB's POWER Project Participants in Gaibandha, received 'Joyeeta' award 2018 for their contribution on overcome VAW.

The women leaders believe that this recognition will inspire them to do more for their community and for the society.





Workshop with the Journalists in Cox's Bazar

Since the beginning of the Rohingya crisis, journalists have played a significant role to cover the issues and facts of the crisis. Considering the possible scopes and challenges of covering Gender Based Violence issues more intensively, ActionAid Bangladesh organized a workshop with the journalists in Cox's Bazar with the support of UNFPA and Canadian High Commission.

While Chairing the session, Dr Khalilur Rahman, Member, Executive Board, ActionAid International Bangladesh said, since the journalists in Cox's Bazar have been playing the key role of presenting the GBV related issues faced by the forcefully displaced Rohingya women in front of the world, therefore more awareness need to be created among them.

Mohammad Abul Kalam, NDC, Commissioner, Refugee, Relief and Repatriation Commission was present as the Chief Guest. Among other panelists,

Ms. Nejemalmolook Ibrahim, UNFPA, Mr. Abu Taher, Secretary, Cox's Bazar Press Club, Roselidah Raphael, Head of Sub Office, Cox's Bazar, UNFPA Bangladesh and Ms. Annika Sandlund, Senior Coordinator, Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) were present at the workshop moderated by Farah Kabir, Country Director, ActionAid Bangladesh.

The participants called for strong international cooperation to ensure safe and dignified repatriation of the Rohingyas which might face slower phase due to systematic complexities. They also stressed on the need of paying attention to the host communities who are facing sufferings while giving shelter to the Rohingyas.





Raising Voice Against VAW Through Theatre

While the entire world observed 16 Days of Activism to End Violence Against Women, a two-day long programme has been organized at Rohingya camp to raise awareness among the community. With the support of UNFPA, ActionAid Bangladesh initiated the programme where a group of ten artists performed interactive theatre drama in front of the

Rohingya people. Through a total of twenty shows at twenty different places of Camp 11 and 12, they delivered message to stop child marriage and forced marriage as well as to stop all sort of violence against women, said Samiun Jahan, On behalf of ActionAid Bangladesh, Interactive theatre specialist and the writer, instructor, and director of the drama.



Dignity Kit for Rohingya Women

Senuara Begum, who is currently living in one of the Rohingya camps, received Dignity Kit consisting all necessary products for her during the time of menstruation as well as her daily life. Amid all the limited facilities at the camps, practicing menstrual hygiene is a big challenge for the Rohingya women. This challenge eventually creates risk for their health. To ease the situation, Like Senuara Begum, about 11 thousand women and girls from Rohingya camps including two camps of Moynarghona and

host community received the Dignity Kit throughout the month of December. Starting from the 1st December, ActionAid Bangladesh, with the support of UNFPA, distributed the kits which consisted one hand towel and napkin, eight reusable sanitary napkin strips, two reusable sanitary napkin holders, one soap bar, four inner garments, one set of Thami, one shawl and one blanket.





Sustainable Consumption and Production in Fashion Industry to Prevent Pollution

Globally, fashion industry is responsible contributing to global water waste by 20% and emits 10% of global carbon emission.

Cotton farming itself is responsible for 24% of insecticide production and 11% pesticide production. While 15% of textiles are recycled, the rest of 85% is sent to landfill, that is about 21 billion ton per year which puts a huge impact on the environment, he said, adding that the waste, as they decompose, release methane, which is a significant contributor to global warming.

In this background, ActionAid Bangladesh along with ULAB and Fashion Revolution hosted a discussion session 'Third Annual National Conference on Urban Resilience to Climate Change 2018' on 19 November 2018.

During the session on 'Sustainable Consumption and Production, Fashion Industry and Urban Resilience to Climate Change: Connecting the dots for sustainable solutions', the experts emphasized on strengthening policies about using chemicals and water resources in fashion industry as well as reusing garments as sustainable solution. Farah Kabir, Country Director of ActionAid Bangladesh, urged for raising awareness in this regard.

Mr. Dr. Mohidus Samad Khan, a Chemical, Biochemical and Biotechnological Engineer and Researcher, Dr. Saleemul Huq, Director of ICCCAD, Dr Saima Selim, Associate Professor of ULAB and Nawshin Khair, fashion designer also spoke in the occasion among others.



Youth Voice to Ensure Climate Justice

Climate change is affecting everyone, specially vulnerable communities. Engaging young people's voice is therefore needed to bring change.

To encourage the young people to raise their voice in global platform to ensure international fund and climate justice to fight climate change, Youth Environment and Social Development Society (YESDS) organized 'Dhaka Climate Talk 2018' in association with Stamford University Bangladesh, ActionAid Bangladesh, Oxfam and Independent University, Bangladesh.

In this day long conference, experts said, young people's participation is a must to the policy and strategy level.

Md. Mohsin, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, Ranjit Kumar Chakraborty, Project Manager, IBFCR Project, UNDP, MB Akhter, Program Director, Oxfam in Bangladesh and Farah Kabir, Country Director of ActionAid Bangladesh talked in the conference among others.



Youth demands More Job Opportunities



The young people of the country are the biggest resource in terms of the demographic dividend. ActionAid Bangladesh believes the young people have the power to bring change and their voice must be come to the policy level.

On 25 December 2018, the national daily Prothom Alo in association with ActionAid Bangladesh and Institute of Informatics and Development (IID) organized a roundtable discussion for the youth. In the discussion, the discussants demanded for better

employment opportunities and implementation of National Youth Policy to ensure sustainable development of both the rural and urban youth.

Stressing on the need of creating equal facilities for all youth, Farah Kabir, Country Director of ActionAid Bangladesh lamented the absence of a platform where the young generation can interact with the policy-makers.

National Consultation Workshop for Youth



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Toward Ensuring Decent Work for Youth in Informal Sector



Decent work is one of the key agendas of sustainable development goals which often remains under the line. Specially in informal sector, workers face more discriminations in different ways.

To identify the issues and challenges of informal sector, Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS) conducted a research with the support of ActionAid Bangladesh.

Mostafiz Ahmed, associate professor of Jagannath University, presented the research report during the roundtable discussion “Decent Work for Youth in Informal Sector: Status, Challenge and Way Forward” on 19 December 2018.

The study report suggests that workers in the informal sector are being deprived of different benefits and social securities as they don't get any contract or identity cards from employees.

According to the report, around 88 percent workers

of the informal sector do not get any written contract or appointment letters while 82 percent do not have any employers ID card, found the study conducted over 250 youths aged between 15 to 29 years employed in construction, automobile garages, beauty parlours, hotels and restaurant and online businesses in Dhaka, Chattogram and Satkhira districts. The study also found high rate of child labour in this sector.

During the discussion programme, the discussants urged the need of skills development training to enhance productivity of the informal sector where currently a lion's share of the workforce is employed. Identifying non-compliance to labour laws in the informal sector is the main barrier towards protecting decent work, the study recommended raising awareness among youth about decent work.



Upcoming Events

17 January 2019

‘Seeking Her Safety Everywhere’

While many women are victim of domestic violence in one hand, the majority of university students and professionals are not aware of the directions of the Supreme Court (SC) to prevent sexual harassment that were issued in 2009 on the other hand. ActionAid Bangladesh has conducted two research studies to identify the current situation of Violence Against Women inside home as well as in educational institutions and workplaces. These two reports are going to be launched on 17 January 2019 at Bishwo Shahityo Kendro conference room in the capital's Banglamotor area.

29-30 January 2019

River: A Living Being

Taking into account the cases of New Zealand and India where rivers were granted same legal rights as human being, ActionAid Bangladesh is going to organise its fourth International Water Conference in 2019 titled ‘River: A Living Being’ on 29 and 30 January 2019 at Kuakata, Patuakhali. This year the conference will emphasize on the recognition of river as a living entity to ensure river rights.



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