

A STORY OF CHANGE

**South Asian Youth for Inclusive Development:
Empowering Individuals; Strengthening Communities**

AN ACTION RESEARCH

**2020
LAW AND SOCIETY TRUST**

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Abbreviations

| | |
|-------|---|
| BJP | Bharatiya Janata Party |
| CAA | Citizenship (Amendment) Act |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| HIV | Human Immunodeficiency Virus |
| IDRC | International Development Research Centre |
| LST | Law and Society Trust |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| NRC | National Register of Citizens |
| SAG | State Advisory Group |
| SOGI | Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities |
| SRHR | Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights |
| STI | Sexually Transmitted Infections |
| YIELD | Youth for Inclusive Development in South Asia |

*This report uses the term 'Diverse Communities' to refer to communities with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

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Executive Summary

South Asian Youth for Inclusive Development: Empowering Individuals; Strengthening Communities (YIELD) was an action research that was implemented in India and Bangladesh from January 2018 to July 2020. In India, Misaal Foundation built a network of youth from minority Muslim communities and in Bangladesh, Bandhu Social Welfare Society built a network of youth from sexuality and gender diverse communities. The capacities of the youth were systematically developed so that they became ‘Changemakers’ in their communities. They designed and implemented community-centered interventions. This action research sought to explore ways in which youth civic engagement can be used to minimize the effects of discrimination, exclusion, marginalization, and reduce the appeal to violence. Lessons emerging through these interventions form the subject of this action research. In particular, this action research sought to examine means and modes of youth civic engagement, including factors that affect youth engagement and the youth’s response towards violence and discrimination. The project also attempted to draw out lessons on gender and the use of new technologies. This report presents our process, challenges, and the lessons learned. YIELD helped us understand the context in which youth from marginalized communities live. In India amidst growing anti-Muslim hate crime and new citizenship laws, minority communities remain anxious. Deeply rooted gender norms and social hierarchies work to maintain the social status quo, posing a barrier to youth civic engagement. Socio-economic factors, discriminatory laws, and concerns around safety and security posed barriers to youth civic engagement. While voluntary engagement of youth proved unsustainable, remunerating youth for their time allowed us to develop organic leadership from within the marginalized communities. Changemakers used strategic entry-points into the communities and gained trust over time. In India, the introduction of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in December 2019 was a turning point for the action research. As the communities turned to the Changemakers for leadership, the Changemakers seamlessly stepped into expanded roles. When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out and providing humanitarian relief to marginalized communities became a matter of urgency, the Changemakers supported the organizations. This is a story of youth civic engagement in our region. It is a story of solidarity and leadership. This is our story of how change may take place.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1. Background

Youth for Inclusive Development in South Asia or ‘YIELD’ for short, was an action research carried out by the Law and Society Trust (LST) in partnership with Misaal Foundation¹ in India and Bandhu Social Welfare Society² in Bangladesh. The research was supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and was carried out for two and a half years, ending in July 2020. This action research sought to set up networks of youth from minority communities, facilitate youth civic engagement, and draw out lessons learnt in the process.

The two and a half years during which the research unfolded saw violence against minorities increase across South Asia region.³ Muslim communities in India faced increasing levels of violence, including hate speech, mob-violence, and lynching. The year 2018 saw the greatest number of hate crimes motivated by religious bias in India in a decade.⁴ Amnesty International recorded a total of 218 incidents of alleged hate crimes out of which 50 hate crimes were perpetrated against Muslims.⁵

Political manipulation was a key factor driving violence against Muslims in India. The ruling party’s communal rhetoric that grew particularly since 2014, justified communal violence.

¹ Also referred to as “Misaal” in this paper.

² Also referred to as “Bandhu” in this paper.

³ The South Asia Collective. South Asia State of Minorities Report 2018 (2018). Available at http://www.misaal.ngo/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/SASM-Report-2018_e-Book-revised.pdf. The South Asia Collective. South Asia State of Minorities Report 2019 (2019). Available at <http://thesouthasiacollective.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Report2019.pdf>.

⁴ The Wire India [website]. ‘2018 Saw Most Religious Hate Crime, Most Deaths in Decade’ 27/12/2018. Accessed at

<https://thewire.in/communalism/2018-saw-most-religious-hate-crimes-against-religions>.

⁵ Amnesty International India. ‘Over 200 Alleged Hate Crimes In 2018, Reveals ‘Halt The Hate’ Website’ 05/03/2019. Accessed at <https://amnesty.org.in/news-update/over-200-alleged-hate-crimes-in-2018-reveals-halt-the-hate-website/>.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Shiv Sena— a right wing Hindu nationalist political party, used anti-Muslim sentiment as an electoral strategy and advocated Hindu nationalism. On the ground, this translated into grave consequences for Muslim communities.⁶

In December 2019, the Parliament of India passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) which discriminated against Muslims. This, coupled with the proposals to scale up the National Register of Citizens (NRC), further polarized communities based on religious lines. As fear and anxiety spread among Muslim communities, Muslims protested the discriminatory citizenship laws at Shaheen Bagh in India's capital. The protests that started shortly after the passing of CAA continued until the protesters were forcibly removed from the protest site in late March, after a lockdown was imposed due to the COVID-19 outbreak.⁷ In February 2020 violent clashes erupted in the capital between Hindu and Muslim groups⁸— the deadliest communal violence in Delhi since 1950.⁹

Set against this backdrop, Misaal Foundation built a network of young Muslim men and women in six Indian States— namely Assam, Bihar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh, and enabled them to become 'Changemakers' in their communities who would mobilize and facilitate the communities to counter violence and discrimination.

⁶ Shabbir Hussain et al. 'Violence against Muslims in Contemporary India' (2018). Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326655993_Violence_against_Muslims_in_Contemporary_India.

⁷ NDTV.com [website]. 'Shaheen Bagh Anti-CAA Protesters Removed Amid Delhi Lockdown' 24/03/2020. Accessed at <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/delhis-shaheen-bagh-heart-of-anti-kaa-protests-cleared-after-101-days-amid-lockdown-over-coronavirus-2199558>.

⁸ BBC News [website]. 'Delhi clashes: Thirteen killed as Hindu and Muslim groups clash' 25/02/2020. Accessed at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-51612461>.

⁹ Washingtonpost.com [website]. 'Worst communal violence in Delhi in decades leaves 17 dead as Trump visits India' 26/02/2020. Accessed at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/worst-communal-violence-in-delhi-in-decades-leaves-13-dead-as-trump-visits-india/2020/02/25/ecac4b5e-57dd-11ea-8efd-0f904bdd8057_story.html

Misaal Foundation

Misaal (*'the example'* in Hindustani) is a national network of activists, volunteers, community-based organizations, and advocacy groups— local and national, working with and for marginalized communities— particularly religious minorities. Led by activists, Misaal seeks to transform the energy of its collective into actionable program interventions to enable individuals and communities to bring about positive change.

Misaal was founded in 2014 based on the notions of justice, equality, and pluralism. Misaal envisions a society where individuals and groups have an equal chance in life as empowered citizens, and where they live— side by side— in peace and harmony.

Misaal believes that change can be brought about by youth activists from marginalized communities who assume leadership roles to mobilize communities by organizing them into collectives, raising awareness, and training the communities on their rights. Thus, Misaal works with youth, building their capacities and providing them with tools to engage and mobilize communities to demand their rights, and access their entitlements. Misaal Foundation also facilitates access to justice as well as access to services provided by the State.

Chapter Two of this report details the process, challenges, and results of Misaal Foundation's interventions under project YIELD and Chapter Four outlines the lessons learnt through the interventions.

In Bangladesh, Bandhu Social Welfare Society works with communities with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (SOGI). In this report, these communities are also referred to as 'Diverse Communities'. As part of this action research, Bandhu built a network of youth from Diverse Communities and built their capacities to become Changemakers of their communities. Bandhu's Changemakers engaged in peer-education and peer-counselling, creating safe spaces for youth from their communities.

In Bangladesh, people with diverse SOGIs face continued violence and discrimination. Sexual activity between consenting adults of the same sex remains illegal on the basis of Section 377 of the Bangladesh Penal Code on "*unnatural offences*" that carries a life sentence. Coupled with this punitive law, cultural, and religious prejudices threaten the security, dignity, and human rights of Diverse Communities in Bangladesh. Fear of prosecution and intolerant social norms have pushed the communities into the margins of the society where they live secret lives.

In January 2014, the Cabinet of Bangladesh announced the recognition of the *Hijra* community– feminine transgender people who identify as *Hijra*. Despite this legal recognition, discrimination and harassment of Hijra community continue.¹⁰ At the same time, the legal recognition, excludes from its scope, trans men, and trans women who do not identify as Hijra.

Bandhu Social Welfare Society

Bandhu was established in 1996 by a group of friends to address social exclusion, marginalization, and stigmatization of individuals with diverse SOGIs and combat the risk of HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) among the Diverse Communities. Bandhu is the first organization established in Bangladesh to further Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of Diverse Communities.

Today Bandhu delivers services and implements activities through its 37 countrywide field offices with clinical facilities. Its activities are grounded at the grassroots level, involving emergent community-based organizations across the country. Bandhu implements essential SRHR activities including HIV prevention, legal support, capacity building, and policy advocacy with the aim of bringing about positive changes in the lives of thousands of community members by addressing social, religious, cultural, and legal challenges in terms of their rights and freedoms.

Visit our website at <https://www.bandhu-bd.org>

Chapter Three of this report details the process, challenges, and results of the efforts of Bandhu Social Welfare Society. Chapter Four outlines the lessons learnt through the interventions.

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch. “I Want to Live With My Head Held High” Abuses in Bangladesh’s Legal Recognition of Hijras (2016). Available at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/12/23/i-want-live-my-head-held-high/abuses-bangladeshs-legal-recognition-hijras>.

1.2. Objectives

The overall objective of the action research was to empower minority youth to act as change agents ('Changemakers') in their communities in India and Bangladesh through civic engagement to improve inclusion outcomes.

The specific objectives were the following:

1. Build capacity of (minority) youth groups in documenting rights violations and discrimination based on international and national benchmarks
2. Develop and strengthen minority youth networks to better engage with key stakeholders - state and civil society
3. Document the processes of the mobilization effort to better understand what works and what doesn't work to advance youth civic engagement

1.3. Research Problem

Across South Asia, minority and marginalized communities are experiencing various forms of discrimination and violence that include hate crime, sexual violence, discriminatory laws, and institutionalized forms of discrimination. This context has required an examination of how young people from minority and marginalized communities are responding to discrimination and violence. This action research seeks to draw out lessons on youth civic engagement by employing a set of models and strategies of youth engagement over two years.

1.4. Research Questions

1. How can enabling spaces be created and effective networking for dialogue promoted to prevent or minimize processes of exclusion, violence and radicalization, or reduce the appeal of violence?
2. How are the new spaces of civic engagement gendered and how can they promote greater gender equality among youth and in society?
3. How can new technologies be used to promote youth civic engagement and counter exclusion and violence among and against young women and men?

1.5. Methodology

This is an action research conducted using qualitative method.

In India, case studies and monthly progress reports provided by the Changemakers were used as data collection tools. Once in every two months, the Fellowship Coordinator of Misaal made observation visits to the communities where the Changemakers worked. Based on the case studies, monthly progress reports, and the observations, the Fellowship Coordinator compiled Quarterly Reports which were shared with LST.

In Bangladesh too, Changemakers provided case studies and monthly progress reports. The Project Manager then compiled Quarterly Reports based on the case studies, monthly progress reports, and observations, and shared them with LST.

LST reviewed the Quarterly Reports received from Misaal Foundation and Bandhu Social Welfare Society, and shared the observations and findings with the project teams. To supplement the reports, LST conducted interviews with the project teams of Misaal and Bandhu, as well as with some of the Changemakers. LST also made observation visits and conducted Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with Changemakers during country visits. Data collected were analyzed in 6 monthly cycles and the recommendations based on the findings were fed back into the next cycle of interventions.

Enabling Youth from Minority Communities in India: Process, Challenges, and Results



At a Training for Changemakers in India

2.1. The Beginning: Mapping Capacity and Context

Our YIELD journey in India began with a Baseline Mapping that examined the capacities of Changemakers and the context in which they worked. The Baseline Mapping consisted of two components. The first component assessed the capacities of the Changemakers. This was done by administering four scenario-based comprehension exercises that examined the respondents' ability to identify a problem, design solutions, plan action, mobilize community, document change, and articulate possibilities. The four comprehension exercises examined understanding and skills relating to the following thematic areas.

| | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Socio-economic discrimination, poor access to education, health, livelihood, gender-based discrimination, child labor, & violence against religious minorities | Communal violence, radicalization, discrimination based on caste, access to administrative services, and state apathy & complicity | Inter-religious marriage, young people eloping, violence, and networking | Discrimination of and violence against people with diverse SOGI |

The Changemakers were able to identify issues relating to socio-economic concerns and identity-based discrimination. Understanding of gender, gender-based discrimination, and sexuality was limited. Respondents across all States identified awareness raising and furthering access to entitlements as avenues to counter discrimination. However, some of them (youth who would later become Teachers and Rozgar Trainers, who trained women and girls in the community on stitching and facilitated livelihood development) were unable to identify the causes of discrimination, as well as the systems and processes that perpetuate discrimination. Therefore, they failed to identify effective and long-term solutions. This required that we develop comprehensive training manuals, that would develop perspective on identity, discrimination, and rights to train the Changemakers.

The second component of the Baseline Mapping captured the context in which Misal's Changemakers worked. Thus 11 FGDs were conducted to understand the context of the communities, their challenges, and aspirations for change.

In 2018 when the research began, the growing anti-Muslim sentiment already had disturbing effects on Muslim communities. Amidst growing hate crime and a violent vigilante campaign against beef consumption¹¹, communities remained fearful.

The communities where Misal's Changemakers work are characterized by extreme poverty. In addition, these communities face diverse and specific challenges. For instance, some communities such as those in Muzafarnagar survived riots. Phulwarishareef is an urban slum. In Bhopal, Misal works with the 'waste picker' community.¹² People in Barpeta were severely affected by the recent citizenship laws.

¹¹ Human Rights Watch. Violent Cow Protection in India— Vigilante Groups Attack Minorities (2019). Available at https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/india0219_web3.pdf

¹² Communities who make a living primarily through recycling waste

In these communities, girls are often given in marriage early. Young men enjoyed a higher degree of autonomy than women, but also faced pressure to drop out of school and find work. With little or no education and employment opportunities, young men from the communities expressed a sense of hopelessness. Both young women and men drop out of school to take over the gendered roles of taking over household work and earning an income.

The anxiety around discrimination by state institutions was particularly prominent. There was a pervasive feeling of discrimination at the hands of the state. Though there were contextual differences in the responses of the communities, poor access to education, unemployment, and poor livelihood opportunities emerged as key concerns across the communities. The social condition of poverty materialized clearly as the main challenge of the communities. Recurrent suggestions surrounding education and livelihood pointed to the need for interventions surrounding education and livelihood.

Concerns around lack of opportunities for education stood side by side with the concern of lack of opportunities to earn a living even when one is educated. Though this appears contradictory, poor capacities and skills, and inadequacy or lack of relevance of the education system, constitute the underlying reasons. Therefore, it was understood that our interventions needed to include skill development, and the development of knowledge seeking practices.

Discrimination and violence against women also emerged as a theme. Because of this, adopting an approach that addressed inequality and violence against women, and respect for gender equality became necessary. At the same time, we observed that patriarchal practices were ingrained in the communities. The communities were hostile to the engagement of women in trainings and community meetings. Thus, the question before Misaal was how to engage women and girls without disturbing the status quo. To address this question, Misaal would later find non-threatening entry points into the communities.

2.2. Process: Rolling out Interventions

Informed by the Baseline Mapping, Misaal Foundation designed three key interventions building upon the work they had already commenced.

1. Furthering access to entitlements and mobilizing the communities
2. Providing education to children and youth who are not in school and conducting other education related interventions
3. Providing livelihood skills and opportunities to women and girls

Misaal set up a network of 18 Changemakers below the age of 35 from the six Indian States where Misaal works. Based on their interests and skills, the 18 Changemakers were trained as either Fellows, Teachers, or Rozgar Trainers. Then there were three categories of Changemakers working with Misaal, each working in their own communities in their respective roles.

FELLOWS

worked on furthering access to entitlements, awareness rising, and community mobilization.

TEACHERS

educated children and youth in their communities and engaged in other education-related interventions.

Rozgar Trainers

trained women and girls in the community on stitching and facilitated livelihood development.

The key task of the Fellows was to support the communities to access entitlement schemes. They identified eligible persons, informed the community on the process, and helped fill out applications. They also facilitated community members to obtain identity documents. Some Fellows worked on legal aid and domestic violence. The fellows held regular community meetings, raised awareness on selected issues, and planned and implemented community-level interventions that were demanded by the community: These included improving access to water supply and sanitation, and local level advocacy. Three of the Fellows worked as State Supervisors who assisted other Changemakers.

Teachers worked at the Misaal's Taleem Centers. During the project period, Misaal had Teachers working in Bhopal, Vaishali, Patna, Phulwarisharif, Jaunpur, and Banda. Primarily, they taught children and youth who had dropped out of school, or who had not enrolled in school. They also raised awareness about education. They conducted regular meetings with parents. In a number of cases, Teachers successfully convinced parents to enroll children in schools and they assisted in the process of gaining school admission for these children.

What is it like to be a Teacher working with Misaal?

"I primarily work with children from the 'waste-picker' community. The community makes a living through begging. I work with children who are aged 6 to 14. Classes start at 10 AM and go on till 5 PM. The Taleem Center provides a safe space for the children while their parents have gone out. I teach them language, mathematics, and general knowledge through games, activities, and crafts. Every day after class, I sit with the children and talk about their day. They usually talk about how much they made begging and what they did with the money.

I'm happy to have the children under my care. It feels like they are my own children. I feel hurt when they are bullied or discriminated against in school. Most students are registered with the schools but they do not attend school due to discrimination".

19 year old Teacher from Bhopal, January 2019

"In the beginning, parents of the children were not happy to send the children to the Taleem Center, as taking them out of work reduced the income for the family. However, when they saw the children at the Centre, they changed their minds.

Some of the parents were reluctant to have the children admitted to school. So, I had meetings with parents where I encouraged them to enroll the children in school. When two or three parents admitted their children to school, others followed. So far 15 children in the community have been admitted to school".

26 year old Teacher from Jainpur, January 2019

While the Teachers worked with the children in the communities, Rozgar Trainers taught women to stitch. Livelihood training for women that did not cause upheavals within the community structures emerged as a desirable intervention in these communities. Livelihood training offered young women, who are prevented by their families from going to school, their only opportunity to go out of their homes. By the end of the project, the work of Rozgar Trainers would economically empower a number of women and their communities.

The mode of engagement used by Misaal through its network of Fellows, Teachers, and Rozgar Trainers had its own merits. The Changemakers were remunerated for their time. The consistent financial support allowed young people who cannot otherwise be engaged— who cannot afford to volunteer, the opportunity to engage. The Changemakers who were from marginalized communities with high levels of poverty, found the financial support empowering. This mode allowed for organic leadership to emerge from the communities.

The Changemakers met once a year, shared their experience, and strategized their interventions for the next year. This Annual Review Meeting became an opportunity to improve knowledge and skills of the Changemakers using the training manuals developed by Misaal Team.

2.3. Challenges

Socio-Economic Conditions

Socio-economic factors emerged as a key challenge to engaging youth. Communities with whom Misaal work live in poverty. While poverty and lack of education prevent civic engagement, these factors have also created a culture of dependency. It was noted that it is nearly impossible for the individuals, even youth, from these communities to break out of the cycle of dependency. It was observed early that youth expected something tangible, or something of direct personal benefit, in return for their engagement. In contexts where basic needs are not met, it was unrealistic to expect robust civic participation in the communities despite the efforts of the Changemakers. Linking Misaal's interventions with education and livelihood was helpful to some extent to circumvent this situation.

"Young people we work with live in abject poverty. When we organize a meeting, there is nothing tangible that we can give them. Sometimes we give them a cup of tea. Last year we organized a meeting for a few youths. We only expected 5-6 young men. But 50 boys turned up expecting some form of benefit. The community is dependent"

Fellowship Coordinator/ January 2018

Trust Deficit

Another early challenge was the community's trust deficit in development interventions. 'In the beginning there was no confidence in Misaal as many NGOs had previously come to the community but failed to deliver any real benefit', shared a Changemaker from Patna in January 2019.

Gender

Gender clearly emerged as a challenge to youth engagement. While it is difficult to engage women in the communities where Misaal works, unspoken rules completely prevent young men from reaching out to women. Similarly, a woman Changemaker cannot engage with young men. Both public and private spaces where the Changemakers meet are gendered. Involving women without a physical safe space for them to meet was a challenge.

"In this youth collective there are only boys. Why aren't there any girls? Well, there is a lot of work in the house. Girls of our age are burdened with housework. So they can't come. But we think that they should also be a part of this group"

19-year-old member of the Youth Collective, Ribhana Village, Rajasthan/ February 2020

Women Changemakers working with Misaal shared that the main challenge to their engagement came from within the family:

"My family initially didn't support my work with the community. Once I was required to attend a program conducted by Awaaz [an NGO]. My parents didn't let me go to this training. Then two members of the Awaaz team visited our home to persuade my parents to allow me to go to the training. My father accompanied me to the first program. He realized that it is a safe space. They are now supportive. Recently my photograph was published in the paper and my parents were proud. My father says that I am a lot of force in a small package"

19- year-old Changemaker from Bhopal/ January 2019

It was possible only for the women Changemakers whose families supported their engagement, to stay engaged. Even then, their continued engagement was difficult as they had to conform to unfair gender roles carrying a disproportionate level of responsibility with regard to housework and the care for children.

"The main challenge came from my own family. My son is in grade 10 and there are expectations from me. Often my family asks for money, but I don't have a lot of money. I get sick when I travel, especially in the winter. My husband says that it's my choice but I know that he is not happy".

26-year-old Changemaker from Jainpur/ January 2019

Issues around gender challenged youth civic engagement in ways that go beyond the engagement of youth and the communities. The community structures were keen on maintaining the status quo with regard to gender. There was resistance from the leaders of the community— usually older men— particularly against interventions on domestic violence.

The former head of the Panchayat of a village in Rajasthan became aggressive when he learned that the research team had conducted a meeting with the Women's Collective. At this meeting women spoke primarily of domestic violence. Day after the meeting, the Panchayat asked the Changemaker to empty the space where the Collective held its meetings.

"The head of the Panchayat asked us to empty the office space. That space where we hold the meetings of the Women's Collective and the Youth Collective belongs to the Panchayat. This reaction is not only because of the FGD we had on the 29th with the Women's Collective, but also because of the trainings we have been doing. We were told that the people in the village have questioned the Panchayat about what we are doing in the office.

We had a similar reaction in Patna. Once our former Head of Operations conducted trainings on domestic violence. Then the men in the community became agitated and questioned why women from outside are coming to teach our women. Men do not want women to get empowered.

I feel sad about it. Men generally react adversely when we work with women. This makes our work difficult.

Generally, it is difficult to mobilize the community. Very few elders participate in meetings. However, they are open to discussions about the NRC.

They question us only when we talk about women. This is sad. It is difficult to have trainings with women. Fights between the husband and wife are common. The community does not want women to learn about their rights. They don't want the women to go to the Police.

Women really like it when we talk about these issues. They learn new information—specially what is practical and useful. But they fail to stand up for themselves. It is perhaps because they are illiterate. They also want to save the family because they love their husbands and the children"

29-year-old Changemaker from Rajasthan/ March 2019

Safety and Security

Ensuring the safety and security of the Changemakers while they challenged the status quo and deeply entrenched social norms was difficult. Changemakers working with Misaal experienced issues around personal safety and security. Local goons threatened the Changemakers on several occasions. 'I work on domestic violence cases. I facilitate domestic violence survivors to escape from violence and I inform the Police in order to get the support the survivors need. Recently the local goons threatened me due to my involvement in domestic violence cases. They were also unhappy about how resources were distributed', shared a Changemaker from Patna in January 2019. Another Changemaker from Bihar shared that he was threatened by middlemen who fill up applications for entitlement schemes and identity documents for a fee— 'Since we are reducing their business, they once threatened to shoot me'.

Ensuring safety and security of the youth was made further challenging by the absence of physical safe spaces. The creation of real safe spaces was not envisioned as part of this action research. During the implementation it was soon understood that conversations on violence require physical safe spaces.

"Another key issue faced by the Misaal's team is the lack of a venue where young people can meet. It is impossible to discuss sensitive issues – issues around discrimination and violence, in public. Firstly, people do not open up, and secondly there is the risk of harm. [...] This is where the idea of youth centers come in. Young people need a safe space where they can feel free and unafraid. It is also not easy to break norms around gender without having a safe space where women can meet."

Fellowship Coordinator/ January 2018

2.4. Results

2.4.1. Changemakers' Response to Violence

Misaal's Changemakers worked in their communities as Fellows, Teachers, and Rozgar Trainers. In addition, they documented rights violations and contributed to Misaal's publications.

In April 2018, Misaal used its Second Quarterly Meeting as an opportunity to develop the capacities of Changemakers. At this residential meeting, Changemakers were trained on Food Security Act of 2013, Right to Education Act of 2009, and the Domestic Violence Act of 2005. Changemakers were also trained on designing and implementing data collection tools. Tools to monitor and analyse incidents of hate online and offline were also shared.

After the meeting, the Changemakers selected an area on which they would focus their work for the next 6 months. The Changemakers selected water, sanitation, and women and child welfare as their areas of focus. In May 2018, the Changemakers conducted surveys and community meetings in Haryana, Muzaffarnagar, Madhubani, Vaishali, and Phulwarisharif in order to develop interventions based on the communities' demands. A few months later, a Changemaker would recall their interventions on ensuring access to clean water:

"We did a campaign to obtain safe drinking water. During this campaign the community groups met 6-7 times. Initially we did a household survey and the issue of lack of safe drinking water came up. We surveyed 100 households. Then we held a meeting to prioritize issues. The majority felt that lack of drinking water was the most pressing concern. We sent a letter to the Department of Water Supply but there was no response. Then we accessed the online portal 'CM Window' at the Additional District Magistrate's (ADM) office and lodged a complaint. The complaint was transferred to the central authority and directions were forwarded to the district authority/relevant department. We submitted photos of damaged pipelines with the complaint. In October, the officials visited the village and decided to make a budgetary allocation to give water supply. Later, they visited 2-3 times to decide upon the specifics of the project.

Getting water supply is a demand of the community that specially concerns women's health. Women have to travel long distances to fetch water, and people fall sick when there is no clean water. This area lacks drinkable underground water due to high concentration of minerals. There are laws in place which say that people cannot be made to live in hunger and thirst. There are rights. When other villages get water, why didn't this village get water? There were many demands but it was agreed that water is the main concern. We can access entitlement schemes later but without water, we cannot live. Government has a responsibility to provide for these needs. There has to be equality".

27-year-old Changemaker from Bandra (State Supervisor- Haryana)/ January 2019

In July 2018, Misaal set up State Advisory Groups (SAGs). SAGs are a platform for local level stakeholders– including civil society activists and lawyers to come together and assist the Changemakers in their roles. SAGs were also used to develop capacities of Changemakers and to afford an opportunity for the Changemakers to engage in local level advocacy.

In the following months, Misaal developed a resource pack for the Changemakers that contained the following publications:

- *Access to Rights, Entitlement and Opportunities*- a compilation of the 150 social protection schemes by central and state government, eligibility, and application methods
- *Access to Justice*– a manual on operationalizing access to justice for minorities and marginalized groups, and international humanitarian rights mechanisms
- *Reflection and Documentation*- a manual on research tools and data analysis

In January 2019, Misaal’s Changemakers met at the Annual Convention, reflected on the work carried out in the previous year, and developed work plans. Activities planned included awareness raising, campaigns on education, assisting in cases of domestic violence, provision of para-legal aid to persons who are excluded from the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, furthering access to entitlement schemes, and legal aid. In August, Changemakers met in Bihar and further engaged in reflection and the development of work plans.

The Changemakers identified a range of issues on which they conducted community meetings to raise awareness. Education, vaccination, women’s health, and sanitation were among the thematic areas.

357

community meetings across communities in 2019
with the participation of

499 men

and

1040 women

In addition to teaching students in the Taleem Centers, the Teachers raised awareness on the importance of education. In 2019, the Changemakers in Patna secured school admission for 110 children on full scholarship after collaborating with local philanthropists. Changemakers facilitated the school enrolment of a further 75 students across sites. Over 200 parents participated in parent-teacher meetings.

382

students in Taleem Centers by the end of 2019

147 boys

and

235 girls

In Patna, two Changemakers Ayesha and Zainab* raised awareness among women in their communities on education and health. They worked with local charitable organizations to help students who had dropped out of school get admission into schools on scholarship.

Another Changemaker who is working as a Taleem teacher assisted 15 school-drop-out youth regain enrolment. He organized an outreach program with government schools in the area. As part of this outreach program he conducted a general knowledge quiz competition among the students studying at the Misaal's Taleem Center. 80 students participated in the competition. This exercise helped strengthen connections with local community based organizations who work on promoting education.

In Uttar Pradesh, Tahiya* worked as a teacher for young girls. Apart from conducting regular classes, during this period, she organized community meetings to raise awareness on the importance of girls' education. She assisted 20 girls regain admission into schools.

Another Taleem teacher in Bhopal helped 20 students gain admission into local government schools. She organized parents' meetings with the families of students attending the Taleem Center where she discussed the importance of education and sexual abuse of children.

*Names of the Changemakers have been altered
Misaal 7th Quarterly Report/ February 2020

Rozgar Trainers conducted stitching classes for women and girls. Changemakers in Uttar Pradesh formed and registered three self-help groups consisting of 32 women. Another group of 12 women was formed in Punhana, Harayana. These groups were able to secure contracts under National Rural Livelihood Mission and support the members achieve economic independence. In Bhopal, Rozgar trainers set up a collective for women and girls. These spaces became safe spaces for women to engage in discussions and reflections on the

concerns in their communities. One of these Rozgar Trainers connected the women in her community with a market space so that their products can be sold.

05 collectives of women

formed across sites

“Teachers and Rozgar Trainers enabled the Fellows to reach out to the larger community and created space for Misaal to address issues around gender. The fact that the Teachers and Trainers were women from the community increased credibility and strengthened the trust in Misaal. This helped Misaal organize large capacity building and leadership programs at the community level”.

Misaal Fellowship Coordinator/ August 2020

Changemakers who worked as Fellows facilitated access to entitlements—welfare measures established by the government. Fellows identified eligible individuals, informed the communities of the available entitlement schemes, and supported the communities with the application process. In addition to improving access to entitlements, the Changemakers assisted their communities obtain identity documents and bank accounts.

Communities assisted in

3022 instances

to access entitlements in 2019,
including the obtaining of

302 birth certificates

186 residential certificates

166 Adhaar cards

652 voter IDs

“Around 30% of people in the community do not have their names in the voting list. Though about 70% of the community is eligible to vote, about half of them do not have the Voter ID card that is required for voting. So, we help them obtain the Voter IDs... Voting is important. Voting has been provided for, by the Republic. There is a right to choose the candidate we like”.

27-year-old Changemaker from Bandra (State Supervisor- Haryana)/ January 2019

The Changemakers also provided trainings for the members of their communities on accessing entitlements. 51 trainings were conducted in 2019. 519 men and 706 women participated in these trainings.

With the passing of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in December 2019, and the proposals to scale up the National Register of Citizens exercise, the communities called upon the Changemakers to raise awareness on citizenship issues.

In Patna, Ayesha and Zainab* who used to work with women groups, organized awareness programs on the CAA upon requests from the women in the community. In Uttar Pradesh, Kusana* worked with victims of communal riots. In the aftermath of the introduction of CAA, she organized a large community awareness program on National Register of Citizenship.

*Names of the Changemakers have been altered
Misaal 8th Quarterly Report/ February 2020

In November 2019, before the CAA was passed by Parliament, Changemakers across the communities organized training sessions on National Register of Citizenship. Changemakers also supported communities obtain documents which might be required in order to be listed in the Register.

After the CAA was passed, Misaal's Changemakers developed workplans around improving awareness and building capacity on these policies and its implications. The policies affected the perspective of the Changemakers – they were motivated to conduct interventions and their enthusiasm was met with acceptance from the community.

COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020 seriously disrupted the activities of the Changemakers. However, during the lockdown, they engaged in COVID-19 related relief work.

2.4.2. The Change that We Saw

The improvement of knowledge and skills of the Changemakers was observed early. By the second year of the project, the Changemakers showed improved understanding of the issues faced by the communities and possible solutions. Improved documenting skills and mobilizing skills were observed.

“They were able to write better case studies and document in general. This was observed through the monthly report and assessments. Writing better case studies helped them better plan and organize their work for the following months”

Misaal 4th Quarterly Report/ July 2019

By July 2019, there was a visible improvement of the capacities of the Changemakers and a corresponding increase in their confidence. Changemakers successfully completed tasks that required a considerable level of planning and collaboration with multiple parties.

The Changemakers organized a vaccination campaign in Patna where 176 children were vaccinated. They also carried out a campaign on education to encourage school enrollment of children. Rozgar Trainers were able to secure government contracts under the National Rural Livelihood Mission. Documentation skills, comprehension, articulation, and communications skills of the Changemakers improved.

Misaal 4th Quarterly Report/ July 2019

It was observed that Fellows who were engaged in furthering access to entitlements displayed greater development of skills when compared to Taleem Teachers and Rozgar Trainers. This could be attributed to their constant engagement with the community and stakeholders. Some of the Misaal Fellows filed Right to Information (RTI) applications with ease and provided para-legal support to the communities. Continuous engagement with lawyers helped Changemakers gain some legal knowledge. State Supervisors of Misaal showed improved skills at teamwork and supervision. Taleem Teachers and Rozgar Trainers were seen to expand the scope of their work on their own. For instance, a Changemaker from Bhopal took the initiative to educate children on ‘good touch-bad touch’.

By 2020, as the project completed two years, Changemakers in India demonstrated personal growth. There was clear improvement in capacities, particularly with regard to networking and mobilizing. These improved skills helped the Changemakers to better engage the communities.

Tahiya* is a Changemaker from Bareilly. She comes from a family that was victimised by hate crime and discrimination. She had no formal education and no prior training in grassroots level activism. A State Supervisor of Misaal introduced her to Misaal team in July 2019. Since then she has been working as a Taleem Teacher. She teaches 60 children— 50 girls and 10 boys. In Misaal’s Baseline Assessment of her capacities, it

emerged that she was unable to understand implications of discrimination and envision long-term solutions to address the consequences of discrimination. However, during July to December 2019, she improved her capacities remarkably. Though she was appointed as a Teacher, she voluntarily took up activities that are generally done by Misaaal's Changemakers who are Fellows. She built strong connections with her community, particularly with young women, and organized several training programs for the community. She assisted the community to obtain Adhaar cards, PAN cards, and scholarships. She organized a cleanliness drive in the community and as part of this drive, called upon the local authorities to ensure sanitation in the area.

*Names of the Changemakers have been altered
Misaaal 8th Quarterly Report/ February 2020

It was also observed that many Changemakers stepped out of their usual roles to assist the community. For instance, in Bhopal, a Taleem Teacher organized meetings with parents on sexual abuse and assisted 15 families obtain Adhaar cards. Another Taleem Teacher from Bareilly mobilized women for a protest demanding better sanitation.

In the meantime, a shift in the role of the Changemakers was observed. Affected by the CAA and NPR, the communities called upon the Changemakers to assist them with regard to protecting their civic rights. Changemakers were now required to act beyond their original roles of facilitating socio-economic upliftment in the communities and furthering access to entitlements. Their new roles had a direct impact on the civic rights of Muslim minority communities. Particularly in Uttar Pradesh, members of the community reached out to the Changemakers seeking support with regard to the process of obtaining corrected documents.

In Bihar, Ayesha and Zainab* were engaged in raising awareness on education and assisting communities with school enrolment. They reported that a large number of women expressed deep anxiety about the CAA and requested them to organize awareness programs and training sessions on the new citizenship laws. At the request of the community, Ayesha and Zainab also joined the sit-in protests in Patna.

The political climate obliged the Changemakers to act pro-actively:

Shazia* was conducting livelihood training for 20 young girls in her community. She had set up a small Women's Collective. The center where Shazia was based, also served as a place where girls learnt about health and sanitation. When the communities became anxious of the consequences of NRC, Shazia organized awareness sessions on NRC for the community.

*Names of the Changemakers have been altered
Misaaal 8th Quarterly Report/ February 2020

When the community needed the support of Changemakers to ensure their civic rights, the Changemakers seamlessly stepped into the new role of educating the community on citizenship laws and supporting them to obtain relevant documents. Exposure to different

types of interventions undertaken by fellow Changemakers, and the availability of support, seemed to have helped the Changemakers to grow into organic leaders of their communities.

Corresponding to the changes in the Changemakers, the communities where they worked also changed.

The most evident change in the community was the improved trust in the Changemakers. A trust deficit was observed early in the communities where Misaal's Changemakers work. The community was initially reluctant to engage with the Changemakers due to their disappointment and distrust in NGOs. However, by July 2019, there were signs of improvement in the trust placed in the Changemakers. For instance, in Patna, where initially the Changemakers found it challenging to engage women, women began to reach out to the Changemakers seeking support in cases of domestic violence.

By 2020, a shift in the perspective and behavior of community groups was observed: Victims/survivors of domestic violence who were previously hesitant to discuss domestic violence reached out to Changemakers for support. In communities where Misaal conducted awareness programs on girls' education, parents of young girls reached out to Changemakers seeking assistance to enroll their children in schools. In Haryana and Rajasthan, young men sought out to the Changemakers to discuss career options as well as livelihood and scholarship schemes initiated by the central government. The Youth and Women Collectives established by Misaal Fellows turned into safe spaces for youth and women where they gathered to reflect upon issues in their communities and reach resolutions collectively.

In communities where Misaal Fellows organized regular trainings, the community became more independent. Changemakers observed that the community members would request assistance only when their applications for entitlements reached a halt in the process. In addition to the increase in engagement with the Changemakers, in 2020, for the first time since the commencement of the project, the communities mobilized and took initiative to address concerns in their communities with no assistance from the Changemakers: In Uttar Pradesh, a group of community members reached out to government authorities on their own accord seeking information on entitlement schemes. In Haryana, a group filed several grievance applications online and engaged with duty bearers in local authorities demanding action. In Bihar, members of the community reached out to block level officers requesting documents to enable them to get their identity cards.

“Before 2018 also I worked with the community, but it was under the YEILD project that I learned about research methodology. We learned how to do FGDs, community meeting etc. Learning about research methodology help us work with the communities. These tools help us ask questions in a very specific manner– and that allows us to understand the community clearly. When we understand the issues of the community, we know what we need to work on. So the project has helped us do work on the ground, in a more community-centric way.

Apart from research methodology, we learned about documentation and creating volunteer groups. I created youth groups and women groups. These volunteers are my way into the communities. I primarily work with these groups. Using the research tools and the volunteer groups, I have identified some pressing issues such as child marriages and domestic violence. I was able to do some work on domestic violence, but I have not yet been able to work on child marriages as this issue is so ingrained in the community.

The project has helped us to go beyond social protection schemes and understand issues through a rights-based approach. Under the project I have learned about women’s rights and child rights, and overtime I have become more aware of the importance of protecting these rights. I have also learned about minority identity– What does it mean to belong to a minority? I have understood minority identity, politically. I am now inclined towards a more liberal understanding of rights.

If I say very briefly, YIELD has helped us organize ourselves methodically. It has helped us work in an organized manner. This has been really useful to us in our work with the communities.”

Nazar*, 28- year-old Changemaker/ May 2020

Enabling Youth from Minority Communities in Bangladesh: Process, Challenges, and Results



Engaging Diverse Communities in Bangladesh

3.1. The Beginning: Mapping Capacity and Context

Our YIELD journey in Bangladesh fell across rough terrain. The barriers of bureaucratic procedure obstructed the implementation of the action research more than once. Bandhu Social Welfare Society worked with Changemakers from Diverse Communities, developed their capacities, and set up a network of peer educators. Bandhu's YIELD journey brought out intriguing lessons on identity-based marginalization and exclusion as well as on solidarity and friendship.

In Bangladesh too, YIELD commenced with a Baseline Mapping. The first component of the Mapping examined the capacities of the Changemakers and the second component attempted to understand their context. The responses from young people for the scenario-based comprehension exercises showed that almost all the respondents were aware of the identity-based discrimination, violence, and exclusion that their communities experience. The youth identified discrimination as a denial of human rights. The respondents identified intersectionalities and the increased vulnerability of people who face multiple forms of

discrimination. One third of the respondents were aware of discriminatory laws, policies, and practices in Bangladesh.

Stigma and discrimination, exclusion, bullying, and harassment characterize the space where the Changemakers live. Changemakers discussed the multi-layered discrimination experienced by Diverse Communities. Discrimination by the state compromised the safety of the community. Criminalization of sexual relationships between consenting adults of the same sex, abuse of authority by the Police, police harassment, and violation of civil and political rights such as right to vote, freedom of movement, and freedom to engage in a lawful occupation were identified as key concerns.

Changemakers noted that people with diverse SOGIs start experiencing discrimination early—at home, in school and in the community. Most of the respondents stated that they experienced discrimination at home. Discrimination by family took the forms of denial of inheritance and exclusion from decision-making. Young people are denied the expression of sexual orientation and gender identity, forced to conform to gender binary and gender roles, and when they resist, ‘disowned’ by the family. The resultant financial challenges have a crippling effect on young people. These communities are also denied entry into religious places and excluded from community gatherings. Rejection by family results in isolation and causes the deterioration of mental health of young people. Rejection by peers and the disclosure of SOGI had severe effects on the mental health of youth. One third of the participants revealed that they experienced depression due to exclusion.

“Changemakers Jummi, Ruki, and John had all left home at a very early age. They experienced bullying at school and in the neighborhood. Parents were unsupportive. When they decided to change their gender, the parents refused to keep them at home. So they left their parent’s house.

When they left home, they could no longer go to school. In some cases, the school authority did not allow them to continue education when it was found that they were transgender. Some found it impossible to go to school due to severe bullying”.

Names of the Changemakers have been altered.

YIELD Coordinator– Bandhu Social Welfare Society / June 2020

The Government of Bangladesh acknowledged the Hijra community in a Gazette in 2014. Though this proved legal recognition for Hijra community, transgender people (and people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities) who do not identify as Hijra, fall beyond this legal recognition. The Gazette also led to confusion about gender

“The Gazette in fact created confusion around the idea of ‘gender’, as the Hijra community is only one of many diverse communities, and being ‘Hijra’ is neither a biological characteristic nor a gender identity. It simply means that one is part of this community. The 2014 recognition did not identify communities and individuals who have

non-normative gender and sexual expressions but do not belong to the Hijra community.”

Names of the Changemakers have been altered.

YIELD Coordinator– Bandhu Social Welfare Society / June 2020

It was observed that Hijra youth in particular, face discrimination, violence as well as exploitation.

“Transgender youth face physical as well as sexual violence at a young age. Sexual exploitation is common in the Hijra community– sometimes trans women are directly forced into sex work by community members, and sometimes the pressure by Guru Mas to bring back money leads to sex work. At the same time, disclosure of sex work leads to loss of employment and humiliation outside the Hijra community.

In Dhaka there are about 2500 members of the Hijra community, and the great majority are living with Guru Mas. Though in rare occasions Guru Mas allow Hijra youth to continue studying, most of the Guru Mas do not. Guru Mas are often described as dominating and generally ‘cruel’. They involve the Hijras living under them in a systematic collection and distribution of money.”

YIELD Coordinator/ December 2018

3.2. Process: Rolling out Interventions

Bandhu set up a group of 15 Changemakers from Diverse Communities.

‘Courtyard Meetings’

Changemakers engaged in peer-education through monthly community meetings which were called ‘Courtyard Meetings’. Changemakers used these meetings to share information, discuss day-to-day concerns, find solutions to such concerns, and to document human rights violations. These meetings allowed members of the communities who are reluctant to reach out to Bandhu Social Welfare Society, or other service providers, access accurate and up-to-date information. These meetings also created the only space where youth were able to express their identity.

Courtyard Meetings were also used as a platform to network with Diverse Communities. The understanding of the needs of communities helped Bandhu develop community-centric approaches and strategies to service delivery. Changemakers contributed to the design of such strategies by bridging the organization with the communities.

Courtyard Meetings brought together youth from Diverse Communities creating a space where the youth were able to gain an understanding of discrimination and the experience of

queer people broadly; an understanding that goes beyond their individual experiences. This was also a space for friendship and solidarity.

Peer- Counselling

The Changemakers provided counselling to members of their communities. Communities expressed that they face mental health challenges due to bullying, exclusion, and marginalization. Some of the Changemakers themselves faced challenges with regard to mental health. Changemakers provided one-on-one peer counselling to youth who required support.

Referrals to Counselling and HIV Testing

Where the psychological support required was beyond the capacity of the Changemakers, they referred the youth to Bandhu's Counselling Unit.

Changemakers also referred youth for HIV testing. Peer-educators supported events where Bandhu provided free HIV testing. Changemakers also informed people living with HIV about free medical clinics and other available services.

Advocacy

Changemakers brought the concerns and challenges of their communities into advocacy platforms. They participated in advocacy events organized by Bandhu and voiced their challenges and demanded solutions before stakeholders. The Changemakers found the engagement in advocacy to be an empowering experience.

3.3. Challenges

Discriminatory Laws and Institutions

In Bangladesh, colonial sodomy laws still criminalize sex between consenting adults of the same sex.

Section 377 of the Penal Code titled ‘Unnatural Offences’ criminalizes voluntary ‘carnal intercourse against the order of nature with man, woman, or animal’. An explanation provides that ‘penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse’. The offence carries a sentence of imprisonment for life, or imprisonment which may extend to 10 years, and a fine. Though the language does not specifically refer to same-sex sexual activity, it is generally understood to exclude all sexual relations except those between heterosexual partners.

This criminalization has forced queer people to live in secrecy. Fear of prosecution under s.377, as well as the fear of police harassment and intimidation were found to be barriers to engage youth from Diverse Communities in Bangladesh.

In addition to s.377, there are laws that are often used to intimidate, threaten, and harass people with diverse SOGIs. The Dhaka Metropolitan Police Ordinance of 1976 allows the Police to detain any person from sunset to sunrise under any suspicious circumstances. This law looms over transwomen who stay out late. The communities are also harassed using laws prohibiting impersonation and sex work.

Cultural values and stigma

In most instances, youth faced harsher treatment from family and society rather than from law enforcement. Youth experienced bullying at school and exclusion within family. This context of marginalization caused extreme anxiety around identity disclosure. This was another challenge to work with youth from Diverse Communities in Bangladesh.

“I identify as gender queer. It is becoming difficult for me to spend time on project related work because my family is becoming suspicious. I don’t want them to know anything. So I want to stay away from everything for a while”

25-year-old Changemaker from Dhaka/ May 2020

Anxiety around identity disclosure, remained a key challenge to engage youth from the communities. Fear of identity disclosure among the youth, and prevalent stigma prevent the community members from reaching out to the Changemakers. There is fear that associating with groups who are open about their diverse SOGIs will make public their own sexual

orientation and gender identity. This in turn, made it difficult for the Changemakers to communicate with, and mobilize youth from the communities.

Safety and Security

Intimidation by the law enforcement and the threat of hate crime against queer people were challenges to engage youth. In addition, the Changemakers expressed their fears that rising religious extremism may lead to persecution of their communities. It was shared that the sense of security was seriously threatened when political leaders with extremist ideologies come into power.

Economic condition

Due to rejection of family and poor opportunities at education and employment, queer youth in Dhaka face dire economic circumstances.

“Trans Changemakers Jummi, John and Ruki have left home. Jummi and John live with other transwomen– They’ve joined Hijragiri [They engage in Hirja lifestyle]. After years of struggle they now have some stability. Ruki is only 20 years old. She lives in difficult circumstances. Despite having completed school education and received several trainings from Bandhu, she has not been able to secure a job with a decent income. She is currently living in Dhaka city with a meager income of \$58 a month. This situation, added to the difficulties in finding safe accomodation and the difficulties to use public transport due to harassment, make the lives of trans youth difficult”

Names of the Changemakers have been altered.

YIELD Coordinator– Bandhu Social Welfare Society / June 2020

Gender

Just as in India, in Bangladesh too, gender posed a key challenge to youth engagement. Changemakers found it difficult to reach out to women. Out of Bandhu’s 11 cisgender Changemakers, only 3 were women. A cisgender person is someone whose gender identity corresponds to their sex that was identified at birth in a traditional sense. For instance, if someone was identified as *female* at birth and she identifies herself as a *woman* today, she is cisgender. In other words, someone who is not transgender, is cisgender. In this case, the lack of engagement of cisgender women Changemakers shows the effects of gendered learning and gender based barriers where girls and young women are taught against going outside and engaging with the society.

Meanwhile, all 4 of the transgender Changemakers were women, pointing to the difficulty in reaching out to trans men. Trans men find it particularly difficult to find accommodation as they are often asked to share housing with men. Trans men also face high levels of stigma

and resort to a life of complete secrecy. They are prevented from accessing health services due to the fear of disclosure of identity.

While all members of Diverse Communities face some form of discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization due to the fact that they either challenge gender norms or choose transition, women and transmen remain particularly vulnerable due to intersectionalities of discrimination.

Administrative challenges

Red tape posed perhaps the most serious challenge to implement YIELD in Bangladesh. Government approval to send and receive funds for project activities took months.

Bandhu received the approval of Bangladesh NGO Affairs Bureau to receive funds for the period of 15th January to 15th July 2018, only on the 15th July 2018. The Approval of Central bank of Sri Lanka to transfer the funds took another three weeks.

Bandhu commenced project activities on 15th July 2018, borrowing from the organization's funds. But the activities came to halt in March 2019 when the received funds ended. The project budget was being revised at this stage.

By this time, Bandhu expected the second fund disbursement for the period from 15th July 2018 to 15th January 2019 which had already passed. Bandhu applied for approval of Bangladesh NGO Affairs Bureau and received the approval on 19th August 2019. The approval was limited to receive only 50% of the expected disbursement. LST sent the funds soon after.

Having spent the 50% of the funds, Bandhu applied again to receive the remainder of the funds for the period from 15th July 2018 to 15th January 2019 and the remaining funds of the project. The NGO Affairs Bureau gave approval on the 24th June 2020.

The delays in fund transfers had serious implications on Changemakers' activities. They started activities in July 2018 and work continued till March 2019. They resumed activities in August 2019 but resources ceased by December 2019. During the periods when funds were unavailable, Changemakers held Courtyard Meetings. But the Changemakers had exciting plans– for instance, they intended to conduct training programs, develop videos, make a photo novella, conduct art therapy, and celebrate special days. When these plans could not be implemented, there was frustration and disappointment. Towards the end of the project period, sustaining engagement became challenging.

3.4. Results

3.4.1. The Changemakers' Response to Violence

Bandhu's Changemakers held monthly Courtyard Meetings with youth from the community and conducted review meetings. At the review meetings, the Changemakers discussed findings from the Courtyard Meetings and designed activities in response.

50 Courtyard Meetings
in 2019
with the participation of
378
youth from Diverse Communities
in Dhaka

At the Courtyard Meetings, the Changemakers raised awareness on HIV prevention, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), mental health, and human rights. Based on their discussions at the Courtyard Meetings, Changemakers recommended activities to be conducted for the benefit of the community. Raising awareness on mental health was one such suggestion.

The Changemakers organized a side event at a Conference held in the Dhaka University. Changemakers engaged with the students at the University and disseminated information on mental health of sexuality and gender diverse youth and on accessing mental health services available at Bandhu, using conversation and leaflets.

Bandhu 8th Quarterly Report/ February 2020

In addition to Courtyard Meetings, the Changemakers engaged in peer-counselling and advocacy. They also referred members of the community to counselling, clinics, and HIV testing.

The Changemakers also developed 3 mobile videos on their YIELD journey. Unfortunately, these videos could not be finalized before lockdown was imposed in Dhaka due to COVID-19 outbreak.

After March 2020, the Changemakers could no longer hold Courtyard Meetings due to the pandemic. Movement became restricted. At this point, they began to meet on online platforms. COVID-19 relief became a matter of urgency and the Changemakers began to support Bandhu Social Welfare Society with COVID-19 relief distribution.

3.4.2. The Change that We Saw

By the end of 2018, when Changemakers in Bangladesh had completed 6 months of engagement with YIELD, we observed that the Changemakers' engagement with Bandhu improved. They were keen on participating in review meetings and at the review meetings they pro-actively provided suggestions for the organization's strategic plan.

By mid 2019, there was a visible improvement of the capacities of the Changemakers. By this time, they had participated in three trainings:

- Training on advocacy and documentation
- Training on human rights which included sessions on national and international laws, policies, and practices, Yogyakarta Principles, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
- Training on violence and discrimination

As capacities improved, there was a corresponding increase in their confidence. For instance, Bandhu's women Changemakers who were previously anxious about working with Hijra youth, now confidently conducted Courtyard Meetings with the Hijra community. Changemakers also became vocal in advocacy platforms.

As the project progressed, it was observed that Changemakers have developed friendship and solidarity.

"At the beginning of the project there were tensions between the Changemakers. Some Changemakers felt left out of decision-making with regard to project activities. But after many meetings and workshops together, they learnt each other's stories and developed a bond. The project helped them understand the struggles of different communities. The opportunity to work together helped them see beyond initial prejudices and develop friendships"

YIELD Coordinator – Bandhu Social Welfare Society / June 2020

By the end of the project period, the Changemakers had acquired new skills: They could now use a computer, conduct a FGD, and write a report. They are informed of laws and available redress mechanisms if their rights are violated.

"From the beginning, the Changemakers wanted to engage with the communities. But now they also understand the importance of advocacy to bring about change. During this action research, the Changemakers attended many advocacy events. These events helped them understand that our messages need to reach every level of society—including the policy makers, to bring about change"

YIELD Coordinator – Bandhu Social Welfare Society / June 2020

"I got in touch with Bandhu in January 2018. I initially joined as a volunteer. Working with YIELD project has caused many changes in my life. Now I am more independent. I have my own say over my life. When I say 'independent', I mean financial independence. It is the best thing for you. In our society if you can't earn, your opinion doesn't matter. At the same time, being part of this organization has earned me respect in the society. Now I am heard.

My family has expectations of me that I cannot fulfill, but here at Bandhu, I feel that the project staff is happy with me.

I come from a very conservative family. They have been trying to get me married since I was in the 9th Grade. Now I'm in the University and they are still pressuring me to get married. A few months ago I set my hair on fire to escape from a marriage proposal. Before I joined Bandhu, I worked at an insurance company, and I left because of sexual harassment.

I have learned many things while working with Bandhu.

I learned Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word, and this is so important to me. In our families, girls are not permitted to use a computer. They can use a computer only if the husband allows it. So this was very important to me.

I learned to write reports and communicate. Now I can speak to a group and build good relationships. I learned about the law – I don't know a lot, I know only a little bit, but even that will help me.

I found my people here. I used to suffer from the fear of existence. I felt alone, I felt like an alien. But now I have found my people. First I found people who are exactly like me, and then the other communities. This has enriched my life. Now I feel like I have a part in the future – a purpose.

I want to work for the communities in any way I can. If it is advocacy, I will do advocacy. I know how painful it is to be alone, and what change is made possible by having a platform. It helps.

I have developed many new skills. I was trained on human rights. I was given information on paralegal services. I learned to make videos. Recently, I filmed an entire short video. I could have never imagined doing something like this. I was never allowed to do these things"

Sonia 25 years old Changemaker from Dhaka/ May 2020*

Findings: Lessons on Youth Engagement

4.1. Lesson on Strategies of Youth Engagement

This section shares our learnings on the first research question: How can enabling spaces be created and effective networking for dialogue promoted to prevent or minimize processes of exclusion, violence, and radicalization, or reduce the appeal of violence?

4.1.1. Choosing Entry Points into the Communities

In India, when this action research started, anti-Muslim violence was on the rise and the communities were fearful to engage with work surrounding identity based discrimination and violence. Social structures and hierarchies also posed barriers to civic engagement. Patriarchal values in particular, made the communities hostile towards the engagement of women. In this setting, Misaal was required to use non-threatening entry-points into the communities. Therefore, Misaal's Changemakers helped the communities access entitlements, educated children at the Taleem Centers, and provided women and girls training on dress-making.

The context of growing persecution of Muslims made it difficult for Misaal to discuss identity using an ideological approach. The condition of suppression itself prevented Misaal from taking an ideological approach to engage communities in a conversation to deconstruct suppression.

However, the constant engagement of Changemakers with their communities allowed the Changemakers to emerge as organic leaders of the communities. As the Citizenship Amendment Act was passed by the Government in December 2019, anxiety around the proposed NPR exercise grew, and the communities turned to the Changemakers for mobilization, information, and support.

In Bangladesh, Bandhu's Changemakers selected sexual and reproductive health as the entry point into the communities. It was recognized that the communities were open to discuss concerns around health. There was also a need to start conversations on health as the communities were reluctant to access government health services due to the prevalence of stigma on the part of service providers.

4.1.2. Concerns around Voluntary Engagement

Bandhu's experience showed us that engagement that depends entirely on voluntary commitment is unsustainable. A key challenge to the implementation of the action research in Bangladesh was with regard to sustaining engagement. In Bangladesh where the mode of engagement initially depended entirely on voluntary commitment from youth, sustaining engagement was difficult. The fact that youth are financially insecure in these demanding times was understood as the cause. This situation is aggravated with regard to youth with diverse SOGIs who suffer rejection from family, poor access to formal education, and discrimination in the job market. Hijra youth in particular, have adopted a practice to reject volunteer work due to their dire economic circumstances and past experience of exploitation. Motivating youth to stay engaged required extensive effort and even then, ensuring that the Changemakers adhered to timelines, or performed specific tasks became challenging.

In comparison, the mode of engagement used by Misaal, where the Changemakers were remunerated for their time, yielded better results over time. Consistent financial support allowed young people who cannot otherwise participate, the opportunity to engage. This process created organic leadership from within the communities and the youth become catalysts for change. As Changemakers are based in communities with high levels of poverty, financial support is motivating and empowering. As capacities improved with time, Misaal's Changemakers became more confident and more willing to take initiative. They identified the satisfaction derived from working for the community to be the main motivation for their engagement. The Changemakers in Bangladesh, including Hijra youth, acknowledged that there is value in serving the community, but found it harder to stay engaged with the same degree of motivation they expressed at the beginning of the project.

To address this issue in the strategy, in November 2019, it was decided to provide a monthly allowance to the Changemakers of Bandhu. Due to bullying and harassment based on SOGI, the Changemakers found it challenging to take public transport. Therefore, in addition to the monthly allowance, it was required to provide the Changemakers with a travel allowance.

4.1.3. Capacity Development and Perspective Building

Developing capacity of youth is at the center of youth civic engagement. It was observed that success of community interventions depended largely on the capacity of the Changemaker—particularly, the capacity to understand context and the needs of the community, capacity to facilitate community meetings, and their skill to navigate the community in a way that builds trust. Therefore, when engaging young people, an approach that incorporates continuous capacity development is needed.

Curriculum development emerged as a means to methodically improve knowledge, behavior, and the perspective of youth.

It was understood that capacity development must go beyond training young people to network and deliver services. It needs to enable youth, through perspective building, to perceive and unpackage discrimination broadly, and recognize that discrimination is the way in which unfair power imbalances are perpetuated. This understanding (of the structural dimensions of discrimination) transcends individual experience and borders to make it a societal issue.

Perspective building needs to start at inception as part of capacity building. Having clarity about our political ideology and having a set of organizational values can help us strengthen our political vision. Building perspective of young people can have a snowball effect of empowerment— when they become aware, they begin to make their communities aware.

Issues of marginalized communities, women, and young people need to be understood within the political context— because personal is political, and this empowers communities and allows them to fight internalized stigma, express their identity without fear, and confront social inequalities. Perspective building is also central to mobilization and movement building.

Grounding our perspective in human rights can be useful in the long-term. Our core values (such as equality, non-discrimination, respect for dignity, democracy, justice etc) need to be reflected at every stage of our work— designing interventions, implementation, and financial planning.

4.1.4. Creation of Safe Spaces

Ensuring that the space for young people has an inclusive and non-judgmental culture has worked well for Bandhu's interventions. Expression of identity being a fundamental aspect of queer rights, providing an inclusive and non-judgmental space for young people with diverse SOGIs to 'be themselves' is crucial. It is an achievement in itself. Some of the trans Changemakers engaged with Bandhu get limited opportunity to express identity. Except for small parties organized at a private residence, Bandhu is the only space where they can express themselves in community.

A safe space needs an inclusive and non-judgmental culture as well as a relaxed environment. Young people find it difficult to express themselves openly in office settings controlled by adults. While it is essential that the platforms we create are non-judgmental and inclusive, the existence of physical safe-spaces are vital for youth engagement.

Bandhu's experience shows that youth engagement works well in informal settings— peer education takes place through monthly Courtyard Meetings which were intended to take place in a public space. However, due to the legal and cultural context in Bangladesh, public spaces are not safe for youth from Diverse Communities to sit together and discuss issues of discrimination, human rights violations, or sexual and reproductive health concerns. There is the risk of police abuse and even the possibility of physical violence. This affects the quality of information shared and the genuineness of conversations, effectively diminishing the value of the mode of engagement.

In the context of Misaal's work too, lack of a venue to hold meetings has been a challenge. 'It is impossible to discuss sensitive issues – i.e. issues around discrimination, in public. Firstly, people do not open up and secondly there is a risk of harm', shared the Misaal's Fellowship Coordinator. Though Misaal has three hubs Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, these hubs neither have the space to accommodate a fairly large group of young people, nor the environment conducive for effective participation.

Absence of a physical space also makes it difficult to challenge gender norms. Both public and private spaces where the Changemakers meet are gendered. Involving women without a safe space for them to meet is challenging. In gendered spaces, only women can reach out to women. When working in communities where women do not come out of their homes, expecting the Changemakers to engage with the community in public spaces can have the effect of excluding women from the interventions.

4.1.5. Sustaining Engagement

It was observed that when change is slow, there is the risk of disappointment and resultant disengagement. Periodic engagement to inject motivation and continued perspective development appeared to be helpful.

Establishing a mechanism to incorporate young people's recommendations when planning organizational policy and direction is mandatory in order to achieve meaningful youth engagement. Positive relationships with the organization help retain youth engagement.

In late 2019, while Misaal's Changemakers took on their expanded roles with heightened enthusiasm, Changemakers linked to Bandhu, who resumed activities after several months of inaction due to the unavailability of funds, struggled to regain the initial momentum. Two Changemakers dropped out. The Changemakers also found it challenging to engage youth from the communities. During the months of inaction, the relationships the Changemakers maintained with the community appeared to have broken down, with the community distancing themselves from the Changemakers.

4.2. Lessons on Gender

This section shares our learnings on the second research question: How are the new spaces of civic engagement gendered and how can they promote greater gender equality among youth and in society?

Gender norms and resultant restrictions posed serious barriers to youth engagement. Challenges faced by women Changemakers and the challenges faced in engaging women from the communities in India and Bangladesh were discussed under sections 2.3 and 3.3 respectively. In the communities where Misaal works, it is impossible for a young man to sit with a group of women to have a meeting. Women are not 'allowed' to come to meetings and reaching out to young women is difficult. The Changemakers attached to Bandhu also faced challenges in reaching out to women.

In this setting, unfortunately, the spaces we created also remained gendered:

Out of the 11 cisgender Changemakers attached to Bandhu, only 3 were women. Meanwhile, all 4 of the transgender Changemakers were women, pointing to the difficulty in reaching out to trans men.

All 3 of Misaal's State Supervisors were men: State Supervisors act as the link between the National Resource Center and the Changemakers. They supervised the interventions of the Changemakers.

Out of the seven Fellows, five were men. It was observed that Fellows whose role included furthering access to entitlements, awareness rising, and community mobilization, showed faster development of capacities when compared to capacities of Teachers and Rozgar Trainers. This was attributed to constant engagement with the communities and stakeholders.

While three out of six Teachers were women, both the Rozgar Trainers were women. Their mode of engagement—teaching dress making to women and girls—a strategically selected entry point into the community—reinforced traditional gender norms. But for young women who are unable to step out of their homes due to restrictive gender norms, the livelihood trainings provided their only opportunity to go out. Rozgar Trainers also set up self-help groups and supported the economic empowerment of women.

Despite the gendered roles of the Changemakers, the space created by YIELD provided the Changemakers an opportunity to break barriers. Both the modes of youth engagement used by Misaal Foundation and Bandhu Social Welfare Society provided a space where young men and women can learn together and interact as equals.

"I come from the village where interaction between men and women is limited. At an earlier point in time, I would not have even come out of the house. My journey with Misaal has empowered me"

35-year-old Changemaker from Muzafar Nagar/ January 2019

Changemakers attached to Misaal received several trainings relating to gender, including trainings on domestic violence prevention– and they shared that these learnings have helped them in their personal lives.

"My wife and I were married as children. I was 15 years old. I was not allowed to study. Now I raise my voice against child marriages. Now I believe that girls and boys are equal. I know that girls and boys in the family should be treated the same way. My brother has a daughter and I always persuade my family to give her a good education".

27-year-old Changemaker from Rajasthan/ March 2020

Deconstructing gender binary was very much part of Bandhu's interventions. Due to the nature of Bandhu's work, perspective on diversity of gender was already built in to Bandhu's organizational values. The communities with whom Bandhu worked, were open to understand gender as a social construct. However, in the communities where Misaal works, gender norms are so deeply embedded that it was harder to challenge these norms.

One of the primary ways in which Misaal's Changemakers worked towards gender equality was through rising awareness against domestic violence and supporting domestic violence survivors. Initially it was difficult to engage women on issues surrounding domestic violence. Women were reluctant to speak in spaces where there were men. However, by 2020, survivors of domestic violence who previously hesitated to discuss domestic violence, reached out to Changemakers for support.

"I married when I was 18. Husband beat me asking for dowry. About 6 months ago, he asked for a car and my parents were not able to give the money. They beat me. They locked me in a room and didn't give me food. I could not bear the beating anymore, so I came to my parents' house. This Women's Collective [set up by Changemakers] helped me and took care of me. Now I have applied for divorce".

A domestic violence survivor from Rajasthan / February 2020.

The Women's Collectives set up by the Changemakers provided a safe space for women.

"We meet at this center once every week for 2 hours. It provides us a safe space to gather and speak about our issues."

Member of Women's Collective- Ribana Village, Rajasthan /February 2020.

Misaal's Changemakers, especially those who are Teachers campaigned on the importance of girls' education. In communities where the Changemakers conducted awareness programs, parents of young girls reached out to Changemakers seeking assistance to enroll their children in schools.



A community meeting in India

4.3. Lessons on using New Technologies

This section seeks to share our limited findings on the third research question: How can new technologies be used to promote youth civic engagement and counter exclusion and violence among and against young women and men?

Developing computer related skills of youth has become necessary for youth engagement. While the internet helps youth stay informed, the internet and social media also facilitate community engagement. Both in India and Bangladesh, the number of internet and social media users has been growing rapidly.¹³ In the last five years the number of internet users in India and Bangladesh has increased by 23% and 31.4%, respectively. In 2020, 50% of India's population and 41% of the population of Bangladesh use the internet. With over 560 million internet users, India is the second largest online market in the world with a booming telecommunication industry. It is not surprising that in 2020 nearly 50% of India's population accessed social media.¹⁴ These statistics suggest that internet and social media have become crucial platforms to engage youth and mobilize communities.

Bandhu's experiments with social media pointed to the opportunity provided by virtual spaces to scale up interventions: A video shared by Bandhu on Facebook reached 32,000 views. Bandhu's Changemakers experimented with video making for storytelling in order to increase awareness as well as to be used in advocacy efforts.

Bandhu's Changemakers stayed connected with each other and the communities using social media. They formed 'secret groups' on social media- virtual safe spaces to express identity, share information, and stay in touch. They also set up social media pages to support the community.

¹³ Statista [website]. 'Social network user penetration in India from 2015 to 2020 with a forecast until 2025 03/08/2020. Accessed at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/240960/share-of-indian-population-using-social-networks/>, DataReportal [website]. Digital 2020: Bangladesh 17/02/2020. Accessed at <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-bangladesh>, Internet Live Stats [website]. 'Bangladesh Internet Users', n.d. Accessed at <https://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/bangladesh/> and Statista [website]. 'Internet usage in India – Statistics and Facts' 07/07/2020. Accessed at <https://www.statista.com/topics/2157/internet-usage-in-india/>

¹⁴ Statista [website]. 'Social network user penetration in India from 2015 to 2020 with a forecast until 2025 03/08/2020. Accessed at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/240960/share-of-indian-population-using-social-networks/>

At the same time, Bandhu's Changemakers pointed out the disturbing reality of hate speech and violence online. Sexuality and gender diverse youth become targets for cyber bullying. The anonymity enjoyed online may also contribute to impunity for violence. Youth from Diverse Communities often resort to virtual spaces to find partners. The Changemakers shared that at times, the partners so found harassed, blackmailed, and stole from youth from Diverse Communities. This points to the need to provide training and tools on digital security to young people.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, all forms of white collar work was suddenly moved to online spaces. When this happened, the Changemakers attached to Bandhu requested further training on the use of digital platforms and this was provided.

As part of YIELD, Misaal commenced the development of a curriculum for youth activists that will be shared online. 'Misaal School for Social Action' is expected to help Misaal scale up interventions through youth engagement. This curriculum contains modules on identity, core values, law and justice system, social protection schemes, and transferable skills relating to designing and executing interventions. Unfortunately, the lockdown imposed due to the COVID-19 outbreak prevented the completion of the curriculum before the expiry of the project period.

Online space is also being used to file entitlement applications in India. Changemakers in India now use the internet to submit applications where online submission is an option. At least on two occasions Changemakers used the online portal CM Window to successfully address demands of the communities. Once the Changemakers lodged a complaint over damaged pipelines and helped the community regain access to clean water. In another instance, the Changemakers obtained a guarantee of fund transfer.

"Indira Gandhi Aavaaz Yojana is a central government scheme to provide financial assistance to families below the poverty line to construct brick houses. Funds are given in 3 installments. The first installment is given before construction. Some community members had not received the second installment even after 2 years of the receipt of the first installment. This was one of the concerns of the community. Then the Changemakers accessed CM Window and obtained a written guarantee that funds will be transferred once available"

Misaal's State Supervisor of Haryana/ January 2019

The ability to network and to access public complaint mechanisms online emerged as compelling reasons to develop computer-related skills in youth.

During the pandemic, when movement became restricted, the Changemakers conducted trainings for the communities using online platforms. Six virtual trainings were conducted between 17th March and 15th July 2020 with the participation of 84 women and 113 men.

In our interventions, it emerged that lack of resources and poor literacy among the communities posed serious challenges to using new technologies in our work:

“The community Misaal works with is economically marginalized. Technology—especially internet and social media, has reached far flung places but it is still a distant dream to use these means for community development. Most families don’t even have a mobile phone. Those who have a phone, have one phone for the whole family. Those who have phones can’t use them for larger social benefits due to illiteracy. Changemakers repeatedly flagged this as a major issue in their work.”

Fellowship Coordinator/ July 2020

Concluding Thoughts

The Muslim communities in India face discrimination and violence. Recent changes to citizenship laws have left Muslim communities particularly vulnerable. In rural India, patriarchal social structures suppress women in all aspects of life. Poverty makes the communities further vulnerable. Widespread hatred and stigma against Muslim communities, and the institutionalization of discrimination has led to a condition of suppression. During YIELD, the Changemakers in India responded to this context of violence. Unsurprisingly, this context of violence which called for youth civic engagement, posed the greatest barrier to the same.

The sexuality and gender diverse communities in Bangladesh face violence as a result of discriminatory laws and policies, police abuse, widespread stigma, and discrimination. Discrimination prevents the realization of civil and political rights, and leads to the denial of socio-economic rights. In India, there was historically a greater acceptance of sexual diversity and relations but with the advent of colonialism, restraints were imposed on the communities. Bangladesh and India have the same (British inflicted) Penal Code that has since determined sexual norms and created a system of oppression. Even though Britain and India have changed the laws to respect sexual diversity, changing attitudes remains difficult.

To facilitate youth civic engagement, there needs to be spaces that are inclusive and non-judgmental which provide opportunity for education and capacity building, as well as support. Ensuring the safety and security of youth involved needs to be a priority. Therefore, it is essential that there are physical safe places where young people can meet, learn, and collaborate.

Both the modes used to engage youth by Misaal and Bandhu have great potential. While peer-education has been tested in many settings, Misaal uses the innovative approach of employing young people from marginalized communities. This model develops organic leadership. This empowers young people. When coupled with the development of perspective and capacity, this strategy has the potential to give rise to a grassroots-level movement.

Misaal's choice of non-threatening entry points into the communities helped gain trust within the communities. Constant engagement with the communities and continuous capacity development gave youth confidence. When they were called upon by the communities to mobilize the communities and raise awareness on citizenship laws in India, they seamlessly stepped into their new roles.

Perspective development and curriculum development are very useful for youth engagement, and for setting in motion an approach that will have a long-term impact. Perspective building needs to enable youth to perceive discrimination broadly, and recognize discrimination as a way in which unfair power relations and social imbalances are perpetuated.

While systematic documentation and periodic reflection upon our work helped us remain focused and improve the quality of interventions, for meaningful youth engagement, the reflections and recommendations of young people need to be used to design and plan interventions. When working with young people, a progressive engagement can be expected and this needs to be facilitated within our organizations. Securing young people's participation in organizational decision-making process helps sustain engagement.

In our interventions we need to be conscious of gender and the restrictions it imposes on civic engagement. Both patriarchy and heteronormativity need to be recognized as structures of oppression that result in systematic discrimination and violence. Existent intersectionalities need to be viewed in the backdrop of this knowledge.

