

*The Southern Women Feminist  
Network (SoWFeN)*



# Annual Report



2021-2022

Prepared by

**NICE FOUNDATION**

## Executive Summary:

The Southern Women Feminist Network (SoWFeN), is a platform for women feminists, led by the *Nice Foundation*, and has achieved remarkable success aimed at uplifting the rights of women, religious minorities, Dalit families, People with disabilities, and LGTB, with a specific focus on the advocacy and awareness raising on social issues. This year besides advocacy, awareness raising mass movement a tobacco control campaign, and an untouchable pig farming community were targeted to support sustainable agriculture practices, the initiative targeted Dalit families, distributing pigs, ducklings, composted manure, and seeds to encourage self-sufficiency through backyard vegetable cultivation. This comprehensive approach sought to enhance the overall quality of life and livelihoods within the community.



Key to the network's success was robust community engagement facilitated by organized meetings and courtyard gatherings, fostering stronger bonds within the community.

Collaborations with government agencies, Agriculture and Animal Resource Officers, and local markets further amplified the initiative's impact. The network resulted in addressing GBV, early marriage, access to paternal properties by the minority Hindu women, and pig farmers' livelihood rights. It also initiated increased income and improved livelihoods for the targeted vulnerable community including pig farming families, fostering advanced skills and sustainable agriculture practices that were embraced by 300 families, leading to heightened food security and economic stability as one of their rights.

Addressing challenges such as logistical obstacles and initial community reluctance, the network employed strategic resource allocation, community support, and targeted awareness campaigns.

Comprising a diverse and dedicated group of organizations, SoWFeN's member entities include:

- i. BanchteShekha (Jashore, Bangladesh)
- ii. Dhruva (Khulna)
- iii. Prerona (Satkhira)
- iv. SHEBA (Bagerhat)
- v. ManabadhikarSangskriti Foundation (MSF) (Dhaka)
- vi. Welfare Efforts (WE) (Jhenaidah)
- vii. Social Upliftment Voluntary Organization (SUVO) (Barisal)
- viii. Aid Comilla (Cumilla)
- ix. SamajKalyanUnnayanSangstha(SKUS)
- x. Association for Social Development & Distressed Welfare (ASDDW)
- xi. Clanship, Khulna
- xii. RUSTIC, Khulna
- xiii. Dustha Mohila Sangstha (DMS), Khulna

SoWFeN, an acronym for the *Southern Women Feminist Network*, represents a dynamic coalition of Civil Society Organizations dedicated to advancing human rights, particularly focusing on women's

issues in the southern region. The collaborative efforts of SoWFeN and the Nice Foundation underline their unwavering commitment to fostering positive change and uplifting marginalized communities. This comprehensive report encapsulates the journey, successes, and challenges, providing a resilient foundation for future initiatives. The Network anticipates continued support, replication of successful models, and fervent policy advocacy to foster an environment conducive to sustainable development. SoWFeN's dedication ensures a promising future for minority Dalit families, PWD, and LGBT in the pursuit of holistic well-being, aligning with their mission to advance human rights and gender equality in the southern region of Bangladesh.

## **I. Introduction:**

**Background:** In pursuit of transformative change, the Southern Women Feminist Network (SoWFeN), operating under the Nice Foundation, launched a groundbreaking project dedicated to uplifting Dalit families, with a special focus on the Kawra community, PWD, and LGB community. The initiatives aim for an equitable and accessible approach to the overall quality of life and livelihoods of marginalized families. Conceived against socio-economic disparities, the initiative addresses immediate needs and lays the foundation for long-term self-reliance with a quality peaceful life.

**Network intervention purposes:** This genesis lies in reinforcing the Human Rights Defenders Network as a resilient platform for effective advocacy and protection. Overarching goals include comprehensive capacity building, amplification of advocacy efforts, and fostering collaboration within the Human Rights Defenders Network. The integrated approach to addressing social issues enhances capacity, stability, and quality services for overall well-being within the community including the Dalit community. The project serves as a beacon of hope, embodying the collective commitment of SoWFeN and the Nice Foundation to drive positive and lasting change within marginalized communities.

### **Specific Objectives:**

- Empower the community and Dalit families to protect from social stigma
- Promote inclusive and sustainable practices to address early marriage, adolescent SRHR, and gender-based violence.
- Strengthen community bonds through different events
- Establish partnerships with government agencies and local stakeholders
- Enhance the skills and knowledge of human rights advocates within the network.
- Amplify advocacy efforts for the protection and promotion of human rights.
- Foster collaboration and communication within the Human Rights Defenders Network.

### **Community Engagement and Celebrations:**

- Meetings and yard gatherings are held for accelerated activities.
- Various days are celebrated to foster community bonds.

### **Strengthening Feminist Human Rights Defenders:**

- Enhancing the skills and knowledge of human rights advocates within the network.
- Amplifying advocacy efforts for the protection and promotion of human rights.
- Fostering collaboration and communication within the Human Rights Defenders.

### **Hindu Minority Women's Development initiatives:**

With the funding of Global fund for women we have formed and revised the feminist women led organizations. We have a bi-monthly meeting the network members where we have discussed on the human rights situation in the area, collecting facts findings of cases related to violence against women, stopping early marriage and awareness on those issues. Following major activities were implemented:

- Formation of Human Rights Defenders committee at network members District level and conducted six meetings facilitated collaboration, information sharing, and coordination among District Human Rights Defenders members.
- Arranged three training sessions for Human rights defenders to enhance human rights knowledge and fact-finding skills of members.
- Factual investigations were conducted into 18 instances of violent incidents to gather accurate information and documentation for justice and accountability.
- Four district-level meetings held for open dialogues and advocacy efforts, engaging key stakeholders to address human rights situation, paternal properties rights and other social issues.
- Different day observations dedicated to significant events or themes related to human rights for fostering awareness and advocacy within the community.



### **Creating Young Women Leaders**

With the support of GFW, USA, and mentorship of CREA we have created a batch of Young Women Leaders at the organizational level. Two have received intensive training at home and abroad and worked as a trainer for the other 10 Young Women staff at the organization. Under them, in 20 villages we have created 20 community young women leaders and 20 shadow CYWL who have been working closely with the community at the village level to collect information and motivate the women and girls on the social issues, movement building, and transformation of leadership process.

### **Creating Community Young Women Leaders (CYWL)**

With the support of GFW, USA our YWL has created a batch of 20 CYWL and 20 shadow CYWL who have been capacitated by receiving training on Leadership Development, Advocacy and movement building, GBV, protection, Gender equity, PSEA, combat early marriage, courtyard session facilitation, GBV case management and reporting and also 3 days Training provided on SRHR. We conduct bi-monthly meetings with them on the progress and make community plans to address the social issues mentioned above. They report to the network immediately after the incident on early marriage, child abuse, GBV, and social discrimination which are jointly addressed by the human rights defenders.

### **Covid-19 awareness initiatives**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we distributed masks, sanitizers, soap, and detergent to the entire community, reaching more than 300,000 people with our awareness messages.

### **Advocacy on Minority women's access to paternal property:**

Over the year, the **Nice Foundation** has empowered 20 young women from the community through comprehensive training, including leadership, group management, mass movements, and Sexual & Reproductive Health Rights. The organizational Young Women Leaders (YWL) have undergone training, grasping leadership and feminist principles, ready to tackle social issues. Additionally, 10 organizational young women staff received training on YWL leadership and feminist capacity building facilitated by YWL Rabeya and Marzia.



**Challenges:** The major challenge faced was the complex issue of "Hindu minority women's access to paternal properties," requiring time and strategic approaches. The process involved legal intricacies and needed community and civil society support.

**Initiatives:** The YWL and CYWL organized local meetings, workshops, and discussions, garnering public signatures in support of the issue. A position paper was developed, seeking legal advice, and subsequently submitted to the Divisional Commissioner Khulna. Petitions were presented to the Prime Minister, Whip of Parliament, State Minister to Land, and NGO Executive and Member of Parliament Ms. Dr. Aroma Dutta.

**Outcomes:** Nice Foundation and the network successfully brought the issue to the Prime Minister's attention, marking a significant achievement. Letters were campaigned to key authorities in the Law Ministry, Secretary of Law Ministry, Speaker of Parliament, and Land Minister.

**Way Forward:** The Divisional Commissioner recommended a petition directly addressed to the Prime Minister. A round table discussion was planned to arrange with National level stakeholders by

involving ManusherJonno Foundation and Bangladesh MohilaParishad to strengthen the movement but was not happened due to pandemic and shortage of resources. The involvement of influential figures, such as Ms. Dr. Aroma Dutta, enhances the project's credibility.

Nice Foundation and Network member's dedication to advocating for Hindu minority women's property rights has achieved notable success in raising awareness, mobilizing support, and reaching influential figures. The ongoing round table discussions and strategic partnerships indicate a promising way forward in addressing this complex social issue.

### **The Quantitative Achievements:**

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Name of Activities</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Achievement</b>
1.	Monthly Women group meeting on social issues (Early Marriage, Dowry, Violence against women)	240	Male: 0, Female: 6984, Total: 6984
2.	Courtyard sessions on social issues, Human Rights	240	Male: 0, Female: 5766, Total: 5766
3.	Monthly Adolescents Meeting on social issues	240	Male: 0, Female: 6788, Total: 6788
4.	Leadership Training for women group leaders	4	Male: 0, Female: 240, Total: 240
5.	Leadership Training for CYWL	4	Male: 0, Female: 160, Total: 160
6.	Bi-monthly meeting of CYWL on movement building	6	Male: 0, Female: 195, Total: 195
7.	Staff Training on Policies, leadership development	1	Male: 8, Female: 13, Total: 21
8.	Staff monthly meeting on the progress of activities	12	Male: 120, Female: 180, Total: 300
9.	Southern Women feminist Network (SoWFeN) meeting	4	Male: 10, Female: 76, Total: 86
10.	16 days Activism observe (25 November-10 December)	1	Male: 81, Female: 473, Total: 554
11.	Different days observed	28	Male: 365, Female: 724, Total: 1089

### **OUTCOME: Strengthened the movement on human rights**

#### **Activities**

1. Strengthened the coordination and cooperation with different stakeholders and conducted 2 meetings with Human rights workers and institutes
2. Conducted one meeting with the Divisional Police Commissioner on the investigation of GBV cases and expedited the cases without further harassment of victims, especially women-related violence cases, and to reduce state violence
3. Conducted one meeting with Khulna District Press Club Chairman and secretary on fair press release on the human rights violence cases and making it for further movements
4. Raised human rights issues especially access to paternal properties by the Hindu women in the monthly Khulna Deputy Commissioners meeting
5. Given the presentation in the Deputy Commissioners meeting on the situation of human rights and our working strategies with religious minorities especially Hindu women and adolescents.



#### Accomplishments

- The coordination and cooperation between YWL, CYWL, organization, and different Government and non-government stakeholders are strengthened which makes the process easy to implement the project activities in a timely fashion.
- The press, social and print media have been playing the roles of promoting the project to achieve the objectives
- The local administration is well aware of the project goal and objectives and has been supporting us to go ahead with the causes to resolve

#### Day Celebration (National, International and Worldwide)

In a steadfast commitment to championing human rights and equality, the Nice Foundation and its members actively participated in the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, spanning from November 25th to December 10th. This period witnessed a diverse spectrum of activities meticulously designed to raise awareness and advocate for the fundamental rights of individuals.

The Foundation orchestrated engaging discussions and rallies, effectively bringing communities together to address the pervasive issues surrounding gender-based violence. Special gatherings were dedicated to celebrating the invaluable contributions of Feminist Human Rights Defenders, acknowledging their unwavering dedication to the cause. Discussion meetings and courtyard gatherings served as platforms for open dialogue on GBV, SRHR, inclusion and as a holehuman rights, fostering a culture of shared understanding and empowerment within communities.

In alignment with our commitment to holistic well-being, the Foundation extended vital health services to the community, with a specific focus on the health needs of pregnant women. Simultaneously, economic empowerment initiatives for women were launched, aimed at fostering financial independence and resilience among women in the communities we serve. A comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health campaign further exemplified our commitment to promoting informed choices and safeguarding reproductive rights.

The commemoration extended to Begum Rokeya Day, a moment to honor the visionary leader's significant contributions to women's empowerment and education. The International Human Rights Day was marked with renewed vigor, emphasizing the universality of human rights principles and the paramount importance of collective action.

A dedicated effort was made to address the critical issue of child marriage. Through targeted community engagement and awareness campaigns, the Foundation actively worked towards preventing child marriages, placing a strong emphasis on education and safeguarding the rights of the young.

In conclusion, these observation days, advocacy, dialogues, and inclusive approach stand as a resounding testament to the Network's unwavering dedication to human rights. The multifaceted activities undertaken during this period not only raised awareness but actively contributed to empowering communities, fostering meaningful dialogue, and advocating for a society built on principles of equality and justice. The Network remains resolute in its commitment to advancing human rights and effecting positive, sustainable change within the diverse communities it serves.

**Community Engagement:** The project has successfully fostered strengthened community bonds through regular meetings and celebrations. These communal gatherings provided a platform for sharing experiences and increased awareness and participation in project activities. The heightened sense of community has created a supportive environment for the successful implementation of the project.

**Strengthening Human Rights Defenders Network:** The project has achieved substantial outcomes in strengthening the Southern Women Feminist Network (SoWFeN) Human Rights Defenders Network, exemplified by the following impacts:



**Successfully Strengthened the Human Rights Defenders committee:** The network has evolved into a robust platform, providing a unified voice for human rights advocacy. It has become a supportive environment fostering collaboration and mutual empowerment among defenders.

**Conducted Training Sessions, Workshops, and Awareness Campaigns:** Through the organization of 10 training sessions, 5 workshops, and 20 awareness campaigns, the project has empowered and mobilized human rights advocates. Participants have gained enhanced skills, strategic approaches to advocacy, and increased public awareness, contributing to a more effective Human Rights Defenders Network.



### Challenges Faced and Overcomes Strategies:

**Logistical Challenges:** The project encountered logistical challenges stemming from limited resources. However, these challenges were effectively addressed through a strategic approach to resource allocation and unwavering support from the community. Efficient utilization of available resources ensured the successful implementation of project activities and mitigated the impact of resource constraints.

**Stakeholders and Community Participation:** Initial reluctance within the community posed a challenge to effective project participation. This hurdle was overcome through targeted awareness campaigns and the active involvement of community leaders. By fostering a sense of shared understanding and community ownership, the project successfully garnered increased participation and collaboration from community members.

### Sustainability:

The Southern Women Feminist Network (SoWFeN) places paramount importance on the sustainability of its initiatives, recognizing that enduring impact on communities extends beyond immediate outcomes. The commitment to sustainability is evident through strategic measures:

**Capacity/Skill Development:** Ongoing training programs form a cornerstone of sustainability efforts. Continuous capacity development, particularly in movement building, awareness campaigns, and grassroots advocacy community members with knowledge and expertise for independent thriving. These interventions cultivate a culture of continuous learning, ensuring acquired skills/capacities remain relevant and adaptive to evolving service delivery, ultimately contributing to the long-term success of the communities served.

**Community Empowerment:** True sustainability emerges when communities, especially women-headed families, are equipped with leadership and institutional capacity to chart their own course. The commitment extends to the empowerment of local leadership and community institutions, fostering self-reliance and resilience. By strengthening these foundations, communities are empowered to navigate current challenges and proactively address future opportunities and obstacles. This multifaceted approach ensures that the positive impacts of interventions are woven into the fabric of community life, fostering lasting change and self-determined progress.



In essence, sustainability initiatives transcend immediate project timelines, embodying a vision where communities are not just recipients of support but active architects of their flourishing future. The SoWFeN Network remains steadfast in its dedication to fostering lasting positive change and contributing to the sustainable development of the communities it serves.

### **Recommendations and Future Directions:**

The success of the Southern Women Feminist Network (SoWFeN) sets the stage for continued impact and sustainable development. Reflecting on achievements, several key recommendations and future directions emerge with a specific focus on feminist initiatives and gender-based violence (GBV), SRHR, inclusion of LGBT, PWD, refugees:

#### **a) Continued Support:**

- Advocate for sustained support from donors and stakeholders, emphasizing the intervention's feminist and GBV-related outcomes.
- Proactively communicate the significance of outcomes, highlighting the positive impact on gender equality, social issues, and policy reformation.
- Express gratitude for the invaluable contributions of supporters, acknowledging their role in advancing feminist causes.

#### **Replication and Scaling:**

- Explore opportunities to replicate successful feminist and GBV-focused interventions in other communities as well as districts.
- Extend the benefits of gender-sensitive interventions to a broader demographic, addressing diverse socio-economic contexts.
- Identify and collaborate with communities that share similar challenges related to gender disparities and violence.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation:**

- Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation framework for the network, with a specific focus on feminist and GBV indicators.
- Conduct regular assessments of activities, outcomes, and the community's impact on gender dynamics.
- Embrace data-driven decision-making to enhance the effectiveness of feminist initiatives and GBV interventions.

### **Policy Advocacy:**

- Engage in policy advocacy for creating an enabling environment for feminist interventions and initiatives combating GBV, gender justice, SRHR, and social issues.
- Actively participate in dialogues with policymakers, governmental bodies, and stakeholders to influence policies supporting gender equality, sustainable development, and empowerment.
- Advocate for policies that address the root causes of gender-based violence and promote a culture of respect and equality.

This report offers a comprehensive overview of Nice Foundation and SoWFeN annual activities, underscoring our commitment to positive change and the empowerment of marginalized communities, with a specific emphasis on feminist initiatives and combating GBV, addressing social issues. As we chart our course forward, the Nice Foundation and SoWFeN remain resolute in their mission to foster sustainable development, social upliftment, and the advancement of gender equality. We look to the future with optimism, driven by a collective commitment to creating lasting positive change in the lives of those we serve.

### **Conclusion:**

The collaborative efforts between the Southern Women Feminist Network (SoWFeN) and the Nice Foundation have yielded significant and impactful outcomes, particularly benefiting the Dalit community. The successful execution of network initiatives, sustainable service delivery, and community engagement activities showcase tangible positive changes within the Network's reach. Looking ahead, our commitment to holistic development, feminist perspectives, and combating gender-based violence remains steadfast. Ongoing skill development initiatives ensure community members are well-equipped for sustainable interventions. The SoWFeN Network remains dedicated to fostering transformative change, emphasizing feminist principles, and addressing GBV. Our journey with the community reflects a narrative of empowerment, resilience, and positive transformation, guided by collaboration, community engagement, and a shared commitment to lasting impact.