



SPOTLIGHT ON YOUTH and R2P



Hate Speech and Youth Project, Research Initiatives Bangladesh

APPAP partner, Research Initiatives Bangladesh, conducted a participatory action research (PAR) project between February and April 2022, called “Hate Speech Contextualized and Countered through Transformative Processes among Marginalized Youth: a Participatory Action Research”. The project was conducted in Ramu, Cox’s Bazar, with Rakhine and Borua Buddhist communities.

The project involved participatory action research meetings to consult with young people and to identify challenges and strategies to change behaviour. An intensive training on PAR was provided to enhance the capacity of the youth group members. Issues identified included a lack of access to vocational studies, hate speech against Buddhists, drug addiction, early marriage, and corruption. Participants decided to pri-

oritize the problem of hate speech, and identified ways to take action, such as seeking legal support, raising awareness and promoting education, seeking support from elected representatives, and asking teachers to address this issue in class.

During the next stage of the project, around 15 young people from each community met once a week to discuss their experiences of hate speech, discrimination in society, and social divisions over religion and race. During the five meetings, specific issues discussed included the changes in young people’s lives over the past five years, the impact of the Rohingya community in Bangladesh since 2017, and the legacy of the 2012 violence in Ramu, which continues to have a traumatic impact on young people who witnessed the attacks on Buddhist religious build-

ings and homes in the Cox’s Bazar District in September 2012.

In relation to hate speech and discrimination, the majority of the Rakhine Buddhist youth have been exposed to hate speech on the street, at school and at shops and markets. A common form was the derogatory term ‘Moghi’, which is used by Bengalis to refer to ethnic groups perceived to come from Burma.

One participant said, “We have a Borua teacher who address me and ask me whether I eat Nappi [a fish dish] in every sort of food. I can understand that he says it only to demean me and everyone laughs at me.” Others mentioned being teased about their cultural celebrations, such as ‘Sangrai’, or water splashing festival. Borua Buddhist youth are also targeted with derogatory language, some of which is gendered.

For example, Buddhist girls are referred to as 'Buri' (aged) because they do not tend to marry at a young age.

The issue of hate speech for Borua and Rakhine Buddhist youth was also identified as linked with broader societal discrimination including disproportionately low numbers of high school scholarships and tertiary places, and exclusion from business and markets. Young people are concerned they are blamed for violence in Myanmar committed against the Rohingya population.

Participants did reflect that their situation has improved over the past five years, with greater freedom of expression, lower risk of threats or riots, and broadly less tense relationships between Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus, however the issue of hate speech and discrimination remains a significant concern.

This project built the capacity of youth from marginalized communities in Bangladesh to identify, address and solve problems, highlight social, institutional and political discrimination, and use the PAR method for addressing social problems. Feedback from participants indicated they had understood the concept of PAR and could apply it to other issues. In order to address the problem of hate speech, they are planning to hold further meetings involving youth from other communities to work in partnership on building social cohesion and communal harmony. This will help to reduce hate speech and discrimination against Buddhist young people in Bangladesh.



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