

Bangladesh



Investment to date: USD 9,600,00
Investment started: 2016
Current investment: USD 3,300,000
Current round: September 2019–June 2022

Drivers of Violent Extremism in Bangladesh

GCERF’s country strategy for Bangladesh (2019–2022) has identified key drivers of violent extremism as:

- Normalisation of violence
- Resentment and identity crises caused by rapid social change, economic inequality, and poor governance
- Resentment and divisions caused by the arrival of forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals from Rakine State to Cox’s Bazar and the resultant economic and social challenges
- Heavy social media use coupled with a lack of critical thinking skills and social media literacy
- Youth unemployment, in particular for those with tertiary education
- Youth exclusion from decision-making processes
- Insufficient religious knowledge to create resilience to VE narratives.



GCERF in Bangladesh

GCERF has been investing in Bangladesh since 2016, and is currently in its third round of investment, including one round of accelerated funding to respond to the drivers of the Holey Artisan Bakery Attack. GCERF works with local stakeholders to ensure that programming is aligned with other stakeholders’ and government priorities. We also coordinate with the UN, the Kofi Annan Foundation, government, in-country donor representatives, and local stakeholders to ensure a coordinated response to the drivers of violent extremism. We have made a difference in Bangladesh by investing in programming that includes:

- Sensitising youth and empowering them to engage in community level PVE initiatives, community-level decision making and PVE initiatives through support of existing and newly formed youth clubs and platforms. Youth clubs initiate and lead community debates, cultural activities, and awareness campaigns in their local communities
- Online and offline awareness-raising initiatives on violence, violent extremism, and peaceful conflict resolution
- Providing psychosocial support to individuals vulnerable to radicalisation through PVE training key community figures (religious leaders, teachers, government officials, healthcare professionals)
- Regular courtyard meetings with women where they discuss challenges facing their communities and their role in building peace and tolerance
- Dialogues between local authorities and communities
- Training religious leaders, journalists, and local governments
- Sensitising students of madrasas and higher educational institutions on PVE and empowering them to engage in community PVE initiatives.

Portfolio Overview as of September 2021

Grantee	Funding since	No of CSOs	Focus populations	Key activities
Rupantar	2016	5	Youth (18-35)	Establishing youth peace clubs to run PVE activities, psychosocial support, awareness-raising
Young Power in Social Action	2016	3	Rohingya community, youth, key influencers	Establishing and training youth platforms; training religious leaders, journalists, local governments, and teachers
PULSE	2020	1	Youth & women from Rohingya and host communities	Training change agents, developing Rohingya-host community youth platforms, development of community action plans

Independent Evaluation: Young Power in Social Action Round 1 (July 2016–April 2019)

Evaluation based on 20 key informant interviews and 12 focus group discussions.

- **90% of direct beneficiaries gave a positive assessment** of activities they had participated in. Beneficiaries were able to give examples of how activities had improved their knowledge and skills about VE.
- Compared to other projects/organisations, the programme was **perceived positively by the local authorities and communities**, as this is the **first such project** working to promote cohesion and peace in society.
- Activities **created a stronger sense of community**. New relationships were fostered by activities that brought sections of the community together across institutions and social groups.
- Respondents reported that **social awareness of the challenges of VE has increased**, alongside the aim of improving resilience. Respondents mentioned that VE organisations are facing more resistance in their recruitment efforts.
- Life skills training was well-received by respondents. Direct beneficiaries reported an **increase in their knowledge and understanding of the causes and manifestations of VE** as a result of the trainings provided.
- Asked about an overall change and improvement in the community, women responded that they were confident that they personally and as a group are **now better able to confront violent extremism and related problems** such as drug abuse, domestic violence, and other physical abuse. Women also saw an **increase in cooperation and social cohesion** in their communities and a **reduction of violent behaviour**.

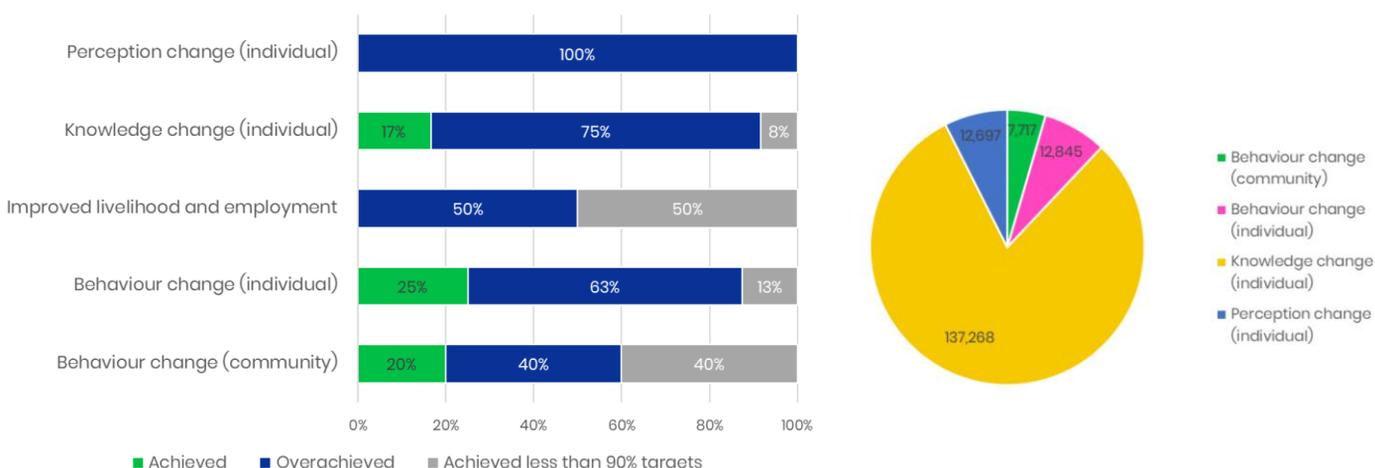
The positive evaluation of YPSA’s programme led GCERF to continue funding, with a second grant signed in November 2019. Recommendations from the evaluation were taken into account in the second round of funding.

BENEFICIARY TESTIMONY

“More people, particularly students from different schools, colleges, and madrasas are coming together to participate in different activities. This is creating friendships among these students who didn’t know each other before ... this also increased communication among different people, and ... there will be more opportunities to address conflicts through unity and collaboration.”

- Respondent in independent evaluation

Achievement of project outcomes: Round 1 Results



Figures 1 and 2: achievement of Round 1 project outcome targets (July 2016–April 2019) as a percentage of the target (figure 1) and in total beneficiary numbers (figure 2)

Results



Total direct beneficiaries: 1,068,231
Total indirect beneficiaries: 3,927,000
Main leverage point: social cohesion

Debate Competitions as Tools of PVE

Saiful Islam, a young 21-year-old student from one of the six madrasa schools, participated in a PVE debate competition run by GCERF’s partner in Bangladesh, together with students from 16 other educational institutions. Graduate-level students who participated in the competition were trained by public speaking experts. Saiful emphasised that for Madrasa students, this is the first-ever debate competition that they attended, which provided them with the opportunity to debate at the National level, as well as to be broadcasted on TV platforms.

Saiful explained: “Our training with the experts enhanced our capacity to become a debater and gain knowledge and skills to compete with those who have long debating experience...” He added: “Now we have gained new insights, self-realisation, and ability to think differently. We now feel that we also belong to the mainstream society and we, as citizens, have the responsibility to support and care for the people and the country.’ He believes that: “Previously we used to judge, act, and behave in a unilinear way, which might not always be the correct path as there could be different views which were also correct. Such a multi-dimensional outlook will now enrich us to become complete and balanced human beings with holistic views.” He further emphasises: “I can thus be the ambassador and a frontline warrior to prevent violent extremism which is a motto of my Islam.”

Beneficiary Quote

“I was growing an ‘us versus them’ mentality. My inner beliefs were changing gradually in favour of their logic and the company of my other friends and family did not give me much comfort.

After several conversations, I came to realise that I was walking on the wrong path.”

– Arizul, 18 of Khulna, whose radicalisation process was identified and stopped by a peace club member in Bangladesh

Key Outputs

Round 1:

- 3,531 awareness-raising activities
- 23,144 change agents trained
- 15,585 people engaged with conflict resolution mechanisms
- 241,720 people participated in cultural and sports activities
- 40,103 people participated in dialogues and consultations
- 763 youth clubs established
- 640 people received material support with livelihoods, mostly in the form of small grants
- 21,671 trained in leadership skills, conflict resolution, or peace advocacy
- 1,012 trained in vocational skills

Round 2 Progress to date (final data not yet available):

- 6,294 participants in awareness-raising campaigns
- 8,589 participants in community and interfaith, intercommunity, or intergenerational dialogues
- 527 beneficiaries of counselling and psychological support
- 120,523 people engaged with conflict resolution mechanisms
- 12,283 participants in cultural and sports activities
- 5,004 beneficiaries of leadership training
- 18,199 beneficiaries of skills training (critical thinking, conflict resolution)

PARTNER TESTIMONY

“During the design phase, GCERF gave us time to bring contextual applications. This is the main success of GCERF – they have made us realise that contextual approaches can be adopted if development actors remain supportive.”

– Pitom Mustafi, Rupantar – GCERF Partner in Bangladesh since 2019

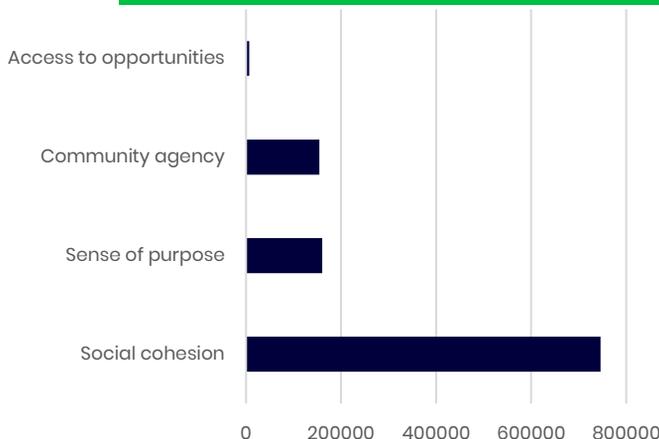


Figure 2: direct beneficiaries by focus area 2017-2021

Flexible response: The Accelerated Funding Mechanism



Targeted response to Holey Artisan Bakery Attack in July 2016

Investment: USD 990,000

October 2018–July 2019

Main leverage points: social cohesion, sense of purpose

39 small grants through a host organisation

Focus: students from madrasas and public universities in Dhaka

Key Activities in the AFM

- **39,000 students benefitted from social cohesion activities**, which included folk song performances, street festivals, sports competitions, and youth carnivals. Students from public and private universities and madrasas also worked together to develop the content and scripts required for events such as theatrical plays, TV dramas, movies, animations and comic books, in which they mainstreamed PVE narratives.
- **289 madrasa teachers and imams from 55 different mosques were trained** in promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence in the community, as well as on the issue of VE and their role in prevention.
- **2,500 youth were trained on entrepreneurship**, marketing, advertisement, and information technology to increase their access to employment opportunities.
- **19,894 students** participated in activities designed to strengthen their **critical thinking and analytical skills**, develop a stronger and more positive sense of self, and enhance their capacity and knowledge to become **advocates for peace and PVE**. These activities included intensive training on critical thinking skills, cyber-crime reporting, leadership, PVE, photography, debating, acting, and painting workshops.
- **250 young men and women trained as PVE ambassadors**. They gained the necessary skills and knowledge to train more than 2,700 youth on the issue of VE, early warning signs of radicalisation, and how they can effectively prevent it.
- **220 youth** from 25 educational institutions participated in **national-level debates**.

Independent Evaluation: How well did the AFM work?

- **Relevance:** All projects selected for GCERF support were explicitly tailored to align with GCERF's objectives. All were based on a baseline study conducted by the host organisation and the evaluation therefore concluded that **all grants funded through the project were highly relevant**.
- **Effectiveness:** Most of the reviewed grants (sample of 13 of the total 39 grants) were **successful in implementing their planned activities**. Only one grant reviewed failed substantially to reach its objective.
- **Sustainability:** Naturally, sustainability is a challenge for small, short-term grants. One organisation of the sample of 13 was **able to secure additional funding to replicate and scale up successful activities**. The evaluators expected that only a small minority of the total of 39 organisations would be able to achieve this. They also thought that some activities would continue if the momentum is kept alive by motivated and engaged students.

Beneficiary Quote

GCERF's partner in Bangladesh holds courtyard meetings with women to raise awareness of VE and the role that women can play in tackling it. 197 of these meetings have been held since the project began in 2019. Below is the testimony of one woman who attended one of these meetings.

"Now I know what is violent and extremism, the bad impact of VE, the at-risk population, how women can protect the family members from VE, and the signs of peaceful family and society. I feel confident to discuss PVE to protect my family members from VE. I am giving my commitment that I will discuss PVE issues with my family members, relatives, and neighbours."

GCERF

Geneva, Switzerland
Find out more about becoming an investor, our work, and the collective impact we make at:
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