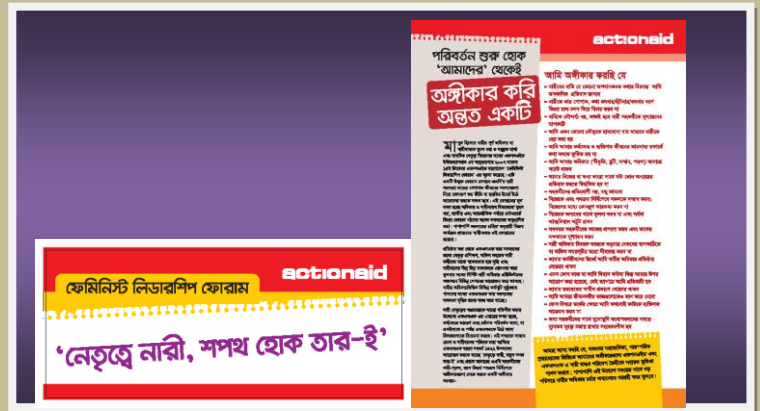


Feminist Leadership Forum (FLF)

April 2014- March 2016

Aiming to uphold feminism¹ and ensure collective leadership ActionAid Bangladesh initiated its Feminist leadership forum (FLF) on December 14, 2007 encouraged by ActionAid International. It is an open forum where all women colleagues within AAB have the space to share and discuss their professional as well as societal problems without fear or intimidation. Main objective of FLF is to motivate members in upholding their rights, supporting issues of women and building networks and forums nationally and internationally. This forum also has the freedom to design its activities according to the needs of the members.



Since its inception, FLF has organized leadership trainings, enhanced literacy among AAB support staff and arranged discussion sessions to understand various interpretations of feminism through facilitations by different prominent women rights activists. It has also organized its members for demonstrations, performances and monologues on occasions delivering specific messages to the audiences to promote different women's rights based issues.

This forum's beauty lies in inspiring new leadership every year through election. This year, in 2014, there has been a tough competition for the position of 'convener' among three candidates. Self-nomination was the starting point and the progress was observed through the lively campaign run not by the candidates only but by others also including men and women staffs. Zinat Hasiba, Senior Officer from Program Quality and Impact, won the election

¹Feminism is about women demanding their full rights as human beings

Feminism challenges the relations between women and men and rebels against all power structures, laws and conventions that keep women servile, subordinate and second best.

Feminism is about women consciously working together for change

Feminism is about challenging the division of labour in the world that puts men in charge of the public sphere – work, sports, media, government – while women slave away unpaid in the home.

-Adopted from Feminism For Beginners, by Susan Alice Watkins, Marisa Rueda and Marta Rodriguez

with highest votes. Tonny Nowshin from Education and Kashfia Firoz from Women Rights were the other two candidates taking part in the election.

Group Work to Nurture Leadership Qualities

This year was planned to be one of working together, performing lead roles, speaking out loud, appreciating others, knowing each other, sharing the feeling and painting dreams. Members worked in five groups and all the members played specific roles in their group presentations with optimum enthusiasm in August 2014. The group activities were designed in a way so that it helps members explore and nurture their leadership skills and build their confidence. These group works brought realizations among the members about the barriers they have within themselves and brought some issues to be addressed to enhance the effectiveness of the forum as a collective platform.



Identifying Changes FLF Demands for a Women Friendly Atmosphere

It was repeatedly coming that members are not being open as expected to utilize the space and it was identified that there are gaps regarding trust and sisterhood among the members. Therefore just to initiate the process the forum decided to confidentially collect the demands and concerns from the members and then start working together. It totally worked and platform could identify where to start with.

The demands were mostly about-

- discouraging working after office hour,
- behavioral practices concerning AAB values and FLF principles
- 360 degree accountability mechanism in appraisal,
- rest room for pregnant staffs
- addressing improvement of environment in terms of fear free conversation irrespective of hierarchical position,
- women's skill development and health awareness initiatives

Based on these demands as well as concerns raised at regular meetings, the forum later made some recommendations to the Extended Leadership Team (ELT). With regular follow ups realization of two of the recommendations have been ensured.

Recommendations made to the Extended Leadership Team:

- FLF concerns support staffs' given contract through external arrangement resulting in losing maternal benefit; recommends ensuring rights of the staffs while going for such agreement in future and influencing e-zone to have maternal benefit in their policy.
- FLF concerns maintaining minimum distance for face to face communication with staffs working at the reception. As a precaution the forum recommends reception table to be redesigned addressing the concern immediately.
- The concern about pregnant and lactating mother staffs moving to the field needs to be addressed in the policy so that no one suffers for non-cooperation of the team in such cases. Duration of lactating mothers availing attendant facility can also be reconsidered.
- For relaxation there should be a common room for the staffs (specially focused on the pregnant Staffs) where they can take rest if they feel sick or can have a power nap.
- Policy implications for work life balance needs to be concerned. Besides, utilizing existing policies that might encourage practicing work life balance can be strategically adopted.

Session Concerning Women's Health

A session was organized for all the members about pelvic floor dysfunction which is a very important concern for women's health, especially her sexual and reproductive life. Through this session the forum tried to make the members aware of the concern and inspire them for living a healthy, energetic and confident life.

Feminist Movie show

A movie show had been organized for the forum members so that it enhances the spirit of feminism. The movie was about sexual abuse against a girl child and freedom of women. The forum enjoyed the show a lot as they found it very effective to use a feminist lens while watching a movie together in the forum.



Upholding the spirit of Feminism through Stage Performances

The forum developed two scripts for two performances upholding the spirit of feminism. The monologue script was performed at the stage first while safe city campaign was being launched by AAB. It had been performed three more times in different occasions which include street gathering at National museum premise while celebrating one billion rising (OBR) in Bangladesh, OBR celebration by AAB in 2015 and Nasreen Srimiti Padak award giving ceremony . The second script was for collage performance of recitation, song and dance. In 30 years celebration of ActionAid Bangladesh it was performed by the members of FLF to deliver specific message to the audience about the rise of women. Going through the overall process of this initiative was worked remarkably to uphold the spirit of feminism, reenergize the members and build confidence, sisterhood and trust among them.

Step towards a change within

To continue the journey towards strengthening women's leadership, FLF has intended to bring changes in attitudes and practices in the work space which will simultaneously address issues raised during FLF sessions held till date. Keeping this in mind and respecting the spirit of feminism, FLF with all staff celebrated new Bangla year 1422 with a slogan 'Netritte Nari, Notun Shopoth Tar-e' (Address Women Leadership, Have a New year Resolution!) and with a proposition to all AAB colleagues regardless of age, sex and position to keep at least one promise among a bunch of promises demanded by FLF. Later at the end of the year 2015 FLF produced and disseminated a souvenir to all staff as a reminder for those behavioral changes with the top raked promises printed on it. It is also being presented to potential visitors as a promotional material towards women's rights.

And we promised individually-

- to raise my voice to protest against jokes humiliating women

- to not judge any woman by the way she dresses/talks/walks/sits
- to not participate in jokes disrespectful to women
- to appreciate strengths of my women colleagues to praise and recognize them, not their physical appearance/beauty only
- to negotiate for having my work-life balance
- to be vocal about my rights (recognition, leave, dignity, choice etc.)
- to be vocal against any wrong that is instigated on me others
- to see my peers as my friends and co-workers and not as competitors
- to respect myself and others regardless of our differences and hierarchy
- to not compare myself with others and keep confidence in me
- to appreciate my colleague's work and recognize their strength
- to not limit my work (that I believe in) towards women rights according to my job description
- to be vocal about women's rights beyond my work life
- to be vocal against works imposed on me that I do not believe in
- to be vocal to share the ideas I have
- to share my spouse's workload (for men, especially)
- to not personally attack others while arguing on an issue
- to keep personal space while having face to face conversation considering the relationship between us.



We do hope that all our

promises and commitments

will further build

cooperation and mutual respect

and support a

women friendly atmosphere

within ActionAid Bangladesh. We shared our promises with all our partners. With time we hope that this will

inspire others of the larger community to do the same thus multiplying this effect!

Prepared by

Zinat Hasiba

Convener, FLF (April 2014- March 2016)

