

Activity/Event Report

Aparajita: Political Empowerment of Women (Extension Phase) Khan Foundation, Rajshahi Cluster

Event Name: Divisional Aparajita Conference, 2024

Date and Time: March 08, 2024 | Friday | 10:00 AM –5:0 PM |

Venue: Upazilla Parishad Auditorium, Naogaon Sadar, Naogaon

1. Overview:

Khan Foundation hosted a Aparajita conference at divisional level on Women Political Empowerment, under Aparajita: Political Empowerment of Women (Extension Phase) project, funded by SDC and technical assistance provided by Helvetas Bangladesh. The meeting had been held at Upazilla Parishad Auditorium, Naogaon Sadar, Naogaon on March 8th, 2024.

A total of 245 participants attended in the meeting of whom 220 were women and 20 were men. A total of (200) enlisted Aparajitas, 5 invited guests, 5 journalists were actively participated in that meeting. Besides, 13 participants participated from the host organization.

The conference began with opening remarks by Ad. Rokshana Khandokar, Executive Director of Khan Foundation. Morshed Alam, the Project Coordinator of Aparajita, provided an overview of the project's objectives, emphasizing the crucial role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in promoting women's political participation. Parvin Akhtar, President of the Divisional Aparajita Network, chaired the event, coinciding with International Women's Day.



Notable figures like the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Naogaon District, Mr. Golam Mawla, and Additional Police Superintendent Fauzia Habib Khan, graced the first phase of the meeting as chief and special guests, respectively. The second phase saw the presence of Naogaon Zilla Parishad Chairman Advocate AKM Fazle Rabbi as the chief guest, along with other dignitaries.

In addition, 192 Aparajitas from Rajshahi, Natore, and Naogaon actively participated, adding depth and diversity to the conference's discussions. Overall, the event served as a platform to empower and encourage women's involvement in politics at both local and national levels.

2. Objective of the Event

A major objective of the conference was to share experience and views on how and to what extent Aparajita can work together with representatives of different parties (families, society, local government, political parties) to resolve this impasse. Some Specific objective of the conference are as follows;

The divisional level Aparajita conference served as a platform for Aparajitas to exchange their experiences, fostering mutual relations among them. It also provided opportunities for collaboration, aiming to strengthen the sustainability of Aparajita networks. Discussions revolved around the roles Aparajitas can play in advancing women's political empowerment, sharing successes, experiences, and challenges faced at the local level. Participants explored the support needed from policymakers to overcome these obstacles effectively.

- Exchange of experiences of Aparajitas at the divisional level;
- To build mutual relations among the Aparajitas;
- Opportunities of Aparajitas to work together and strengthen the sustainability of Aparajita networks;
- To discuss what role Aparajitas can play in advancing the work of women's political empowerment; and
- To share what kind of success and experience the Aparajitas have achieved so far at the local level, where they are facing obstacles, and what kind of support they need from the policy-making circles to overcome these obstacles.

3. Details Narrative Report:

The day's program kicked off with a celebration of the Aparajitas in front of Naogaon Sadar Upazila Parishad. Led by the District Commissioner of Naogaon, the district administration and Aparajitas marched through the city's main road at 10:00 am. After the rally, there was a brief discussion about International Women's Day. Following this, Advocate Rokhsana Khandkar, who is the Executive Director of Khan Foundation, officially opened the Divisional Aparajita Conference by releasing pigeons and decorating with colorful banners. Guests were then taken on a tour of the fair's stalls.

During the first phase of the discussion meeting, Mr. Parveen Akhtar, President of the Divisional Aparajita Network from Rajshahi, led the discussion. Mr. Golam Mawla, the Deputy Commissioner of Naogaon, attended as the chief guest, along with special guests like Fauzia Habib Khan, Additional Superintendent of Police in Naogaon, and Advocate Rokhsana Khandkar from Khan Foundation.

The grassroots Aparajitas shared their experiences of working together to empower women politically. In the second phase, Advocate AKM Fazal Rabbi, Chairman of Zilla Parishad in Naogaon, was the chief guest for the award distribution and cultural program discussion. Alhaj Nazmul Haque Soni, the Mayor of Naogaon Municipality, attended as a special guest. Advocate Rokhsana Khandkar chaired this session.

During the concluding session, the Executive Director of Khan Foundation, along with the chief guest and special guests, presented awards to those who had won or participated in various activities. Later, there was a fantastic cultural program featuring performances by tribal and local artists.

4. Results/ Outcomes of the Event/ Activity:

The immediate result of the dialogue was noteworthy, as all participants(both Aparajita and other representatives) have realized and agreed that they should work together to resolve all sorts of obstacles in the path of women while they were going to empowerd politically . Some other notable outcomes are as follows;

- During the conference, an action plan was developed to enhance collaboration and ensure the sustainability of Aparajita networks. This plan aimed to maintain the experiences gained by Aparajitas at the divisional level. Additionally, efforts were made to foster mutual relationships among Aparajitas from the three districts. It was anticipated that this would strengthen connections between political leaders and the administration through the involvement of Aparajitas.
- Moreover, invited guests pledged to bring up these matters for discussion at higher levels of administration, indicating a commitment to address the concerns raised during the conference. This collective effort aimed to promote dialogue and cooperation between Aparajitas and key stakeholders in the political and administrative spheres.

5. Participant details (Gender and Sector Wise)

Tabel-01: Gender wise Participation

Gender	Number of the Participants
Men	20
Women	200
Gender Minorities	0

Tabel-02: Sector wise Participation

Sector	Number of the Participants
NGOs	2
Public office	6
Media	5
Ethnic minority	6
(CSO)	0
Aparajita	192

Participants Quotes:

““Since 1995, Khan Foundation has been dedicated to empowering women. My journey with women began during my time at Dhaka University. After thirty years of working with women, I feel immensely proud today. It's time for us to shift our perspective. Many women, despite facing exploitation in male-dominated societies, are incredibly efficient and capable. Our goal is to see more women actively participating in general elections – that's our aspiration.”“I'm pleased to share that four national-level organizations, with support from the Swiss government, are collaborating on women's political empowerment through the Aparajita project, coordinated by Helvetas Swiss Inter-Cooperation Initiative. Additionally, we've received extensive support from government officials, including district and police administrations, who are backing the Aparajita Movement wholeheartedly. Throughout our work, we've been grateful for the unwavering support of individuals like Additional Superintendent of Police Fauzia Habib Khan.”

Ad. Rokshana Khandokar, Executive Director of Khan Foundation

"I pledge to immortalize the memories of today's Aparajita conference in my writings. Attending this program has been incredibly enriching, and I would have missed out on a lot if I hadn't been here. Looking into the eyes of each one of you, I can see the glimmer of self-confidence shining brightly! It reaffirms my belief that as women, we are capable of achieving anything.”“To all the Aparajitas, I offer this advice: 'Don't confine yourselves, but carve out your space wherever you go.' Let your presence be known and your voices be heard. Together, let's continue to break barriers and pave the way for a brighter, more empowered future.”

Fauzia Habib Khan, Additional Superintendent of Police, Naogaon

"The Aparajita project has been instrumental in nurturing skilled women leaders at the grassroots level. Thanks to the project's encouragement, and with guidance from our MP, we have successfully incorporated 10 to 12 women into the main committee of the Awami League in each union within Naogaon Sadar Upazila. This initiative has sparked a wave of women's empowerment and awakening across our unions, under the leadership of Aparajitas.”“In this context, I must commend the exceptional leadership demonstrated by the Executive Director of Khan Foundation. Her strong guidance and support have been pivotal in driving the success of our endeavors towards gender equality and women's empowerment.”

Elias Tuhin Reza, Upazila Vice-Chairman, Naogaon

"Khan Foundation's commitment to the political empowerment of women through the Aparajita Project since 2021 has been unwavering. This initiative has sparked an unprecedented awakening among women. It's worth mentioning the resilience of women who may have faced electoral defeat but remain undefeated in their dedication to public service, making a difference in every sphere they engage in. I extend my best wishes for the success of this event and reaffirm my steadfast support for the Aparajitas.”

Alhaj Nazmul Haque Soni, Mayor Naogaon Municipality, Naogaon

"Today, the significant presence of Aparajitas demonstrates the increasing involvement of women in the political sphere. However, it's crucial for women to enhance their efficiency further. To achieve this, the Aparajita project should focus on providing additional training and support. If required, Aparajitas can take the initiative to organize weekly experience-sharing sessions among themselves. I am committed to standing by the Aparajita project in its mission to advance women, and I will continue to support them wholeheartedly. I extend my best wishes for the success of the conference."

Advocate AKM Fazal Rabbi, Chairman, Zilla Parishad, Naogaon

"I've achieved my dreams with the support of my parents and my husband. Even after marriage, my husband has been there for me, helping me pursue my PhD. I believe women benefit greatly from the support of men and positive counseling in various aspects of their lives, rather than engaging in unnecessary arguments. The Aparajita project has provided me with a significant platform. Within this vast network of women's rights, we will raise our voices collectively and walk together towards our shared goals."

Dr. Falguni Rani Chakraborty, Member, District APJ Network, Naogaon

"Despite the existing clashes between men and women in society, both genders together will contribute to building a prosperous Bangladesh. Unfortunately, women continue to face the torment of family pressures. I, too, experienced being cast aside by my family after birth, facing life's setbacks. However, through the Aparajita project, we have risen above these challenges and emerged as true Aparajitas, strong and resilient."

Mst. Rahima Begum, Member, Divisional APJ Network

"I come from a marginalized background, hailing from a farmer family in a remote village. When I joined the Aparajita Project in 2012, I lacked confidence in speaking up. But today, I stand as a true 'unbeatable' Aparajita. I've learned to work with responsibility and lead others. I believe women should step out of reserved seats and actively participate in voting for general seats. Together, we can make a difference."

Morium Akter, General Secretary, District Aparajita Network, Naogaon

"Although women have equal rights in the constitution, the reality doesn't always reflect this equality. The Aparajita Project has been instrumental in bridging this gap by providing us with knowledge and creating a space for women to actively participate in the political life of society. Through this project, we've gained insights and opportunities that were previously inaccessible to us."

Fahima Begum, Joint General Secretary, Divisional Aparajita Network

6. Challenges and lessons learned

- The main conference, held jointly with International Women's Day, appeared more like an International Women's Day event due to its extensive focus on the occasion. Despite efforts to collaborate under the guidance of the District Commissioner, there was a lack of cooperation from the District Women Affairs Officer. In the future, it might be preferable not to organize such events jointly with government programs to avoid complications.
- Coordinating government guests and representatives from various political parties to sit together on the same stage was challenging. It could enhance the project's success if every participant's voice at the event could be heard, ensuring inclusivity and diverse perspectives are represented

6. Photos attached (Delivering speech)



Advocate Rokhsana Khandkar, Executive Director, Khan Foundation inaugurated the divisional Aparajita Conference



Preparation of the rally under the leadership of Parveen Akhtar, the divisional president of the Divisional Aparajita Conference



International Women's Day and Aparajita Conference
Chief Guest Mr. Golam Mawla, Deputy Commissioner, Naogaon



Naogaon District Additional Superintendent of Police Fauzia Habib Khan along with Aparajitas



Advocate AKM Fazal Rabbi, Chairman, Zilla Parishad, Naogaon, is speaking as the Chief Guest at the Divisional Aparajita Conference.



Alhaj Najmul Haque Soni, Mayor Naogaon Municipality is speaking as a special guest at the Aparajita conference



Alhaj Elias Tuhin Reza, Vice-Chairman, Upazila Parishad, Naogaonsdar, is speaking as the Chief Guest at the Divisional Aparajita Conference.



Advocate Rokhsana Khandkar, Executive Director, Khan Foundation, is speaking as the Chief Guest at the Departmental Aparajita Conference.



Chairman Boalia UP, Naogaon Sadar Mr. Apheletun Nescha who won by accepting the general seat election.



Chairman Raninagar UP, Raninagar, Naogaon awarded memento to Mr. Chandana Sarmin Rumki who won the General Constituency Election.



Interesting cultural programs were held with tribal and



Interesting cultural programs were held with tribal and

local artistes	local artistes
 Part of conference attendance	 Part of conference attendance

7. News Clipping

- News Link:

<https://dailysonardesh.com/%e0%a6%a8%e0%a6%be%e0%a6%a8%e0%a6%be-%e0%a6%86%e0%a6%af%e0%a6%bc%e0%a7%8b%e0%a6%9c%e0%a6%a8%e0%a7%87-%e0%a6%a8%e0%a6%93%e0%a6%97%e0%a6%be%e0%a6%81%e0%a6%af%e0%a6%bc-%e0%a6%86%e0%a6%a8%e0%a7%8d/>

- <https://www.cniasia.news/post/155681>
- <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=893413695894047>

