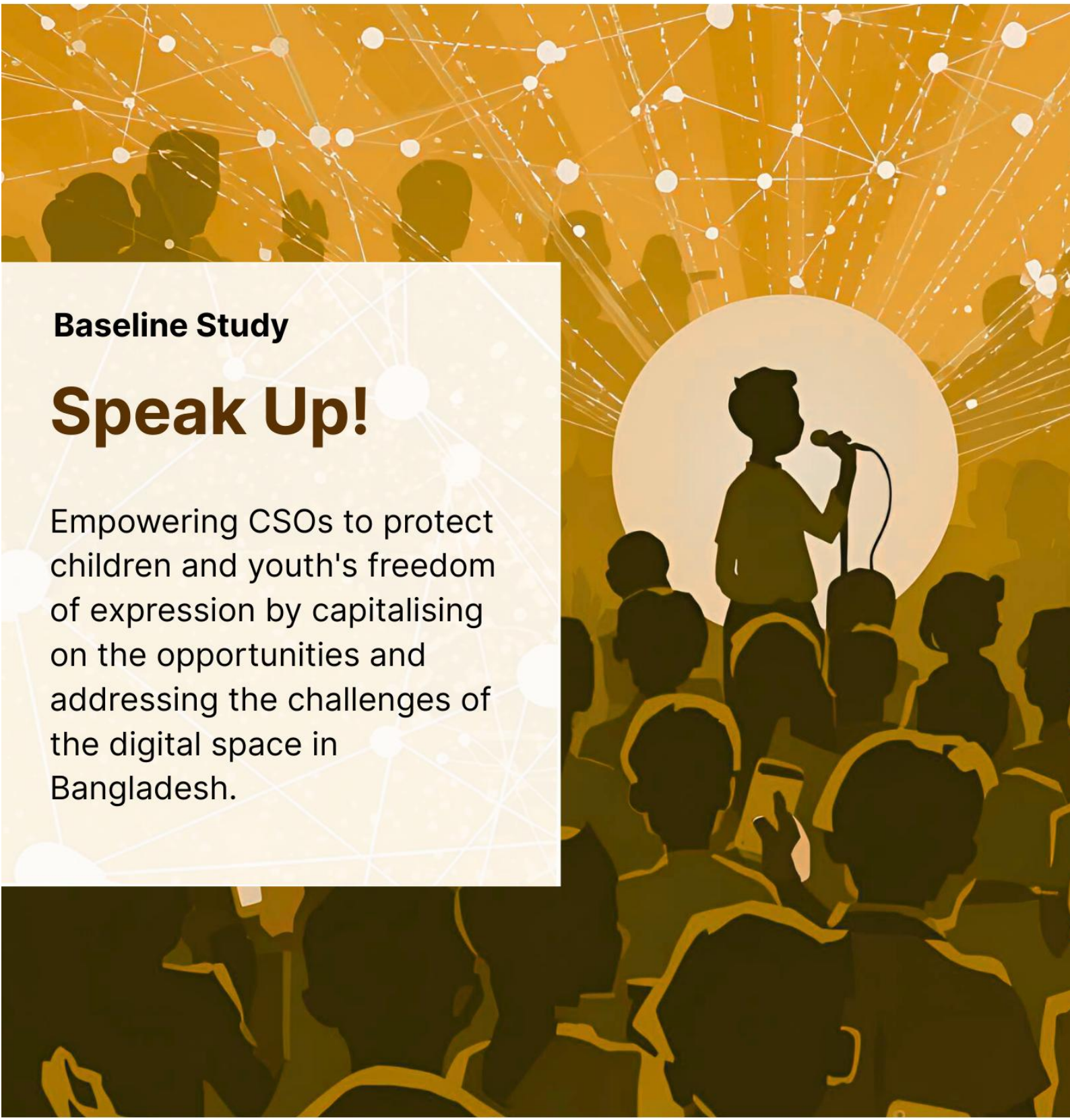
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STOP CHILD EXPLOITATION
Terre des Hommes Netherlands



Baseline Study

Speak Up!

Empowering CSOs to protect children and youth's freedom of expression by capitalising on the opportunities and addressing the challenges of the digital space in Bangladesh.

BREAKING THE SILENCE
ৰেকিং দ্য সাইলেন্স

we work with people
INCIDIN Bangladesh

Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK)
A Legal Aid & Human Rights Organisation

Funded by the European Union

Baseline Study Report

Speak Up! Empowering CSOs to Protect Children and Youth's Freedom of Expression by Capitalising on The Opportunities and Addressing The Challenges of The Digital Space in Bangladesh

Prepared By

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Finally, the study team aspires that the findings of this research will serve as a meaningful resource for policymakers and practitioners in strengthening interventions that empower civil society organizations to protect and promote children and young people's freedom of expression by leveraging opportunities and addressing challenges in the digital space, thereby contributing to a safer and freer digital environment in Bangladesh.

Acronyms

ASK	Ain o Salish Kendra
BLAST	Bangladesh Legal Aid Trust
BTS	Breaking the Silence
CBCPC	Community-Based Child Protection Committee
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CWB	Child Welfare Board
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IDI	In-Depth Interview
INCIDIN	Integrated Community and Industrial Development Initiative
ISPAB	Internet Service Provider Association of Bangladesh
KAP	Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice
KII	Key Informant Interview
OSEA	Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
PCSW	Police Cyber Support for Women
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics
ToT	Training of the Trainers
TG	Target Group
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The Speak Up! The project aims to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Bangladesh to protect and promote the digital rights and freedom of expression of children and youth, particularly against online sexual exploitation and abuse. Centering on children and youth aged below 24—including Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) youth who face greater online risks—the initiative addresses issues of harassment, violence, and misinformation in digital spaces. Implemented by Terre des Hommes Netherlands in partnership with Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), Breaking the Silence, and INCIDIN Bangladesh, and funded by the European Commission, this three-year program operates across Dhaka, Gazipur, Bagerhat, and Satkhira. It equips young people to navigate digital platforms safely, report abuse, counter misinformation, and participate confidently in online and public discourse. Using gender-responsive, child-friendly, and trauma-informed approaches, Speak Up! builds CSOs' capacity as digital defenders to ensure safer, more inclusive digital environments for all children and youth.

The baseline study aims to collect and analyze data to establish a reference point for project indicators outlined in the logical framework. It gathers disaggregated data by age, gender, and disability to measure progress and impact throughout the project cycle. Specifically, the study will: (1) establish baseline values for outcome indicators, (2) refine indicators for effective progress tracking, and (3) inform the phasing and targeting of interventions. The findings will assess the existing knowledge and resources among children, CSOs, and communities, guiding capacity-building, training, and resource mobilization efforts to empower beneficiaries and strengthen their ability to advocate for their rights and protection.

Methodology

This baseline study provides actionable insights into the digital rights, safety, and protection of children and youth in Bangladesh. Conducted through an indicator-based assessment—including Knowledge Attitude and Practice (KAP) surveys with children and youth, CSO capacity assessments, key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and case studies—it explores digital safety, freedom of expression, and the organizational readiness of CSOs. The study, carried out across Dhaka, Gazipur, Bagerhat (Mollahat), and Satkhira, emphasizes inclusive and gender-responsive approaches. Its findings will guide evidence-based interventions to strengthen CSO advocacy, enhance community protection mechanisms, and promote safe, rights-based online engagement for children and youth.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining desk research, stakeholder validation, and extensive primary data collection. This included a KAP survey of 383 children and youth, a rapid assessment of 39 CSOs, 37 interviews (Key Informant Interviews-KII and In-Depth Interviews), 20 focus group discussions, and six case studies across Dhaka, Gazipur, Bagerhat, and Satkhira. CSO assessments evaluated organizational readiness, online safety practices, capacity-building needs, and implementation gaps. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and H-Tool exercises captured perspectives of youth, children, and community members on digital rights and protection. Case studies highlighted the consequences of digital safety violations

and restrictions on freedom of expression, illustrating coping strategies and support mechanisms. Additionally, 27 KIIs with a diverse set of stakeholders—including government, civil society, UN agencies, INGOs, private sector actors, and academics—provided multi-stakeholder insights into challenges and opportunities for promoting youth digital rights and online safety in Bangladesh.

The KAP Survey of Children and Youth

The KAP Survey result reveals a stark contrast between the rapid digital adoption and the lag in awareness regarding digital safety and freedom of expression among children and youth. While 89.06% of children and 85.59% of youth use smartphones, and 97.73% of children and all youth have internet access, there is a significant lack of digital security and rights knowledge. Only 32.08% of children and 39.83% of youth are aware of laws related to digital safety, and just 27.55% of children and 37.29% of youth have heard of children's rights to safety and protection online. Alarmingly, 92.95% of respondents have never received any training or awareness on safe online behavior or freedom of expression, highlighting the urgent need for targeted educational initiatives in these areas.

Indicator-based Assessment

The 2025 baseline highlights that both CSO capacity and children and youth's agency around freedom of expression and safe digital participation are starting from a relatively low level, with notable variations between national and local actors and across age and gender groups. It highlights a mixed yet foundational picture of the efforts to support children and youth in advancing their rights and freedom of expression in both public discourse and digital spaces. The indicators outlined below underscore the starting points for future programming, while emphasizing areas that require strengthening across CSOs and youth populations.

CSOs Capacity & Engagement:

- Among CSOs, only about one in ten organisations (10.26%) currently show strengthened organisational capacity to advance children and youth's rights and ensure their freedom of expression in public discourse and digital spaces, with national CSOs performing slightly better (12.82%) than local CSOs (10%).
- A similar proportion of CSO staff (10.3% overall; 10.53% in national CSOs and 10% in local CSOs) demonstrate improved knowledge and skills to mobilise and engage children and youth to use digital technologies safely and speak up about their rights.
- At baseline there is no documented evidence yet of CSOs systematically consulting children and youth and taking their views into account in decisions affecting access to rights and freedom of expression, and CSO-led actions and case-handling systems around violations of children and youth's freedom of expression are effectively absent: the reported numbers of protective actions taken and cases monitored, reported and responded to both stand at zero.
- CSOs show relatively low levels of capacity to advocate for children and youth's freedom of expression and their access to rights. Only 10.26% of CSOs have strengthened organisational capacity to support these goals, with national CSOs performing slightly better (12.82%) compared to local CSOs (10%).

- Additionally, 10.3% of CSOs demonstrate improved skills in mobilising children and youth to use digital technologies safely and to speak up about their rights, with national-level CSOs again showing a slight edge (10.53%) over local ones (10%).
- The baseline also reveals a concerning gap in proactive responses to violations of freedom of expression, with 0% of CSOs reporting actions taken against such violations, and no gender-transformative policies yet in place to monitor, report, or respond to online abuse, harassment, or exploitation.

In a word, CSOs in Bangladesh demonstrate widespread institutional weaknesses, fragmented engagement, and limited operational readiness, leaving children and youth vulnerable in digital spaces. Critical gaps exist across governance, advocacy, youth participation, monitoring, policy engagement, and internal safeguards. Immediate, targeted capacity-building, structured partnerships, sustainable funding, legal and referral mechanisms, digital literacy training, and strategic advocacy support are essential to enable CSOs to systematically safeguard and advance children's digital rights and freedom of expression.

Children and Youth Participation in Digital Rights Advocacy:

On the side of children and youth, the baseline shows modest but uneven levels of self-confidence and skills. Confidence among children and youth in expressing their rights and opinions is low but shows some variation between groups-

- 8.09% of children and youth overall report confidence in advancing their rights, with youth showing a higher percentage (12.71%) compared to children (6.04%). Gender disparity is evident, with boys displaying higher confidence (9.84%) compared to girls (6.5%).
- Only 4.96% of children and youth show the necessary knowledge and skills to advocate for their rights and express opinions safely online. This indicates a significant gap, especially for boys, who show markedly lower proficiency (2.19%) compared to girls (7.5%).
- Overall, 8.09% of children and youth report self-confidence to advance their rights and freedom of expression in public discourse and digital spaces. Youth display higher confidence than children (12.71% vs 6.04%), and boys are consistently more confident than girls: among children, 7.14% of boys versus 5.04% of girls; among youth, 15.79% of males versus 9.84% of females.
- When it comes to concrete knowledge and skills to advocate for their rights and express opinions safely in online environments, the starting point is even lower, at 4.96% overall.
- Here, however, girls outperform boys: females overall stand at 7.5% compared with 2.19% for males, and girls (8.63%) are ahead of boys (3.17%), while children (6.04%) are somewhat better equipped than youth (2.54%).
- Among youth, 12.28% of males and 13.11% of females report confidence in expressing opinions related to political, cultural, and social norms in a safe online environment. However, no significant action has been reported regarding youth involvement in safeguarding digital spaces.
- Among youth, 12.28% of males and 13.11% of females report confidence in expressing opinions related to political, cultural, and social norms in a safe online environment. However, no significant action has been reported regarding youth involvement in safeguarding digital spaces.

These findings highlight pronounced vulnerabilities among younger children, girls, informal learners, and dropouts, emphasizing the urgent need for inclusive, gender-responsive interventions to strengthen digital literacy, confidence, and civic engagement.

Conclusion

Children and youth in Bangladesh are highly connected and active online, yet they lack the knowledge, skills, and confidence to navigate digital spaces safely. Fear, self-censorship, and social pressures limit their freedom of expression, while risks such as cyber violence, online gambling, and misinformation remain unaddressed. Civil society organizations (CSOs), which serve as key actors in promoting digital rights, are largely underprepared due to weak legal awareness, limited advocacy capacity, fragmented engagement with youth and government stakeholders, and fragile institutional structures. Volunteers and staff often lack adequate training, resources, and continuity to provide consistent protection and support. Field consultations further reveal a strong demand for awareness and training programs, particularly among marginalized communities, children with disabilities, and intersex youth. Digital access alone is not enough—immediate, structured interventions are needed to build digital literacy, strengthen online safety, and empower children and youth to exercise their rights. The Speak Up! The initiative presents a timely opportunity to equip young people, families, and CSOs with the tools, knowledge, and confidence required for safe, inclusive, and meaningful digital participation.

In conclusion, the study reveals a cautious digital environment for children and youth, where online participation is rare and shaped by gender norms, safety concerns, and educational status. While older youth and those with formal education show slightly higher participation, consistent and confident online expression remains scarce. Addressing these challenges requires multifaceted interventions that focus on improving online safety, reducing self-censorship, and fostering inclusive support networks. Such initiatives will empower children and youth to participate more freely and confidently in social, cultural, and political discourse in the digital realm.

Recommendation

To ensure effective project implementation in Bangladesh, a clear and contextually relevant definition of "freedom of expression" is essential, aligning with both international frameworks and local needs. Grassroots CSOs require capacity-building and funding support to enhance their ability to promote digital safety and freedom of expression, especially in remote areas with limited resources. Collaboration with government and private sector stakeholders is critical, including formalizing protocols with agencies like BTRC and law enforcement, and leveraging private sector CSR goals for mutually beneficial partnerships. Additionally, establishing an online safety working group and providing targeted training for children, youth, and community members will address urgent needs for digital safety, rights awareness, and responsible online engagement, particularly in marginalized communities where issues like online gambling and excessive social media use are prevalent.

a) **Establishing a Contextual Definition of Freedom of Expression:**

For effective project implementation in Bangladesh, it is crucial to define "freedom of expression" clearly, incorporating both international frameworks and local context.

This definition will ensure alignment and facilitate collaboration with key stakeholders, including private and government entities. A precise operational definition will provide clarity on the actions considered under freedom of expression, enabling consistent engagement with all involved parties.

b) Capacity Building and Funding Support for Grassroots CSOs:

Many grassroots Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) face significant challenges, including limited capacity in digital safety and freedom of expression, as well as financial constraints. A targeted capacity-building initiative, complemented by funding support, is recommended to strengthen these organizations. This approach will enhance their ability to promote digital safety, combat online sexual exploitation, and support freedom of expression, particularly in remote areas where funding is scarce.

c) Formalize Collaboration Plan With Government Stakeholders

A clear collaboration protocol should be established with government agencies such as the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), law enforcement, Internet Service Providers (ISPs), and District Legal Aid Offices. This collaboration will facilitate the protection of freedom of expression and digital rights, including coordinated responses to cybercrimes and violations of children's rights online. Engaging with government stakeholders in a structured manner will ensure efficient and effective implementation of digital safety measures.

d) Formalize Collaboration Plan With Private Stakeholders

Private sector stakeholders, particularly telecommunication companies and media outlets, have shown interest in supporting awareness-raising initiatives. To engage these partners, the implementation partner should align project objectives with their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) goals. Developing a detailed work plan, emphasizing mutual benefits, and holding coordination meetings will establish strong partnerships. Collaborative campaigns with private sector partners can amplify the impact of the project, leveraging media and telecom services to promote digital safety and freedom of expression.

e) Safety and Freedom of Expression Working Group for Children and Youth

Establishing a working group comprising government and private sector representatives, law enforcement, CSOs, and child protection agencies will ensure a comprehensive approach to children's online safety. This group will provide a platform for ongoing dialogue, joint action planning, and capacity building, prioritizing the rights and safety of children in the digital space.

f) Online Safety and Freedom of Expression Training for Children, Youth, and Community Level

There is a clear demand for training on digital safety tools, digital rights, and freedom of expression in marginalized communities. Parents and community members, particularly from areas such as Jhilpar Slum and the Bihari community, have expressed the need for practical training on distinguishing between educational, recreational, and harmful apps, including those related to online gambling. Offering comprehensive training will help empower parents to guide their children's digital activities, address

concerns about excessive use of social media and gaming, and mitigate financial risks associated with online gambling.

1. INTRODUCTION

The struggle for freedom of expression in Bangladesh has extended beyond traditional arenas such as public spaces and the press, reaching into the most personal spheres—especially the digital spaces inhabited by children and youth. Recent findings reveal that about 43% of young people aged 18 to 35 feel hesitant or fearful about exercising their right to free expression within their families, communities, and workplaces (Plan International Bangladesh, 2023). This widespread anxiety reflects a deeper national crisis: with a GxR score of only 15 and a global ranking of 127 out of 161 countries (Article 19, 2025), Bangladesh faces a severe decline in civic freedom that threatens the voice and agency of its younger generations. The study team has recently documented a case that starkly illustrates this violation of young people's right to freedom of expression in Bangladesh-

> A 17-year-old female approached the Women and Children's Affairs Desk to complain about her safety within her family environment. She reported that she had left her parental home and was residing at a hostel for working girls. The victim has completed her Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and is currently employed as a sales representative.
>
> The family's socio-economic background is modest: the father is a vegetable vendor, and the mother is a homemaker. The mother expressed grievances that the girl sought greater personal independence, including visiting friends, socializing with multiple male acquaintances, and using a smartphone with regular access to social media platforms. In response, the mother attempted to compel the victim into marriage with a male residing abroad and employed as a laborer. Her mother allegedly subjected the victim to physical assault, verbal abuse, and coercion to effectuate a child marriage.
>
> Furthermore, the mother confiscated the victim's smartphone to prevent her from posting on social media regarding family matters, thereby violating the victim's right to freedom of expression. Subsequently, the victim filed a complaint at Mohammadpur Police Station. The Officer-in-Charge, along with other police personnel, convened a meeting with the victim, her siblings, and her parents. During the proceedings, the victim clearly expressed her refusal to return to her parental home. Following this, the police facilitated her placement at the Victim Support Center to ensure her safety and protection.
> - Inspira Exploration (Case study)

Building on these insights, the picture becomes even more alarming when attention shifts to those who already live at the margins of society. This environment becomes exponentially more dangerous when considering the experiences of minority and marginalized groups. The exploration specifically included the **Bihari and Barman communities**, revealing that as ethnic minorities, they already face an amplified risk of digital exclusion due to lower literacy levels. This exclusion, ironically, increases their vulnerability when they do go online, making them specific targets for online harassment and hate speech.

However, the most acute, targeted forms of digital violence were documented in the In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) with Persons with Disabilities (PwD) and Intersex Individuals across the project areas. Intersex respondents, in particular, recounted enduring

extreme gender-based digital violence, including constant, **cruel questioning of their identity or threat (IDI Findings, Inspira 2025).**

> I have been on Facebook since 2011, and every time I post a picture, people ask my gender. After I answer, they block me or send sexually explicit images. So, I warned them not to send this image again. Then the person threatened me, saying, 'I will kill you!'- IDI participants (Intersex).

This level of targeted digital abuse represents a fundamental assault on their right to expression, self-definition, and personal safety, forcing them into paralyzing self-censorship and severe psychological distress.

However, against this backdrop of pervasive harm, one would expect local institutions to offer protection; the reality is far bleaker. While the threats are high and the victims are numerous, the collective shield that should be offered by local institutions is distressingly absent. The qualitative data established a near-universal fact: there is a near-total absence of community-level digital safety programs across the four project areas. This finding is critically illuminated by the analysis of the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) profiled across Dhaka, Gazipur, Satkhira, and Bagerhat, which reveals a landscape of committed organizations that are nonetheless paralyzed by severe internal constraints (Inspira Exploration-See Figure 1).



Figure 1: The struggle of CSOs for protecting

This institutional stagnation is worsened by the absence of structured youth participation in digital rights advocacy. Although some CSOs engage youth informally, their voices remain largely excluded from policy and strategic processes, resulting in outdated or ineffective interventions. Limited resources and weak institutional ties with key government bodies, such as MoWCA and MoICT, further hinder meaningful policy influence. Ultimately, severe funding shortages—particularly the lack of dedicated donor support for digital safety and freedom of expression—emerge as the greatest barrier, leaving CSOs trapped in a cycle of minimal impact and unsustainable efforts. This analysis highlights that while many CSOs demonstrate a strong commitment to traditional child rights advocacy-such as health and gender equality-there is a profound and unaddressed significant gap in comprehensive and structured digital

safety initiatives. A vast number of these organizations lack the fundamental internal policies related to child digital safety, fail to establish formalized mechanisms to monitor or respond to online violations, and report having inconsistent application of digital safety knowledge among their staff and volunteers. This creates a critical institutional vacuum: they see the problem, but they lack the tools, training, and systems to execute a meaningful response, leaving children unprotected and incidents of abuse systematically underreported (Inspira exploration).

This shift is not just a policy failure; it reflects a profound, silent erosion of rights that underpins the “Speak up! Empowering CSOs to protect children and youth's freedom of expression by capitalising on the opportunities and addressing the challenges of the digital space in Bangladesh” project.

Rationale of This Study

Given this combination of individual suffering, structural neglect, and institutional paralysis, the rationale for this study emerges as not just logical but urgent. Therefore, the Project Rationale is not merely based on a need, but on an emergency anchored in a three-fold gap: the national failure to protect Freedom of Expression through legal policy, the localized failure to protect children and marginalized groups from immediate, life-threatening digital harm, and the systemic failure of the civil society sector to pivot and respond effectively to the digital age’s challenges. The "Speak Up!" The project is designed as the necessary rescue mission to bridge this chasm, directly addressing the urgent need for targeted training, internal policy development, and strategic partnerships. By empowering these CSOs to develop internal digital safety policies and robust, youth-inclusive advocacy mechanisms, the project seeks to transform a passive, frightened environment into an active, resilient digital ecosystem where the rights and the essential voices of children and youth in Dhaka, Gazipur, Satkhira, and Bagerhat can finally be protected and truly heard.

1.1. Project Description

The Speak Up! The project was designed to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs) to defend and promote the digital rights and freedom of expression of children and youth. With a particular focus on addressing online sexual exploitation and abuse, the project targeted the intersecting challenges of harassment, violence, and misinformation in digital spaces.

Children (below 18) and youth (18–24) were placed at the center of the initiative. While this demographic became increasingly reliant on digital platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic, they often lacked adequate awareness of online safety and remained highly vulnerable to exploitation. The risks were found to be even greater for SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics) youth, who sought greater freedom of expression online but simultaneously faced heightened exposure to targeted abuse.

Implemented by Terre des Hommes Netherlands in partnership with Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), Breaking the Silence (BTS), and INCIDIN Bangladesh, this three-year, €1,000,000 initiative was funded by the European Commission. Activities were carried out across Dhaka, Gazipur, Bagerhat, and Satkhira, equipping children and youth to navigate digital spaces safely, report abuse effectively, counter misinformation,

exercise freedom of expression in both public discourse and online platforms, and engage confidently in public debate.

Through gender-responsive, child-friendly, and trauma-informed approaches, Speak Up! aimed to build the capacity of CSOs as digital defenders, ensuring that children and young people were equipped with the knowledge, tools, and support systems necessary to thrive online without fear.

Table 1: Project Summary

Country	***Bangladesh***
Project title	Speak up! Empowering CSOs to protect children and youth's freedom of expression by capitalizing on the opportunities and addressing the challenges of the digital space in Bangladesh.
Project code	
Total budget (euros)	1,000,000 (One Million)
Source of funding	European Commission
Period start date:	1st March 2025
Project end date:	29th February 2028
Project duration:	*36 Month*
Thematic program	Sexual Exploitation of Children (SEC)
Sub program	Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OSEA)
Implementing partner(s)	Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), Breaking The Silence (BTS), and INCIDIN Bangladesh
Lead partner	Terre des Hommes Netherlands Bangladesh
Target areas	Gazipur, Bagerhat, Sathkira, and Dhaka districts in Bangladesh
Target beneficiaries	CSOs, children, and youth

Target Groups (TG) of the Project

Table 2: Target Group

TG 1	50 CSOs, 30 at district level: (10) Bagerhat - INCIDIN, (10) Gazipur -ASK, (10) Satkhira - BTS, 20 CSOs selected from the CSO networks (e.g, ATSEC, NACG, CSA Prevention, CRAC,B,

	and other local networks) - INCIDIN, ASK & BTS
TG 2	Children and Youth (2,000): 1,500 children (under 18) and 500 youth (18-24). This target group includes girls and boys, young women and men, and 'gender-diverse' 10 children and youth who experience specific threats related to their online freedom of expression or OSEA
TG 3	Families and Communities (10,000): including children and youth's family members, community leaders, local elite, religious leaders, teachers, professionals, and the general public
TG 4	Government representatives (150): government officials at national and local levels. awareness and capacity building on their roles in ensuring a safe digital space, especially at the local level.
TG 5	Protection Committees and Systems (12): 6 Child Welfare Boards (CWB) and 6 Community-Based Child Protection Committees (CBCPC) and District Legal Aid Committees at Upazila & district levels comprising 100 members
TG 6	Private Sectors Representatives (50): from ISPAB, telecommunication companies (i.e., Grameenphone, Robi, Axiata, Banglalink), internet service providers, and popular platforms (i.e., Google, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram)
TG 7	Law Enforcement Agencies (50): representatives from local and national level police stations, BPCCU, Child Affairs Police officers, Police Cyber Support for Women (PCSW), lawyers, and judicial bodies.
TG 8	Independent Media Actors (50): representatives will be selected from independent media actors from print and electronic media, local media associations/press clubs, and reporters/journalists forums
Final Beneficiaries	100 CSOs working on human rights and children and youth rights, 6,000 disadvantaged children and youth in all their diversity in 4 districts (Dhaka, Gazipur, Satkhira, Bagerhat)

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE BASELINE STUDY

The primary goal of the baseline study of this project is to gather and analyse data aligned with the project's logical framework indicators and target groups across the implementation areas. This includes collecting disaggregated data (by age, gender, and disability) using a questionnaire designed around the project's indicators. The findings will establish a reference point for future impact evaluation at the end of the project cycle, helping measure the changes and outcomes achieved through project interventions. Specifically, the baseline study will serve to:

1	Establish baseline data for project indicators	The baseline study will collect data that will be the starting point for change measurement, confirming baseline values for all outcome indicators.
2	It provides an opportunity to refine indicators	The baseline study will help to refine indicators to track progress toward achieving desired outcomes. This may be through determining the extent to which certain indicators can be easily measured.
3	Inform intervention phasing	The baseline study provides data that guides the phasing and targeting of project interventions.

The objective of the baseline study is to assess and consolidate the current knowledge base and available resources among beneficiaries, civil society organizations (CSOs), children, and the broader community. The findings will inform strategic interventions aimed at addressing identified needs, particularly those of children and CSOs. This will include efforts to enhance their capacity to advocate for their rights and protection. Based on the results, tailored modules will be developed, resources will be mobilized, and targeted Training of Trainers (ToTs) will be conducted to drive meaningful and sustainable impact.

3. SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The Baseline Study of the project was conducted in the Dhaka, Gazipur, Satkhira, and Bagerhat districts in Bangladesh. Among these districts, the study included Mirpur and Mohammadpur of Dhaka district, Gazipur Sadar Upazila under Gazipur district, Shatkhira Sadar Upazila under Satkhira district, and Mollahat Upazila under Bagerhat district. The study team also included marginalized communities such as respondents from the Intersex community, Bihari community (Irani camp and Rahmat camp), Jhilpar slum, and Barman community in Dhaka and Gazipur. The selected study areas are-

- **Dhaka:** Ward-5,6, 33,34
- **Gazipur:** Gazipur Sadar, Bhawal Garh union, Baria union, Pirujali union, Mirzapur union
- **Bagerhat (Mollahat):** Udaypur union, Kulia union, Chunkhola union, Atjuri union
- **Satkhira:** Satkhira Sadar Municipality union, Dhulihar Union, Bolli Union, Agordari Union, Alipur Union



Figure 2: Geographical coverage of the study

3.1 Scope of the Baseline Study

This study focuses on the project outcome indicators outlined in the project logical framework and engages targeted communities, including CSOs, children and youth, families, government representatives, protection committees, private sector actors, law enforcement agencies, and independent media. It draws on insights from a diverse range of stakeholders, including government agencies such as the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), District Legal Aid Offices, District Social Service Offices, the Child Welfare Board, CBCPC, and law enforcement agencies; educators from local institutions; private sector actors like Grameenphone and the Internet Service Provider Association of Bangladesh (ISPAB); advocacy groups and activists, including the Cybercrime Awareness Foundation and Samantaral; media professionals from The Dhaka Tribune; mental health experts from Faysal Rafi & Associates (Mindwizz); and civil society and development practitioners. The baseline study is conducted across the Dhaka, Gazipur, Bagerhat, and Satkhira districts of Bangladesh. The entire assignment has taken 4 months to complete.

3.2 Limitations of the Baseline Study

- The study team sought to capture comprehensive insights for the baseline; however, most respondents demonstrated limited understanding of freedom of expression in digital spaces, particularly regarding children and youth.
- Similarly, many CSOs engaged in the survey were found to focus on broader thematic areas, with relatively weak linkages to digital safety and freedom of expression—resulting in fewer context-specific insights.
- In terms of coverage, the survey reached 265 children and 118 youth (a total of 383 respondents), comprising 273 students, 82 drop-outs, and 28 with informal education. Intersex participants and children with disabilities were engaged

through IDIs, though their small numbers limited disaggregated analysis. As such, the survey data have primarily been analyzed by age, gender, and educational status.

4. BASELINE STUDY FRAMEWORK

This baseline study delivers actionable insights into the digital rights and protection of children and youth in Bangladesh. The study is conducted based on 3 segments-

- Indicator-based assessment (It included KAP survey, CSO survey, KII, IDI, FGD, and Case studies)
- KAP Survey with Youth and Children
- Survey with CSOs

By combining **a KAP survey, CSO capacity assessment, and indicator-based assessment**, it examines digital safety, freedom of expression, and organizational readiness of the CSOs, with a focus on inclusive, gender-responsive practices in Dhaka, Gazipur, Bagerhat (Mollahat), and Satkhira. Findings will inform targeted, evidence-based interventions to strengthen CSO advocacy, community protection systems, and safe, rights-based online engagement for children and youth (For details, see Annex 3).

5. ETHICS AND SAFEGUARDING

The baseline study followed strict ethical standards to ensure credibility, inclusiveness, and participant protection. The evaluation team conducted systematic, transparent inquiries with integrity, prioritized safeguarding—especially for marginalized groups—and maintained sensitivity to child rights, gender, and cultural contexts. Confidentiality and data protection were ensured, while broad participation was encouraged through age- and gender-appropriate tools. Reliability and independence were upheld, with informed consent and risk assessments applied to safeguard children and young participants (For details, see Annex-4).

6. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a robust mixed-methods approach, beginning with desk research to review relevant literature and project documents, followed by an inception meeting with stakeholders to validate objectives and finalize tools. Primary data collection combined both qualitative and quantitative methods, including a Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) survey with 383 children and youth, a rapid assessment survey with 39 CSOs, 27 key informant interviews, 12 focus group discussions (FGDs) with youth and community members, 8 FGDs with children using H-Tools, 10 in-depth interviews, and 5 case studies across selected areas. Secondary data sources were systematically reviewed and contextualized for Bangladesh, using an essential checklist, an implementation measures matrix, and a summary synthesis of findings. Rigorous quality assurance processes were applied during analysis, leading to a comprehensive report with key findings and recommendations, which was subsequently shared with stakeholders for validation and discussion (For details, see Annex 2).

The H-tool assessment was employed to explore children's perspectives and experiences related to social media use, as well as to examine their coping mechanisms for managing negative online experiences with support from family

members, parents, community members, and teachers. Overall, the children rated their social media experience between 6 and 8 on a 10-point scale, indicating a moderately positive engagement but an imperfect experience — children are generally coping, but with room for better support, safety, and digital literacy for establishing freedom of expression in the digital platform.

6.1. Data Collection Methods

Table 3: Methodological Snapshot

SL	Methods	Number
1	Secondary data analysis	-
2	Survey with children (below 18) and youth (18-24 years)	384
3	Rapid assessment survey with CSOs	39
4	Key Informant interviews (implementation partners, private sector actors, government representatives, activists, and community leaders)	27
5	Focus group discussions (FGD) with youth and community members	12
6	FGD with children using H-Tools	8
7	In-depth interviews (IDI)	10
8	Case study	5 (in 5 areas)

6.1.1. Secondary data

Several secondary documents were reviewed during the study. Documents were sorted and analyzed with a certain degree of contextualization for Bangladesh. The steps were included-

- Preparing an essential checklist of relevant information sources
- Matching with a checklist of the relevant information sources
- Developing a general implementation measures matrix
- Preparing a summary report of the review of secondary sources

6.1.2. Primary data

The study team used a mixed-methods approach that combined initial desk research and stakeholder validation with extensive primary data collection. This included a quantitative KAP survey, the indicator-based survey (383 children/youth), and a rapid CSO assessment (39 CSOs) (For details, see Annex 2). Additionally, 16 FGDs with youth

(18–24 years)(Bangali and Bihari community) and community members (village and slum areas, such as Jhilpar slum), and H-Tool exercises with children (11–17 years) captured diverse perspectives on digital rights and protection (For details, see Annex 2). Additionally, the study team developed six case studies with youth and children across Dhaka, Gazipur, Bagerhat, and Satkhira, illustrating the consequences of digital safety violations and restrictions on freedom of expression. These narratives provide evidence-based insights into the coping mechanisms of affected individuals, alongside the responses and support services offered by government institutions and civil society actors (For details, see Annex 2).

To complement these findings, 27 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including project consortium members, UN representatives, CSOs, activists, private sector actors, government agencies, INGOs, and academics. This diverse pool ensured a multi-stakeholder perspective on the challenges and opportunities in promoting youth digital rights and online safety in Bangladesh (For details, see Annex 2)-

- Project Consortium & Implementing Personnel: 3 (Ain O Salish Kendra, Breaking the Silence, INCIDIN Bangladesh)
- CSOs & Activists: 2 (e.g., Cyber Crime Awareness Foundation, BLAST)
- Private Sector Actors: 4 (e.g., Grameenphone, ISPAB, Dhaka Tribune, cybersecurity firms)
- Government Agencies: 14 (e.g., BTRC, CWB, CBCPC, police units, district legal aid officers, district social service officers, and probation officers)
- Community Leaders: 4 (teachers, psychiatrists, youth activists)

The study team has conducted 2 IDIs with intersex youth and 6 IDIs with children with autism, Down syndrome, and physical disabilities.

6.2. Sampling

The study covered 383 respondents across four districts—Dhaka, Gazipur, Bagerhat, and Satkhira. The age distribution included 130 aged 10–14, 134 aged 15–17, and 121 aged 18–24. Sampling achieved near gender balance, with males (49%) and females (51%) represented almost equally across all locations, ensuring broad geographic and demographic coverage based on a simple random sampling method. Based on the finite population correction formula, with a population size of 50 CSOs, the study team conducted 39 Capacity Assessment Surveys, administered both online and offline depending on respondent convenience, to assess organizational capacity, online safety-related knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP), implementation status, capacity-building needs, and institutional priorities (For details, see- Annex 2).

6.3. Design Data Collection Tools

The study team designed two structured questionnaires, primarily comprising closed-ended questions, to ensure consistency and comparability of responses. In parallel, open-ended interview guides were developed to support qualitative methods, including FGDs, IDIs, KIIs, and case studies.

6.4. Data collection

Data collection was carried out using the Kobo Collect application for both the CSO capacity assessment survey and the survey with children and youth, ensuring efficiency and data quality.

6.5. Data Management, Data Analysis, and Reporting

The study team conducts a targeted KAP survey to assess the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of children and youth regarding digital rights, online safety, and participation in the project areas. This is complemented by an indicator-based survey, with questions structured across knowledge, attitude, and practice dimensions, to generate quantitative evidence on the current digital landscape. Together, these surveys capture both the gaps in digital literacy, digital safety, freedom of expression, awareness of online risks, coping strategies, and engagement in safe and responsible digital spaces. The findings inform evidence-based interventions and support targeted advocacy, capacity-building, and policy recommendations for promoting empowerment of the CSOs, safe, inclusive, and rights-based digital environments.

The study team maintained separate consent forms for all respondents across surveys with children and youth, FGDs, KIIs, and IDIs. Survey data were extracted from the KoBo Collect application in .csv and .xlsx formats, and subsequently exported to R Studio and MS Excel for statistical analysis and visualization. Qualitative data were organized in an evidence matrix, enabling systematic coding and analysis.

6.6. Data Quality Assurance

To ensure data quality, the study applied a rigorous, multi-step assurance framework spanning preparation, collection, and post-study processes. Research objectives and variables were clearly defined, and structured quantitative and qualitative tools were developed, refined through expert review, client feedback, and pilot testing. Enumerators were carefully selected and trained on ethical standards, consent procedures, and data collection protocols, with pilot exercises conducted to strengthen accuracy. During fieldwork, standardized survey procedures, confidentiality safeguards, and systematic tracking mechanisms were applied. Quality assurance was reinforced through high-frequency checks via KoBo Toolbox, respondent back-checks, field spot-checks with GPS validation, and daily monitoring by field coordinators. Data management followed strict security protocols, including encrypted storage, double-entry verification, and cross-checks between quantitative and qualitative data. Finally, the analysis combined statistical methods with thematic review, and findings were validated through triangulation before being responsibly disseminated with due consideration for ethical standards and limitations (For details, please The information outlined is vital for the successful launch of the project, as access to the internet and devices, along with device ownership and social media usage, are fundamental to ensuring freedom of expression within the digital space. These elements are central to the project's objectives and are essential for fostering an inclusive and equitable digital environment (For details, see Annex-13).

7. FINDINGS

The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining desk research, stakeholder validation, and extensive primary data collection.

7.1. Description of the Respondents

Quantitative data includes a KAP survey of 383 children and youth and a capacity assessment of 39 CSOs (online or offline), examining organizational readiness, online safety practices, capacity-building needs, and implementation gaps. Qualitative data is collected through 27 Key Informant Interviews, 16 FGDs with youth (including youth from both Bengali and Bihari communities) and community members (including religious and ethnic marginalized communities), H-Tool exercises with children aged 11–17, and six case studies across Dhaka, Gazipur, Bagerhat, and Satkhira, capturing diverse perspectives on digital rights, protection, and coping mechanisms.

Stakeholder engagement spans a wide spectrum, including project consortium members, UN agencies, CSOs, activists, private sector actors, government institutions, INGOs, and academics, ensuring a multi-dimensional understanding of challenges and opportunities in promoting children and youth digital rights and their freedom of expression.

Special attention is given to marginalized groups, with IDIs conducted with **2 intersex youth (age: 18-24 years) participants and 6 children with disabilities (6) (autism, Down syndrome, physical disabilities).** The comprehensive methodology provides robust, evidence-based insights to guide targeted interventions, advocacy, and capacity-building initiatives.

Table 4: Demographic Information of the Survey Respondent

Children (n=265)						
Educational Status	**Student**		**Informal Education**		**Left School (Dropout)**	
Location	**Girl**	**Boy**	**Girl**	**Boy**	**Girl**	**Boy**
Dhaka	27	22	3	1	5	11
Gazipur	34	32	0	0	0	0
Bagerhat (Mollahat)	31	19	4	2	1	8
Satkhira	31	16	1	0	2	15
Total	**123**	**89**	**8**	**3**	**8**	**34**
Youth (n=118)						
Educational	**Student**		**Informal Education**		**Left School (Dropout)**	

Status						
Location	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
Dhaka	7	0	1	0	6	11
Gazipur	10	13	4	3	0	0
Bagerhat (Mollahat)	9	8	0	7	6	1
Satkhira	7	7	0	2	7	9
Total	**33**	**28**	**5**	**12**	**19**	**21**

CSO Types	Dhaka	Gazipur	Bagerhat	Satkhira
National	15	4	0	0
Local	1	2	7	10
Total	16	6	7	10
Respondent types	Executive Director, President, Director	Executive Director, President, Director	Executive Director, President, Director	Executive Director, President, Director, Assistant Director, Project Officer

7.2. Digital Natives, Real Challenges: Understanding Children and Youth In The Online Sphere

To understand the true depth of this crisis, it is essential to move from national indicators to the lived realities of those most affected-the children and youth navigating this digital terrain every day. Moving beyond the national headlines, the immediate, agonizing human cost of this digital reality is exposed in the localized findings gathered across the four project areas-Dhaka, Gazipur, Satkhira, and Bagerhat. The Inspira field findings, which utilized Survey Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), In-Depth Interviews (IDIs), and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) captured the raw, lived experiences of children, youth, and marginalized communities on the ground (Inspira field findings, 2025).

The study team conducted a Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP) survey to assess children and youth's access to and use of digital devices, internet connectivity, social media habits, commonly used applications, awareness of digital security threats, and knowledge of law and rights related to freedom of expression in digital spaces. The survey also explored respondents' exposure to capacity-building opportunities on

digital threat mitigation, time spent online, and experiences of reporting violence linked to exercising freedom of expression.

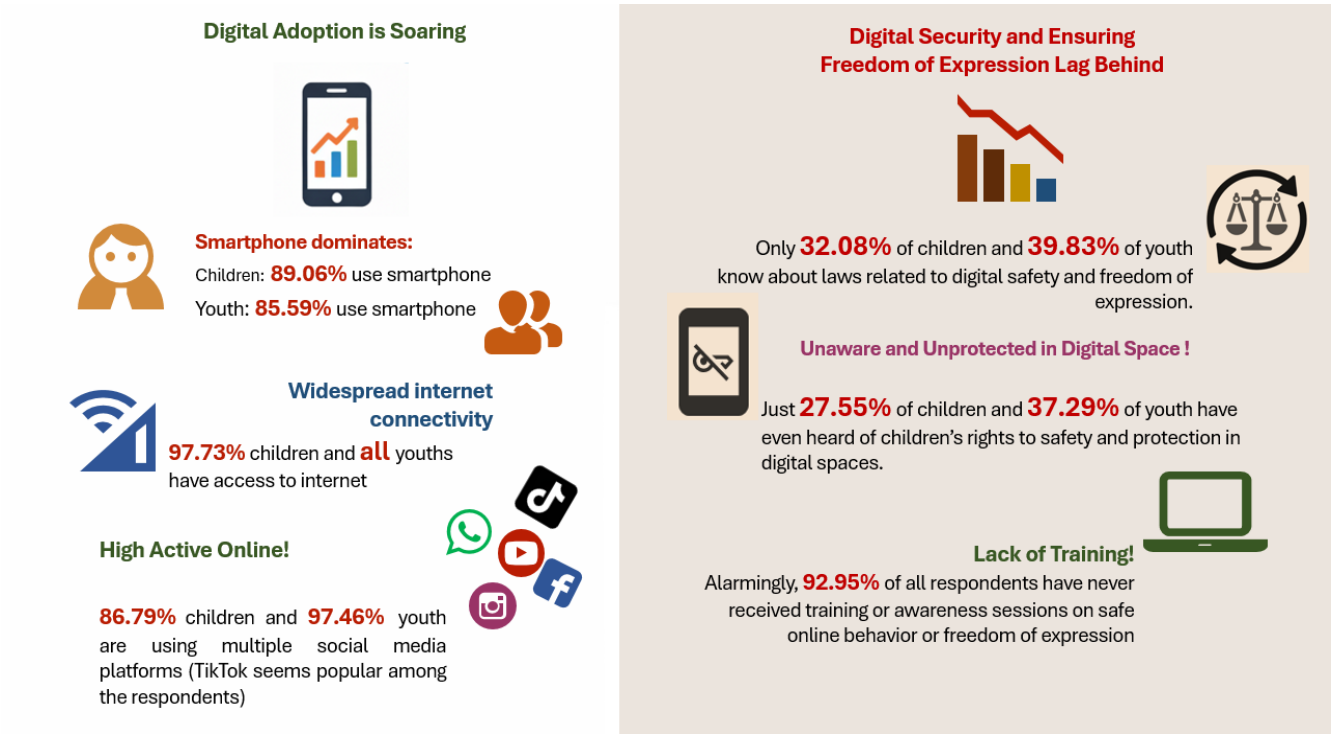


Figure 3: Situation of children and youth in the digital age

The survey findings indicate that smartphone usage is predominant among both children (89.06%) and youth (85.59%), with minimal dependence on multiple devices and very limited use of button phones (Table 1–2, Annex 8). Dual connectivity (use of both mobile data and Wi-Fi) remains the primary mode of internet access across all age and gender groups (Table 4–5, Annex 8). In terms of online engagement, a significant proportion of both children (86.79%) and youth (97.46%) are active across multiple social media platforms—including Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram, and Telegram (Table 7–8, Annex 8).

Among single-platform users, YouTube emerges as the most preferred platform (7.71%), while 24.15% of children report avoiding social media altogether, preferring gaming activities instead. Despite the widespread access to smartphones and the internet, awareness of digital rights and safety remains limited. Only 32.08% of children and 39.83% of youth reported being aware of laws related to digital safety and freedom of expression. Furthermore, an overwhelming 92.95% of respondents have never received any formal training or awareness sessions on digital safety, online behavior or freedom of expression (For details, please see Annex 1).

This deep crisis reflects the normalized condition of digital addiction, hate speech, violations of freedom of expression, sexual harassment, blackmailing, and online gambling—where the digital world actively consumes children's attention and robs them of their futures. Law enforcement officials reported receiving between 100 and 300 cases of sexual harassment, blackmail, and online gambling each year (KII, Inspira Exploration, 2025). Individuals affected by these issues often experience severe social stigma on social media, leading many to leave online platforms out of fear of insecurity,

financial and social harm, bullying, and threats. These findings underscore the urgent need to promote digital safety awareness, which has become a prerequisite for ensuring freedom of expression in the digital space.

Across the metropolitan areas of Dhaka and the peri-urban fringes of Gazipur, children reportedly spend between 3 to 6 hours daily on digital platforms, with some alarmingly dedicating up to 7 hours. This is not casual use; it is a behavioral pattern that parents correctly recognize as a form of addiction—particularly to competitive gaming such as Free Fire and the endless, attention-grabbing scroll of TikTok (FGD Findings, Inspira, 2025).

> Mom, you don't understand anything about smartphones or the internet, so don't disturb us. – FGD (Community Members)

> I don't know how to read or write, so what will I study? And how can I catch what they saw or did?- FGD (Community Members)

Most guardians have a limited understanding of technology, social media use, and the details of online gaming. Many express fears that their children may be involved in online gambling through gaming platforms. Although they try to warn their children, the latter often pay little attention to such concerns (FGD at Jhilpar Slum, Inspira Exploration, 2025). Parents, especially those in the **more rural districts of Satkhira and Bagerhat,** are profoundly overwhelmed by the speed and complexity of the digital space.

They feel profoundly inadequate to manage their children's online lives. Furthermore, it contributes directly to the disconnected communication between parents and children regarding digital activities, preventing children from reporting incidents of harassment or abuse, thereby creating a sustained and dangerous veil of silence around digital harms. The parents want training on identifying the harmful applications and items on social media so that they can warn their children.

The most severe, heart-wrenching manifestation of this unregulated environment is the emergence of online gambling and catastrophic financial risks, predominantly impacting boys. The allure of gaming, often through mandatory financial investments in games like Free Fire, leads swiftly to catastrophic financial losses-

> In Dhaka's Jhilpar Slum (Ward-6), the digital landscape is a double-edged sword for youth. Shakil, a 17-year-old boy from a modest background, was an active participant in online gaming, particularly drawn into the world of gambling through Free Fire, a popular game among youth in lower-income communities. He gambled away BDT 300,000, a sum that his family could never afford to lose. The weight of his financial loss led him to take his own life; his body left in the Dhaka Medical College morgue because his family couldn't afford to retrieve it- (FGD participant, Jhilpar Slum)

7.4 Indicator-based Assessment

These data points are not just a statistic; it is a devastating indicator that the risk is not merely academic or emotional, but a matter of irreversible life and death, reinforcing the desperate, immediate need for protective measures. The information outlined is vital for the successful launch of this baseline study, as access to the internet and devices, along with device ownership and social media usage, are fundamental to ensuring freedom of expression within the digital space. These elements are central to the project's objectives and are essential for fostering an inclusive and equitable digital environment. So the study team has also conducted the indicator-based assessment to set the baseline value of this baseline study.

Hence, this section presents an indicator-based assessment derived from two surveys aligned with the project's goal and outcome-level impact indicators (For details, see Annex 1).

The assessment draws on data from:

a) a survey conducted with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and
b) a survey conducted with children and youth.

The baseline values for these indicators are provided below-

Goal: Civil Society (including women, youth and child rights) organisations are empowered to promote the rights of girls, boys and gender-diverse children and youth ensuring their freedom of expression in public discourse and digital spaces

Impact Indicator 1: % of CSOs with strengthened organisational capacity to advance children and youth's rights and ensure their freedom of expression in public discourse and digital spaces, disaggregated by types of CSOs

Definition:

- CSOs include the organization that has an entity and legal registration and is selected by the partners following the section criteria in working areas.

- CSOs strengthened organisational capacity refers to measurable improvements in the CSO's ability to:

i) Develop and implement programs or advocacy related to freedom of expression for children and youth,

ii) Engage meaningfully with children and youth, especially in participatory or rights-based approaches,

iii) Monitor, report on, or respond to violations of expression rights, and

iv) Navigate and influence public or digital policy environments affecting young people's expression,

v) Sustain and scale such work through effective governance, staffing, digital literacy, and partnerships with improved organisational capacity to advance children's and youth's rights and ensure their freedom of expression in public disclosure and digital spaces.

Calculation:

(Number of CSOs with improved capacity to advance children's and youth's rights and freedom of expression in public and digital spaces ÷ Total CSOs assessed) × 100

- The baseline value indicates that overall, 10.26% of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have enhanced their organizational capacity to advance children's and youth's rights and freedom of expression.
- National CSOs demonstrate a comparatively higher level of capacity development (12.82%) than local CSOs (10%).

These low percentages indicate that the CSO ecosystem is still in an early phase of institutional readiness, requiring structured and long-term investments in digital rights knowledge, coordination mechanisms, and organizational systems. The disparity between national and local CSOs further suggests that capacity enhancement efforts must be geographically and institutionally differentiated, with priority support directed toward local CSOs that operate closest to communities yet possess weaker technical and advocacy capabilities.

Link to Project Implementation:

- ➔ Developing a modular training packages on digital rights, online safety, and freedom of expression is necessary for tailoring to the needs of local CSOs, which can be complemented by a "National–Local CSO Twinning Model" where stronger national organizations mentor local ones on organizational development, advocacy, and digital governance.

- ➔ Capacity-building efforts should also strengthen CSOs' ability to conduct evidence-based advocacy using child- and youth-generated data, community case studies, and digital behaviour insights, while fostering strategic engagement with media actors, digital platforms, and government stakeholders to influence policy and practice.

- ➔ Regular coordination forums involving CSOs, government agencies, teachers, parents, and the tech sector should be established to enhance collaboration, alongside support for CSOs to develop safeguarding policies, digital risk-management systems, and child-feedback loops that ensure meaningful and safe participation.

These actions can be reinforced through collaborative campaigns during key global observances such as Safer Internet Day to promote awareness and amplify children's voices.

Impact Indicator 2: % of children and youth demonstrating improved knowledge and skills to advocate for their rights, and express their opinions safely in online environments, disaggregated by sex, gender, and diversity

Definition: Demonstrating self-confidence refers to the degree to which children and youth feel capable and empowered to:
i) Express their opinions, ideas, or concerns openly,
ii) Participate in public debates, protests, or advocacy efforts,
iii) Use digital platforms to share their voice, engage in discussions, or challenge injustices,
iv) Take action in response to issues affecting their freedom of expression.

Calculation:

(Number of children and youth showing self-confidence to advance their rights and freedom of expression in public and digital spaces ÷ Total interviewed) × 100

The baseline value of Impact Indicator 2 highlights that self-confidence in children and youth is low (8.09%). Additionally, there is a clear gender disparity, with males showing consistently higher levels of self-confidence than females, both in children and youth groups. Efforts to boost self-confidence should particularly focus on supporting girls and younger children.

- **Age Comparison:**

Children: Only 6.04% of children demonstrate self-confidence in advancing their rights and freedom of expression. Among them, boys show a slightly higher percentage (7.14%) compared to girls (5.04%).

Youth: In contrast, a higher percentage of youth (12.71%) exhibit self-confidence, with males (15.79%) showing much higher confidence than females (9.84%).

- **Gender Comparison:**

Overall, Males across both children and youth demonstrate greater self-confidence compared to females. The overall male percentage is 9.84%, whereas the overall female percentage is lower at 6.5%.

Children: The gender disparity is noticeable in children, with boys showing a significantly higher percentage of 7.14% compared to girls at 5.04%.

Youth: The gender gap widens among youth, where males (15.79%) are far more confident than females (9.84%).

These findings indicate that youth are comparatively more empowered to express their rights, while persistent gender disparities underscore the need for targeted interventions to promote equitable participation and confidence among girls. These disparities underscore an urgent need for targeted, gender-responsive interventions that begin early in childhood and continue through adolescence.

Link to Project Implementation:

➔ Design age- and gender-responsive life-skills modules focusing on communication, leadership, digital expression, and safe online participation.

➔ Use participatory methods—peer circles, girls' clubs, storytelling, and role-play—to build a supportive environment that encourages girls to voice their opinions.

➔ Pair girls and younger children with youth leaders, female role models, and alumni who have demonstrated confidence in advocacy and digital spaces.

➔ Integrate intergenerational mentorship involving teachers, community leaders, and parents to normalize participation of children and youth in decision-making.

➔ Establish child- and youth-friendly digital platforms, clubs, or "expression labs" where participants can practice articulating their views, create content, and safely engage in dialogues.

➔ Offer guided sessions on online safety to reduce fear of harassment—one of the major barriers to girls' online confidence.

- ➔ Conduct awareness campaigns with parents, teachers, and community influencers to challenge restrictive gender norms that limit autonomy and public expression of children and youth.

- ➔ Facilitate community dialogues emphasizing equal rights, freedom of expression, and the value of girls' participation in digital and civic spaces.

- ➔ Integrate confidence-building exercises into school clubs, debates, arts programs, and digital literacy classes.

- ➔ Train teachers to adopt inclusive facilitation techniques that ensure equal participation from girls and shy or younger children.

- ➔ Strengthen youth-led groups where young people can practice advocacy, public speaking, and digital storytelling, with dedicated mechanisms ensuring girls' leadership positions.

Strengthening confidence requires not only skill-building for children and youth but also transforming the environments around them—families, schools, communities, and digital spaces—to be more supportive and equitable. Without deliberate efforts to uplift girls' voices, the existing imbalance will persist, undermining the broader goal of advancing children's and youth's rights and freedom of expression.

Impact Indicator 3: Evidence of CSOs consulting with and taking into consideration the decisions, opinions, and views of children and youth in relation to their access to rights and advanced freedom of expression in public discourse and digital spaces

Definition:
This indicator measures the extent to which Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) actively seek, consider, and integrate the perspectives, opinions, and decisions of children and youth when addressing issues related to their rights and freedom of expression. It focuses on how CSOs engage young people in discussions and decision-making processes concerning their rights in both public forums and digital platforms.

Key Components:
Consultation: The process through which CSOs actively seek input from children and youth through structured or unstructured mechanisms (e.g., focus group discussions, surveys, workshops, online platforms).
Consideration: The extent to which CSOs integrate the feedback and perspectives of children and youth into programmatic or advocacy work, policy recommendations, or public statements.
Public Discourse: The inclusion of youth voices in public platforms such as community meetings, media, campaigns, and policy dialogues.
Digital Spaces: The facilitation of safe and inclusive online platforms for children and youth to express their views, raise concerns, or advocate for their rights.

Impact Indicator 3 underscores the significance of engaging children and youth regarding their rights and their freedom of expression. Current data availability for national and local CSOs in this domain remains incomplete, indicating a critical gap in

the systematic inclusion of children and youth in decision-making processes. Among the 39 CSOs assessed, 10 partially incorporated feedback from children and youth and implemented social media campaigns focused on cyber awareness and digital security. 1 CSO organized cyber awareness exhibition in a local fair for children and youth in 2024. Notably, **none** of the organizations reported initiatives specifically addressing freedom of expression in the digital space.

Outcome 1: Children and youth in all their diversity express their opinions in a safe online environment, and participate in political, cultural and social actions.

1.1 % of CSOs staff demonstrating improved knowledge and skills to mobilise and engage children and youth to use digital technologies safely, and speak up about their rights and freedom of expression, disaggregated by sex, gender and diversity

Definition: This indicator measures the percentage of Civil Society Organization (CSO) staff who have shown an increase in knowledge and skills related to:

- Mobilizing and engaging children and youth to use digital technologies safely.
- Empowering children and youth to speak up about their rights and freedom of expression.

Calculation:

(Number of CSO staff with improved knowledge and skills to engage children and youth in safe digital use and rights-based expression ÷ Total CSO staff interviewed) × 100

This indicator measures the proportion of CSO staff who possess enhanced knowledge and skills to support children and youth in safely using digital technologies and advocating for their rights and freedom of expression online.

The overall baseline value is 10.3%, with 10.53% of the national-level CSOs and 10% local-level CSOs demonstrating these competencies. The findings indicate that only a small fraction of CSOs currently have the capacity to effectively engage in digital safety and rights-based advocacy, highlighting a significant need for targeted training and capacity-building efforts across both national and local organizations to strengthen their role in promoting children's digital empowerment and protection.

Link to Project Implementation:

- ➔ To strengthen CSO capacity in digital safety, freedom of expression and rights-based advocacy, a targeted implementation plan should focus on needs assessment, tailored training, and practical capacity-building interventions.
- ➔ Both national and local CSOs will benefit from modular workshops, mentorship programs, and resource toolkits that address their specific operational contexts.
- ➔ Ongoing technical support, coupled with monitoring and evaluation, will track improvements in skills, advocacy initiatives, and outreach effectiveness.

➔ By institutionalizing best practices and fostering peer learning networks, the plan aims to sustainably enhance CSOs' ability to promote children's digital empowerment and protection across diverse organizational settings.

Outcome 1: Children and youth in all their diversity express their opinions in a safe online environment, and participate in political, cultural, and social actions.
1.2. # of actions taken by CSOs at local and national level to identify, prevent and protect children and youth from violations of their freedom of expression in public discourse and digital spaces. **Definition:** Actions taken by the CSOs can include awareness session/campaign/ day celebration/referral etc. in the nation and local levels. **Calculation:** The study team counted the actions taken by CSOs at local and national levels to identify, prevent, and protect children and youth from violations of their freedom of expression in public and digital spaces.

Outcome Indicator 1.2 shows that no actions have yet been taken by CSOs at national and local levels to protect children and youth from violations of their freedom of expression, reflected by a baseline value of 0. This suggests a critical gap in proactive measures, such as monitoring and responding to violations, which needs urgent attention.

Three CSOs reported implementing limited campaigns and cybersecurity awareness exhibitions targeting children and youth. One CSO additionally noted conducting courtyard meetings with community members to address issues such as online blackmailing and sexual harassment; however, these activities were carried out with minimal financial and logistical support, underscoring the need for more structured and adequately resourced interventions.

The CSO representatives reported that most organizations rely heavily on small grants from NGOAB or project-based funding from INGOs. As a result, many CSOs struggle to implement programs effectively due to insufficient and unpredictable funding. They cited limited funding opportunities specifically related to digital safety, a lack of donor interest in child and youth digital rights, and challenges in meeting donor compliance or reporting requirements. Additional barriers include inadequate budgeting and financial planning skills, difficulty covering core operational costs, short-term or one-off funding cycles, weak financial management systems, limited capacity to diversify funding sources, and delays in donor disbursements.

Beyond funding constraints, CSOs also acknowledged significant knowledge gaps in digital skills required to safeguard freedom of expression in online spaces and to protect children and youth from digital threats. They highlighted the need for improved technological and logistical support. CSOs expressed interest in training on digital safety and digital expression rights, as well as access to resources and toolkits for participatory engagement, dedicated funding for programs and advocacy, legal support or referral mechanisms, monitoring and evaluation frameworks for expression

rights, policy and advocacy guidance, and stronger partnership opportunities with technology actors and government stakeholders.

Link to Project Implementation

1. Capacity-Building on Digital Safety and Expression Rights

- ➔ Conduct modular training sessions on digital safety, online freedom of expression, and protection against digital threats.
- ➔ Provide hands-on workshops on using digital tools and platforms safely for program implementation and advocacy.
- ➔ Develop e-learning modules for continuous skill development accessible to remote CSOs.

2. Financial and Operational Strengthening

- ➔ Organize training on budgeting, financial planning, and donor compliance.
- ➔ Introduce simple financial management systems and digital tools for tracking program expenses and operational costs.
- ➔ Support CSOs in diversifying funding sources through proposal development workshops and donor mapping exercises.

3. Development of Resources and Toolkits

- ➔ Develop and disseminate toolkits on child and youth digital rights, participatory engagement methods, and online safety protocols.
- ➔ Create guidance materials for monitoring and evaluating programs related to freedom of expression.
- ➔ Offer templates for advocacy campaigns, policy briefs, and community engagement strategies.

4. Legal, Policy, and Partnership Support

- ➔ Conduct policy workshops to build CSOs' understanding of child and youth rights in digital spaces.
- ➔ Facilitate partnerships with government bodies, tech companies, and other relevant stakeholders for programmatic and advocacy initiatives.

5. Programmatic and Advocacy Support

- ➔ Provide seed funding or small grants for pilot projects in digital safety and expression rights.
- ➔ Assist CSOs in designing and executing advocacy campaigns targeting digital rights and child protection.
- ➔ Offer mentoring and peer-learning platforms to share best practices and challenges.

6. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

- ➔ Develop M&E frameworks to track progress on digital safety, freedom of expression, and capacity-building outcomes.

- ➔ Conduct periodic reviews and learning workshops to capture lessons and replicate best practices.
- ➔ Facilitate reporting mechanisms that meet donor compliance requirements efficiently.

The findings indicate that CSOs face significant challenges in both funding and digital capacity, limiting their ability to effectively promote children's and youth's digital rights and freedom of expression. Targeted interventions—such as capacity-building, financial strengthening, resource development, legal support, and strategic partnerships—are essential to empower CSOs, enhance program implementation, and enable sustainable advocacy. Strengthening these areas will ensure CSOs can protect young people online, amplify their voices, and drive meaningful change in digital rights.

Outcome 1: Children and youth in all their diversity express their opinions in a safe online environment, and participate in political, cultural and social actions.

1.3. # of cases of violations of children and youth's freedom of expression in public discourse and digital spaces that are monitored, reported and responded to by the CSO representatives

-Cases involving violations of children's and youth's freedom of expression in public discourse and digital spaces that have been identified, referred, or provided with appropriate services
- CSO representatives refer to the staff, entities, and community members who have agreed to work collaboratively to respond to cases and provide necessary services.
- Monitored, reported, and responded by the CSO representative refers to actions undertaken by the entities, partners, community groups, and committees that have agreed to collaboratively respond to reported cases

Calculation:

The study team counted the cases of violations of children and youth's freedom of expression in public discourse and digital spaces that are monitored, reported and responded to by the CSO representatives

This outcome indicator 1.3 measures the number of cases related to violations of children's and youth's freedom of expression that Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have successfully monitored, reported, or addressed. The baseline value for 2025 is 0, signifying that neither national nor local CSOs have documented or responded to such cases during the reference year. This absence underscores a critical gap in reporting and response mechanisms, highlighting the urgent need for CSOs to establish structured systems for monitoring, documenting, and addressing violations to strengthen the protection of children's rights in both public and digital spaces.

Link to Project Implementation:

To address the current gap in monitoring violations of children's and youth's freedom of expression, the project will support CSOs in establishing structured systems for case documentation and response. This will involve conducting a needs assessment,

developing standardized monitoring and reporting protocols, and providing targeted training on identifying, verifying, and addressing violations. CSOs will be equipped with referral pathways, digital tools, and internal escalation procedures to ensure timely and ethical handling of cases. Ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and knowledge-sharing will track progress and refine approaches, enabling both national and local CSOs to actively protect children's rights in public and digital spaces.

Outcome 2: Children and youth in all their diversity express their opinions in a safe online environment, and participate in political, cultural and social actions.

2.1. % of children and youth demonstrating improved knowledge and skills to advocate for their rights, and express their opinions safely in online environments, disaggregated by sex, gender and diversity

Definition:

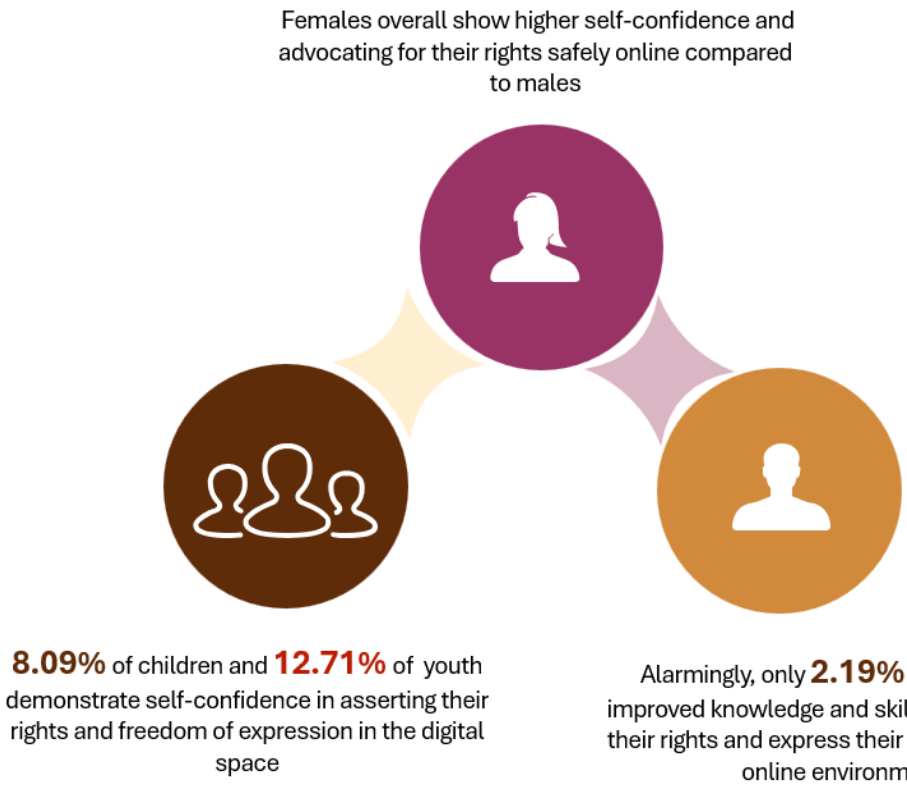
This indicator measures the percentage of children and youth who have demonstrated an increase in knowledge and skills in:
- Advocating for their rights effectively in digital and online platforms.
- Expressing their opinions safely in online environments, minimizing risks such as cyberbullying, online exploitation, and misinformation

Calculation:

(Number of children and youth with improved knowledge and skills to advocate for their rights and express opinions safely online ÷ Total surveyed) × 100

The data for Outcome 2, Indicator 2.1, measures the percentage of children and youth demonstrating improved knowledge and skills to advocate for their rights and express their opinions safely in online environments.

The baseline value of 4.96% reflects a low level of such knowledge and skills. In both children and youth, girls consistently show slightly higher levels of confidence in expressing themselves safely online compared to boys, especially in youth where male representation is nearly absent. This highlights a need for gender-targeted interventions to build digital confidence among boys, particularly in youth.



Age Comparison:

Children: 6.04% of children demonstrate these skills, with a notable gender difference—boys (3.17%) show significantly lower self-confidence compared to girls (8.63%).

Youth: Only 2.54% of youth overall demonstrate these skills, with males (0%) showing no reported confidence and females (4.92%) displaying some confidence. This shows a marked contrast, as youth, particularly boys, struggle more in utilizing digital spaces safely for advocacy.

Gender Comparison:

Overall: Females overall show slightly higher self-confidence, with 7.5% of girls and women expressing confidence in advocating for their rights safely online compared to 2.19% of males.

Children: Girls in the children category significantly outnumber boys in this area, with 8.63% of girls expressing confidence compared to just 3.17% of boys.

Youth: The gender disparity widens in youth, where females (4.92%) demonstrate more confidence compared to males (0%).

These findings underscore both the overall low level of digital advocacy skills among children and youth and the persistent gender disparities, pointing to an urgent need for targeted interventions—particularly aimed at boys and young males—to strengthen safe and confident online expression.

Link to Project Implementation:

- ➔ To improve children's and youth's knowledge and skills for safely advocating for their rights online, the project will implement targeted digital literacy and rights-based training programs, with a particular focus on building digital confidence among boys.
- ➔ Interactive workshops, mentorship initiatives, and peer-learning sessions will equip participants with practical skills for safe online expression, while integrating gender-sensitive approaches to address disparities in confidence levels.
- ➔ Complementary resources, such as toolkits and online guidance, will reinforce learning, and periodic assessments will monitor improvements, enabling the project to adapt interventions and ensure measurable increases in safe digital engagement for all children and youth.

Outcome 2: Children and youth in all their diversity express their opinions in a safe online environment, and participate in political, cultural and social actions.

2.2 % of children and youth who reported they are confident to express their opinions related to political, cultural and social norms in a safe online environment, disaggregated by sex, gender and diversity

Definition:
This indicator measures the proportion of children and youth who feel confident in expressing their opinions and perspectives on political, cultural, and social norms in online spaces they perceive as safe. It assesses both the sense of safety and the perceived freedom to express oneself without fear of retaliation, discrimination, or harm.

Confidence in Expression: The level of self-assuredness in voicing opinions on sensitive or impactful topics in online spaces, including social media, online forums, and messaging platforms.
Political, Cultural, and Social Norms: Topics may include but are not limited to governance, human rights, cultural identity, gender norms, and community issues.
Safe Online Environment: Online spaces where children and youth feel protected from harassment, cyberbullying, discrimination, or surveillance that may inhibit their ability to express themselves freely.

Calculation:

(Number of children and youth confident expressing opinions on political, cultural, and social norms in a safe online environment ÷ Total surveyed) × 100

The baseline value of Outcome Indicator 2.2 indicates that overall, 8.62% of children and youth reported confidence in expressing their opinions related to political, cultural, and social norms in a safe online environment. The data reveals a huge gap in the confidence to express opinions online.

- **Age Comparison:**

Children: 6.79% of children overall reported confidence in expressing their opinions safely online. There is a noticeable gender difference within this group—boys show a higher confidence level (10.32%) compared to girls (3.6%).

Youth: The confidence level increases among youth, with 12.71% of youth overall reporting such confidence. Again, there is a clear gender gap, with males (12.28%) showing slightly less confidence than females (13.11%).

- **Gender Comparison:**

Overall: There is a higher confidence level among males (10.93%) compared to females (6.5%) in the overall group of children and youth.

Children: The disparity is more pronounced in children, where boys (10.32%) report a much higher confidence in expressing themselves online compared to girls (3.6%).

Youth: Among youth, females (13.11%) report more confidence than males (12.28%), suggesting a reversal of the trend seen in the children's category.

These findings suggest that gender-targeted initiatives might be necessary to empower girls, particularly younger ones, to express their views confidently and safely in digital spaces.

The study team conducted Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with children and youth, which revealed a recurring theme of inter-generational control over social media use. Participants consistently expressed a lack of confidence in voicing their opinions online, primarily due to fears of parental disapproval when addressing political, social, or family-related topics. Several participants indicated that they refrain from sharing personal views on digital platforms out of concern that relatives might report their activities to parents, potentially triggering conflict and tension within the family-

> "I refrained from posting opinions out of fear that relatives might inform their parents, potentially leading to conflict within the family.'- FGD Participant (Girl)

Another female participant shared that she was directly threatened by a political actor for expressing dissenting views in own Facebook id:

> "If you don't delete the post, I will send the police to your house to arrest you."

The threat of state-sanctioned violence and arrest created a climate of fear, leading to forced self-censorship under familial pressure. As a result, she deleted all posts that criticized law enforcement violence, as well as those condemning violence against children and youth during the July uprising.

This case underscores a critical challenge to digital rights and freedom of expression, where intimidation and coercion silence voices and undermine civic participation. Moreover, these finding highlights the need for awareness initiatives that promote inter-generational dialogue and support safe, respectful expression for children and youth in digital spaces.

Link to Project Implementation:

- ➔ To address the low confidence of children and youth in expressing their opinions safely online, the project will implement age- and gender-targeted digital empowerment initiatives. Interventions will include interactive workshops, mentorship programs, and peer-learning sessions designed to build digital literacy, rights awareness, and safe online expression skills, with particular focus on empowering girls—especially younger children—who demonstrate the lowest confidence levels.
- ➔ The program will also incorporate guidance on navigating inter-generational dynamics and parental oversight, providing strategies to express opinions safely on sensitive topics.
- ➔ Complementary tools such as online resources, scenario-based exercises, and moderated discussion platforms will reinforce learning, while regular monitoring and feedback mechanisms will track improvements and inform adjustments to ensure measurable gains in confidence and safe online engagement among all participants.

Outcome 2: Children and youth in all their diversity express their opinions in a safe online environment, and participate in political, cultural and social actions.

2.3 - % of children and youth who took action in response to violations of their rights to freedom of expression in public discourse and digital spaces, disaggregated by sex, gender and diversity.

Definition: Actions in response to violations of their rights to freedom of expression in public discourse and digital spaces may include any event organized by the projejct or outside to express their opinion.

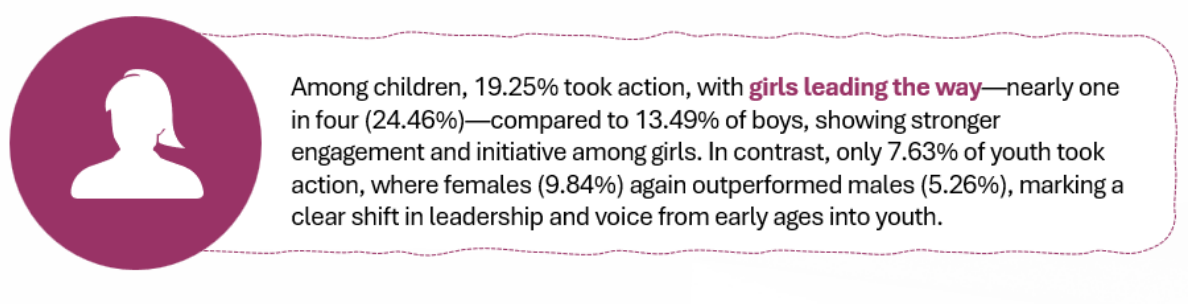
Calculation:

Number of children and youth who acted against violations of their freedom of expression in public and digital spaces ÷ Total surveyed) × 100

The baseline value of the Outcome Indicator is 15.67%. Only 15.67% of children and youth who took action in response to violations of their rights to freedom of expression in public discourse and digital spaces. Here's a comparison based on age and gender:

- **Age Comparison:**

Children: 19.25% of children overall took action, with a noticeable gender difference—girls (24.46%) were more active than boys (13.49%). This suggests that girls are significantly more engaged within the children's category.



Youth: Only 7.63% of youth overall took action, with males (5.26%) showing lower involvement than females (9.84%). This is the reverse of the children's category, where boys were more active than girls.

- **Gender Comparison:**

Overall: Females (20%) are more likely to take action compared to males (10.93%) when looking at the overall children and youth groups.

Children: Among children, girls (24.46%) show higher levels of action than boys (13.49%), marking a significant gender difference.

Youth: In youth, females (9.84%) are again more proactive than males (5.26%), highlighting that girls in the youth group are more likely to respond to violations of their rights.

The data indicates that girls show a higher tendency to take action compared to boys, particularly in the youth category, while boys are more engaged than girls in the children's category. This suggests a shift in engagement with age, where gender dynamics play a pivotal role in influencing how children and youth respond to violations of their rights online. Programs aiming to increase engagement should address these gender-based differences, providing targeted support for boys in the children's group and girls in the youth group.

Link to Project Implementation:

- ➔ To increase children's and youth's proactive responses to violations of their rights to freedom of expression, the project will implement age- and gender-targeted interventions.
- ➔ Activities will include training on rights awareness, digital advocacy, and safe response mechanisms, with a focus on empowering boys in the children's category and girls in the youth category to address observed engagement gaps. Interactive workshops, mentorship programs, and scenario-based exercises will build confidence and practical skills for taking action in both public and digital spaces.

- ➔ Complementary resources, such as toolkits, guidance on navigating social pressures, and peer-support networks, will reinforce learning.
- ➔ Continuous monitoring and feedback will track improvements, enabling adaptive strategies to ensure increased, equitable participation in responding to rights violations across age and gender groups.

Outcome 3: Civil society actors are motivated and proactively engaged to advocate for gender transformative policy and legal-institutional reform to prioritise protection of children and youth's rights in the digital space

3.1 -% of CSOs who take action in monitoring and advocating for gender transformative policy and legal-institutional reform to protect children and youth from online abuse, harassment and exploitation, disaggregated by types of CSOs

Definition:
- CSOs refer to the organizations selected by the project that have worked collaboratively and engaged in advocacy to promote transformative policy, legal, and institutional reforms in order to achieve the project's overall goals.
- Actions in monitoring and advocating for gender transformative policy and legal-institutional reform to protect children and youth from online abuse, harassment and exploitation may include physical, sexual, online or offline any type of exploitation.

Calculation:

(Number of CSOs taking action to monitor and advocate for gender-transformative policies protecting children and youth online ÷ Total CSOs surveyed) × 100

Outcome 3, Indicator 3.1 measures the extent to which CSOs engage in monitoring and advocating for gender-transformative policies and legal reforms to protect children and youth from online abuse, harassment, and exploitation. Overall, 12.82% of CSOs are actively involved, with national-level organizations showing higher engagement (15.79%) compared to local-level CSOs (10%). This disparity suggests that while national CSOs are relatively more proactive in promoting legal reforms and gender-sensitive policies, there is a clear need to strengthen the capacity and involvement of local CSOs to ensure broader, more inclusive advocacy efforts.

Link to Project Implementation:

- ➔ To enhance CSO engagement in advocating for gender-transformative policies and legal reforms protecting children and youth from online abuse, harassment, and exploitation, the project will implement a targeted capacity-building and advocacy support program. This will include training for both national and local CSOs on policy monitoring, legal frameworks, and gender-sensitive approaches, with particular focus on strengthening the capacity of local organizations.
- ➔ Mentorship and knowledge-sharing platforms will facilitate collaboration between national and local CSOs, enabling the replication of effective strategies at the community level.
- ➔ Additionally, the project will provide practical toolkits, advocacy guidance, and opportunities for joint policy engagement, while establishing monitoring mechanisms to track progress and ensure inclusive, sustained advocacy efforts across all organizational levels.

Outcome 3: Civil society actors are motivated and proactively engaged to advocate for gender transformative policy and legal-institutional reform to prioritise protection of children and youth's rights in the digital space.

3.2- # of gender transformative laws/ policies/ regulations/ code of conduct/ national plans developed/ revised/ drafted by CSOs that ensure children and youth's safety when exercising their rights to freedom of expression in digital spaces

Definition: CSOs include initiatives aimed at drafting gender-transformative laws, policies, codes of conduct, and national plans of action (NPAs) that contribute to ensuring children's rights and safeguarding their protection.

Calculation:

Count the number of gender transformative laws/ policies/ regulations/ code of conduct/ national plans developed/ revised/ drafted by CSOs that ensure children and youth's safety when exercising their rights to freedom of expression in digital spaces.

The baseline value for this indicator is 0, indicating that, as of the survey year (2025), no CSOs have yet developed, revised, or drafted such gender-transformative policies or plans. This highlights a significant gap in terms of legal and institutional action for protecting children and youth in digital spaces, underlining the need for urgent efforts to create these frameworks.

Link to Project Implementation:

- ➔ Given the baseline value of 0, indicating that no CSOs have yet developed or revised gender-transformative policies or plans, the project will prioritize the creation and institutionalization of such frameworks. This will involve providing technical guidance and capacity-building workshops to CSOs on drafting, revising, and implementing gender-sensitive policies that protect children and youth in digital spaces.
- ➔ Collaborative forums and mentorship programs will facilitate knowledge exchange between national and local CSOs, while practical toolkits and templates will support policy development.
- ➔ Ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and peer review processes will ensure the quality, relevance, and adoption of these policies, fostering sustainable institutional action to safeguard children and youth online.

Present Status of Legal, Institutional and Policy Reformation Capacity of the CSOs: A Quantitative Observation

The assessment of CSOs' contributions to gender-transformative laws, policies, regulations, or codes of conduct related to children's and youth's freedom of expression and safety reveals an alarming lack of engagement in policy and law development processes. Out of 39 CSOs, an overwhelming 74.4% (n=29) have no involvement at all, showing complete disengagement from institutional reform in this area (Table-9, Annex-5). Only 9 CSOs provide informal input to draft documents, but their contributions are inconsistent and lack strategic focus. Critically, just one CSO demonstrates a moderate level of engagement, having directly contributed to drafting

or revising a gender-responsive law or policy in collaboration with stakeholders (Table-9, Annex-5).

Unfortunately, no CSOs are operating at the highest level, where they would lead or coordinate multi-stakeholder processes, use gender data, and systematically integrate youth voices to influence systemic legal or policy change.

District-level trends mirror this overall weakness: Dhaka hosts the only CSO with moderate-level engagement, while all other districts remain confined to low or basic capacity, with Bagerhat particularly underperforming as none of its CSOs have even basic-level contributions. The findings underscore a systemic policy advocacy gap among CSOs. Despite their mandate to protect and advance children's and youth's rights, the vast majority remain passive observers in law and policy processes, offering little to no influence on systemic change. The absence of high-capacity CSOs is a serious red flag: without stronger institutional support, advocacy skills, and structured engagement with policymakers, CSOs will continue to be sidelined, leaving critical legal and policy spaces around digital safety and freedom of expression dominated by other actors.

Understanding of Digital Child Protection Laws & Rights

The assessment shows that 22 CSOs demonstrate only a basic understanding of digital child protection laws, with limited participation in legal or policy spaces. 8 CSOs have a moderate working knowledge and participate occasionally in consultations, while none possess strong legal literacy or play an active role in policy reforms (Table-10, annex-5).

Alarmingly, 9 CSOs fall into the lowest tier, with little to no awareness of relevant laws and no engagement in policy dialogues. District-level analysis reveals that Bagerhat is the weakest, with six out of seven CSOs at the lowest capacity level (Table-10, Annex-5).

By contrast, Dhaka hosts relatively stronger organizations, yet even here, most are confined to the basic category. The complete absence of high-capacity CSOs underscores a systemic deficit in legal literacy and policy engagement across all districts, leaving children's digital rights largely unprotected at the institutional level.

Youth & Child Participation in Digital Child Protection Advocacy

The findings reveal a deep structural weakness in ensuring youth and child participation in digital child protection advocacy. More than half of the CSOs (53.8%, n=21) are at the lowest level, with no involvement of children or youth, no defined strategies, and a complete absence of youth voices in policy discussions (Table-11, Annex-5).

Another 13 CSOs operate on an ad hoc or tokenistic basis, engaging sporadically but without strategic frameworks or meaningful youth involvement (Table-11, Annex-5). Only 5 CSOs have developed a moderate agenda where children and youth are occasionally involved, but participation is not systematically integrated into policy processes (Table-11, Annex-5).

Critically, none of the organizations are at a high level, meaning there are no CSOs consistently co-leading multi-stakeholder advocacy, shaping agendas, or engaging youth meaningfully in structured platforms. This signals that youth and children remain largely excluded from digital policy formulation, with their voices underrepresented or absent altogether.

Engagement with Government & Regulators

Engagement with government and regulators is similarly weak. Nearly one-third of CSOs (30.8%, n=12) have no relationships or coordination with relevant ministries, regulators, or authorities (e.g., MoWCA, MoICT, BTRC) (Table-12, Annex-5). The majority (61.5%, n=24) are limited to occasional or informal contacts that do not translate into meaningful influence (Table-11, Annex-5).

Only 3 CSOs have moderate-level engagement, regularly participating in dialogues with ministries or regulators. Not a single CSO has achieved a trusted-partner status that allows them to shape national digital safety agendas or contribute to policy reforms (Table-11, Annex-5).

District-wise, Dhaka CSOs fare slightly better in maintaining basic-level connections, but overall, the absence of any high-capacity CSO means that civil society's influence on government-led digital child protection policies is negligible.

Legal Services & Referrals

The findings highlight a weak and fragmented legal response capacity among CSOs. Over one-third (35.9%, n=14) have no capacity to provide legal support or referrals for children facing digital harm (Table-13, Annex-5). Another 16 CSOs engage in basic, informal referrals without formalized mechanisms. Only 9 CSOs have established referral pathways, and none have institutionalized, comprehensive legal support mechanisms (Table-13, Annex-5).

District patterns show Bagerhat and Gazipur particularly weak, while Dhaka hosts most of the moderate-level referral systems. The absence of any high-level institutionalized services exposes a significant protection gap—children affected by online abuse are largely reliant on ad hoc or poorly structured legal responses.

Institutional Reform Initiatives

The data shows that most CSOs remain passive or minimally engaged in institutional reform related to online child protection. Nearly half 18 CSOs have no involvement in shaping institutional responses, while another 14 CSOs are limited to ad hoc participation in reform discussions, such as attending meetings but not influencing outcomes (Table-14, Annex-5).

Only a small fraction 7 CSOs collaborate with institutional actors to integrate digital safety into child protection systems, and none are driving or co-leading institutional transformation (e.g., SOPs, digital case management, or policy audits) (Table-13, Annex-5). This indicates that CSOs are largely followers rather than leaders in institutional reform, with little influence over systemic change.

Internal Policy & Compliance

Internal safeguarding policies remain underdeveloped across CSOs. Almost half (43.6%, n=17) lack any internal digital safeguarding frameworks or compliance with national/international standards (Table-15, Annex-5). A further 41% (n=16) have only basic safeguarding policies that make limited mention of digital risks (Table-15, Annex-5).

Only 6 CSOs demonstrate moderate alignment with national standards, having clear policies and protocols addressing staff obligations and digital risks (Table-15, Annex-5). Critically, none of the organizations have comprehensive digital child protection policies aligned with global best practices.

This means that even where CSOs are active in advocacy or programming, their own internal governance systems are not adequately safeguarding children in digital spaces.

Volunteering

The data highlights a serious weakness in the role of volunteers in advancing digital child protection. A striking 61.5% (n=24) of CSOs are at the lowest capacity level, where volunteers demonstrate limited awareness, low digital literacy, and are engaged only informally, without protocols or structured guidance on digital safety (Table-16, Annex-5).

Another 11 CSOs function at a basic level, with volunteers showing some reliability but operating without proper digital safeguarding protocols. Only 3 CSOs have moved toward moderate, structured volunteer involvement, where volunteers are trained and meaningfully engaged under supervision (Table-16, Annex-5).

Critically, just one CSO has volunteers at a high capacity level, where they are fully capable, digitally literate, and actively leading child protection initiatives. This distribution demonstrates that most CSOs are failing to leverage volunteer capacity as a sustainable driver of digital child protection, leaving organizations overly dependent on weak and informal support systems.

Employment Turnover

The findings show that staff turnover is another systemic vulnerability undermining organizational capacity. Nearly one-third of CSOs (28.2%, n=11) are at a low level, where frequent turnover disrupts institutional knowledge and weakens the consistency of digital safeguarding practices (Table-17, Annex-5).

The majority (48.7%, n=19) operate at a basic level, where some institutional knowledge is retained, but continuity mechanisms are weak, and digital protection practices remain fragile (Table-17, Annex-5).

Only 9 CSOs have reached a moderate level, maintaining relatively stable staffing structures that allow gradual institutional growth and consistent safeguarding practices (Table-17, Annex-5).

Alarmingly, none of the CSOs are at the high level, meaning there are no organizations with strong internal systems that make digital safeguarding resilient to staffing changes.

Outcome 3: Civil society actors are motivated and proactively engaged to advocate for gender transformative policy and legal-institutional reform to prioritise protection of children and youth's rights in the digital space.

3.3: Private companies (ISPs, mobile companies) have and implement a code of conduct along with the government's policies and procedures that ensure children's safety when exercising their rights to freedom of expression in digital space.

Definition: Private companies include internet service provider companies, mobile companies who deliver relevant services.

Count the number of private companies (ISPs, mobile companies) that have and implement code of conduct along with government policies and procedures that ensure children's safety when exercising their rights to freedom of expression in digital spaces."

The baseline data for Outcome Indicator 3.3, measures the extent to which private companies—specifically Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and mobile companies—adhere to and implement a code of conduct aligned with government policies and procedures to ensure the safety of children and youth in exercising their rights to freedom of expression in digital spaces. The study team engaged with private sector entities, including ISPAB, telecommunications, and media companies, to learn about their experiences—if any—in developing and implementing codes of conduct, as well as aligning with government policies and procedures that safeguard children's safety while they exercise their right to freedom of expression in digital spaces. Discussions held with **Grameenphone, the Dhaka Tribune, and the Internet Service Provider Association of Bangladesh (ISPAB)** indicate a shared understanding among these organizations of the need to protect children's rights and promote safe digital participation. Each institution acknowledges that ensuring a secure online environment is a growing national priority, particularly as more children engage in digital spaces for education, communication, and expression.

As of the reference year 2025, the baseline value for this indicator is 0, indicating that no private companies have yet implemented such a code of conduct. This finding underscores a significant policy and practice gap, highlighting the absence of a formalized framework among private digital service providers to safeguard children and youth online and the urgent need for targeted action to promote responsible corporate engagement in digital child protection.

Private Sector Implementation of Child-Safe Digital Policies and Practices

Grameenphone emphasized that freedom of expression and digital safety are key priorities within its ESG framework, but acknowledged gaps in defining the boundaries and responsibilities associated with online expression-

> "Ensuring freedom of expression and promoting digital safety are key priorities for our ESG team. Although challenges arose during the internet outage on August 5, 2024, we have since observed a gradual easing of restrictions on freedom of expression. However, prolonged limitations on open expression have left lasting impacts. Many individuals now express their opinions online without adequate understanding of the responsibilities, boundaries, and consequences of digital communication.
>
> As a result, concerns about privacy and digital safety have become increasingly significant. This highlights the pressing need to promote responsible digital behavior. At Grameenphone, we remain dedicated to supporting freedom of expression while maintaining a safe and secure digital environment for all. There is now a growing need to clearly define which actions, words, gestures, texts, and forms of expression fall within the scope of freedom of expression, as its boundaries remain uncertain."- Grameenphone (KII respondents)

The company noted that prolonged restrictions on free expression have led to misuse and misunderstanding of digital communication. While Grameenphone has launched several awareness programs—such as the Child Online Safety Initiative and partnerships with UNICEF, Plan International, and BRAC—it has not been directly involved in the development of codes or ethical guidelines for digital protection and freedom of expression in the online space.

ISPAB representatives explained that while their association and member ISPs follow certain internal protocols for data privacy, cyber violence response, and victim management, these are not formalized under a nationally recognized code. They reported an increase in complaints related to digital threats, stalking, and harassment, especially against women, and noted that ISPs cooperate with law enforcement agencies such as the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) when handling cybercrime investigations. ISPAB expressed a willingness to engage more actively with NGOs and INGOs to strengthen network security, standardize victim response mechanisms, and improve nationwide collaboration in combating online violence. An ISPAB representative noted that the ISPAB board will decide on further strengthening guidelines for ISPs to address these issues more effectively.

ISPAB also recommends greater collaboration with NGOs and INGOs, focusing on network security and strategies for ISPs to enhance support in combating cyber violence against women and children online. To implement this on a national scale, CSOs in local areas can assist regional ISPs,

The Dhaka Tribune described having internal policies and a dedicated cell for addressing cases involving cyber violence and freedom of speech, particularly those affecting women and children. The organization frequently collaborates with development partners such as UNICEF, USAID, and the European Union on child protection and digital safety issues. However, like the other stakeholders, it lacks a formalized code aligned with national or international standards. Based on these insights, the study recommends establishing a multi-stakeholder framework involving telecom operators, media houses, ISPs, and civil society organizations to jointly develop child-sensitive codes of conduct, enhance digital literacy, and institutionalize

ethical reporting and victim protection mechanisms across Bangladesh's digital ecosystem. Media companies typically engage in joint collaborations on specific occasions, often when NGOs and INGOs seek to raise public awareness on particular issues. The Dhaka Tribune has participated in several such collaborations, projects, and initiatives in the Rohingya camps and UNICEF-supported coverage focusing on children. In some instances, specific cases require careful handling, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) also play a key role as stakeholders in these collaborative efforts.

These collaborations not only amplify critical issues but also help ensure that the messaging is accurate, timely, and sensitive to the target audience. By working together, media outlets and civil society actors can leverage their respective strengths—the media's reach and communication expertise combined with NGOs' and INGOs' field knowledge and community engagement—to create more impactful campaigns.

Furthermore, such partnerships are increasingly important in the digital space, where children's safety, freedom of expression, and protection from online violence are pressing concerns. Coordinated efforts allow for the development of comprehensive strategies, including online campaigns, multimedia content, and follow-up initiatives, that can reach wider demographics and sustain engagement over time. This approach ensures that awareness-raising is not just episodic but part of a continuous effort to safeguard children's rights and digital well-being.

Despite this collective awareness, none of the three organizations has yet established or adopted a formal Code of Conduct or Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that specifically address children's digital safety or their right to freedom of expression online. Their current practices tend to focus on broader issues such as data protection, cybercrime response, or general awareness campaigns rather than dedicated child-centered frameworks. This gap highlights an urgent need for structured policies and coordination among the private sector, media, and internet service actors to ensure consistent standards and accountability in protecting children online. Developing such frameworks could help bridge institutional responsibilities, promote ethical digital behavior, and support children's ability to express themselves freely yet safely in the evolving digital ecosystem.

However, Grameenphone is dedicated to promoting digital inclusion and safety and requires that any organization seeking collaboration follow a structured process tailored for partnerships with humanitarian organizations and civil society organizations (CSOs) operating in this area. The company emphasizes the importance of incorporating lessons on freedom of expression in digital spaces and digital safety for children and youth into educational content. In line with this approach, Grameenphone has recently launched digital safety courses for students, with provisions allowing parental participation. Additionally, Grameenphone remains open to partnerships with CSOs, provided that the goals of both parties are aligned and mutually reinforcing. To ensure these initiatives are effective and sustainable, the company maintains a dedicated annual workplan and budget focused on advancing digital inclusion and development.

8. GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES AND COOPERATIONS TO SAFEGUARD DIGITAL SAFETY AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The study team held discussions with law enforcement officials, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), district legal aid officers, law enforcement agencies, probation officers, and district social service officers to explore government initiatives and collaborations aimed at promoting digital safety and freedom of expression.

Findings reveal that government officials primarily handle cases related to online blackmail, sexual harassment, and online gambling. **Police stations** in the project areas reportedly receive over 100 such cases annually. Unfortunately, Mohammadpur police station receives 200-300 cases of abuse, blackmail, child marriage, eve-teasing, online gambling, and sexual harassment.

Victims currently rely on the Code of Criminal Procedure (1898), Penal Code (1860), and Children Act (2013) for legal redress, with the 999 hotline providing immediate support. Digital evidence handling is centralized at the Detective Branch (DB) and Criminal Investigation Department (CID), leaving local police stations without the necessary digital tools or forensic capabilities. Furthermore, local stations are excluded from coordination meetings with ISPs, digital platforms, and international partners, limiting their operational involvement in cybercrime responses.

However, incidents directly linked to freedom of expression remain largely underreported. One law enforcement official shared-

> Recently, we have started receiving cases where adolescent boys and girls report feeling unsafe within their own families. Their parents often restrict smartphone use at night, discourage chatting with friends of the opposite gender, and prohibit sharing personal photos. While parents are guided by social and religious norms, many children struggle to adapt to these expectations and consider it a violation of freedom of expression.- Police officer (KII respondent)

In cases where a girl reports abuse or violations of her digital rights and freedom of expression against parents, police officers have reportedly contacted the parents instead of addressing the complaint directly-

> "Your daughter has become more modern and educated than you, which is creating conflict."

It highlights a need for targeted training and awareness-building on children's rights and freedom of expression in digital space among law enforcement officials, children, and youth. However, the police officers are also arranging meetings with parents and

guardians to mitigate the problem among parents and children. At the same time, police officers are proactively engaging parents and guardians through community meetings aimed at reducing misunderstandings and conflicts between parents and children related to digital behavior.

Additionally, law enforcement representatives are participating in awareness campaigns and seminars focused on promoting digital safety, responsible online engagement, and the protection of children's rights. They are attending awareness-raising campaigns and seminars for children and youth. In this regard, a police officer said-

> We recommend that the term "Freedom of Expression" be clearly defined within legal, policy, and operational frameworks. This definition should clearly outline:
>
> - The scope of permissible speech, discussions, and communications that fall under the protection of freedom of expression.
> - The boundaries where speech may constitute defamation, hate speech, or other legally prohibited acts.
>
> By establishing clear guidelines on what constitutes freedom of expression versus actionable offenses, we can promote consistent enforcement, safeguard individual rights, and provide clear direction for law enforcement agencies, legal professionals, and civil society organizations working to advance digital safety and child protection- Mohammadpur Police Station

Local police receive general investigation training, but lack specialized instruction on digital tools, ICT operations, or handling emotionally sensitive cases. Awareness programs occasionally address social issues such as child marriage or drug abuse, but rarely cover digital safety or freedom of expression. There is a clear need for targeted training, gender-sensitive practices, and awareness-building among law enforcement personnel.

However, the District Legal Aid Offices in Dhaka and Gazipur have reported handling multiple cases involving blackmail through explicit personal images, domestic violence, dowry, and online sexual harassment. These offices provide direct legal assistance and comprehensive support to victims, encompassing the following services:

- **Legal Aid:** Facilitating access to justice in matters related to family disputes, cyber violence, and associated offenses.
- **Psychosocial Support:** Offering counseling to victims to mitigate further trauma during criminal proceedings and cross-examinations.
- **Settlement Facilitation:** Assisting parties in reaching amicable resolutions, where legally appropriate, in accordance with prevailing laws.

Depending on the nature and circumstances of each case, the Office may:

- Refer matters to local police, the Police Cyber Support for Women, or the Cyber Tribunal;
- Coordinate with the District Social Services Office; or
- Convene settlement meetings between parties.

Cases involving cyber violence, digital security threats, and harassment online are typically registered as General Register (GR) cases and are ordinarily reported to local police stations. In situations where the police do not provide adequate support, victims can seek recourse through the District Legal Aid Office, which ensures access to justice and comprehensive legal assistance.

However, cyber tribunals are only operational at the divisional level, meaning that District Legal Aid officers in Bagerhat and Satkhira do not handle cases of cybercrime or violations of freedom of expression in digital spaces. Victims from these districts must travel to Khulna to pursue legal redress. Children are accorded the highest priority under the mandate of the District Legal Aid Offices. In line with the Legal Aid Services Act and relevant government provisions, the State covers the costs of legal proceedings involving children.

District Legal Aid Officers strongly support the formulation of codes of conduct, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and ethical guidelines. These instruments should be designed through inclusive consultations with professionals, children, and youth to ensure they are responsive to real needs and practical challenges. However, it is observed that District Legal Aid Officers have not yet been engaged or invited to participate in such processes. Their inclusion in the development and review of these frameworks is advisable to ensure alignment with legal aid practices and to strengthen the institutional role of the District Legal Aid Office in matters concerning digital child protection and cyber safety.

On the other hand, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), follows strict legal protocols before acting on cyber offenses, such as shutting down harmful websites or servers. These actions typically require prior approval from courts or law enforcement agencies, after which BTRC collaborates with ISPs to implement technical solutions. However, officials noted that existing laws governing online content and OTT (Over-The-Top) platforms remain outdated and fragmented.

It is therefore recommended that the Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications, and Information Technology (MoPTIT) initiate a review and modernization of current cyber and telecommunication regulations. Updated laws should clarify roles, reporting channels, and accountability mechanisms among the Digital Security Agency (DSA), Cyber Security Division, and BTRC, ensuring faster, more coordinated responses to online crimes involving children.

BTRC's limited scope in awareness-raising and public education can be addressed through partnerships. BTRC's mandate does not directly cover preventive or community-level interventions; a multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism should be established involving BTRC, law enforcement agencies, ISPs, civil society, and educational institutions. This framework should define how data privacy, content takedown, and victim protection efforts intersect across institutions.

District Social Service Officers and Probation Officers are actively engaged in child protection initiatives, including case management and awareness-raising programs

addressing issues such as eve-teasing, child marriage, support for destitute individuals, and the operation of safe homes for children. Occasionally, they also organize and participate in seminars focused on online sexual harassment, cyberbullying, hacking, and misinformation.

Government stakeholders have expressed a strong interest in strengthening the capacity of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) through collaborative training and joint initiatives aimed at preventing Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (OSEA) and addressing violations of freedom of expression in digital spaces. This reflects a growing recognition of the need for multi-sectoral cooperation and capacity enhancement to ensure more effective protection and response mechanisms for children and vulnerable groups online. Collaboration with development partners and digital platforms can also support technical innovation—such as automated detection of child exploitation material and real-time reporting channels.

9. CONCLUSION

Bangladesh's children and youth are highly active online, with widespread access to smartphones and social media. However, this high digital adoption is not matched by adequate digital literacy, awareness of digital safety, or understanding of rights, leaving young people highly vulnerable. Most have never participated in training on safe online behavior or freedom of expression, and knowledge of digital rights remains limited.

This knowledge gap directly affects civic engagement and expression. Many children and youth have not used digital platforms to voice opinions or take action on issues affecting their rights. Fear of judgment, self-censorship, and strong familial or cultural pressures are significant barriers. Young people overwhelmingly prefer in-person expression over online engagement, indicating that digital spaces are perceived as unsafe and disempowering. Cyber violence, online gambling, and misinformation further exacerbate these vulnerabilities.

Education and adult support are critical but often insufficient. Students in formal education report higher confidence, a stronger sense of agency, and better support than informal learners or dropouts. Adult support—both from family and the broader community—is limited, leaving children and youth without adequate guidance to navigate digital spaces safely.

CSOs, as frontline actors in promoting digital rights and freedom of expression, remain underprepared. Most operate at low or basic capacity levels, constrained by weak legal knowledge, limited advocacy skills, fragmented engagement with youth and government actors, and inadequate governance mechanisms. The absence of high-capacity CSOs exposes children to inconsistent services and insufficient protection online. Volunteers, who could act as community champions, are largely untrained and digitally unprepared, while staff face challenges of high turnover and weak institutional continuity. Without targeted investment in capacity-building, structured partnerships, sustainable funding, volunteer training, and institutionalized knowledge systems, CSOs will remain peripheral actors, unable to provide meaningful and sustainable protection for children in digital spaces.

Field consultations reinforce this urgency. Marginalized communities—including slums, minority camps, children with disabilities, and intersex youth—express strong demand for awareness programs on digital safety and freedom of expression. This highlights an immediate need for interventions that bridge digital access with knowledge, skills, and empowerment.

High digital connectivity alone is insufficient. Children and youth remain vulnerable, underconfident, and hesitant to exercise their rights online. Urgent, structured interventions are required to build digital literacy, enhance safety, and foster freedom of expression. The Speak Up! The initiative represents a timely opportunity to equip young people, families, and CSOs with the knowledge, tools, and confidence needed to safely navigate digital spaces and meaningfully participate in civic life.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Establishing a Contextual Definition of Freedom of Expression for Effective Project Implementation in Bangladesh

In preparing for the project's launch, the implementation partners need to establish a clear and specific definition of "freedom of expression" that is relevant to the targeted beneficiaries in the project area. This definition should be rooted in both international frameworks and the local context of Bangladesh. Both private and government stakeholders have emphasized the importance of setting a precise operational definition of freedom of expression to ensure effective collaboration with the implementation partner and associated organizations. These stakeholders have expressed a need to understand which actions—such as words, thoughts, gestures, conversations, statements, and activities—will fall under the umbrella of freedom of expression, facilitating clear and aligned collaboration across all involved parties.

10.2 Capacity Building and Funding Support for Grassroots CSOs to Strengthen Freedom of Expression and Digital Safety

Discussions with low- and basic-level CSOs revealed a strong demand for capacity development in key areas, including freedom of expression, digital safety awareness, the use of digital safety tools, project management, managing employee turnover and fundraising. Many of these organizations also expressed a pressing need for financial support to sustain their programs.

CSOs operating in remote areas face significant funding constraints, as existing resources from the Social Service Department and NGOAB are inadequate. In some instances, lack of funding has led to the suspension of CSO activities.

To address these challenges, it is recommended that the development and implementation partners design a targeted capacity-building initiative complemented by funding support for participating CSOs. Such an approach would not only enhance their institutional capacity but also empower them to promote freedom of expression and effectively combat online sexual exploitation and abuse (OSEA) within the project areas.

10.3 Formalize Collaboration Plan With the Government Stakeholder

A clear and collaborative protocol between agencies like the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), local law enforcement, ISPs, District Legal Aid Offices, and CSOs should be established. This collaboration can ensure freedom of expression and digital rights promptly and comprehensively, including coordinated responses to cybercrimes, violations of children's rights online, and the provision of victim support services.

To collaborate effectively with BTRC on digital safety and freedom of expression in the digital space, CSOs and INGOs have to follow the formal procedure of applying to the Chairman of BTRC, outlining their project activities and the type of cooperation they seek. This application should align with BTRC's core focus on ensuring digital freedom of expression, online safety, and cybercrime prevention, while safeguarding children's rights and fostering a secure digital environment.

The District Legal Aid structure is organized through committees at three levels: Union, Upazila, and District. These committees are responsible for deliberating on policy issues, addressing key concerns, and overseeing field missions, thereby ensuring a coordinated and structured approach to the delivery of legal aid services. In the interest of fostering enhanced collaboration, International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are welcome to participate as observers in these committees. This involvement will facilitate stronger partnerships and a more inclusive approach to addressing legal aid challenges.

It is recommended that CSOs and INGOs propose joint awareness campaigns or capacity-building programs that leverage government stakeholders' technical expertise, enabling CSOs to engage directly with communities and promote responsible digital practices of freedom of expression. Additionally, these organizations can collaborate with government stakeholders to establish data-sharing protocols for real-time reporting of cyber threats and violence, and cases of violation of freedom of expression, especially those targeting vulnerable groups like children.

Furthermore, CSOs and INGOs should collaborate with relevant government representatives from the Bangladesh police, BTRC, the district legal aid office, the district social service office, and probation officers on advocacy campaigns aimed at updating laws and regulations to better protect children's digital rights and ensure their freedom of expression in the digital realm. Finally, implementing a robust monitoring and evaluation framework will ensure that the collaboration remains effective and accountable, tracking the impact of joint initiatives and promoting continuous improvements in digital safety and freedom of expression.

10.4 Formalize Collaboration Plan With the Private Stakeholder

Private sector stakeholders typically contribute to awareness-raising initiatives as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) commitments, which are managed through their ESG or sustainability divisions. Media outlets and journalists play a vital role in supporting public relations, communications, and media coverage for these campaigns. Telecommunication companies, in particular, have been providing support through online training platforms. These stakeholders have expressed a willingness to further engage in empowering CSOs and raising awareness among youth and children—provided that project objectives align with their corporate priorities and areas of interest. To facilitate such collaboration, it is recommended that the

implementation partner share a detailed work plan with relevant private organizations and convene coordination meetings. This will enable the development of a mutually beneficial partnership model and guide the effective execution of project activities.

Mindwizz (The psychiatrist) emphasized the critical need for strengthened collaboration among Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to ensure comprehensive psychosocial support for individuals experiencing trauma resulting from cyberbullying, online threats, and violations of freedom of expression. Effective coordination with key stakeholders, mental health professionals, and organizations working directly with children and youth is essential to develop a holistic response mechanism. Such collaboration enables context-specific understanding and intervention at the community level, which is particularly vital in the current digital age where psychological well-being is increasingly influenced by online interactions and exposure. Negative experiences, particularly backlash from digital activities and expressing opinions online, can have lasting effects on an individual's mental health. As Mindwizz noted, this also creates a broader chilling effect—when others witness such psychological or social consequences, they may refrain from exercising their freedom of speech for fear of facing similar repercussions.

To effectively engage private sector entities, such as telecommunication companies and mass media outlets, as sponsors and supporters for your project, the following recommendations can help establish a strategic partnership model:

a) **Align with Corporate Priorities:** Understand the corporate social responsibility (CSR) goals of private sector stakeholders, specifically their Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) initiatives. Tailor your project's objectives to align with their CSR and sustainability focus areas, emphasizing social impact, youth empowerment, and community development. This increases the likelihood of their involvement and support.
b) **Develop a Detailed Work Plan:** Prepare a comprehensive and clear work plan that outlines project objectives, key milestones, and the expected outcomes. Highlight how private sector partners can contribute, whether through financial support, in-kind contributions, or media/telecom services (e.g., mobile platforms, data support, media coverage). Share this plan with potential partners to show a well-structured approach to collaboration.
c) **Emphasize Win-Win Collaboration:** Demonstrate how the partnership will be mutually beneficial. For media partners, emphasize the visibility and positive brand association they would gain by supporting a socially impactful initiative. For telecommunication companies, offer opportunities to provide value-added services, such as training platforms or mobile-based content, that align with their CSR goals, while also contributing to the social good.
d) **Engage Through Coordination Meetings:** Arrange coordination meetings between project stakeholders and private sector partners. These meetings should focus on building trust, ensuring that both parties understand each other's goals, and discussing how each can contribute to the project's success. By facilitating these discussions, you ensure that both the private sector entities and the CSOs are aligned on the scope, responsibilities, and execution of the project.
e) **Create Collaborative Campaigns:** Propose joint awareness-raising campaigns that leverage the strengths of both the implementation partner and private sector entities. For example, a telecommunication company might provide the infrastructure for online training, while media outlets could offer their platforms

to broadcast the campaign's message. This creates an integrated approach to promoting project goals.

f) **Provide Clear Metrics for Success:** Establish clear metrics and outcomes that demonstrate the impact of their support. Private sector entities are more likely to engage if they can see tangible results and success stories, which can be shared in their annual reports or through other public-facing communications.

By following these steps, the implementation partner can effectively garner support from private sector stakeholders, ensuring a successful collaboration that is impactful for both the project and the partners involved.

10.5 Online Safety and Freedom of Expression Working Group for Children and Youth

Establishing a working group under the guidance of government and private entities would provide a platform for continuous dialogue, joint action planning, and capacity building. This working group should include representatives from law enforcement, government ministries, CSOs, digital platforms, and child protection agencies to ensure that the rights and safety of children online are prioritized through a comprehensive, cross-sector approach.

10.6 Online Safety and Freedom of Expression Training for Children, Youth, and Community Level

During field visits to marginalized communities, including Jhilpar Slum, the Bihari community (Irani Camp and Rahmat Camp), and consultations with intersex individuals, the study team identified a significant need for training on basic digital safety tools, digital rights, and freedom of expression in the digital space. Youths from Irani Camp reported having social media accounts buta limited understanding of these concepts.

Community members from Jhilpar Slum, although not youth, children, or CSO members, also expressed interest in awareness programs and training. Parents highlighted concerns about their children's excessive use of social media and online gaming, which has negatively impacted their education and career focus. In families facing extreme poverty, adolescents' persistent demand for smartphones and engagement in online gaming have led to conflicts and financial losses ranging from BDT 80,000 to BDT 300,000. Some children have also engaged in online gambling, often under the guise of gaming, creating additional challenges for parents.

Parents indicated a need for practical training to distinguish between applications that are educational or recreational, those that facilitate gambling, and those that pose real risks to youth. They emphasized the importance of guidance on smartphone usage, social media engagement, digital rights, online safety, and freedom of expression to effectively support and supervise their children's digital activities.

CSOs corroborated these concerns, reporting that online gambling is widespread in both rural and urban marginalized communities, with many adolescents and youth experiencing substantial financial losses.

Police representatives highlighted the importance of implementing community-level awareness and capacity-building programs focused on digital safety. They

recommended incorporating real-life case examples of online sexual harassment, blackmail, abuse, and online gambling into these sessions. Such cases, presented through audiovisual materials and visual displays, would enhance participants' understanding of the risks and consequences of unsafe online behavior and strengthen the overall impact of the training.

This highlights an urgent need for targeted capacity-building initiatives for both youth and parents to promote safe, responsible, and informed use of digital platforms.

Based on the concerns raised by marginalized communities, including Jhilpar slum, the Bihari community, and intersex individuals, as well as feedback from CSOs, the following recommendations are made to address the urgent need for digital safety awareness, digital rights education, and practical training on smartphone use:

a) **Develop Targeted Digital Safety and Awareness Programs:**

Design and implement tailored digital safety workshops that address the specific needs of both adults and youth in marginalized communities. These should cover:

- Basic smartphone operations to enable better navigation and understanding of device functionalities.
- Social media literacy to help both parents and youth identify appropriate vs. inappropriate content.
- Digital rights and freedom of expression, focusing on understanding online rights, safe usage, and how to protect oneself from online harassment.
- Online gambling identification training helps parents and youth distinguish between harmful gambling apps and legitimate games or entertainment platforms.
- Parental guidance techniques for monitoring and regulating children's online activity, addressing concerns about online gaming addiction, financial loss, and exposure to harmful content.

b) **Capacity Building for Parents and Caregivers:**

Offer parenting and digital awareness workshops that equip parents with skills to better understand and manage their children's online presence. Focus on:

- Training parents to identify signs of addiction and risky online behavior (e.g., online gambling, fraudulent schemes).
- Providing tools to parents on how to set boundaries, track their children's activities online, and discuss the risks involved in online gaming and social media.
- Educating them on how to monitor digital consumption, including tools or apps that limit screen time, block harmful content, or monitor app usage.

c) **Community Awareness Campaigns:**

Initiate community-based campaigns to raise awareness about freedom of expression and digital safety, focusing on community centers, schools, and informal groups. These campaigns should emphasize:

- The risks of online gambling and how it affects youth, including financial losses and social consequences.

- The importance of digital rights, such as privacy protection and freedom of expression, is tailored to marginalized communities where access to legal and digital knowledge is limited.
- Highlight success stories from local role models or community members who have benefited from using digital tools for career building or education.

d) Utilize Mobile-Based Learning:

Given the high smartphone penetration, create mobile-based digital literacy programs that can be accessed via smartphones. These could include:

- Short video tutorials on how to use smartphones safely
- Interactive quizzes on digital rights and safety, ensuring the learning process is engaging and effective.
- Resources for identifying digital threats and protecting children and youth from online gambling.

e) Create a Digital Safety Helpline:

Set up a helpline or chatbot, or group in a social media platform or page that community members can access to report online gambling issues, seek advice on smartphone safety, or inquire about digital rights. This would provide immediate support and guidance to parents and youth facing online risks.

f) Strengthen Regulatory Advocacy:

- Engage with telecommunication and tech companies to introduce measures that address online gambling in marginalized communities, such as:
- Enhanced parental control features on smartphones.
- Flagging and restricting gambling-related apps, especially those targeting younger audiences.
- Collaborating with law enforcement to ensure that **legal frameworks** are strengthened to tackle online gambling in marginalized areas.

By implementing these recommendations, it will be possible to empower communities with the necessary tools to protect themselves in the digital space, reduce the harms of online gambling, and ensure a safer and more informed engagement with digital platforms for both youth and parents in marginalized communities.

11. REFERENCE

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12. Annexure

Annexure A: Baseline Values

Levels and Statement	Indicator	Dissegregation Type	Baseline Value	Data Source	Data Collection Method	Reference Year
Goal: Impact Indicator 1	% of CSOs with strengthened organisational capacity to advance children and youth's rights and ensure their freedom of expression in public discourse and digital spaces, disaggregated by types of CSOs.	● National Level CSOs ● Local Level CSOs	Overall: 10.26% National CSO's: 12.82% Local CSOs: 10%	CSO	Survey	2025
Goal: Impact Indicator 2	% of children and youth who demonstrate self-confidence to advance their rights and freedom of expression in public discourse and digital spaces, disaggregated by sex, gender, and diversity.	● Children ● Youth ● Gender ● Overall	● Overall: 8.09% ● Overall Male: 9.84% ● Overall Female: 6.5% ● Children: 6.04% ● Youth: 12.71% ● Children - Boy: 7.14% - Girl: 5.04% ● Youth - Male: 15.79% - Female: 9.84%	Children and Youth	Survey	2025

Levels and Statement	Indicator	Dissegregation Type	Baseline Value	Data Source	Data Collection Method	Reference Year
Goal: Impact Indicator 3	Evidence of CSOs consulting with and taking into consideration the decisions, opinions, and views of children and youth in their access to rights and advanced freedom of expression in public discourse and digital spaces	● National Level CSOs ● Local Level CSOs	n/a	CSO	Survey	2025
Outcome Indicator 1.1	% of CSOs staff demonstrating improved knowledge and skills to mobilise and engage children and youth to use digital technologies safely, and speak up about their rights and freedom of expression, disaggregated by sex, gender, and diversity	● National Level CSOs ● Local Level CSOs	Overall: 10.3% • National CSOs: 10.53% • Local CSOs: 10%	CSO	Survey	2025

Levels and Statement	Indicator	Dissegregation Type	Baseline Value	Data Source	Data Collection Method	Reference Year
Outcome 1 Indicator 1.2	# of actions taken by CSOs at local and national levels to identify, prevent, and protect children and youth from violations of their freedom of expression	● National Level CSOs ● Local Level CSOs	0	CSO	Survey	2025
Outcome 1 Indicator 1.3	# of cases of violations of children and youth's freedom of expression that are monitored, reported, and responded to by CSO representatives	● National Level CSOs ● Local Level CSOs	0	CSO	Survey	2025
Outcome 2 Indicator 2.1	% of children and youth demonstrating improved knowledge and skills to advocate for their rights, and express their opinions safely in online environments, disaggregated by	● Children ● Youth ● Gender ● Overall	● Overall: 4.96% ● Overall Male: 2.19% ● Overall Female: 7.5% ● Children: 6.04% ● Youth: 2.54% ● Children - Boy: 3.17% - Girl: 8.63%	Children and Youth	Survey	2025

Levels and Statement	Indicator	Dissegregation Type	Baseline Value	Data Source	Data Collection Method	Reference Year
	sex, gender and diversity.		● Youth - Male: 0%, - Female: 4.92%			
Outcome 2 Indicator 2.2	% of children and youth who reported they are confident to express their opinions related to political, cultural and social norms in a safe online environment, disaggregated by sex, gender and diversity.	● Children ● Youth ● Gender ● Overall	● Overall: 8.62% ● Overall Male: 10.93% ● Overall Female: 6.5% ● Children: 6.79% ● Youth: 12.71% ● Children - Boy: 10.32% - Girl: 3.6% ● Youth Male: 12.28% Female: 13.11%	Children and Youth	Survey	2025
Outcome 2 Indicator 2.3	% of children and youth who took action in response to violations of their rights to freedom of expression in public discourse and digital spaces, disaggregated by	● Children ● Youth ● Gender ● Overall	● Overall: 15.67% ● Overall Male: 10.93% ● Overall Female: 20% ● Children: 19.25% ● Youth: 7.63% ● Children - Boy: 13.49%	Children and Youth	Survey	2025

Levels and Statement	Indicator	Dissegregation Type	Baseline Value	Data Source	Data Collection Method	Reference Year
	sex, gender and diversity.		- Girl: 24.46% ● Youth - Male: 5.26% - Female: 9.84%			
Outcome 3 Indicator 3.1	% of CSOs who take action in monitoring and advocating for gender transformative policy and legal-institutional reform to protect children and youth from online abuse, harassment and exploitation, disaggregated by types of CSOs.	● National Level CSOs ● Local Level CSOs	Overall: 12.82% National CSOs: 15.79% Local CSO's: 10%	CSO	Survey	2025
Outcome 3 Indicator 3.2	# of gender transformative laws/ policies/ regulations/ code of conduct/ national plans developed/ revised/ drafted by CSOs that ensure children's and youth's safety	● National Level CSOs ● Local Level CSOs	0	CSO	Survey	2025

Levels and Statement	Indicator	Dissegregation Type	Baseline Value	Data Source	Data Collection Method	Reference Year
	when exercising their rights to freedom of expression in digital spaces					
Outcome 3 Indicator 3.3	Private companies (ISPs, mobile companies) have and implement a code of conduct along with the government's policies and procedures that ensure children's safety when exercising their rights to freedom of expression in digital space.	n/a	0	Private companies (ISPs, mobile companies)	KII	2025

Annexure B: Case Studies

Case-1	
Topic: Freedom at Risk: Community Experiences of Expression Violations	
Gender: Female	

A 17-year-old female approached the Women and Child Affairs Desk to lodge a complaint regarding her safety and freedom of expression within her family environment. She reported that she had left her parental home and was residing at a working girls' hostel. The victim has completed her Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and is currently employed as a sales representative.

The family's socio-economic background is modest: the father is a vegetable vendor, and the mother is a homemaker. **The mother expressed grievances that the girl sought greater personal independence, including visiting friends, socializing with multiple male acquaintances, and using a smartphone with regular access to social media platforms and expressing opinions in the online platforms. In response, the mother attempted to compel the victim into marriage with a male residing abroad and employed as a laborer.**

The victim, however, expressed her intention to continue her education and pursue admission for the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examination. The mother allegedly subjected the victim to physical assault, verbal abuse, and coercion to effectuate a child marriage. Furthermore, the mother confiscated the victim's smartphone to prevent her from posting on social media regarding family matters, thereby violating the victim's right to freedom of expression.

Subsequently, the victim filed a complaint at Mohammadpur Police Station. The Officer-in-Charge, along with other police personnel, convened a meeting with the victim, her siblings, and her parents.

During the proceedings, the Sub-Inspector of the Women and Child Support Desk addressed the parents, stating:

"Your daughter has become more modern and educated than you, which is creating conflict. However, arranging her marriage at this stage would be unlawful and constitute child marriage. Are you prepared to face potential criminal proceedings?"

The mother responded aggressively, asserting her intention to proceed with the marriage. Given the escalating situation, police officers convened a meeting with the Officer-in-Charge to address the matter.

However, the victim clearly expressed her refusal to return to her parental home. Following this, the police facilitated her placement at the Victim Support Center to ensure her safety and protection

Case-2
Topic: Freedom at Risk: Community Experiences of Expression Violations

Gender: Female	Location: Gazipur
One participant shared that she was directly threatened by a political actor for expressing dissenting views in own Facebook id: “If you don’t delete the post, I will send the police to your house to arrest you.” The threat of state-sanctioned violence and arrest created a climate of fear, leading to forced self-censorship under familial pressure. As a result, she deleted all posts that criticized law enforcement violence, as well as those condemning violence against children and youth during the July uprising. This case underscores a critical challenge to digital rights and freedom of expression, where intimidation and coercion silence voices and undermine civic participation.	

Case-3	
Topic: Bullying due to physical disability	
Gender: Male	Location: Satkhira
The respondent Siam is a disabled child with issues. His mother looks after him all the time. She mentioned he doesn't consume much digital content rather she said she gives and he follows specific rules, such as limiting screen time and ensuring the child only engages with age-appropriate content. His only entertainment method is watching cartoons most of the time while he is on the internet. The mother mentioned since the boy doesn't use much internet and social media , she doesn't keep up with online activities herself. She also said her other son knows a lot that's why she keeps some tabs on the other son. **The mother of the respondent said that because of the boy's low online engagement, he has never had to face any digital threats. However, he is often bullied in his madrasa by his peers. This is a significant problem the family faces, along with stigma and discrimination due to his disability. He has also suffered from severe pneumonia.** **Mother said he gets bullied a lot. But they can't do enough to stop the bullying. There was an incident in Madrasha regarding the bullying, their parents got into conflict. They don't get any external help for the boy. They struggle on their own but they recently joined a parents group where their children are also disabled.** The support is non-existent, according to the mother. Digital safety help is almost a luxury to them, but the boy said he wants to learn more about the advantages of digital tools. He mentioned that he wants to buy a laptop, start earning online, become independent, and move on from relying on his parents' help, as traditional life will not be easy for him due to his disability. The mother and respondent are not aware of digital safety laws and mentioned they are open to learning about these things as it will benefit them in the long run. The boy also mentioned that some people in his area actually talk about freedom of expression and freedom of speech. He got a brief from the interviewer, he said he really liked the concept and wanted to further work on it in the future. The parent suggests that more support and training are needed to help caregivers like herself confidently guide their children’s online behavior. She recommends that schools, NGOs, and government organizations provide additional resources, such as training programs and workshops, to help parents protect their children online and foster a safer digital environment.	

Case-4	
Topic: Hacking and the Fight for Digital Freedom	
Gender: Male	Location: Bagerhat

The participant is a college student who actively uses social media platforms, particularly Facebook, for communication and networking. However, he admitted that he had not adopted adequate safety or security measures to protect his online accounts at the beginning of his digital journey. His online activities were not closely monitored by his family, as they trusted him to use digital platforms responsibly.

Initially, the participant had limited awareness about potential risks such as hacking, identity theft, and misuse of personal information. He did not use a strong password or advanced security features for his Facebook account, which ultimately made him vulnerable to cyberattacks. Following the incident, he became more conscious of digital safety and has since adopted stronger passwords and enabled protective mechanisms to safeguard his account.

The participant personally experienced a significant online safety breach when his Facebook account was hacked. The hacker misused the account to spread misinformation about him, tarnishing his online image. This incident had the potential to cause severe reputational and emotional harm, highlighting the seriousness of online threats which destroyed his digital freedom and freedom of expression in the online space.

The participant noted that in response to the incident, the participant filed a formal case against the hacker, demonstrating his willingness to take legal action. However, the hacker, feeling threatened by the legal consequences, began to issue threats to intimidate him. Despite these challenges, the participant remained determined to pursue the case. Eventually, he regained control of his hacked Facebook account.
Throughout this difficult period, the participant received strong support from his parents, relatives, and friends. Their encouragement helped him to cope with the emotional stress and to pursue justice. Although institutional support is not elaborately mentioned, the involvement of legal authorities played a role in deterring the hacker's actions.

The participant became aware of the importance of legal protections in the digital space through this incident. Filing a case against the hacker gave him firsthand experience of how the law can be used to address cybercrimes. However, his experience also reflects the challenges individuals face when confronting cybercriminals, including intimidation and harassment.
Reflecting on his experience, the participant recommended regular training and awareness campaigns on cybersecurity for both parents and children. He believes such initiatives could help prevent similar incidents by equipping people with the knowledge to protect their digital accounts and to recognize online threats. He emphasized the importance of adopting preventive measures such as strong passwords and secure mechanisms to reduce vulnerabilities in digital platforms.

Case-5
Topic: Blackmailing in the online platform

Gender: Female	Location: Satkhira

Tania, a teenager from Bangladesh, spends much of her free time on her touchscreen phone. Like many of her peers, she chats with friends, watches videos, scrolls through TikTok, and browses Facebook and YouTube. Her parents let her enjoy this freedom—as long as she keeps up with her studies. If she spends too much time on the screen, she faces the occasional scolding.

But behind this ordinary routine lies a reality many young people face: the risks of life online.

Tania is no stranger to unsolicited messages from strangers. One Facebook user began asking her personal questions; when the conversation escalated, she didn't hesitate to block him. "You have to act quickly," she said, describing how persistence from strangers is common in her online world.

Tania's concerns are not just personal. She recalls the story of a school senior who sent private photos to her boyfriend—images that were later shared widely without consent. A cousin of hers faced the same trauma when intimate pictures leaked after a long relationship ended. Both incidents caused deep distress. When reported to police, instead of offering help, officers blamed the girls: "It's your daughter's fault. Why would she share such photos?

For Tania, these cases underline the dangers of sexting and the devastating impact of victim-blaming attitudes in society. She also encountered fake accounts, including one using a girl's photo to scam others for money. Although she didn't fall victim, the experience opened her eyes to how easily digital deception thrives online.

Tania deals with harassment decisively—blocking, refusing money requests, and reporting suspicious accounts. She often advises her peers to do the same and stresses the importance of trusted adults. "If pictures go viral, contact the cybercrime unit. If there's harassment, first inform parents or a teacher before going to police," she explained.

Her family and friends provide a safety net. When a friend faced harassment, Tania advised her to block the offender and lean on her brother for support. Peer and family networks, she believes, are crucial when facing online abuse.

Tania knows that the cybercrime unit exists and that police should be contacted in serious cases. Yet, her understanding of digital rights laws is limited. Worse, the victim-blaming her cousin endured has left her skeptical about formal protection. "Why go to the police if they'll only blame you?" she asked.

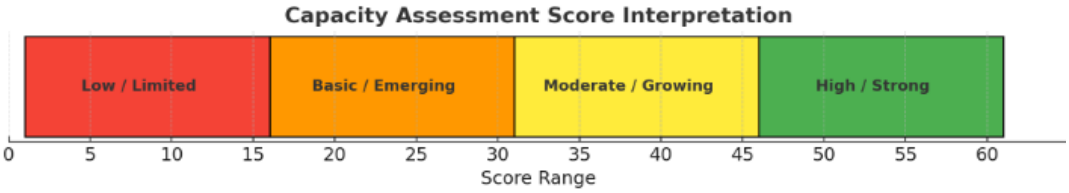
Tania's story is a window into the digital lives of many young people—active, curious, and resourceful, yet vulnerable. While she shows resilience in blocking abusers and supporting peers, the lack of structured digital safety education and the absence of supportive legal systems leave her and others at risk.

Case-6	
Topic: The danger of online gambling	
Gender: Female	Location: Dhaka
A case was reported in Jhilpar slum (Ward-6) involving a young man named Shakil, whose family is experiencing extreme poverty. Shakil had initially developed an addiction to Facebook, which later progressed to online gaming and gambling. Among adolescents and youths in the community, online gaming and gambling are often perceived as sources of adventure, excitement, and even indicators of modernity or “smartness.” Many expressed aspirations of becoming wealthy in the shortest possible time, a perception Shakil also shared. On August 14, 2025, after losing approximately BDT 300,000 in online gaming, Shakil died by suicide through hanging. Following his death, his body remained in the Dhaka Medical College morgue for postmortem, as his family lacked the financial resources to release it.	

Annexure C: Tools for the Capacity Assessment Survey with the CSOs

The study team has prepared a tool for a capacity assessment survey for CSOs to assess the organizational capacity, online safety-related KAP and implementation, capacity-building needs, and priorities of the CSOs. This assessment tool has been designed using a hybrid approach, drawing from **UNICEF's Child Protection Systems Strengthening (CPSS) Framework and the McKinsey-developed Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool (OCAT).**

The CPSS approach[1] defines a child protection system as a dynamic interplay of core components, including human resources, financing, legislation and policy, governance mechanisms, data systems, service delivery structures, and case management processes. It also recognizes the critical role of diverse stakeholders—children, families, communities, and actors operating at local, national, and international levels. Central to this system is the quality of interaction and coordination among these components and actors. It is these interdependent relationships and their outcomes that ultimately define the effectiveness of the child protection system.[2] Additionally, the McKinsey-developed Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool contains the assessment of aspirations, strategy, leadership, board, and staff, funding, marketing, communications, advocacy, business process, infrastructure, and organizational structure of the organization.[3] Based on the CPSS and OCAT components, the study team has developed a four-point scale assessment framework aligned with key indicators under Outputs 1 and 3. This structured grid has been applied to the Rapid Assessment Survey with CSOs to systematically evaluate their capacities, practices, and engagement levels in relation to the intended outcomes. The tool enables a consistent, evidence-informed analysis of organisational maturity and areas for targeted capacity strengthening.-



Here is your diagram showing the **Capacity Assessment Score Interpretation**:

- **1–15**: Low / Limited
- **16–30**: Basic / Emerging
- **31–45**: Moderate / Growing
- **46–60**: High / Strong

Figure 5: Capacity Assessment Score implementation

Scores will be given by consultants based on the response of CSOs in the Activity-A: Organizational Readiness and Commitment. Activity-B will conduct a CSO action survey on Youth Digital Rights and Freedom of Expression.

Capacity Assessment Survey Framework for the CSOs

Table: Assessment Framework for Surveying the CSOs

[1] The UNICEF Child Protection Systems Strngthening Approach- https://www.unicef.org/media/110871/file/1.%20the%20unicef%20child%20protection%20systems%20strengthening%20approach.pdf

[2] United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Save the Children and World Vision, 'A better way to protect all children: The theory and practice of child protection systems, conference report', 2013 -https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/c956_cps_interior_5_130620web_0.pdf

[3] The Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool (OCAT) by McKinsey and Company- https://www.issuelab.org/resources/27379/27379.pdf

Indicators	Low/ Limited (1 Point)	Basic/ Emerging (2 Points)	Moderate/ Growing (3 Points)	High/ Strong (4 Points)
Goal: Civil Society (including women, youth, and child rights), organisations are empowered to promote the rights of girls, boys, and gender-diverse children and youth, ensuring their freedom of expression in public discourse and digital spaces				
Impact Indicator 1: % of CSOs with strengthened organisational capacity to advance children and youth's rights and ensure their freedom of expression in public discourse and digital spaces, disaggregated by types of CSOs	The CSO has limited or no internal strategies, resources, or knowledge related to child/youth digital rights or expression.	Some basic structures, policies, or staff capacity are in place to support child/youth rights, but not yet applied consistently or systematically.	The CSO has integrated child/youth expression rights into policies, programming, staff training, and partnerships. Systems for digital safety and participation are actively used.	The CSO demonstrates strong, sustained capacity in child/youth rights advocacy and programming, including policy influence, institutional safeguarding, digital tools, and inclusive governance.
Impact Indicator 3: Evidence of CSOs consulting with and taking into consideration the decisions, opinions, and views of children and youth in their access to rights and advanced freedom of expression in public discourse and digital spaces	CSO activities are adult-driven; limited or no mechanisms for youth input or consultation.	Occasional consultation through informal or ad hoc methods, but feedback is not systematically integrated into decision-making.	Regular and structured consultation mechanisms exist; some youth influence on programs or advocacy is evident.	Youth are consistently involved in decision-making through co-creation, advisory roles, and policy influence. Their input demonstrably shapes outcomes and public messaging.
Outcome 1: Civil society organisations, including human rights defenders, are well equipped to support children and youth's safe use of digital technologies to speak up about their rights and protect themselves online				
Indicator 1 Outcome 1: % of CSO staff demonstrating improved knowledge and skills to mobilize and engage children and youth to use digital technologies safely and speak up about their rights and freedom of expression	Staff have minimal or no training or knowledge on digital safety or child/youth expression rights.	Some staff are trained or aware, but skills are inconsistently applied.	The majority of staff apply improved knowledge in programs promoting digital safety and youth voice.	All relevant staff apply advanced skills; CSO embeds learning, tools, and policies across all operations.
Indicator 2 Outcome 1: # of actions taken by CSOs at local and national levels to identify, prevent, and protect children and youth from violations of their freedom of	No actions taken; the issue is acknowledged but not acted upon.	A few isolated actions taken (e.g., a campaign or event); limited reach.	Multiple structured actions at local or national levels, including partnerships or policy work.	Sustained, multi-level action plans with systemic impact; actions are monitored and evaluated.

Indicators	Low/ Limited (1 Point)	Basic/ Emerging (2 Points)	Moderate/ Growing (3 Points)	High/ Strong (4 Points)
expression				
Indicator 3 Outcome 1: # of cases of violations of children and youth's freedom of expression that are monitored, reported, and responded to by CSO representatives	No structured monitoring or response; ad hoc efforts only.	Some cases monitored or responded to informally; processes unclear.	Systematic tracking and response mechanisms exist with follow-up.	Robust, gender-sensitive case management system in place; data informs advocacy and reform efforts.
Outcome 3: Civil society actors are motivated and proactively engaged to advocate for gender transformative policy and legal-institutional reform to prioritize the protection of children's and youth's rights in the digital space				
Indicator 1 to Outcome 3: % of CSOs who take action in monitoring and advocating for gender transformative policy and legal-institutional reform to protect children and youth from online abuse, harassment, and exploitation, disaggregated by types of CSOs.	No actions taken; limited or no awareness of gender-based online harms or policy implications.	Some awareness and minimal engagement (e.g., participating in meetings or signing petitions); advocacy is not gender-transformative.	CSO actively monitors and advocates for reforms with a gender lens; participates in relevant coalitions, and contributes to consultations or campaigns.	CSO leads or co-leads sustained, evidence-based, gender-transformative advocacy efforts; influences or co-creates policy/legal change at local/national levels.
Indicator 2 to Outcome 3: # of gender transformative laws/ policies/ regulations/ code of conduct/ national plans developed/ revised/ drafted by CSOs that ensure children and youth's safety when exercising their rights to freedom of expression in digital spaces	No engagement in policy/law development or reform processes.	CSO contributes informally or provides input to one or more draft documents, but not consistently or strategically.	CSO has directly contributed to drafting or revising one or more gender-responsive laws/policies/plans in partnership with stakeholders.	CSO has played a lead or coordinating role in the development of multiple legal/policy instruments, using gender data and youth input to influence systemic change.

Table: Rapid Assessment Framework for CSOs (Legal, Policy & Institutional Engagement Capacity)

Legal, Policy & Institutional Engagement Capacity	Capacity Level			
Investigating Factors	**Low/ Limited (1 Point)**	**Basic/ Emerging (2 Points)**	**Moderate/ Growing (3 Points)**	**High/ Strong (4 Points)**
Understanding of Digital Child Protection Laws & Rights	No awareness of laws or rights related to online child protection; no engagement in policy dialogues.	Basic understanding of relevant laws (e.g., ICT Act, CRC, Digital Security Act); limited participation in legal/policy spaces.	Good working knowledge of digital child protection rights and national laws; participates in select consultations or advocacy platforms.	Strong legal literacy and ongoing tracking of legislative changes; active contributor to legal reforms and digital child rights policy spaces.
Policy Advocacy Capacity	There is no involvement of youth or children in digital child protection advocacy. The organization lacks a defined strategy, partnerships, or presence in relevant policy spaces. Youth voices are absent from both policy discussions and programmatic approaches.	Some advocacy activities related to digital child protection may occur on an ad hoc basis. However, these efforts are not supported by a clear strategy, and youth or child participation in policy discourse is minimal or tokenistic.	The organization has a defined advocacy or policy agenda related to digital safety for children and periodically engages in advocacy coalitions or campaigns. Youth and children are involved in select initiatives or consultations, but their participation is not systematically integrated into policy formulation processes.	The organization leads or co-leads multi-stakeholder, evidence-based advocacy for digital child protection at national or regional levels. Youth and children are meaningfully and consistently engaged in shaping advocacy priorities and influencing digital safety policy through structured platforms and sustained support mechanisms.
Engagement with Government & Regulators	No relationships or coordination with relevant government entities (e.g., MoWCA, MoICT, BTRC).	Occasional or informal contacts with government stakeholders; limited influence.	Regular engagement with government ministries, regulators, and parliamentary actors on child online safety.	Trusted partner of government and regulators; shapes digital safety agendas and contributes to national/institutional reforms.
Legal Services & Referrals	No capacity to provide legal support or referrals in cases of digital harm against children.	Some informal referrals to legal actors or agencies, but without a formal process.	Established referral pathways for digital child protection cases; partners with legal aid and protection actors.	Institutionalized legal support mechanisms provide or coordinate comprehensive services for

Legal, Policy & Institutional Engagement Capacity	Capacity Level			
Investigating Factors	**Low/ Limited (1 Point)**	**Basic/ Emerging (2 Points)**	**Moderate/ Growing (3 Points)**	**High/ Strong (4 Points)**
				children affected by digital abuse.
Institutional Reform Initiatives	No involvement in shaping institutional responses to online child protection issues.	Limited engagement in reform discussions (e.g., online child protection units in schools or law enforcement).	Collaborates with institutional actors on integrating digital safety in child protection services and systems.	Drives or co-leads institutional transformation (e.g., standard operating procedures, digital case management tools, or policy audits).
Internal Policy & Compliance	Lacks internal digital safeguarding policies or compliance with national/international standards.	Basic safeguarding policy with some mention of digital issues.	Clear internal policies and protocols addressing digital risks and staff obligations, aligned with national standards.	Comprehensive internal digital child protection policy; routinely reviewed, practiced, and aligned with global best practices.
Volunteering	Individuals show limited awareness or capacity in digital child protection, with low digital literacy and minimal understanding of online risks. Volunteer engagement is informal, with no protocols or guidance on digital safety in place	Individuals demonstrate basic skills and moderate awareness of digital safety in child protection. Volunteers are generally reliable and managed within programs, but digital safety protocols and accountability mechanisms remain underdeveloped.	Structured Volunteer Involvement: Individuals are capable and increasingly committed to supporting digital safety for children and youth. Under staff supervision, they contribute to protection efforts. Volunteers receive basic training in digital safety and are meaningfully involved in program activities.	Individuals are highly capable, digitally literate, and actively champion child online protection. Volunteers are well-trained, strategically engaged, and empowered to lead digital safety efforts independently, significantly strengthening the organization's impact.
Employee turnover	Frequent staff turnover challenges the organization's ability to sustain knowledge and	While turnover exists, core staff retain some institutional memory on digital child	The organization maintains a relatively stable team, allowing for steady growth in institutional	The organization has low turnover and strong internal systems that ensure digital safety for children

Legal, Policy & Institutional Engagement Capacity	Capacity Level			
Investigating Factors	**Low/ Limited (1 Point)**	**Basic/ Emerging (2 Points)**	**Moderate/ Growing (3 Points)**	**High/ Strong (4 Points)**
	consistent implementation of digital safety practices for children, highlighting the need for stronger institutional systems and onboarding.	protection. However, knowledge transfer and continuity mechanisms need strengthening to ensure consistent safeguarding practices.	knowledge and practices related to children's digital safety. New staff are oriented, and digital safeguarding responsibilities are shared across roles.	is embedded in policies, training, and culture, making knowledge and practice resilient to staffing changes.

Annexure D: Capacity Level of the CSOs

Study Location	Type	Name of the CSO	Level
Dhaka	National	Bangladesh Rural Economic Development (BRED)	Moderate
Dhaka	National	Nari Maitree	Moderate
Dhaka	National	Society for Social Service (SSS)	Moderate
Gazipur	National	Shakti Foundation	Moderate
Gazipur	National	VERC, Gazipur	Moderate
Bagerhat (Mollarhat)	Local	Youngster Club	Moderate
Satkhira	Local	Samprity Aid Foundation (SAF)	Moderate
Satkhira	Local	ARA-Action for Rural Advancement	Moderate
Satkhira	Local	Satkhira Cyber Crime Alert Team (SCCAT)	Moderate
Dhaka	National	Action for Social Development (ASD)	Basic
Dhaka	National	KiKi Charity Educational Support Program	Basic
Dhaka	National	Social and Economic Enhancement Programme (SEEP)	Basic
Dhaka	National	Alokito Shishu Prokolpo (Project under Caritas Bangladesh)	Basic
Dhaka	National	Ashar Alo Society	Basic
Dhaka	National	Community Participation and Development (CPD)	Basic
Dhaka	National	Society for Underprivileged Families (SUF)	Basic
Dhaka	National	SAWAB Foundation	Basic
Dhaka	National	Local Education & Economic Development Organization (LEEDO)	Basic
Dhaka	National	PIACT Bangladesh	Basic
Dhaka	National	Youth Action for Social Development	Basic
Dhaka	Local	Trenomul Humanity Foundation	Basic
Dhaka	National	Digitally Rights	Basic
Gazipur	Local	Home of Hope	Basic
Gazipur	National	Transparency International Bangladesh	Basic
Gazipur	National	ESDO	Basic
Bagerhat (Mollarhat)	Local	Rangdhonu Nari Unnayan Sangstha	Basic
Satkhira	Local	Sundarban Foundation (SF)	Basic
Satkhira	Local	Pauperism Rag-Tag of Volunteer Association (PROVA)	Basic

Satkhira	Local	Disabled Women Organization (DWO)	Basic
Satkhira	Local	Betna Youth Development Organization (BYDO)	Basic
Satkhira	Local	Society of Development and Education for Small Households (SoDESH)	Basic
Satkhira	Local	Gender Development Forum (GDF)	Basic
Satkhira	Local	Arjon Foudation (AF)	Basic
Gazipur	Local	Sonak	Low
Bagerhat (Mollarhat)	Local	Noyontara Mohila Unnayan Samiti	Low
Bagerhat (Mollarhat)	Local	Garfa Polli Shomaj Nari Unnoyon Shomittee	Low
Bagerhat (Mollarhat)	Local	Shopno Shiri Jubo Nari Unnoyon Shongstha	Low
Bagerhat (Mollarhat)	Local	Mollahat Mohila Unnayan Shamiti	Low
Bagerhat (Mollarhat)	Local	Jhutesshori Islamic Jubo Shomaj	Low