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Winner of the Inspiring Women Volunteer Award 2021 in Bangladesh, Ms Tahiatul Jannat (centre), receiving the award.

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## Inspiring Women Volunteer Award 2021 recognizes 15 volunteers in Bangladesh

Volunteering is a powerful way for women to participate and make a difference. It empowers them to make decisions and help others, while also reducing inequality and promoting progress. To promote and recognize the valuable contribution of women volunteers in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 pandemic, the UN Volunteers (UNV) programme, Volunteer Services Overseas, Plan International and ActionAid Bangladesh jointly initiated the 'Inspiring Women Volunteer Award 2021' campaign.

Applicants were drawn from across the country and represented a diverse range of women from varied backgrounds and regions. Following an extensive selection process, fifteen volunteers were recognized at the final awards ceremony on 13<sup>th</sup> of October in the presence of government officials, UN staff and other development partners.

The top five prize winners were Ms Tahiatul Jannat, Dr Kamrun Nahar Koly, Ms Tashnuva Anan, Ms Arifa Jahan Bithi and Ms Ayesha Akter Eti.

These women volunteers were recognized for the vital volunteering contributions they made towards COVID-19 responses in a broad range of essential areas. These included

health, awareness-raising, food distribution, innovation, working against gender-based violence, child protection, education, WASH, environment, and mental health.

The first place winner, Ms Tahiatul Jannat from Faridpur, is the Founder of 'HashiMukh Pathshala' and 'Nandita Suraksha' which are volunteer organizations that work to improve women's lives. These organizations focus on gender equality through women's empowerment, positive mental health, menstrual health protection, prevention of child marriage, and prevention of sexual harassment.

“ This award brings me and my district immense joy and honour. I realized thousands of people in our country are facing multidimensional challenges just due to a lack of awareness. I felt as a person, I also have some responsibility towards society. And one of the ways to pay the debt is to serve the disadvantaged people. --Ms Tahiatul Jannat, winner of the Inspiring Women Volunteer Award 2021 in Bangladesh

The second prize winner was Dr Kamrun Nahar Koly, who is a mental health researcher and Founder of Women Support Initiative Forum (WSIF). Through her work, she promotes mental health awareness, support to cope with stress during the pandemic, and provided 120 counselling sessions free of cost.

The third prize was awarded to Ms Tashnuva Anan, a news anchor, dancer and actress who has motivated minority communities to build confidence in themselves and promote greater equality. Her support of transgender communities through raising awareness has helped bring attention to their unique struggles during the global pandemic.

Several influential women spoke at the awards ceremony, sharing insights and congratulating award recipients. Ms Sultana Afroz, Secretary & CEO, Public Private Partnership Authority, Prime Minister's Office, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest.

“ During the pandemic, we have experienced the great role of volunteers throughout the country. But among them, the contribution of female volunteers was significant. PPPA will look into ways to work on incorporating more volunteers, to include them in different initiatives and design programs around their overall development, promotion and recognition and also in support of the national volunteer policy. --Ms Sultana Afroz, Secretary & CEO, PPPA, Prime Minister's Office in Bangladesh

Ms Van Nguyen, [Deputy Resident Representative of the UN Development Programme \(UNDP\)](#) went on to explain the connection between volunteering and facilitating women's empowerment:

“ The Inspiring Women Volunteer Award 2021 is a noble initiative to honour our female volunteers. UNDP is committed to evolving and supporting more volunteers, especially women, in our initiatives. When well facilitated, volunteerism has the potential to contribute to women's empowerment and advance gender equality, resulting in a more accountable SDG framework. --Ms Van Nguyen, Deputy Resident Representative, UNDP Bangladesh

Dr Tania Haque (Professor) from the Department of Women and Gender Studies at University of Dhaka spoke of the benefits of volunteerism in providing opportunities for young people to gain experience and confidence which enables them to make good decisions in complex situations. These necessary skills strengthen society and enhance equality. She added that

for the inclusive development of the country, encouraging rural, transgender and disabled women to volunteer is the pathway forward.

Other recipients of awards at the event were: MSt Sathy Aktar, Ms Sabrina Mansur, Ms Shirin Akther Asa, Ms Zarafa Alam Soya, Ms Shapla Devi Tripura, Ms Syeda Naznin Ahmed Silvi, Ms Kamrun nahar mohona, MSt Anju Anwara Pervin, Ms Masuma Moriom and Ms Afrin Amin.

The awards event received significant media coverage and positive responses from the stakeholders. Representatives from the Bangladesh Government, NGOs, INGOs, UN, and other key stakeholders were among those in attendance.

Further special guests attending the occasion included Mr Dipak Chakraborty, Additional Secretary, Local Government Division, Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives, Ms Jolly Nur Haque, Director, Programme Development and Learning, Plan International, Mr Salahuddin Ahmed, Business Pursuit Lead, VSO Bangladesh and Ms Afsana Alim, Programme Officer, ActionAid Bangladesh.

As a part of the campaign, two webinars were also organized earlier in the year highlighting women-led initiatives during the pandemic. These webinars were attended by more than 300 people and demonstrated the role of volunteers, including the importance of ensuring their safety, skill development, and need for greater recognition of their efforts.

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Related media coverage can be viewed online:

[Dhakatribune](#), [Banglatribune](#), [Samakal](#), [Bdnews24.com](#), [Jugantor](#), [Manabzamin](#), [Nayashata bdi](#), [Dhakatimes24](#), [UNB](#), [Doinikalap](#), [Aparajeobangla](#), [ppbd.news](#), [priyo.com](#), [Banglanews 24](#), [bd-pratidin](#), [Noakhaltv.com](#), [Alochitobangladesh](#), [Ajkerpatrika](#), [Shahnamabd.com](#).

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