



Astha – Fostering Democratic Spaces

Swiss Transversal Outcome:	Governance
Implementation period:	01.07.2023 July 2023 – 31.03.2026
Implementing partner:	Rupantar
Swiss contribution:	CHF 3.35 million
Modality:	Contribution

General description

Astha aims to promote smooth and non-violent democratic practices by facilitating the active participation of urban and rural marginalized youth, men and women in the electoral process during and beyond the 2024 National Election across 18 districts in Bangladesh. The programme is strategically designed to foster a peaceful, fair and credible election and to subsequently sustain engagement with youth, women and new voters from different ethnic and minority communities. Through ongoing dialogues and advocacy efforts, Astha seeks to strengthen democratic spaces and promote inclusive governance.

Objectives

The main goal of Astha is to mobilize and empower marginalized youth and women by promoting peaceful democratic practices and upholding human rights in civic and social sectors. This entails providing resources, education on social campaigns and consultations and support to marginalized groups, enabling them to actively engage in democratic processes and contribute to the advancement of human rights within their communities.

Lines of Action / Components

- Develop Establish and activate the Youth Forum at the Upazila level and further links with the district Civic Platform to enhance youth engagement in democratic processes.
- Provide capacity development for the Civic Platform members with a focus on preventing violence and advocating for minority democratic rights
- Organize consultations led by the Civic Platform with newly elected MPs to discuss governance and emphasize prevention of communal violence.
- Facilitate learning-sharing sessions and policy advocacy dialogues with policymakers and influential stakeholders to promote peace, tolerance, and communal harmony.
Conduct social campaigns engaging youth to increase their participation in electoral and governance processes by highlighting government policies relevant to youth in Bangladesh.

Intended Impact in terms of Systemic Change.

Astha strives to drive transformative changes by empowering youth, especially first-time voters from diverse ethnic minority communities. It seeks to mobilize local-level rights holders to proactively initiate collective actions in promoting democracy, good governance, and social harmony throughout the electoral cycle—prior to, during, and after elections. Through targeted activism and engagement, it endeavors to foster lasting positive shifts in societal attitudes and behaviors towards inclusive democratic practices and peaceful coexistence.

Intervention Targets:

- Develop 147 Upazila-based Youth Forums, engaging 4,410 youth, to prevent communal and electoral violence.
- Enhance the capacity of Youth Forums by 60% and conduct awareness campaigns, leading to 735 voluntary actions to increase marginalized voter participation in the electoral process.
- Establish and empower 18 local civic groups (enhancing capacity by 60%) to amplify the voices of women, marginalized, and minority groups in democratic spaces.
- Support enhanced community safeguarding through 1,872 community initiatives, engaging civic and youth groups, to prevent political-communal violence and promote minority democratic rights during pre, during, and post-election periods.