

## Empowering female students with peace-building, leadership

*UN Women, Brac CPJ conclude project*

**Staff Correspondent**

Rahat Ara Risti despised the start of her academic year at Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur (BRUR) because of unwelcoming gestures and glares she faced from senior students, especially males. With time, she discovered that she was only complaining about the campus environment instead of doing anything about it.

So when the opportunity came, Risti seized it to become a changemaker, as UN Women Bangladesh and the Centre for Peace and Justice (CPJ) of Brac University, undertook a project in June last year to give female students training in entrepreneurship, leadership and peace building.

CPJ implemented the project with BRUR and Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University (JKKNIU).

The organisation brought down the curtain on the project yesterday through a “National colloquium on empowering young women: Promoting peaceful cohesive and prosperous Bangladesh” at Brac Centre Inn in the capital.

Three hundred female students from various departments of the public universities took part in a series of three-day training sessions at Brac Learning Centres in Rangpur and Mymensingh between October 2018 and February this year.

Having received an understanding of entrepreneurship skills and businesses relevant to social issues, they proposed business plans. Of the proposals, four groups won seed funds to turn their thoughts into actions.

Risti belongs to one of the groups that came up with the concept of “Songshoptok”, that she said would be instrumental in fighting sexual harassment and violence on campus. The group will organise seminars, workshops and training to inspire confidence in female students. It has set three targets to achieve -- gender parity, reduction of discrimination and a friendly educational environment with peace and justice.

Another winning group is about to launch a campus-based magazine, Break Through, at BRUR to encourage and aware women by publishing articles on success stories of women, harassment, discrimination and women-centric research findings.

In a unique initiative, the CPJ opened peace cafés at the institutions for female students to nurture “innovative business ideas for the promotion of peace, cohesion and prosperity in our society”, as stated in a document distributed at yesterday's event.

“The universities now can take up the responsibility to support peace café,” said Md Tamim, pro-vice chancellor of Brac University.

Prof Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah, vice chancellor of BRUR and Asuka Murata, programme specialist of UN Women Bangladesh, were present as special guests while Charlotta Schlyter, ambassador of Sweden to Bangladesh, was chief guest at the event.