Forced early marriage remains a form of gender-based violence in many communities in Bangladesh. Research shows that early marriage and intimate partner violence are highly correlated. To support local civil society in policy advocacy efforts to combat GBV and early marriage, the Promoting Advocacy and Rights (PAR) project -with support from USAID- is supporting communities to develop GBV platforms, which has in turn led to action against early marriage.

The Digholia GBV Platform of Khulna was developed in October 2020 by the Rupantar consortium under a PAR Advocacy & Networking grant. Four public officials, including the Upazila Nirbahi Officer, participated in its development.

“I am happy to see such various categories stakeholder collaboration in one platform,” said Mr. Mahbubul Alom, Upazila Nrbahi Officer (UNO) of Digholia, Khulna. “I will give all types of support to this platform to make this Upazila free from early marriage.”

After developing the platform, members of the consortium advocated with the UNO to participate on GBV project activities. The members also discussed GBV and early marriage with the UNO on other occasions.

The awareness raising led to the exposure of an early marriage the following month. A 14-year-old girl was to be married to a 25-year-old man in Formayesh khana village of Digholia Union during a night-time ceremony. A GBV platform member, Ms. Jesika Sultana, alerted the platform convener, Shaikh Mamata Shirin, to the event. The news was shared with the UNO who paid a surprise visit to the victim’s house.

Coincidentally, the Digholia platform convener and other members also came to the victim's house the same night. They found the UNO there who then undertook to arrest the groom, imposing an immediate punishment of 12-days imprisonment.

The father of the young girl then pledged not to have his daughter married until she was 18. The UNO described the punishment of early marriage to all present and forgave the victim's father.

“Sir, I made a mistake,” the girl’s father said. “For my poverty and greediness, I was going to make a terrible mistake. You saved my daughter's life. I will never do this again. My daughter will continue her studies.”