

# RAMGOTI CYCLE RALLY

*Laxmipur District, 25 February, 2018*



Nijera Kori

&

One Billion Rising

## REPORT

In Ramgoti, a coastal upazila of Laxmipur district, women face extremely difficult challenges from their families in the form of socio-religious practice and values. They do not have freedom of mobility or expression. Despite many instances of progressive movements in the past, women continue to be pressurised to adhere to the dress code upheld by society. In this context, Nijera Kori and One Billion Rising planned to organize a bicycle rally for young girls and boys in 2018 to challenge religious and social practices and to promote freedom of movement and liberal thinking for girls in their society. In a meeting between the landless members and school children, many of the kids were very enthusiastic about the rally but had reservations about their family and whether they would be able to gain permission. Despite facing stiff opposition from family members, we were able to gather a group of enthusiastic girls and over the course of four weeks, landless members helped them to practice riding a bicycle. None of the school girls owned bicycles, therefore bicycles were rented in bulk for the purpose of this rally.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 2018 - nearly 50 school going girls and boys attended the rally, during which they approached schools, markets, informing the people present there about their opinions on women empowerment and the purpose of the rally. They also talked about their experiences of riding a bicycle and how it was liberating for them. Many of the onlookers commended the efforts of the children which meant that slowly the society began to accept the girls involvement in riding bicycles and other male dominant activities. Parents of roughly 20 of the school girls ended up buying them cycles and now these girls use it to commute to school. Taking these girls as an example, many other girls in the area have started learning how to ride a bicycle.

Despite the overwhelming success of the event, there were a few challenges that were faced along the way. Certain segments of the society were against the idea of women gaining independence, such as religious fundamentalists and those with a patriarchal mindset. In the process of trying to hinder the progress of our work, they tried to circulate rumours about Nijera Kori. According to them, taking the girls out of their homes would stain the image of the community. Attempts were made to convince the people that Nijera Kori doesn't support religion and its practices such as veiling, therefore taking part in their program must be deplorable. In fact they went as far as impeding the girls in a lot of places when they were riding bicycles. However, due to the presence of strong

landless groups within those areas and the formation of groups to protest against these challenges, they managed to overcome these obstacles and could express themselves about their own standing in society to the community.

The difference in the relationship between the boys and girls in schools and colleges is remarkable. As a result of these protests, social and religious barriers have decreased in these areas. Now boys are teaching these girls and encouraging them how to ride bicycles. Their outlook towards women have become more respectful and friendly. This is a positive change towards obtaining a liberating and progressive mindset. Few of the girls and boys made remarks, of which one particularly stood out. “Society treats and views women differently, and in a discriminatory manner. I don’t want to see myself as just a woman, I want to grow up as a human being.” One boy said, “Men don’t have right to tease women. Proper rights should be given to women. We will be more aware towards the violence and exploitation of women. And we promise that we will not exploit women and not allow anyone else to do so.” He went onto say, “being a man or a woman cannot be a persons dominant identity. Their real identity is that they are human beings and we should give that priority.”

We should strive to build a society where women have equal opportunities and are not confined to the conventional definition of what a village girl’s life ought to be like -therein lies one of the fundamental objectives of Nijera Kori.

