



## POLICY BRIEF

# Gender-Responsive Planning and Budgeting (GRPB) for enhancing the social protection of female tea garden workers and their families in Bangladesh

Photo: Kishore Singh/BTS

## CONTEXT

Bangladesh is the tenth-largest producer of tea globally and the ninth-largest<sup>1</sup> tea-exporting country in the world, with 167 tea gardens.<sup>2</sup> According to the 2017-2018 Annual Report of the Bangladeshiyo Cha Sangsad (Bangladesh Tea Association), 440,743 workers and their family members live in 159 commercial tea gardens across the country. Of these workers, 100,619 are permanent (48,611 men and 50,144 women) and 36,028 are temporary (13,186 men and 13,192 women). More than 50 percent of these workers are women.

Tea workers lag behind the rest of the population in terms of human development indicators such as infant and under-five mortality rates, child malnutrition and education, all due to long working hours, low wages, inadequate accommodation and

limited access to education and healthcare.<sup>3</sup> These workers also face other disadvantages, including minimal access to government social services, social stigma, poverty and a unique policy regime.<sup>4</sup>

To address the needs of tea garden workers, especially female workers and their families, the Government of Bangladesh and its relevant ministries, with assistance and support from development partners, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Bangladesh Tea Garden Owners' Association (BTA) and the Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union (also known as the BCSU or Bangladesh Tea Garden Workers' Union), are implementing various programmes. These interventions seek to enhance tea garden workers' access to decent work facilities and to provide them with inclusive social protection and better social services.

<sup>1</sup> Bangladesh Ministry of Commerce, Five-year Plan of Bangladesh 2016, Tea Research Institute FY 2017-2021.

<sup>2</sup> Bangladesh Tea Board Website, June 2021, <https://teaboard.portal.gov.bd/site/page/77c5802c-8aa8-4d93-ad31-07807f4edd0f/->

<sup>3</sup> Iffat Idris, 'Modern slavery within the tea industry in Bangladesh', K4D (UK AID/DFID 2018)

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5aafcc5be5274a7fbb1e/Modern\\_Slavery\\_within\\_the\\_Tea\\_Industry\\_in\\_Bangladesh.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5aafcc5be5274a7fbb1e/Modern_Slavery_within_the_Tea_Industry_in_Bangladesh.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO), 'A Study on Working Conditions of Tea Plantation Workers in Bangladesh', 2016. Authors: Faisal Ahmed, PhD and Md. Ismail Hossain, PhD. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-dhaka/documents/publication/wcms\\_563692.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-dhaka/documents/publication/wcms_563692.pdf)

## PURPOSE OF THIS POLICY BRIEF

This policy brief offers a critical analysis of gender-related issues among tea garden workers and their family members in Bangladesh. It aims to develop a clearer understanding of the social protection issues facing female tea garden workers while also leveraging gender-responsive planning and budgeting (GRPB) as a tool to ensure that national policies, plans and strategies are responsive to the immediate and long-term needs of tea garden workers and their family members.

By consulting this policy brief, stakeholders will be able to identify the key challenges facing this target group and the available resources and support services needed to address these problems. This brief will help stakeholders formulate workable strategies to develop gender-responsive plans, projects and programmes at the local or national level and to allocate the necessary budgets for the effective implementation of those strategies.

## LIVING AND WORKING CONDITIONS

Research indicates that the wages, rights and privileges, medical, educational and childcare facilities, leave benefits, general working conditions, safety protocols, and health and hygiene of tea garden workers are often not protected and do not correspond with the provisions of the Minimum Wage Board<sup>5</sup> and the prevailing requirements of the 2015 Bangladesh Labour Rules (BLR). Tea garden workers live far below the poverty threshold in Bangladesh, which, as of 2018, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) considered to be US\$61.36 per month for low-skilled jobs.<sup>6</sup> This reality is discriminatory and a deprivation for tea garden workers.<sup>7</sup>

## EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES AND WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

According to the Bangladesh Labour Act (BLA) 2006 (amended in 2013 and 2018) and the BLR 2015, permanent tea garden workers should be provided with an appointment letter, job card or service book, a lifelong pension after retirement of Bangladeshi taka (BDT) 100 per week and a contributory provident fund.<sup>8</sup> However, studies on workers' experiences suggest that these provisions are often not followed.

The wage of tea garden workers is calculated weekly on the basis of daily performance. The nominal wage for these workers is BDT 120 (US\$1.40) per day for plucking 18 to 23 kilogrammes of leaves (the production target of leaves is called *nirikh*). However,

employers often engage in discrimination and malpractice when calculating the weight of tea leaves/*nirikh* collected by each worker.<sup>9</sup> Further, the tripartite National Minimum Wage Board does not determine wages for tea garden workers; instead, they are determined bilaterally every two years by representatives from the Bangladesh Tea Workers Union and Bangladesh Tea Association. Workers work six days a week and receive no wages for weekends worked. There is also no provision for casual leave. Workers receive 14 days of sick leave per year and are allowed to earn only one day of leave after 22 days of work. Meanwhile, workers in other sectors get one day of earned leave after 18 days of work. According to the BLA 2006, female workers must be provided with 16 weeks of maternity leave, but the same legislation contains no paternity leave for male workers.

Very few women in the tea garden industry work in supervisory roles, even though the Biennium Collective Agreement 2017-2018 recommended that at least one qualified female *sardar* (supervisor) should be hired per 100 female workers. No toilets exist for workers in the tea gardens, let alone separate toilets for female workers. The toilets that do exist are often unsanitary and present a challenge for female workers during their periods, often causing them to suffer from various health problems. Further, no personal protective equipment is given to workers to safeguard them from workplace hazards. In tea plantation areas, the available drinking water for workers is often unsafe and inadequate.<sup>10</sup>

## NON-CASH EMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

**Food rations:** Permanent workers receive a weekly, subsidized ration of 3.27 kg of rice/flour at BDT 2 per kg.<sup>11</sup> If both spouses are regular workers, it is common practice for husbands to receive the weekly ration instead of their wives. This is clearly gender discrimination.<sup>12</sup>

**Childcare:** Under the BLR 2015, the Biennium Collective Agreement 2017-2018 and onwards, the Bangladesh Tea Association agreed to set up *crèches* in the tea gardens to provide free childcare for the children of workers. So far, there are *crèches* in several tea gardens and some are managed well. However, authorities are required to establish a child-friendly *crèche* in each tea garden, according to the Bangladesh Labour Law 2006. Despite the commitments of tea garden authorities, though, many tea gardens lack such *crèches*.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>5</sup> In September 2018, the Bangladeshi Government announced a new minimum wage for garment workers, which has fixed the minimum monthly wage at BDT 8,000 (US\$95).

<sup>6</sup> ILO, 'A Study on Working Conditions of Tea Plantation Workers in Bangladesh'.

<sup>7</sup> Philip Gain, Researcher and Director of Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD), 'The indigenous communities of the plains need urgent social protection'. The Daily Star, 10 August 2020.

<sup>8</sup> 7.5 percent from the employee and 7.5 percent from the employer. Section 265 of the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 (amendments in 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Report on 'Multi-Stakeholder Workshop on Gender-Responsive Planning and Budgeting (GRPB) and Social Protection of Tea Garden Workers', Sylhet, 11 March 2021, organized by: UN Women.

<sup>10</sup> ILO, 'A Study on Working Conditions of Tea Plantation Workers in Bangladesh'.

<sup>11</sup> Bangladesh Tea Association, Annual Report 2017-2018.

<sup>12</sup> Dr. Rehana Parvin, Associate Professor, Department of Law, Islamic University – Kushtia, 'Health and Economic Conditions of Tea Garden Female Workers: A Study on Legal Rights', Green University Review of Social Sciences, Volume 04, Issue 01, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> UN Women, UNILEVER and UNDP, 'Towards a sustainable and ethical tea sector in Bangladesh: A multi-stakeholder partnership framework', 2018.

**Accommodation:** Cost-free accommodation is provided to permanent workers on the condition of satisfactory job performance. It has been found in many instances that the housing facilities are unsatisfactory, including with respect to the size, quality and design of these facilities and to other amenities in them, such as sanitation, kitchen and drinking water supplies.<sup>14</sup> Regulations about providing and maintaining free housing for tea garden workers, which were stipulated in the 2006 BLA and 2015 BLR, have been ignored.

**Health services:** The BLR 2015 prescribed medical facilities for tea gardens with (i) fewer than 400 workers and (ii) more than 400 workers or more than 400 acres of land. Fully functional clinics, as required by the BLR 2015, are mostly not in place in tea gardens and female workers have poor access to medical services during pregnancy.<sup>15</sup> The results of a survey conducted in 2018 by BBS and UNICEF showed that 80 percent of female tea garden workers in three districts of Sylhet gave birth at home. This practice persists even though there are midwives in almost every garden. The maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH) status in tea garden communities is neglected and often of poor quality.<sup>16</sup> Research suggests that the reasons for workers not receiving proper healthcare services and having high maternal mortality rates include their low socio-economic status, traditional myths and superstitions, dependency on traditional birth attendants and negligence in seeking the appropriate MNCH services.<sup>17</sup>

Access to health services (including reproductive health, maternity and childcare)

Long working hours under extreme weather conditions (no resting place)

Gender discrimination, no career path, patriarchal norms, attitudes and practices (early marriage, dowry and domestic violence)

Women's participation in decision-making bodies, such as panchayat/local government

WASH facilities in the tea gardens (drinking water and toilet facilities)

Wages/income and access to other income-generating and skills development opportunities

**Educational facilities for workers' children:** Despite a provision of Bangladesh Labour Agreement (BLA) 2015, there is usually no school in tea gardens or within a garden's vicinity. If there is a school, the quality of the teachers and facilities is often lacking. Most students cannot pursue post-primary education because of financial constraints, social exclusion and language barriers. Unemployment among youth is also a serious problem, which is caused by a lack of skills training and ethnic discrimination.

**Social and economic issues:** The indigenous communities of the plains of Bangladesh, including those working in tea gardens, are excluded and marginalized due to their identity, occupations, casteism, culture, geographical locations and various other reasons.<sup>18</sup> A large percentage of them are deprived of equal opportunities and face wide-ranging social, economic and political disadvantages. The National Social Security Strategy Action Plan 2016-2021 has not reached tea garden workers as it intended. Child marriage<sup>19</sup> is one of the major factors responsible for children leaving school early. Unfortunately, the dowry system is common in tea garden communities as well.<sup>20</sup>

## GOVERNMENT RESPONSE ON GENDER EQUALITY

The Government of Bangladesh has carried out various development initiatives for women and children in order to implement different international and national policy commitments and 'Vision 2021'. The equal participation of men and women in all walks of life, including employment, education and health, is one of the most important pre-conditions for their development. While embracing these efforts, the government also prioritizes marginalized groups, such as tea garden workers, especially female workers and their children.

Different studies and surveys reveal that the conditions of female workers in the tea gardens are deplorable.<sup>21</sup> To address these conditions, the government's plans, policies and programmes related to gender equality are outlined below.

**National and international policy commitments:** The country's commitments to gender equality are articulated in the Constitution of Bangladesh. The government has also ratified international human rights law and other policy documents, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA), the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and various International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions. It has also codified and implemented national policies, like the National Women Development Policy, the Five-Year Plans, the Labour Law, the Social Safety Net Strategy, the Gender Budget and the Children Budget, which are all concerned with equal rights and opportunities for men and women. Furthermore, most of the ministries have their own policies, all of which address gender issues.

**Policy, legislation and laws for tea garden workers:** All tea garden workers are under the purview of the BLA 2006 (amended in 2013 and 2018) and the BLR 2015, which both contain separate sections for tea garden workers. These regulations recognize the unique forms of discrimination tea garden workers face compared to other

<sup>14</sup> ILO, 'A Study on Working Conditions of Tea Plantation Workers in (Bangladesh).'

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Biswas A, et al., 'What is the Need for Maternal and Neonatal Health Service Delivery in the Marginalized Tea Garden Community of Bangladesh? A Qualitative Study', Centre for Injury Prevention and Research and UNFPA, Bangladesh, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Arifa Islam, et al., 'Utilization of pregnancy related care among female tea garden workers', Journal of Preventative and Social Medicine, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> Philip Gain, 'The indigenous communities of the plains need urgent social protection'.

<sup>19</sup> ILO, 'A Study on Working Conditions of Tea Plantation Workers in Bangladesh'.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

workers in terms of basic rights and facilities (e.g., wages, leave benefits and working conditions), all of which are detailed under the key issues of this policy brief.

**Gender-responsive planning:** Gender-responsive planning requires that the entire planning cycle be gender-responsive in order to bring about gender equality in the Annual Development Programme (ADP). Making long- and medium-term planning gender-responsive requires conscious reflection on gender equality issues in policies, strategies, projects and resource allocations in macro issues and sectoral issues, particularly in line with the National Women Development Policy and 8th Five-Year Plan. Plans, programmes and projects are considered to be gender-responsive when their objectives, strategies and resource allocations consider the different needs of women and men.

The guidelines published by the General Economics Division (GED) Planning Division<sup>22</sup> attempt to explain how to prepare a Development Project Proposal (DPP) and Technical Assistance Project Proposal (TAPP) based on how poverty and gender issues could be better integrated. At the local level, the Union Parishad Act 2009, the Upazila Parishad Act 1998 (amended in 2009 and 2011) and the Upazila Parishad Development Fund Using Guideline 2014 instruct unions and each Upazila Parishad (or council) on how programmes and projects should be planned; how the resources, including the ADP and others, should be used; and how these programmes and projects should be selected, monitored and implemented.<sup>23</sup>

**Gender-responsive budgeting:**<sup>24</sup> A gender-responsive budget (GRB) is a budget that works for everyone (women and men, girls and boys) by ensuring a gender-equitable distribution of resources and contributing to equal opportunities for all. Gender-responsive budgeting is essential for ensuring both gender equality and an equal share of finance. It involves analysing government budgets for their effect on gender equality and the gender norms and roles associated with them. It also involves transforming these budgets to ensure that gender equality commitments are realized as per national priorities and global requirements, such as CEDAW and the SDGs. The Medium-Term Budgetary Framework (MTBF) requires ministries to answer how and to what extent a project meets one or more of the 14 criteria (Form 4 of BC-1) regarding women's advancement.<sup>25</sup> Sex-disaggregated data is a prerequisite for gender budgeting; however, it is still inadequate despite various government efforts. Although monitoring mechanisms are in place, making them operational still remains the weakest link in the public financial management system.

Since 2010, the Government of Bangladesh has released expenditures from GRB allocation by publishing a Gender Budget Report on four ministries in 2009-2010 and again in 2019-2020, which covered 43 ministries and divisions. The monetary allocation

for women's development in the National Budget<sup>26</sup> was BDT 27,248 crore in 2009-2010. In the fiscal year 2019-2020, it was BDT 161,247 crore, which is 30.82 percent of the country's total budget and 5.56 percent of its GDP.<sup>27</sup> The government did not publish any Gender Budget Reports for 2020-2021 and 2021-2022.<sup>28</sup> Gender-responsive planning and budgeting are a critical and powerful tool to generate social protection policies and strategies that ensure good governance, social accountability and democratic engagement.

**Social protection:** Social protection in Bangladesh is embedded in Article 15 (d) of the country's National Constitution (1972). It is also the cornerstone of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) 2015 and its accompanying Action Plan of 2018. The NSSS 2015, Perspective Plan, its Five-year Plans and other policy documents emphasize the need to provide social protection to elderly people, minority communities, disabled persons and deprived women and children. To implement the NSSS, several projects have been undertaken, including the Social Security Policy Support (SSPS) and the Strengthening Public Financial Management for Social Protection (SPFMSP). Projects like these will enhance the social protection system and ensure gender parity.

There are at least 145 social safety net programmes administered by 25 ministries and divisions. The government established programmes among different ministries to address the five core life cycle stages: early childhood, school-age children, working-age people including youth, working-age people and elderly people. Among the involved ministries, the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs (MoWCA) offers a Maternal Allowance Programme for poor, lactating mothers during the early childhood stage. The coverage of this stage is minimal, however. The health- and nutrition-related programmes include the national nutrition service; the national sanitation project; maternal health voucher schemes; maternal, child, reproductive and adolescent health (MCRAH); and the urban public and environment health sector development. The target group for the maternal health voucher schemes and MCRAH are pregnant women, while the other programmes target children, adolescents, adults and the elderly. There is a noticeable gap in social protection programmes under health- and nutrition-related programmes, which contain no major schemes that directly address the needs of pregnant women and young children. Furthermore, the coverage of programmes that do exist is inadequate.

Tea garden workers benefit from social safety net programmes if they meet their criteria. Relevant programmes include the lactating mother allowance, widow allowance and old-age allowance. The coverage of social safety net programmes is very minimal in tea gardens, however. Most female workers who are in need of assistance are not selected by local government bodies that are enlisted to provide safety net allowances. A special programme<sup>29</sup> entitled the 'Policy on Livelihood Improvement of Tea Garden

<sup>22</sup> Bangladesh GED - Planning Commission, Ministry of Planning. Guidelines on Development Project Preparation, Processing, Approval and Ratification of Government of Bangladesh, 2016. Development Project Proforma/Proposal (DPP) Manual, March 2014.

[http://bcsadminacademy.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bcsadminacademy.portal.gov.bd/page/6a28f1e5\\_7ded\\_44a1\\_a531\\_bd13881c8e0c/DPP-Manual-Part-1.pdf](http://bcsadminacademy.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bcsadminacademy.portal.gov.bd/page/6a28f1e5_7ded_44a1_a531_bd13881c8e0c/DPP-Manual-Part-1.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Website of Local Government Division.

<sup>24</sup> Bangladesh, Finance Division - Ministry of Finance, Gender Budget. [https://mof.gov.bd/site/view/budget\\_mof/Gender-Budget](https://mof.gov.bd/site/view/budget_mof/Gender-Budget)

<sup>25</sup> <https://mof.gov.bd/site/view>

<sup>26</sup> Centre for Policy Dialogue - Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development, 'An Analysis of the National Budget for FY 2021-22 Dhaka', 4 June 2021.

<sup>27</sup> Bangladesh, Finance Division - Ministry of Finance, Gender Budget Report FY 2019-2020.

<https://mof.gov.bd/site/page/70890559-b3c1-4452-9559-036cd71a350d>

<sup>28</sup> 'Publish gender report'. The Daily Star, 10 June 2021. <https://www.thedailystar.net/city/news/publish-gender-budget-report-2108117>

Labourers' is directly targeted at tea garden workers. Under this programme, BDT 5,000 or an equivalent benefit is given to a worker's family for three months in a year if there is no work available.<sup>30</sup>

The budget for social safety net programmes for the fiscal year 2019-2020 was BDT 74,367 crore, which was 2.58 percent of GDP and 14.21 percent of the budget. However, the largest shares of social safety net programmes go towards pensions for retired government employees and freedom fighters (BDT 26,395.05 crore in 2019-2020). In the fiscal year 2020-2021, the budget for social safety net programmes was raised to BDT 95,574 crore.<sup>31</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations apply the GRPB as tools at each stage of the policy, planning, programme and budgeting cycle to identify gaps in the policy response. Their acceptance would facilitate the design of a gender-responsive programme and the optimal direction of resources so that policy could improve the living and working conditions of female tea garden workers and their family members.

**1. Special programme and allocation of resources:** The Government of Bangladesh has already taken various initiatives to ensure that there is an equal share of women in all programmes, but the needs of women belonging to excluded groups of people, such as ethnic minorities – including tea garden workers – are not yet addressed quite adequately. The existing programmes for excluded people, including tea plantation workers, ethnic minorities and other marginalized people, could be brought under special programmes to reduce the vulnerability and exclusion of those people and then to be scaled up. Specifically, the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW) could implement a special programme for female tea garden workers and their families<sup>32</sup> in collaboration with relevant line ministries, including the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs (MoWCA). To begin with, the relevant ministries and departments at the local and national levels could undertake a comprehensive analysis of the demand and supply sides. This analysis could adopt a 'life-cycle approach' that considers paid maternity and paternity leave, sick leave, accident coverage, old-age coverage and contributory pension in allocating social protection services to vulnerable people.

**2. Develop a gender-responsive plan and programme:** While formulating new projects for tea garden workers, it is important to hold discussions among local officials and relevant stakeholders that adequately address and reflect gender issues. A checklist following 'leave no one behind' (LNOB) principles could be developed, which government officials at the local and national levels could use to assess, through a gender lens, the needs of tea garden workers. Relevant government ministries and departments could be engaged in the implementation of the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) to formulate a workable strategy at the local or national level and to

allocate necessary budgets for the effective implementation of that strategy. Gender-responsive supervision and monitoring as well as social audit procedures would be essential to provide oversight of the actual implementation of projects. Gaps in the capacity/skills of government officials on Gender-Based Analysis (GBA) are still a constraint.

**3. Access to WASH:** The Sector Development Plan (FY 2011-2025)<sup>33</sup> for Water Supply and Sanitation Sector in Bangladesh recognizes the importance of adequately covering vulnerable groups comprising women, children, persons with disabilities/differently able people, indigenous communities, disadvantaged and extremely poor persons, and floating populations. Currently, there are no separate amenities for women workers, such as toilets or rest rooms, in tea gardens. Latrines and toilets, for example, are supposed to be provided and maintained by the employers, according to the provisions stipulated under the Bangladesh Labour Rules 2015,<sup>34</sup> but, in most cases, these provisions are not respected. Women face tremendous challenges in this regard, as they must defecate openly, which poses security and privacy issues for them. The various government organizations at the national and local levels, the tea garden authorities and BTA could coordinate to ensure that there are safe water and sanitation facilities in tea gardens. This coordination would ensure that there is adequate budgetary allocation from national and local governments and that this need would be addressed in employers' plans and budgets

**4. Childcare facilities at workplace:** The Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 (amendments in 2013 and 2018) requires<sup>35</sup> employers to set up adequate childcare facilities at all establishments that employ at least 40 women employees. Specifically, Bangladesh Labour Rules require tea sector employers to set up crèches for children under six years of age who belong to female tea plantation workers. Thus, employers, the BTA, development partners and CSOs could redouble their efforts to establish such adequate childcare facilities. To do this, each party could be an integral part of local planning involving budgetary allocation by employers and relevant government agencies.

**5. Gender-disaggregated data for GRPB:** Gender-disaggregated data is crucial for national and local development plans in order to address gender-differential needs of targeted groups of people in any sector. Officials in the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs, the Ministry of Social Welfare, local government and the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) could improve their capacity to gather, record and analyse gender-disaggregated data on tea gardens. After having established such capacity, the BBS, in collaboration with line ministries and departments, could collect and update that gender-disaggregated data in order to pursue planning and budgeting in a gender-responsive manner. An example of such successful work is the Bangladesh Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), which the BBS conducted in 2019.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, such data-gathering might be done on a regular basis to identify the gender-differentiated needs of tea garden workers.

<sup>29</sup> Bangladesh, Directorate of Social Welfare, Ministry of Social Welfare, Policy on Livelihood Improvement of Tea Garden Labourers, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Philip Gain, 'The indigenous communities of the plains need urgent social protection'.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> [https://mof.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/47bbc624\\_3e88\\_4af8\\_abd7\\_5d9cf54f4a34/G-2\\_01\\_129\\_Social\\_English.pdf](https://mof.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/47bbc624_3e88_4af8_abd7_5d9cf54f4a34/G-2_01_129_Social_English.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> <https://itn.buet.ac.bd/publications/sector-documents/documents/sdpeng.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Paragraphs 2 and 7(5), Schedule 5, under Rule 96, and Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Schedule 2 under Rule 51, BLR 2015

**6. Career development of female workers:** Gender discrimination is prevalent in all tea gardens, where women find themselves in labour-intensive, low-paying jobs. They enjoy hardly any opportunities for career advancement and engagement in supervisory and management positions. Moreover, the representation of women workers in unions and decision-making bodies is nearly non-existent; when they are present in unions at all, they are present more as tokens, not as members with an actual voice. Such women representatives often do not know the nature of their role in decision-making bodies and their husbands usually serve as their proxies who make decisions on their behalf. To address this, local government, in collaboration with Panchayat and BCSU (Bangladesh Cha Sramik Union), could ensure the effective participation of women leaders in all decision-making bodies. Thus, employers' human resource plans could provide for the career development of women tea garden workers and recruit them for managerial positions in tea gardens. This would require a long-term perspective regarding the goals of tea garden authorities for the next five to 10 years. To achieve this, the government, development agencies, BTA and workers could work together.



**7. Strengthening collaboration and partnership:** There has been progress on addressing human rights and gender concerns in the tea sector in Bangladesh, including how to meet the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Indeed, government and UN agencies are cooperating on economic empowerment, alternative livelihood development, access to the safety net and social protection, education, development of operational standards, and improvement of WASH facilities for tea garden workers, even if NGOs have so far had limited participation in this. Nevertheless, there is no road map for united action by government and industry. Thus, to inform tea garden management and tea garden workers about human rights and gender concerns, there could be more collaboration among NGOs, development partners and employers.



<sup>35</sup> Section 94(1), Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 (2018 amendments)

<sup>36</sup> [https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/media/3281/file/Bangladesh 2019 MICS Report\\_English.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/media/3281/file/Bangladesh%202019%20MICS%20Report_English.pdf)

## CONCLUSION

The Government of Bangladesh has embraced GRPB to address the needs of women, but more focus could be placed on female tea garden workers and their families. This policy brief is meant to help policymakers assess the needs of tea workers and their families and to prepare development plans and projects at the local and national levels that target this population. Renewed commitment among concerned parties and stakeholders on this issue would be essential for successful intervention. The government could adopt a comprehensive policy for tea garden workers to ensure that they receive adequate social safety net coverage and that systems are strengthened. This would afford high-quality basic services to everyone living in these areas. While developing and implementing the NSSF-II phase action plan and GRPB, special emphasis could be placed on reallocating, recapturing and redesigning social safety net programmes for female tea garden workers and their families, who are among the most disadvantaged groups in Bangladesh.

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