



IN BRIEF

GOVERNANCE AND PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE

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Photo: UN Women/Snigdha Zaman

THE ISSUE

National plans, policies, institutions, and budgets enable the government to translate commitments to women's empowerment into practical progress towards gender equality. Too often, however, they overlook measures to ensure that public services respond to women's needs and priorities. Women face several obstacles to participating in political life. Structural barriers, through discriminatory laws and institutions, still limit women's options to run for office. Women and gender-diverse people often have less education, contacts, and resources needed to become effective leaders.

Bangladesh ranks at the top among South Asian countries and 71 among 158 countries worldwide in the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index 2022. [1] Bangladesh adopted a National Development Policy in 2011 and has a strong normative framework to advance women's rights. The country currently has female leaders in three key political positions, including Prime Minister, Opposition Leader, and Speaker of Parliament. Yet, women hold less than 20 per cent of first-class government jobs, less than 23 per cent of leadership roles in local government institutions, and only 21 per cent of positions in the National Parliament. [2] In Bangladesh, 34 per cent of the national budget is allocated as gender budget.

However, expenditure and use of the gender budget are not tracked, which creates a challenge in assessing its effectiveness. The 2016 concluding observations by the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\)](#) Committee highlighted that personal status laws regulating marriage, divorce, inheritance, guardianship, and custodial rights within the various religious groups continue to discriminate against women and girls. Normative commitments to CEDAW, the [Beijing Platform of Action](#), [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), and the [Commission on the Status of Women \(CSW\)](#) need to translate into national legislation, policies, and financing for gender equality.

The CEDAW Committee recommended that the national women's machinery should have sufficient authority and the necessary human, technical, and financial resources to effectively promote women's rights and gender equality and ensure effective gender mainstreaming across all government departments. The CEDAW Committee encouraged the government to collect disaggregated data and also increase women's representation in the parliament, judiciary, administration, and in the private sector.

STRATEGY

In line with Bangladesh's [8th Five-Year Plan](#) and the [United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework \(UNSDCF\) 2022-2026](#), the UN Women country programme (Strategic Note) for Bangladesh contributes to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. UN Women works to strengthen the capacity of the government to formulate gender-responsive policies, programmes, and financing strategies that are consistent with global norms and standards on gender equality and women's empowerment.

[1] [Global Gender Gap Report 2022 - World Economic Forum](#)

[2] [Women's effective participation and decision-making in public life, elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality, and empowerment of all women and girls | UN Women – Asia Pacific Violence Against Women Survey \(2015\)](#)

APPROACH

UN Women works closely with the Government of Bangladesh to technically assist in meeting its normative commitments to international treaty bodies and to strengthen gender-responsive planning and budgeting, including financing for SDGs, an initiative funded by the SDG Fund Secretariat. UN Women also supports the government on the availability, accessibility, and usage of gender statistics, an intervention generously funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The normative work, most notably with the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA), includes strengthening gender-responsive planning and budgeting to enable gender mainstreaming across all sectoral ministries and departments and strengthening gender-responsive policy formulation and implementation. In collaboration with the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), UN Women aims to support the government's monitoring of the implementation of the SDGs by strengthening the collection, analysis, and dissemination of gender statistics.

As part of the [Making Every Woman and Girl Count Programme](#), UN Women will ensure that the availability of quality, comparable, and regular gender statistics will address national data gaps and meet policy and reporting commitments under the SDGs, CEDAW, and the Beijing Platform for Action. UN Women is also working with the United Nations agencies to roll out an Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) to outline how national strategies for sustainable development and the SDGs will be financed and implemented at the national level. UN Women has signed a letter of collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for the period 2022-2026 to promote gender-responsive and -inclusive governance, social protection, disaster risk reduction, women's economic empowerment, and access to justice as well as to fight discrimination against women at all levels in Bangladesh.

RESULTS

(2020-2022)

NORMATIVE FRAMEWORKS

- Through technical and financial assistance to MoWCA, the national women's machinery, UN Women has supported the government in implementing **CEDAW Committee's recommendation for gender mainstreaming and reporting on normative commitments**. As a result, MoWCA has updated the National Action Plan of the National Women Development Policy (2011), including specific actions for 52 ministries and divisions.
- MoWCA has met Bangladesh's reporting obligations for CEDAW and Beijing+25 National Review with the support of UN Women. Similarly, through its programme, UN Women promotes the participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) in reporting on normative frameworks, for example, the **CEDAW alternative reporting for the ninth review cycle led by the CSO platform**.

PLANNING AND BUDGETING

- With technical assistance from UN Women, MoWCA has initiated training programmes on the **gender-responsive planning and budgeting (GRPB) module** for government ministries to strengthen the capacity of gender and budget focal points, as well as for CSO representatives. MoWCA also drafted and piloted a **strategy for local government institutions to mainstream GRPB in their participatory budgeting processes**. The strategy is expected to be adopted in 2023. This is an effort to accelerate gender mainstreaming to address disparities in access, participation, control, and benefits between women and men.
- The Government of Bangladesh **mainstreamed gender equality priorities in the Development Result Framework (DFA) and the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) for SDG financing**. These frameworks forecast the financing required to meet the SDG targets. Through UN Women's technical support, targets related to gender equality are reflected in the frameworks. UN Women also assisted in developing a financing strategy for the SDGs and a financing roadmap for Goal 5, with a projection of USD 54 billion for implementation by 2030.

DATA

- BBS conducted the first-ever [Time-Use Survey \(TUS\)](#) to increase the visibility of unpaid care and domestic work in Bangladesh. UN Women supported BBS to design and launch the preliminary survey report in 2022. This included **specialized data collection and entry training for over 100 enumerators, supervisors, data editors, coders, and other BBS staff.**
- UN Women supported the **operationalization of the Gender Statistics Cell of BBS** to regularly collect, analyse, and disseminate gender statistics. The programme supported the **first-ever interministerial coordination mechanism for gender statistics** to govern and oversee the regular collection of data by BBS.

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

- Women's voice and agency in decision-making at all levels are key to ensuring their equal rights in public life. UN Women published a policy brief in 2021 on ["Women's effective participation and decision-making in public life, elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls"](#). The policy brief recommends **transforming gender-discriminatory beliefs and attitudes** through comprehensive gender equality education with gender-neutral parenting; **reducing and redistributing unpaid care work**; **strengthening normative, legal, and regulatory frameworks**; **preventing and eliminating violence against women**; **strengthening women's voice**; and **adopting the leave no one behind principle in public life**—as pathways for a better tomorrow.

FEATURE STORY

JEN ROSS

"If you ask a homemaker what she does, she will invariably say, 'I don't do anything'," says Shaheen Anam, Executive Director of the Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), a Bangladeshi civil society organization that works on security and rights for women and girls, among other issues. "We want to change that narrative to redefine what we mean by 'work' to include the work women do in their homes." However she says, "It only counts if it's counted," and Bangladesh had no national official data on women's unpaid care and domestic work—until recently. Through the Women Count Programme, UN Women supported BBS to design and roll out the country's first-ever Time-Use Survey (TUS) from January until April 2021. This involved specialized training on data collection and entry for more than 100 enumerators, supervisors, data editors, coders, and other BBS staff. The TUS was fielded among an estimated 24,000 respondents in 8,000 households across 64 districts. UN Women continued to support BBS in analyzing the data and compiling the final report.

Photo : UN Women/Fahad Kaizer



"It's a unique exercise being done for the first time here," explains UN Women Bangladesh Programme Analyst, Md. Shohel Rana. "As soon as we have the data finalized, there is a high-level commitment from Parliament to develop policies and programmes." "We now have more people trained, so in the future, we can generate more gender-specific data more efficiently," says Mashud Alam, Director of the Demography and Health Wing of BBS. "Just giving the data is not enough. That data has to be used and conveyed in a way that makes a connection between what women do and their status in the family. We work very closely with women and men and want to do good dissemination of the results." said Anam.