

**Inputs from Bangladesh for UNSG's report on
'Intensifications of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against
Women and Girls: Gender Stereotypes and Negative Social Norms'**

Introduction:

The Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman started the process of uplifting the status of women in 1972 by establishing equal rights of women and men in all spheres of state and public life as constitutional obligation under Article 27 and 28 of the constitution. It has the advantage of making special provisions for the development of women, children and the disadvantaged population. For the political empowerment of women, Article 65 (3) of the constitution provides 50 reserve seats in the national parliament, and in that paragraph, there has been no barrier for the participation of women to be elected in any of the 300 general seats of the national parliament and article 19 (3) was adopted as a Fundamental Principle of State Policy pledging to ensure equal opportunity and participation of women in all aspects of national life.

The Government of Bangladesh Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has undertaken various steps to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against Women and Girls in Bangladesh. Through her Declaration of building smart Bangladesh by 2041, Election manifesto 2023, 8th five year plan, Delta plan, Perspective plan, a momentum has been created for taking forward Bangladesh to a middle and high income level respectively.

Bangladesh ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1984 with reservation on articles 2, 13.a 16.1.a and 16.1.c. and submits progress report to United Nations after every four years. Bangladesh Government withdraws reservation on article 13.a and 16.1.a in 1997. Withdrawal reservation on article 16.1.c (The same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution) is under process. The Government formulated for the first time National Women Development Policy in 1997 following commitment of Bangladesh in Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action in 1995. In 2009, Govt. took steps to update the policy to ensure women empowerment, equal rights and opportunities and formulated National Women Development Policy in 2011. Government also prepared a National Action Plan for implementation of the policy in 2013.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Actions adopted in the fourth world conference of women in 1995 where all the government of the world including Bangladesh promised that a gender perspective is reflected in all our policies and programs'. As lead ministry of the Government of Peoples Republic of Bangladesh, Ministry of Women and Children

Affairs (MoWCA) is responsible for promoting the overall women empowerment and protecting their rights specific duties and responsibilities of all other the ministries/divisions of the government are described in National Women Development Policy and the action plan for the implementation of the policy.

Ministry of Women and Children Affairs under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is committed to integrating gender equality and women's empowerment and adopted the multi-dimensional activities and steps to ensure women and children development in Bangladesh through various policies, plans and strategies. The ministry also provides secretarial support for the National Council for Women and Children (NCWCD) headed by Prime Minister The ministry coordinates of WID (Women in Development) activities of different ministries through designated WID Focal Points, the activities of the women's organizations and civil society and voluntary women's associations taking programs for empowerment of women including their employment opportunities and programs concerning prevention of repression women and children, As a result, Bangladesh today is the role model of the developing world.

A. Legal and Policy Reforms:

For eliminating discriminations against women and establishing equality, some new laws and ordinance were enacted between 2016 to 2023. For instance.

Acts

1. Dowry Prohibition Act 2018
2. Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017
3. Bangladesh National Social Welfare Council Act, 2019 (Act No. 7 of 2019) which stipulates that the Council will offer financial aid to vulnerable groups of people in society, namely, women, children, disadvantaged groups like ethnic minorities, autistic people or physically challenged or people with visionary or hearing impairments, disaster victims, river eroded people who have been turned into slum dwellers, tea garden workers and other low income groups of people who live below the poverty line.
4. Bangladesh EPZ Labor Act, 2019
5. Bangladesh Rehabilitation Council Act, 2018
6. National Education and Textbook Curriculum Board Act, 2018
7. Hindu Religious Welfare Trust Act, 2018
8. Wage Earner's Welfare Board Act, 2018
9. Christian Religious Welfare Trust Act 2018
10. Buddhist Religious Welfare Trust Act 2018
11. Bangladesh Rural Development Act 2018
12. Women and Children Repression Prevention (Amendment) Act, 2020 (Act No. 22 of 2020)
13. Day Care Centre Act 2021

14. Bangladeshi Nursing and Midwifery Council (Amendment)(Act No. 03 of 2023)
15. Muslim Family Laws 2023 (Act No. 26 of 2023)
16. Digital Security Act 2023 (Act No. 39 of 2023)
17. The Textile Act 2018
18. The National Sports Council Act 2018
19. Public Sector Act 2022
20. Family Code Act, 2023

Rules:

- ✓ Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) Rules 2018
 - ✓ Child Marriage Restraint Rules 2018
 - ✓ National Human Trafficking Suppression Agency Rules 2017
 - ✓ Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Rules 2013
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- ✓ The Government of Bangladesh had an earlier National Action Plan to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Children starting in 2013, which has been updated and revised based on the SDGs and the present context and priorities including those identified in the Seventh Five Year Plan (FYP). The new action plan was published in November 2018. The vision is to develop a society without violence against women and children by 2030. The missions are to ensure accountability and promote agencies for women's empowerment and gender equality to develop and implement specific program plans for preventing and redressing violence against women and girls (VAWG). Its objectives include improving the implementation of existing laws and policies against VAWG. Other strategies including increasing social awareness, improving socio-economic conditions of women and protection services as well as prevention and rehabilitation.
 - ✓ In 2018, the High Court (HC) Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh issued a landmark judgement by prohibiting the derogatory "two-finger test" on rape survivors. The Court further ruled that lawyers cannot ask any question to rape survivors that could hurt their dignity during the trial proceedings. The state further ensured strong punishment of rapists. The 'Women and Children Repression Prevention Act' was amended in 2020 to confirm highest punishment for rape – death penalty.
 - ✓ There has been rigorous action by the GoB, International agencies and NGOs to follow up the High Court's directives to prevent sexual harassment of women and girls in workplace, educational institutions and other public places. In line with the HC directives, the Directorate of the Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) of the Ministry of Education (MOE) has developed a comprehensive guideline for anti-sexual harassment committees established at education institutes.

B. Community Engagement:

- ✓ 495 information service center have been established in 495 Upazilas. One information service officer and two information service assistants are appointed there. The information service officer and information service assistants perform different activities in the information service center such as communication through internet, providing primary healthcare, ensuring the availability of government services of the upazila, application for admission, application for services, video conference, e-commerce, Internet browsing etc. Total 1,11,152 under privileged rural women have been rendered services from information service center in mentioned time.
- ✓ **Door to Door Service:** The information service officer and information service assistant visit door to door in the concerned Upazilas to solve problems relating to education, health, laws, business, gender and agriculture through tech friendly devices. They also advice them to be conscious about various social problems of the rural women. Total 14,04,318 beneficiaries have been given services through door to door service.
- ✓ **Uthan Boithok (Courtyard Meetings):** In each courtyard meeting, 50 rural women participate. Monthly 2 (two) Uthan Boithok are arranged by each Information service center. The concerned UNO, the agriculture officer, the education officer, the fisheries officer, the health officer, the government IT experts and other relevant government officials present there as resource persons to make open discussion about the issues related to IT, education, health, agriculture, law, dowry system, women trafficking, child marriage, evetiging, drug addiction, legal assistance etc. Total 330969 under privileged rural women have been served through courtyard meeting.

C. Advocacy:

- ✓ **Address gender related discriminatory laws:** Undertake strategies and guidelines for reform initiatives- collect statistics to take evidence-based advocacy initiative to address gaps in the existing laws and policies and undertake reform measures/ advocacy programs with relevant ministries.
- ✓ The toll free helpline has been incorporated in more than 250 million textbooks of class VI to Class XI.

D. Budget Allocation:

- ✓ The government has taken several other initiatives with a view to engendering/strengthening the national machinery for promoting and protecting women's rights e.g. introducing gender responsive budgeting, national action plan for the implementation of the National Women Development Policy (NWDP), SDG

Action Plan. Since 2009, the GoB has been applying GRB. Further to earlier attempts to address gender analysis at the planning stage and in consistency with the GRB efforts, at present 44 Ministries and divisions have adopted gender responsive budgeting. Under the GRB project officers from MOWCA, WID Focal points from 54 Ministries, responsible personnel for budgeting and planning in different Ministries as well as 77 representatives of the civil society have received training on gender responsive planning and budgeting.

S.L		2024-25	2023-24	2022-23
1.	Total Budget	7,97,000(in crore)	7,61,785 (in crore)	678064 (in crore)
2.	Women	2,71,819 (34.11%)	2,58,997 (34%)	229816 (33.89%)

Source: Gender Budget 2024-25

E. Support Services for Victims:

- ✓ Under the project of MSPWAW, 14 one-stop crisis centers to provide essential services to abused women and children in Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong, Sylhet, Khulna, Barisal, Rangpur, Faridpur, Cox's Bazar, Noakhali, Pabna, Bogra, Kushtia, Comilla and Mymensingh Medical College Hospitals. Center (OCC) has been set up. On the recommendation of the committee formed for the allocation of space for Gopalganj One-Stop Crisis Center, the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs has issued a semi-official letter to the Health Services Department. Legal services, police services, psychosocial counseling services, medical services and other necessary services have been provided to a total of 65443 abused women and children from the beginning till May 2024.
- ✓ A total of 137,203 women and children have been provided necessary services till May 2024 through a total of 67 one-stop crisis cells in 47 district headquarter hospitals and 20 upazila health complexes to facilitate access to services for women and children who are victims of torture nationwide. One-stop crisis cell mainly ensures necessary services through referral mechanism in coordination with hospital authorities and local administration.
- ✓ 2009 From the National Trauma Counseling Center, psychosocial counseling of all types of women and children and training of officers of public-private and international organizations and teachers of various schools and colleges on counseling awareness, basic skills, community, supportive counseling etc. 8 Regional Trauma Counseling Centers have been set up in Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong, Sylhet, Khulna, Barisal, Rangpur, Faridpur Medical College Hospitals in 2017 to facilitate psychosocial counseling services for women and children. A total of 17747 people have been provided counseling services from the National Trauma Counseling Center till May 2024. A total of 26871 people were provided counseling services from the Regional Trauma Counseling Center.

- ✓ In 2012, National Helpline Center to prevent violence against women and children was established under the project. Call or SMS the helpline center 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The National Toll Free 109 number dedicated to prevent violence against women has been uploaded on all government websites in 2020 to inform the public at large. Also, since 2017, Toll Free Helpline has been printed in the textbooks for immediate assistance in cases of violence against women, prevention of child marriage etc. The number is playing an effective role in preventing sexual harassment and child marriage. A total of 7159897 calls have been received since May 2024. About 12,000 child marriages have been prevented through this helpline center.
- ✓ Joy Mobile Apps: Mobile apps 'JOY' developed on smartphones to provide immediate support to abused women and children. When women or children are going to be victims of abuse, clicking on this app will immediately send a message with GPS location to the National Helpline Center (Toll Free Helpline 109) and the 3 FNF numbers provided in the app. Technical upgradation of apps is in progress.
- ✓ To ensure speedy and fair justice for women and children who are victims of torture, services are being provided through DNA testing of samples through the National Forensic DNA Profiling Laboratory at Dhaka Medical College campus. It should be noted that departmental DNA screening laboratories have been set up in Rajshahi, Chittagong, Sylhet, Barisal, Khulna, Rangpur and Faridpur Medical College Hospitals to help women and children victims of torture nationwide. These laboratories collect case samples from remote areas of the country and send them for DNA testing to the National Forensic DNA Profiling Laboratory. Since inception till May, 2024, 9880 DNA tests have been completed against 31597 samples.
- ✓ Monthly reports and follow-up based on national daily newspaper reports : A monthly report will be prepared on reports of violence against women and children published in 25 national daily newspapers. Quarterly and annual reports in this regard will be prepared and maintained. These reports will lead to follow-up of traumatic events and efforts to provide services to survivors. Later all these reports and related case studies will be sent to the Ministry. The activity will be continued through the proposed project.
- ✓ Public awareness activities to prevent violence against women and children : Brochures, leaflets, publications on various activities of the project will be distributed among government and non-governmental organizations across the country. National Helpline 109 and National Trauma Counseling Centers and Regional Trauma Counseling Centers will prepare and telecast TV scrolls regarding online/tele counseling services. OCC, DNA Laboratory, National Trauma Counseling Center, National Helpline Center, Joy Mobile Apps etc. will be provided training for the related professionals to prevent violence against women and children

and related workshops and seminars will be organized. Also, various programs are organized on the occasion of International Women's Day and International Women's Violence Prevention Committee.

F. Education and Awareness Campaigns:

- ✓ The government of Bangladesh has hugely invested in girls' education. We are providing stipends for 15 million girls students which helps to prevent child marriage
- ✓ Bangladesh has already achieved gender parity in primary and secondary education.
- ✓ Girls enrollment in secondary school has been increased day by day and dropout rates has been decreased. A total of 10,24,803 female students passed the examinations with 84.47 percent success rate according to the SSC results published by 12 may 2024.

G. International Collaboration:

- ✓ CEDAW. Bangladesh ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1984. After ratification 8 periodic reports were sent by the government to CEDAW committee. Now the 9th periodic report is on processing
- ✓ Beijing Platform for Action.
- ✓ Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2022.
- ✓ SARRC Convention on Preventing Trafficking in Women & Children for Prostitution 2022.
- ✓ Village Court

Conclusion:

Eliminating violence against women and girls requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the deep-rooted gender stereotypes and negative social norms that perpetuate such violence. By intensifying efforts through education, legal reforms, community engagement, support services, and international collaboration, societies may move closer to achieve gender equality and ensure the safety and dignity of all women and girls. The fight against gender-based violence is not only a matter of justice but also a crucial step towards building more equitable and humane societies.