

B A N G L A D E S H
**LEADING IN WOMEN
EMPOWERMENT**



Bangladesh: Leading in Women Empowerment

Introduction

Bangladesh has achieved remarkable success in advancing women under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina; the country is regarded as an example for the empowerment of women in the world. She has long recognized that the future of her nation depends largely on the empowerment of women. One of her prime objectives is women's overall development by ensuring their equal and active participation in the mainstream socioeconomic and political activities. Bangladesh has improved gender parity across all parts of society. The World Economic Forum recently ranked Bangladesh first in gender equality among South-Asian nations for the second consecutive year. Bangladesh has had a steady climb in the 'Gender Gap Index of 2017, rising to no. 47 in the world.

The government has initiated various programmes and projects for the development of women. The Sixth and Seventh Five Year Plan of Bangladesh government consider women's engagement in political and economic activities as a cross-cutting issue and one of the main drivers of transformation. The current government is committed to attaining gender equality and empowering women as well as implementing the declarations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action. The government now continues to work relentlessly to ensure women's overall development through equal and active participation in the socio-economic activities and removing the various impediments to their empowerment.

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01

ACHIEVING GENDER PARITY



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We have to work together to create a safer environment for women and girls, equip them with the right skills and education, and empower them as agents of social transformation.

Sheikh Hasina

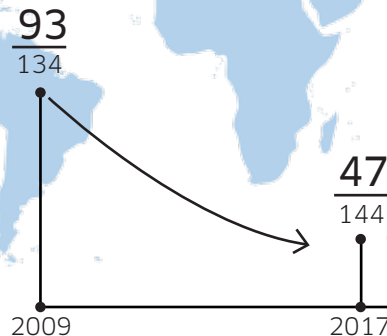
Honourable Prime Minister of People's Republic of Bangladesh

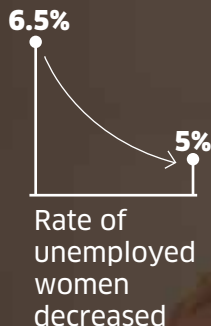
Bangladesh is featured as one of the top ten nations to have reduced gender inequality by political empowerment of women. Bangladesh has been making steady progress year-on-year in reducing gender inequality. Bangladesh is also featured as one of the top 10 nations which have reduced gender inequality by political empowerment of women.

The World Economic Forum recently ranked Bangladesh first in gender equality among South Asia nations for the second consecutive year. The Forum's "Gender Gap Index of 2017" highlights Bangladesh's

success in four key areas: education, economic participation, health, and political empowerment. While no country has eliminated the gender gap completely, Bangladesh has had a steady climb in the ranking, rising 25 places over the preceding year to no. 47 in the world. Bangladesh consistently outperforms its neighbors India and Pakistan on measures of gender inequality. Bangladesh has substantially achieved MDGs with regard to gender parity which will help to implement SDG-5, Gender Equality before 2030. The country is well on track to achieve gender parity in all aspects of life.

**Bangladesh in
World Economic Forum's
Gender Gap Index 2017**





Labour force participation rate of women is **35.6%** higher than the South Asian average of 35%

54,000 women entrepreneurs received \$600 million as SME fund in 2017



Women workforce contributes to **34%** of the GDP

ICT division actively involved in supporting education and entrepreneurship among rural women

2.1 Economic Measures

Women's economic participation is regarded by the current government as the fundamental to strengthening their rights and enabling them to have control over their lives. It has been encouraging female participation in the workforce, bringing millions of women into the labour force and increasing women's participation leading to increased productivity and economic growth. To expedite women's economic empowerment, comprehensive initiatives have been undertaken by providing extensive training, creating job opportunities, ensuring participation in labour market and providing support to small and medium women entrepreneurs. Labour force participation rate of women was 35.6 percent in 2016 which was higher than the South Asian average of 35 percent. All programmes related to women development and employment are being re-structured in order to enhance women participation in all economic activities to 50 percent by 2021.

Banks and non-bank institutions are offering easy-loan to women entrepreneurs. Women are now entitled to get loan at discounted rate of 10 percent interest and 15 percent refinance fund is reserved for them. Women are also entitled to Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) loan over \$30,000 free of collateral, against personal

Collateral Free Micro Credit For Rural Women at only **5% Service Charge**

Entitlement To collateral Free SME loan up to tk **2.5 million**

15% Refinance Fund reserved for women entrepreneurs

Women entrepreneurs receive **10% of small enterprise fund**

Women entrepreneurs receive **10% industrial plots**

guarantee. In 2017, total 54,000 women entrepreneurs received \$600 million as SME fund. This indicates that disbursement towards women entrepreneurs has been increasing both in amount and numbers. Moreover, all banks and financial institutions have set up services dedicated to women entrepreneur. For the economic empowerment of rural women, collateral free micro-credit is given with 5% service charge. Women entrepreneurs receive 10% of the Small Enterprise Fund and 10% industrial plots. The government has also established and operating the Joyeeta Foundation, which is working to commercially engage grass-root women in the supply chain from production to distribution.

Recently, the government has taken a \$30 million project titled 'Income generating

activities (IGA), to make rural women self-sufficient, under which they will receive a four-month duration training on various trades across the 426 sub-districts of the country.

Currently, about 4 million women are working in the Ready-made Garment sector (RMG). Working conditions in the garment industry have significantly improved, thanks to widespread and stringent measures taken by Sheikh Hasina's government. Women's participation in agricultural production is promoted through access to agricultural technologies and loans given for agro-processing, homestead gardening, nurseries, bee-keeping and other activities. Forty-three percent of rural women now contribute to fisheries-related activities. Women are make up more than 60 percent of the fish farmers in Bangladesh.





2.2 | Inclusion in Education

In the past decade under Sheikh Hasina's leadership, Bangladesh has gained unprecedented success in girl's education. To empower women, the current government has attached top priority to girls' education. In that period, coverage of stipend program for girls has been extended manifold and this strategy resulted in almost 100 percent enrollment rate and gender parity. Education of girls up to degree level in public schools is also free. At secondary and higher secondary level, 2.7 million girls received \$ 90 million from different stipend programmes in 2016-17.

Gender parity is achieved in primary and secondary education. Net enrolment rate in primary education has increased from 60.5% in 1990-91 to 98.7%, with 99.4% for girl students. In primary schools, female enrolment is now 51% and in secondary schools it is now 53%, while male is 47%, a sharp departure from even just a few years ago when male was 65% and female was 35%. In primary schools, girl's dropout rate was 24.20 percent in 2012 it got down to 17.00% in 2015. Bangladesh is also well on track to achieve gender parity in tertiary education too, which has increased from 0.37 in 1990-91 to 0.66 in 2016. Female are also encouraged to take teaching as profession and currently 60 percent primary school teachers are women.

Girls enrollment rate at the primary schools is



2.7 million girls receiving stipend at the secondary and higher secondary level

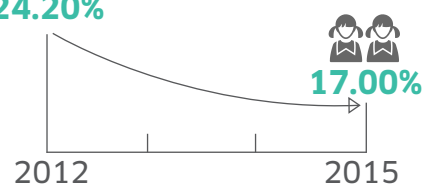


51% students are female in primary schools



53% students are female in secondary schools

Girl's dropout rate





2.3 Improved Health Service

Government enacted Health Policy in 2011 and built a health infrastructure enabling people particularly women and girls at grassroots to avail health care free of cost. It introduced several Social Safety Net Programms (SSNPs) to address health related needs of both rural and urban women.

Fertility declines and increased uptake of maternal and reproductive services over the past two decades, especially antenatal and post-natal care, skilled birth attendance, and facility deliveries, have contributed to the reduction of neonatal deaths. Significant progress has also been made in reducing the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) from 569 in 1990 to 176 in 2015 with an average annual

reduction of 4.7%. The current government plans to reduce MMR to 63 per 100,000 live births by 2030. During Sheikh Hasina's first tenure at the office, she introduced Maternal Health Voucher Scheme. Maternal Health Voucher Schemes provides a voucher package of three ante-natal checkups, safe delivery under skilled birth attendants, one post-natal checkup and transport cost. Currently .15 million women are receiving support under this scheme.

Steps have been taken for delivery of primary healthcare services through community clinics to rural, marginal and vulnerable women. Rural, marginal and vulnerable women now get primary healthcare services at the 16,000



Community Clinics (CCs). The construction of CC establishment started in 1998. On average 10 million patients visit in CCs per month and among the service seekers about 80% are women and children. At the beginning of Sheikh Hasina's second tenure in 2009, her government initiated a project with the title of 'Revitalization of Community Health Care Initiatives in Bangladesh (RCHCIB)' to further develop the Community Clinics (CCs) and strengthen their operations in delivering

primary health care. Moreover, another 13000 maternity centers are established across the country which have been providing service and advice to disadvantaged women on education, healthcare, nutrition, maternal and child care, and interest free microcredit. Sheikh Hasina led government has extended social safety net to bring disadvantaged women under health coverage. Due to some effective legislative measures, women now get six months of paid maternity leave.

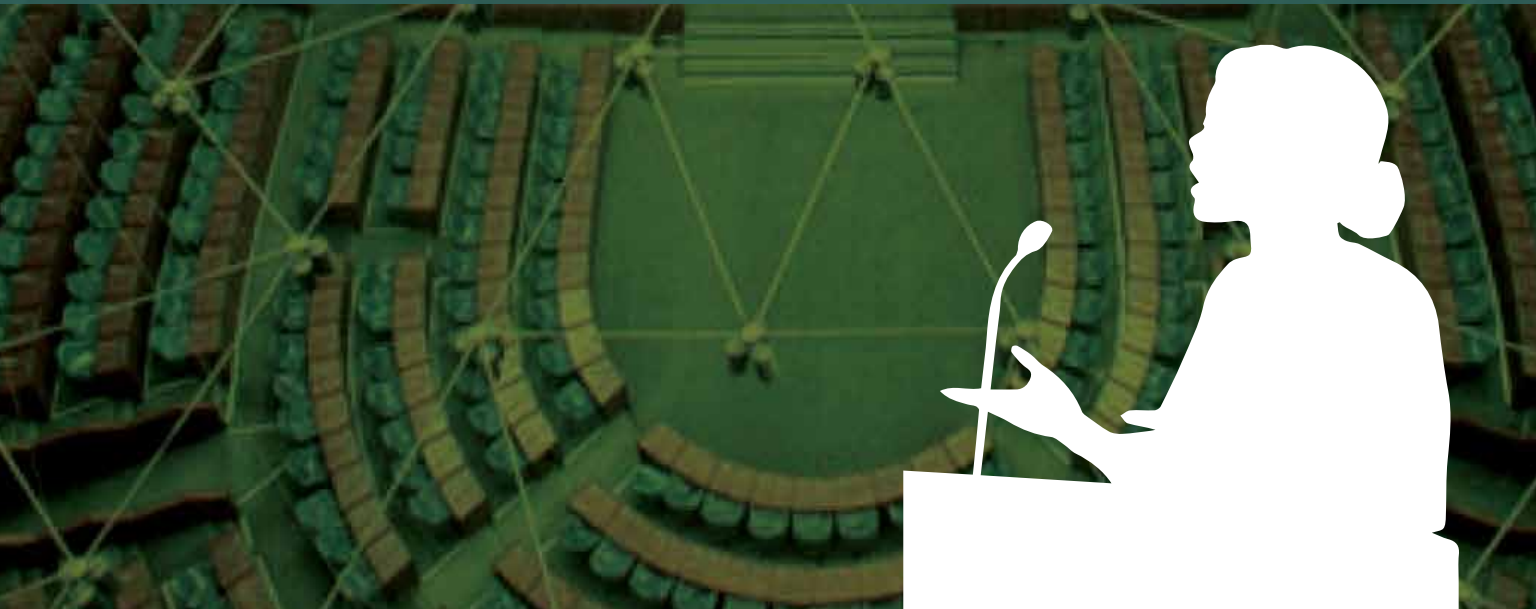


13000
maternity
centers established



0.15 million
women
receiving support under
Maternal Health Voucher Scheme





3.1 | Political Empowerment of Women

PM Sheikh Hasina received loud appreciation in home and abroad for astonishing success in promoting women in the political field. In 2011, her government increased the number of women reserve seats to 50 from 45. Current Bangladesh parliament has 70 women members, which is 20 percent of the total 350 seats. Women member was 12.7 percent in 1990. Bangladesh is the only country in South Asia which has a woman prime minister and leader of the House, woman leader of the opposition, woman speaker and deputy leader of the house. Bangladesh won Women in Parliament (WIP) Award for regional leadership

in the South and Southeast Asia category for closing gap in politics.

The Local Government Second Amendment Act 1997 passed by PM Hasina-led government is seen as a milestone towards ensuring women's equal access and increased participation in local level governance. This amendment provided direct elections to reserved seats for women in local level elections. Her government has introduced a post of female vice-chairman for each Upazila (sub-division) bringing an amendment to Upazila Parishad Act.

Women hold **50 reserve seats** in Bangladesh National Parliament

Current parliament has **70 women members** which is **20%** of total seat

13,500 elected female members are working in different tiers of local government

Bangladesh won the **Women in Parliament Award** in the South and Southeast Asia categories for closing gender gap in politics.

3.2 | Women in Civil Administration

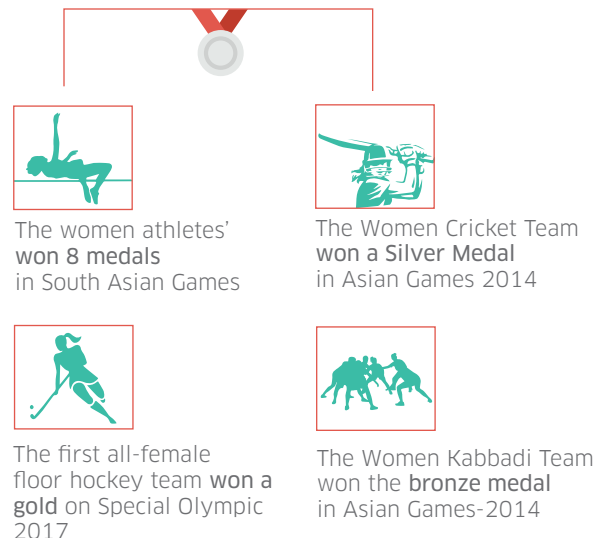
In the past decade, increased participation of women is visible and they are in different tiers of the civil administration. About 1,100 women are now working in the civil service. Women are playing the role District Commissioner (DC) in 6 districts out of total 64. Among 206 Additional District Commissioners (ADCs), 16 are women. One hundred and six women hold the post of Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) at the sub-district level administrative unit, out of total 491 units. Currently 10 women are acting as Secretary at different ministries which is 13 percent of total

number of secretaries. Number of women employees in government jobs increased to 378,354 in 2015 from 227,114 in 2009. top administration positions- secretaries, additional secretaries, joint secretaries, deputy commissioners, top positions of police, armed forces and UN peacekeepers, are all indicators of advancing women's empowerment. Many of these have been possible due to a reserve quota created by this government for women employment at every level of administration.



3.3 | Increased Participation in Sports

Bangladesh boasts of women participation in athletics, swimming, shooting, etc. The Ministry of Youth and Sports is ensuring participation of female in sports. Sports associations offer incentives and special training to women participants. The women's cricket in Bangladesh has travelled a long distance since the team's inception in 2007. Women's Under 16 football team recently qualified for the Asian Football Confederation Championship. Athlete Mabia Akter Simanto won gold in 63kg weightlifting category at the 2016 South Asia Games. She also won gold in 63 kg during Commonwealth Youth competition. Another woman athlete Mahfuza Khatun Shila became the first ever female swimmer from the country to clinch a South Asian Games gold medal in 100 metre breaststroke. Government has established women sports complexes, where women athletes, footballers, cricketers, volleyball players, swimmers, gymnasts are being groomed.





4.1 | Measures to Prevent Violence Against Women

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her government have been strengthening the country's policies and legislative framework to ensure women's rights and combat violence against women. Her government first initiated the concept of gender responsive budget in the 2009-10 fiscal year. Twenty ministries adopted gender responsive budget in 2011-12. The government passed the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010, which was the first recognition of the problem of domestic violence in Bangladesh by the State. Later in 2013, The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Rules was passed for ensuring proper implementation of the act. Child Marriage Control Act, 2013, the latest amendment to this act has been approved by her Cabinet which provides for strict

punishments for marriage of girls below the age of 18. Her government has also enacted the Human Trafficking Deterrence and Suppression Act 2012. This Act complying with the International standards stressed on the protection of the rights of the victims of human trafficking and ensuring safe migration.

A National Helpline Center for violence against children and women has been established to provide support to any women and their families. Women can get necessary information and support by calling the 24-hour Helpline Number 109. One Stop Crisis Centre operates in 6 divisions to give medical, legal and police assistance to women victims of violence. There is also a Trauma Counseling Centre.

4.2 | National Women Development Policy 2011

Sheikh Hasina's government adopted the National Women Development Policy 2011 to promote women's right. Under the policy, women have greater rights to employment, inheritance and education. Refuting all the objections raised by political oppositions and conservative forces, PM Hasina has reiterated that the new legislation is not against Islamic doctrines and that she is committed to women development. Ministry of Women and Childrean Affairs has formulated a national work plan for implementing the policy.

Guaranteeing full control over property, health, education, training, information, inheritance, credit, technology and opportunity

4.3 | Measures for Social Inclusion

The government has taken several initiatives for those women who are in need of financial and other types of assistance under the social safety net schemes. Support like household level asset accumulation, training, micro-enterprise development and employment are offered under these schemes. Under the Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) program, a substantial program for the development of vulnerable community who lives below the poverty line, the government has assisted 750,000 women in the two-year circle of 2015-2017. Extensive social safety net programmes have also been undertaken to provide various kinds of allowances, such as destitute women allowance, maternity and lactating mother allowance, disabled women allowance, divorced women allowance, etc. Widowed, deserted and destitute women receive monthly allowance; currently the

amount is Tk. 600 (more than \$ 7) each month. More than 1.15 million women received \$ 86 million from this scheme in 2017. Another \$ 37.5 million was distributed among .5 million poor pregnant women as maternity allowance during same period. Enhanced participation and livelihood of rural poor women is a priority programme of the government implemented through the "One House, One Farm Project", which gives priority to female households in every village. Government has revised the 'One House One Farm' project for the 3rd time which was introduced back in 2009. Its coverage extended to some 40,950 wards, under 4,550 unions of 490 sub-districts in all the 64 districts. Government raised the number of recipients of widow, deserted and oppressed women allowance to 1.27 million and maternity allowance to .6 million during 2017-18.



Conclusion

In the present decade, Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in educating women and empowering them in the health sector and in the political arena. The government, in association with policy partners, the civil society and rights groups, continues to promote gender equality and empowerment. Today, women in Bangladesh are encouraged to make legal rights claims, compete for elected office, access information and technology and strive for sports and community leadership roles. Strong implementation of the National Women Development Policy has been making sure that women are entitled to equal opportunities in every sphere. The government is now looking to further prioritize women in the labor market with an aim to increase significantly their participation in the mainstream workforce, thus expanding the space for them to contribute towards building a sustainable future. Under the visionary leadership of Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh has come a long way in achieving the 2030 agenda of gender equity for Sustainable Development.

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Published by Centre for Research and Information(CRI), April 2018

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