

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





# Bangladesh: Leading in Women's Empowerment



# Introduction

Bangladesh has improved gender parity across all sectors by ensuring greater participation in socio-economic and political activities. The country is now regarded as an example for the empowerment of women in the world. Continuous efforts during last decade have helped the country attain a steady progress in gender equality. Bangladesh has secured the first spot in gender equality among South Asian countries for the second consecutive year at the Gender Gap Index. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has long recognized that the future of her nation depends largely on the empowerment of women. Her government has initiated various policies, plan and interventions for the development of women. In the Sixth and Seventh Five Year Plan, the government considered women's engagement in political and economic activities as one of the main drivers of transformation. The government now continues to ensure women's overall development and active participation in the mainstream socio-economic activities and remove various impediments to their empowerment.

Allocation for women development was \$ 3244 million in 2009-10, which increased to \$ 13335 million in 2017-18. Average annual growth rate in last 7 years was around 22 percent. The country has approved the highest allocation in history for the sector in the budget for 2018-19 fiscal year. Women's advancement through access to education, health, labour market, employment, and social protection have been prioritized in the FY18-19 budget which is around 30 percent of total budget size. Bangladesh's achievements in the past decade have been exemplary in many sectors such as in reducing infant and child mortality, poverty alleviation, increase in women entrepreneurship, education, and health. The current government is committed to attaining gender equality and empowering women as well as fulfill all its pledges.



# Table of contents

Introduction	
Chapter 1: Achieving Gender Parity .....	5
Chapter 2: Initiatives for Equal Opportunity .....	6
Chapter 3: Increased Participation .....	11
Chapter 4: Special Measures for Women Empowerment .....	13
Conclusion	

01

## ACHIEVING GENDER PARITY



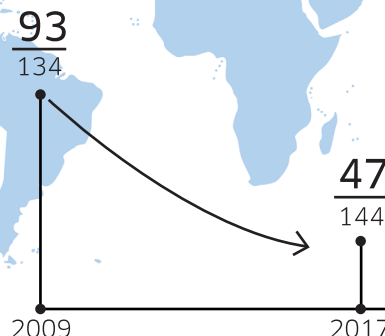
The pace of women empowerment has been attaining greater progress under the governance of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who has widened the door for the females towards proving their worth as an equal force in larger number in all key areas of the country. Now, women are better educated, safer, and more economically prosperous than their previous generations. Today, women are accepted and valued not only as wives and help-mates, but also as farmers, parliamentarians, and entrepreneurs. The whole nation benefits.

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.

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.

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







## 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. 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.

Women's participation is increasing in many non-traditional and emerging sectors, such as hotels and restaurants, transportation, food

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** is reserved for women entrepreneurs

Women entrepreneurs are getting credit at a concessional rate of **10% interest**

**10% of all industrial plots** reserve for women entrepreneurs

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

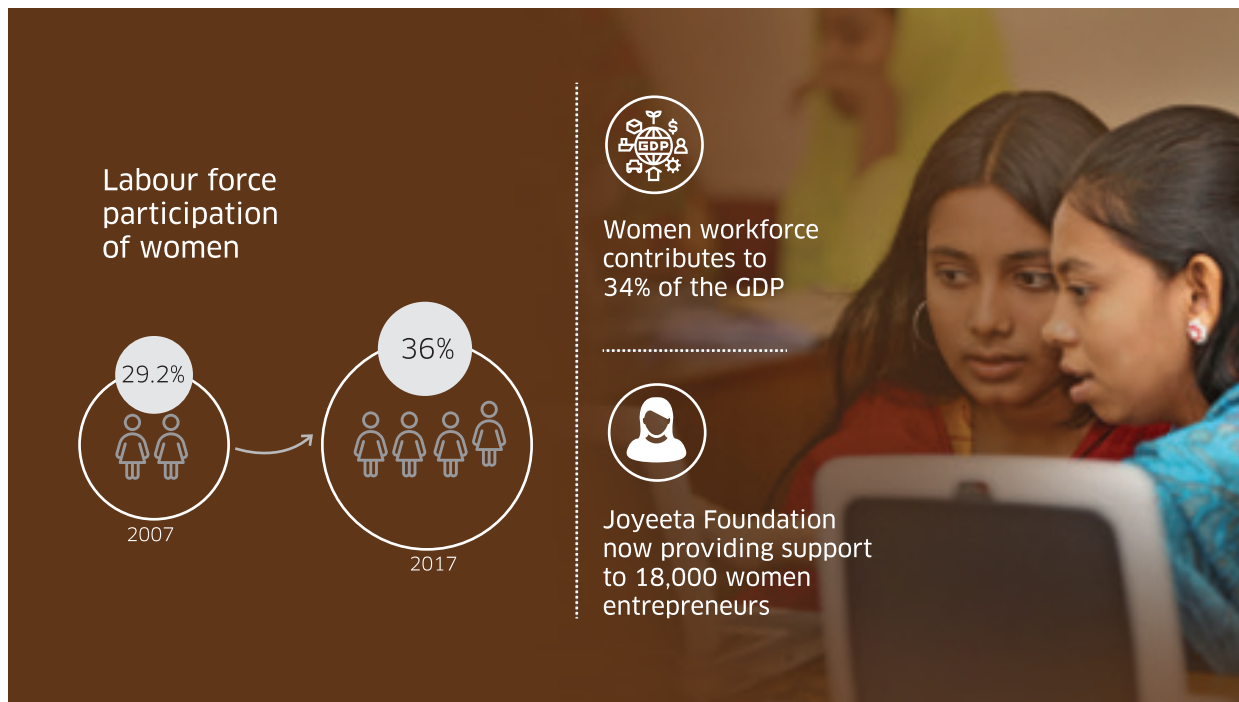
processing. With increased access to higher education, the prospect for getting into high valued job-market also has expanded for women in Bangladesh. The proportion of employed women with no formal schooling almost halved from 41 per cent to 21 per cent from 2010 to 2013, while the proportion with higher secondary education and degrees rose markedly as the employed female population has become more skilled.

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 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.

The Department of Women Affairs (DWA) has been implementing various programmes for creating employment and welfare of the rural destitute and insolvent women under its revenue and development budget. Currently, DWA provides training to rural disadvantaged poor women through its women training centres located in 64 district headquarters. Since 2017, government has been implementing Income Generating Activity (IGA) project worth \$ 30 million for rural women to make them self-reliant through income-generating training at upazila (sub-district) level across the country. The project is being implemented in all 426 upazilas of the country. Rural women are receiving a four-month training on various trades, including tailoring, tourism, handicraft, mushroom growing, carpet making, salesmanship, mobile phone repairing, and computer handling.

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.





## 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 2017.

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. Enrolment of girls in technical education increased by 44% since 2010. 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



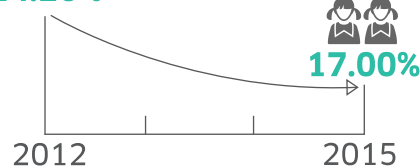
**53%**

students are female in  
secondary schools

Girl's dropout rate



**24.20%**



**17.00%**





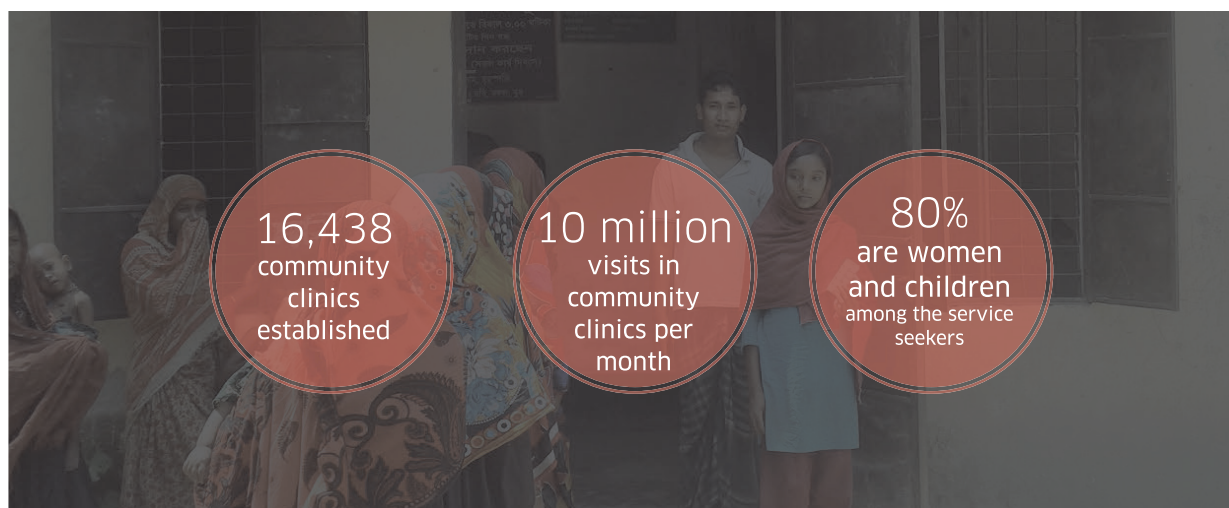
## 2.3 Improved Health Service

Bangladesh made 'enormous' health advances in the last decade. Government built a health infrastructure enabling people particularly women and girls at grassroots to avail health care free of cost.

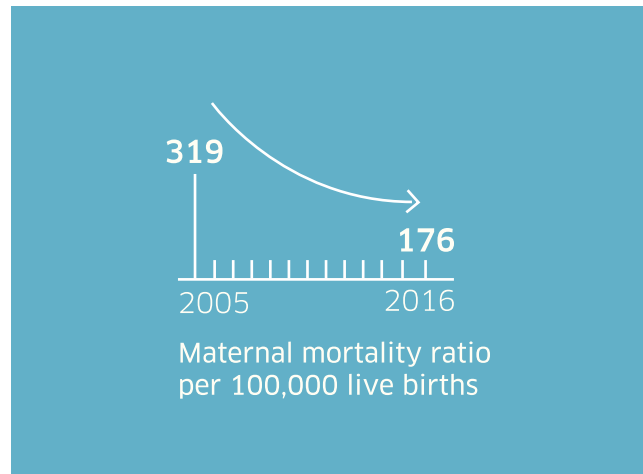
Fertility declines and increased uptake of maternal and reproductive services over the past two decades, especially antenatal and post-natal care, skilled birth attendance, and facility deliveries, have contributed to the reduction of neonatal deaths. Significant progress has also been made in reducing the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) from 242 in 2010 to 176 in 2016 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 16,438 Community Clinics (CCs). The construction of CC establishment started in 1998. On average 10 million patients visit in CCs per month and

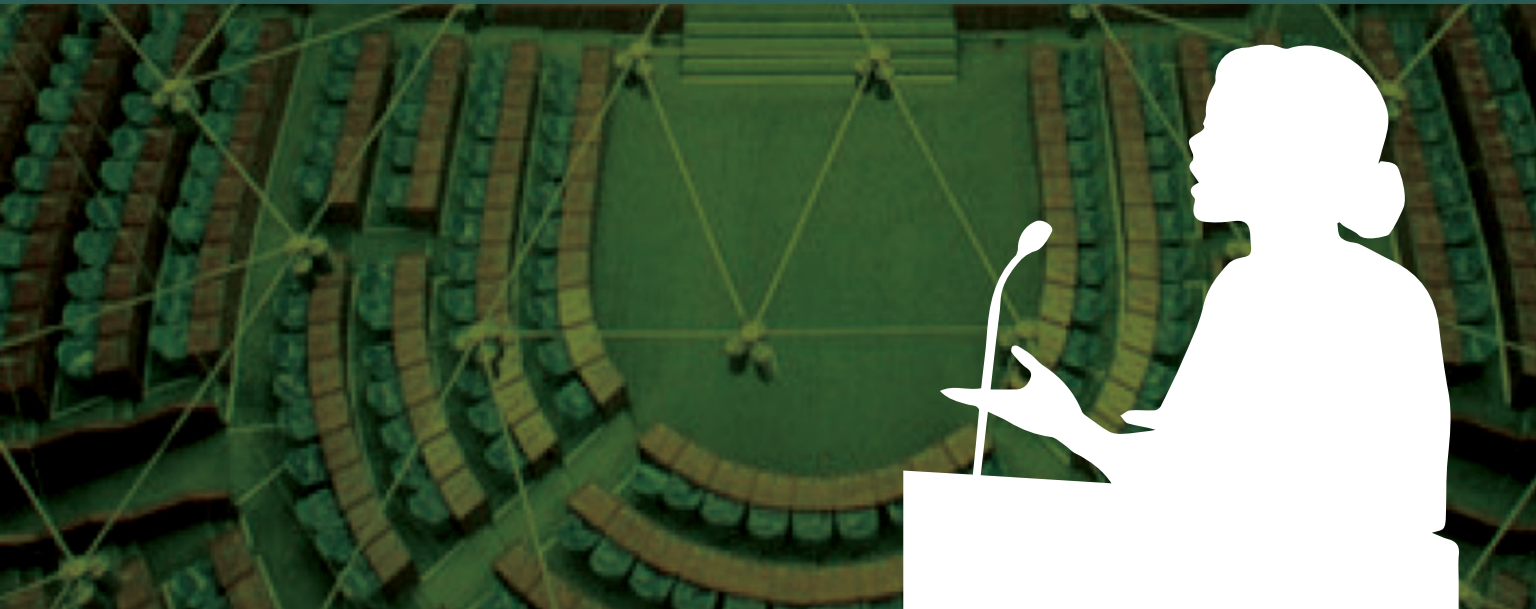


among the service seekers about 80% are women and children. At the beginning of Sheikh Hasina's second tenure in 2009, her government initiated a project with the title of 'Revitalization of Community Health Care Initiatives in Bangladesh (RCHCIB)' to further develop the Community Clinics (CCs) and strengthen their operations in delivering primary health care. Moreover, another 13,000 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.



	<p><b>13,000</b> maternity centers established</p>		<p><b>1,50,000</b> women receiving support under Maternal Health Voucher Scheme</p>
	<p><b>3000</b> midwife positions in government jobs and introduced international standard midwifery course since 2010</p>		<p><b>daycare centres</b> in government and private sector offices</p>
	<p><b>152</b> operating government hospitals to provide 24/7 emergency obstetric care service</p>		<p><b>30,000</b> satellite clinic for child and maternal health care</p>
	<p><b>Special Adolescent Health Program</b> Introduced in line with Global Strategy for Women Children and Adolescent's Health</p>		
	<p><b>6 months paid</b> maternity leave Introduced</p>		





### 3.1 | Political Empowerment

Bangladesh 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

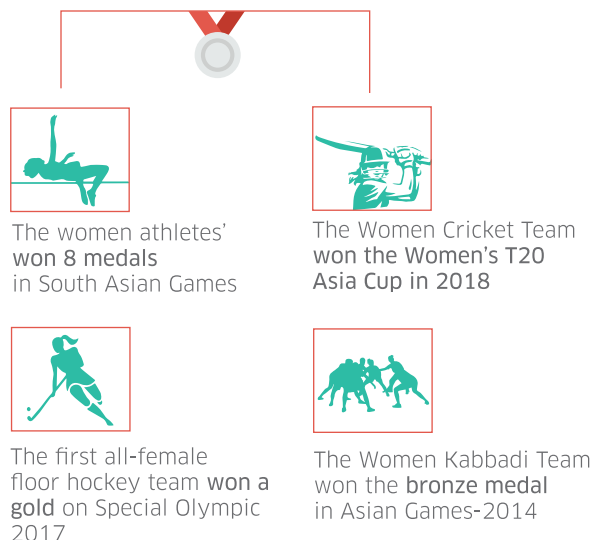
In the past decade, increased participation of women is visible and they are in different tiers of the civil administration. About 1,100 women are now working in the civil service. Women are playing the role District Commissioner (DC) in 6 districts out of total 64. Among 206 Additional District Commissioners (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.



### 3.3 | Increased Participation in Sports

In the recent years, Bangladesh has got acclamation for women's participation and success in different sports i.e. athletics, swimming, shooting, etc. 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. The women cricket team earned their place in the cricket history by bringing Bangladesh's first international trophy namely the Women's T20 Asia Cup in 2018. Women's Under 16 football team recently qualified for the Asian Football Confederation Championship. Athlete Mabiha Akter Simanto won gold in 63kg weightlifting category at the 2016 South Asian 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. Forty-three 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. Another call centre 333 also provide service in cases of eve-teasing, early marriage, dowry related incidents. One Stop Crisis Centre operates in 8 medical college hospital to give medical, legal and police assistance to women victims of violence. There is also a Trauma Counseling Centre.

National  
Women  
Development  
Policy  
2011

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

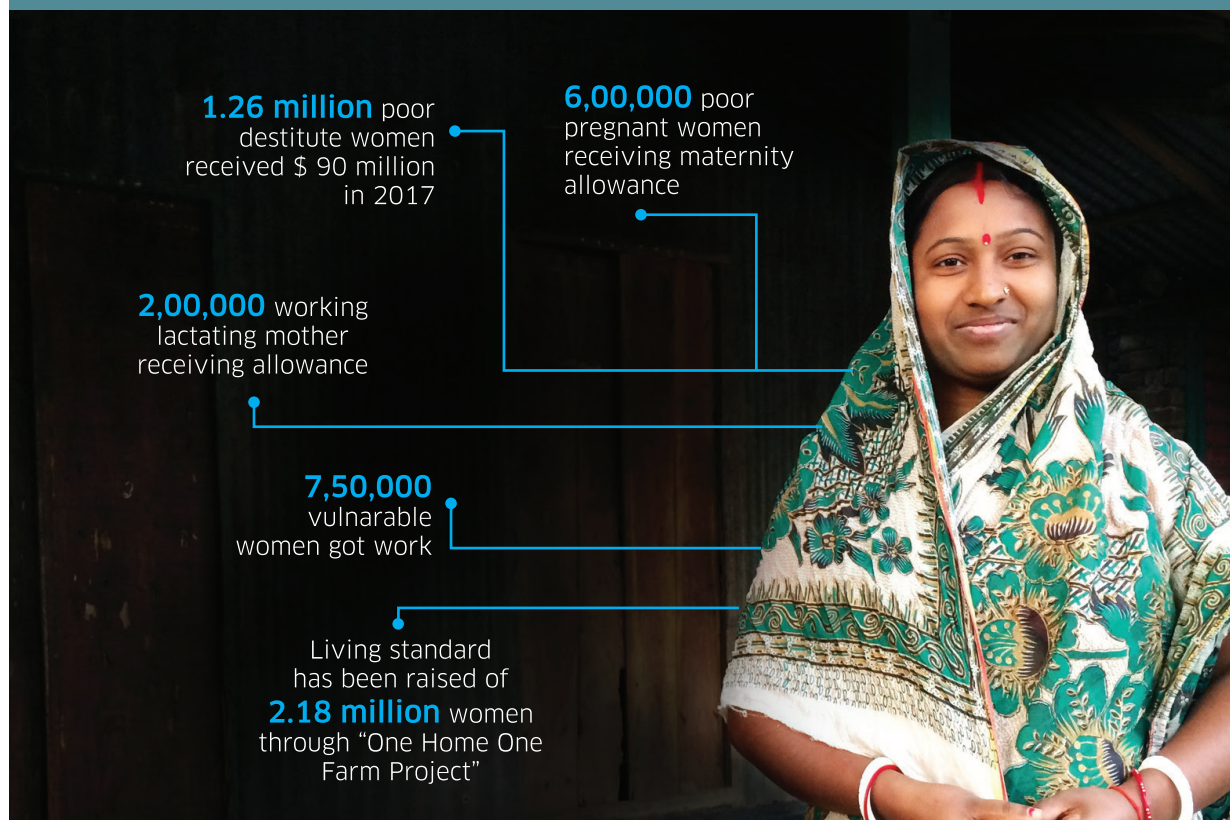


## 4.2 | Measures for Social Inclusion

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 cycle 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 1.26 million women received \$ 90 million from this scheme in 2017. Another \$ 37.5 million was distributed among .6 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.

### Social Safety Net



## 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.



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



**Bangladesh Leading in Women Empowerment**

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

H 2, R 11(New), 32(Old), Mirpur Road, Dhanmondi, Dhaka- 1209

Email: [info@cri.org.bd](mailto:info@cri.org.bd)

[www.cri.org.bd](http://www.cri.org.bd)

**CRI** Centre for Research  
and Information

