

— B A N G L A D E S H —

# THE ROLE MODEL IN WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

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Bangladesh:

The Role Model in Women's Empowerment

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# Introduction

Women of Bangladesh are at the forefront in the endeavor of becoming a progressive and developed country by 2041. Their participation and contribution in sectors such as politics, businesses, sports, armed forces have translated into a socio-economic upsurge the country has witnessed during the first two decades of 21st century.

Gender parity in Bangladesh has improved across all sectors due to greater participation of women in socio-economic and political activities. In the past decade, the country's achievements in girl's education, poverty alleviation, financial inclusion of woman, healthcare, and social safety sectors have been exemplary. Bangladesh has secured the first position in gender equality among South Asian countries for the second consecutive year at the Gender Gap Index. The country is now regarded as an example for the empowerment of women in the world.

Budgetary support for women's development has also been transformed in the last 10 years. Since 2011-12, forty-three ministries have been adopting gender responsive budget. The country saw the highest allocation worth \$16.3 billion in its history for women development in the budget for the 2018-19 fiscal year. This is 5.43 percent of our GDP and 29.65 percent of the total budget.

The government of Bangladesh continues to ensure women's overall development and active participation in the mainstream socio-economic activities and remove all the impediments to their empowerment.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a green and black patterned sari, stands in front of a structure made of bamboo poles. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background is dark and out of focus.

01

## Progress made so far

*Women's empowerment is one of the ten 'Special Initiatives' of the Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the progress of which she oversees herself. Since 2009, she has been undertaking a number of far-reaching and wide-ranging measures to ensure the holistic empowerment of women.*

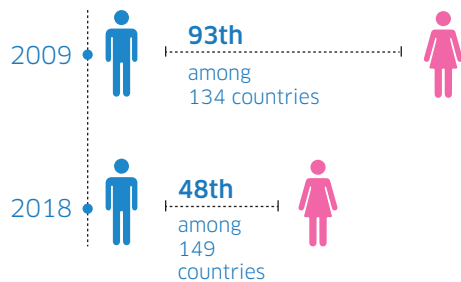
In the past decade, Bangladesh's achievements in reducing infant and child mortality, poverty alleviation, promoting women entrepreneurship, education, and health have been exemplary to the outer world. The pace of women empowerment gained full momentum under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who has widened the door for the females towards proving their worth as an equal force in all the key sectors of development. Now, women are better educated, economically empowered and most importantly confident than their previous generations.





## 1.1 Achieving gender parity

 **Bangladesh in Gender Gap Index 2018**



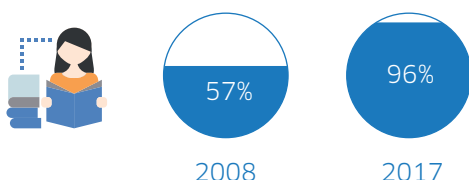
Bangladesh has been making steady progress year-on-year in reducing gender inequality. The country is featured as one of the top ten nations to have reduced gender inequality by political empowerment of women. The World Economic Forum recently ranked Bangladesh first in gender equality among the South Asia nations for the second consecutive year. The Forum's "Gender Gap Index of 2018" 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 to no. 48 in the world in 2018. The country consistently outperforms its neighbors - India and Pakistan on measures of gender inequality. Bangladesh has achieved MDG in regard to gender parity and on the right track in fulfilling Sustainable Development Goal -5 (Gender Equality) before 2030.



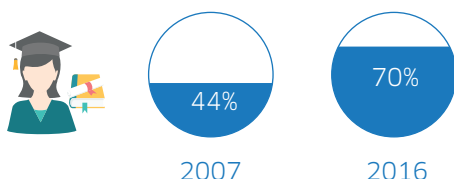
## 1.2 Major successes

*Over the years, the development and empowerment of women in Bangladesh under HPM Sheikh Hasina's watchful leadership has been noticed and applauded by the international community too. She was bestowed with the Global Women's Leadership Award for her outstanding leadership in advancing women's education and entrepreneurship.*

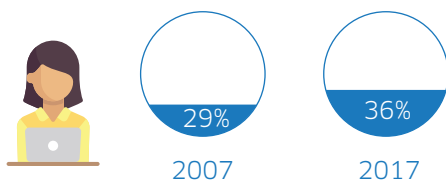
### Enrolment of girls in primary education



### The literacy rate for females



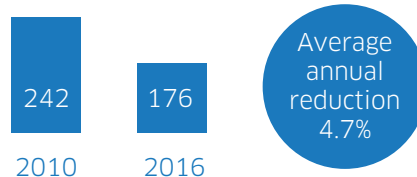
### Women's labour force participation rate



### The number of working women



### Maternal mortality ratio (100,000 live births)



**60%** of all primary school teachers in Bangladesh are women now

**Women's life expectancy of 72.63** is higher than men's life expectancy

Number of women's reserved seats in parliament **increased to 50 from 45**

Sources: BBS, BANBEIS, Ministry of Health



02

## Economic empowerment of women

To expedite women's economic empowerment, comprehensive policies and initiatives have been undertaken for providing extensive training, creating job opportunities and gateway to labour market and financial service to women entrepreneurs.



**20 million** women were in the labour force in 2016-17



**43%** rural women now contribute to fisheries-related activities

31%

1996

39%

2017

Self-employed women increased significantly from **31% to 39%**



**\$ 11.76 million allocated** for the Women Entrepreneurship Fund in 2018-19

### 2.1 Greater participation in labour force

Women in Bangladesh have made progress notably in terms of their participation in the labour force in the last two decades. During the period of 1996-2017, the national rate of female labour force increased from 15.8 to 36.3 percent (which is higher than the South Asian average of 35 percent). Enrolment of women in educational institutions has expedited female participation in the country's labour market. With increased access to higher education, the prospect for getting into high-value jobs also has expanded for women in Bangladesh. The proportion of employed women with no formal schooling decreased and the proportion with higher secondary education and degrees rose markedly. Moreover, rise of corporate and service oriented businesses, as well as the dedicated government policy have contributed to the increase in female employment. After 2010, higher growth in women's participation was observed in sectors like hotel and restaurants, financial intermediations, public administration, education and health.

During the period of 2006-2017, the increase in the women's employment opportunities in the

rural non-farm activities (livestock and poultry raising) was mainly induced by micro credit programmes. More than 90 percent of micro credit borrowers are women and a large part of their credit is used in economic activities like poultry and livestock rearing. The Labour Force Survey data show that a significant portion of females are employed in the agricultural sub-sectors like growing of non-perennial crops (42.3 percent), livestock farming (9.5 percent), etc. Moreover, 43 percent of rural women now contribute to fisheries-related activities. Women now make up more than 60 percent of the fish farmers.

Currently, about 4 million women are working in the Ready-made Garment sector (RMG). Working conditions in the garment industry and social safety situation have significantly improved, thanks to widespread and stringent measures taken by HPM Sheikh Hasina's government.

## 2.2 Women as entrepreneurs

During last two decades (1996-2017), the number of self-employed women increased significantly from 31 percent to 39 percent. Over the time, more women have come up with their own business, creating employment opportunities for themselves and other females. Women's participation has been increasing in

many non-traditional and emerging sectors such as hotels and restaurants, transportation, food processing, etc.

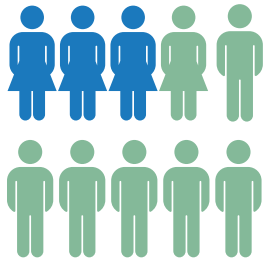
Banks and non-bank institutions are offering easy-loan to women entrepreneurs. Currently, women are entitled to get loan at discounted rate of 10 percent interest and 15 percent refinance fund is reserved for them. Women are also entitled to Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) loan over \$30,000 free of collateral, against personal guarantee. Disbursement towards women entrepreneurs has been increasing both in amount and numbers. Moreover, all banks and financial institutions have set up special services dedicated to women entrepreneur.

For the economic empowerment of rural women, collateral free micro-credit is given on 5 percent service charge. Women entrepreneurs are also entitled to 10 percent of the Small Enterprise Fund and 10 percent industrial plots. In the 2018-19 FY, the government has allocated \$ 11.76 million for the Women Entrepreneurship Fund. Besides, the government has established Joyeeta Foundation, which is working to commercially engage grass-root women in the supply chain from production to distribution. About 18,000 women entrepreneurs under 180 registered women associations are directly engaged with the foundation.





## 2.3 Women in leadership and decision making



Of all government employees **27% are female**



**1,276** women are working as Class I Bangladesh Civil Service officers

The number of female officials in the civil administration, especially at the field level, is increasing fast giving a big boost to women empowerment. At present, 1,276 women (22.42 per cent of the total 5,692) are working as Class I Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) officers. Ten women are working in as many ministries and divisions as secretaries or secretary in charge -the topmost post in the civil administration. There are also 82 female additional secretaries, 99 woman joint secretaries, 306 female deputy secretaries, 394 woman senior assistant secretaries and 389 female assistant secretaries. At least 4 female deputy secretaries are working as Deputy Commissioner (DC), while 15 are working as Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC), 127 women are working as Upazila (sub-district) Nirbahi Officer (UNO) and 134 assistant commissioner of land.

Number of women employees in government jobs has rapidly increased since 2009. Top administration positions- secretaries, additional secretaries, joint secretaries, deputy commissioners, top positions of police are all indicators of advancing women's empowerment. Female soldiers have been lauded for their performance in the Army, Navy and Air Force. Along with other forces, women from Bangladesh are performing responsibly in peacekeeping missions.



### WOMAN IN TOP POSITIONS

In the last four years, the number of woman in top positions rose 4 times. Around 14,000 women held top-tire positions in public and private organizations at the end of 2017. During 2013, the number was around 5,000.

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics





## 2.4 Employment generation programmes

Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWCA) has been implementing various programmes for creating employment and welfare of the rural destitute and insolvent women under its revenue and development budget. Currently, The Department of Women Affairs (DWA) provides training to rural disadvantaged poor women through its women training centres (WTC) located in 64 district headquarters. Every year, 200 women receive training on 5 trades in these WTCs.

Since 2017, government has been implementing Income Generating Activity (IGA) project 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, computer handling, etc. So far 2,17,440 women received training.

Urban Based Women Development Project implemented by MOWCA provides training to

poor, destitute and asset less women of urban areas and engages them in productive and income generating activities. It creates marketing facilities for the products made by the trained women. Government financed \$ 2.4 million in the project for the year 2017-18 which benefited fifty-three thousand women.

Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) runs Comprehensive Rural Employment Support Programme for the poor women in 59 Upazilas under Khulna and Barisal Division. The main objective of the project is to reduce poverty of the poor as well as helpless women and empower them socio-economically. The project mobilizes local resource for capital formation and provide training support to build human capital.

Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) programme, one of the largest under Social Safety Net, enables the poorest rural women and their family members to overcome food insecurity and poor social and economic status.

“One House, One Farm Project”, which gives priority to female households in every village. Government has revised the project for the 3rd time which was introduced in 2009. Its coverage extended to some 40,950 wards, under 4,550 unions of 490 sub-districts in all the 64 districts.



### SKILL TRAINING

Women Training Centres (WTC) located in 64 district headquarters  
Income Generating Activity (IGA) project for rural women in all 426 upazilas

Government financed \$ 2.4 million in Urban Based Women Development Project in 2017-18





03

## Promoting girl's education

*The number of educated young females rose dramatically over the past 10 years.*

In the past decade, under HPM Sheikh Hasina's leadership, Bangladesh has gained unprecedented success in girl's education. Much has been done at national levels to promote the agenda of gender equality in education. Her government has put necessary policies, plans, programs and resources in place to achieve gender equality in the education sector. Concerted efforts from the government, development partners, private sector and NGOs have produced a significant result in the field of girls' education in Bangladesh. The girls' stipend programme is an outstanding effort to address the issues of access, retention and completion of girls' education. In primary schools, girl's dropout rate was 24.20 percent in 2012 it got down to 17.00% in 2015. Coverage of stipend program for girls has been extended manifold and this strategy resulted in almost 100 percent enrollment rate and gender parity.

44%

2007

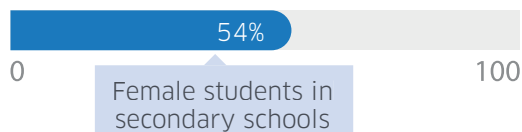
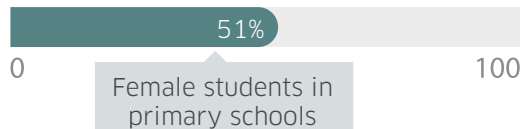
The literacy rate for females

70%

2016

99.4%

Girls enrolment rate at primary level



**2.7 million** girls are receiving stipend at secondary and higher secondary level

Female students make up around **60%** of enrolled medical students

Source: BANBEIS Educational Database

Secondary and higher secondary education is critical to development as a whole; it provides insight, skill and capability to participate in economic activity and live a decent life. Gender disparity has narrowed in this level of education than before. A major project undertaken by the government is Female Secondary School Assistance Project which is playing a key role in retaining girls in schools. Another project in Bangladesh is providing educational stipends for girls, building separate toilets, and introducing a girls' empowerment curriculum that promotes health and hygiene. Currently in secondary schools, 53 percent of the learners are girls which is a sharp departure from even just a few years ago when male was 65 percent and female was 35 percent. 2.7 million girls are receiving stipend at secondary and higher secondary level.

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. Since 2010, enrolment of girls in technical education increased by 44 percent. Education of girls up to degree level in public schools is free. Female are encouraged to take teaching as profession and currently 60 percent primary school teachers are women.



*Bangladesh has made significant strides towards educating girls and giving women a greater voice, both in the household and the public sphere. These efforts have translated into improvements in children's health and education.*

**Kaushik Basu**

World Bank Chief Economist





## Improved health care for women



In the last decade government of Bangladesh successfully built a health service network and infrastructure enabling people particularly women and girls at grassroots to avail health care free of cost/low 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 percent. The current government plans to reduce MMR to 63 per 100,000 live births by 2030. During HPM Sheikh Hasina's first tenure at the office, she introduced Maternal Health Voucher Scheme. The Scheme 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 the delivery of primary healthcare services through community clinics to rural, marginal and vulnerable women. They now get primary healthcare at the 18,000 Community Clinics (CCs). The construction of CCs started in 1998. On average 10 million patients

visit in CCs per month and among the service seekers about 80 percent are women and children.

At the beginning of HPM Sheikh Hasina's second tenure in 2009, the government initiated a project called '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. Her government has also 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.

**18,000**  
community clinics  
established where 80%  
service seekers are  
women and children

**6 months**  
paid maternity leave for  
government job holders

**152**  
operating government  
hospitals to provide 24/7  
emergency obstetric care  
service

**13,000**  
maternity centers established

**1,50,000**  
women receiving  
support under Maternal  
Health Voucher Scheme

**3,000**  
midwife positions in  
government jobs. Government  
introduced international  
standard midwifery course  
since 2010

**Daycare centers**  
in government and  
private sector offices

**Special Adolescent  
Health Programme**  
in line with Global Strategy  
for Women Children and  
Adolescent's Health

**30,000**  
satellite clinic for child and  
maternal health care







05

## Measures to prevent violence against women

### 5.1 Acts and laws

Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010

The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Rules 2013

Child Marriage Control Act, 2013

Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017

Human Trafficking Deterrence and Suppression Act 2012

Provision was included in the schedule of Mobile Court Act, 2009 to take immediate action against offenders of sexual harassment.

In 2009, the High Court Division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh has given a set of directives for action in cases of sexual harassment of women in all academic institutions, workplaces.

To ensure women's rights and combat violence against women, HPM Sheikh Hasina's government have been strengthening the country's policies and legislative framework. Her 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 and 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.

## 5.2 Institutional measures and actions

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*A National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children (2013 – 2025) has been formulated and in effect.*

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The MOWCA is mandated to act as the focal point and catalyst for action on issues of women's equality and development. Since women's safety and wellbeing is a cross-cutting issue, it is not only the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWCA) that is responsible for women's empowerment. It also promotes all the response by all other government agencies to the needs and priorities of women development. There is a central cell to prevent Violence Against Women (VAW) in MOWCA to monitor, supervise and follow up the efforts and initiatives to address violence against women and children.

There is an Inter-ministerial Coordination Committee for the National Programs for the Prevention of Violence and Dowry. The committee includes representatives from ministries and civil society. Its objective is to coordinate and review programs of all organizations and committees working on violence against women (VAW). It meets twice a year and reviews the activities of law enforcement agencies.

Multi-Sectoral Programme on VAW is being implemented by (MOWCA) aims at reducing incidences of violence against women and children and improving redress through collaboration between relevant ministries and non-government agencies. The pilot phase took



The government has set up **41 new tribunals** across Bangladesh to expedite trials in cases filed over the torture of women and children.

Already **41 posts of district and sessions judges and 205 posts of assistants have been created** for the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunals.

place from May 2000 to December 2003, the first phase from January 2004 to June 2008, the second phase from July 2008 to June 2011 and the third phase from July 2011 to June 2016. The programme is now in its 4th phase, which will continue until June 2021.

The National Legal Aid Committee under the Law and Justice Division is providing free legal aid to helpless and poor women seeking justice. There are District Legal Aid Committees headed by the District Judge in all the districts to provide such aids to poor women complainants. As many as 73,795 women were provided with free legal aid service till 2016. Moreover 56,000 women received legal aid through hotline from this committee.

**67** One-Stop Crisis Cells in 47 in District Hospitals and 20 in Upazila Health Complexes

**07** safe custodies for women, girls and adolescents under the Department of Social Services

**4,199** women and children have taken services from Victim Support Centers



Call center

**333**

providing service in cases of eve-teasing, early marriage, dowry related incidents

Government initiated **5,292 clubs in 489 upazilas** for building awareness and prevention against gender based violence



**109**

A National Helpline Center for violence against women

A National Helpline Center for violence against women and children has been established to provide support to women. Women can get necessary information and support by calling the 24-hour helpline number 109. Another call centre- 333 also provides service in cases of eve-teasing, early marriage, dowry related incidents, etc. MOWCA under its Multi-Spectral Programmes on VAW has launched a mobile application named 'Joy'. A victim can call for help through the app. The emergency signal for help will reach the authorities. They will automatically receive and be notified about the locations, recordings and even photos of the area of incident through the app.

Nine One-Stop Crisis Centers, a major component of Multi-Sectoral Programme on VAW, in Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong, Sylhet, Barisal, Khulna, Rangpur, Faridpur and Cox's Bazar Medical

College Hospitals are fully operational now. One-Stop Crisis Centers provide information to the women and children survivors of violence regarding various services i.e. health care, police assistance, legal advice, psychosocial counseling, rehabilitation, reintegration etc. and refer them to the relevant agencies. To extend the support for Women and Children victims of violence around the country, 67 One-Stop Crisis Cells (OCC) were established (47 in District Sadar Hospitals and 20 in Upazila Health Complexes) also. Since 2013, total 47,558 victims have received service from these OCCs.

Police department now has Victim Support Centers (VSCs) which provide wide-range of services to victims including emergency shelter and immediate support, health care, legal advice and support, psychological advice and counseling, training and capacity building for rehabilitation of victims and support for re-integration into family and community. The first VSC of Bangladesh was established at the compound of Tejgaon Police Station in the capital in February, 2009. Later, eight more VSCs were set up in seven divisional cities and Rangamati. Since inception, 4199 women and children have received timely, professional services from the VSCs. A collaboration among VSC, OCC, Hospital, Department of Social-Welfare and other service providing organizations has been built up.



06

## Women in sports



In the recent years, Bangladesh received acclamation for women's participation and success in different sports i.e. football, cricket, athletics, swimming and shooting. Sports associations are more pro-active then before; they have started offering incentives and special training to women athletes. Government has established women sports complexes where women athletes, volleyball players, swimmers, gymnasts, etc. are being groomed by experienced coaches and trainers.

The national women's football team played more matches than ever before during last eight years. The national team and age level teams have seen a surge of potential players from all over the country once Bangladesh Football Federation's (BFF) long term-term development plans culminated in divisional tournaments for aspiring women booters in 2012. The BFF has been exclusively nurturing 39 young footballers, who formed different national women's teams in recent times. Moreover, regular short-training camps are being arranged for age-group teams. Job opportunities have been created for women footballer in Bangladesh Ansar (a security force), Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) and Bangladesh Navy so that their families don't put pressure on them to get married.

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.

The country's women athletes won several prestigious awards in recent years. 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.





07

## Increased participation in politics

In terms of women's political empowerment, Bangladesh made significant progress in the last two decades. The country won Women in Parliament (WIP) Award for regional leadership in the South and Southeast Asia category for closing gap in politics.

In Bangladesh, women have been the heads of the government for almost the last three decades. There are 50 reserved seats for women in the parliament which are allotted to the parties based on their proportional representation in parliament. In the newly-formed government, one minister, one state minister and one deputy minister are women. The total number of women parliamentarians who have been directly elected is 22, including the prime minister. Current Bangladesh parliament has 72 women members, which is more than 20 percent of the total 350 seats. For successive terms, the position of speaker in parliament is held by a woman.



In Global Gender Gap Report 2018, Bangladesh in the 5th position among 149 countries in terms of closing the gender gap in the political empowerment sub-index.



According to the third amendment to the Representation of the People Order (RPO) 1972, political parties have to keep at least 33 percent of all committee positions, including the central committees, for women.

The government of Bangladesh has taken several legislative initiatives to increase women's participation in the local governments. The Local Government Second Amendment Act 1997 passed by PM Hasina-led government is seen as a milestone towards ensuring women's access and increased participation in local level governance. There is now direct election to reserved seats for women in local government elections. Moreover, a post of female vice-chairman for each upazila (sub-division) has been introduced by an amendment to Upazila Parishad Act.

## Challenges



The development and empowerment of women in Bangladesh has been noticed and recognised by the international community. Nonetheless, the journey of the women of Bangladesh has not been a smooth one. From social taboos to conservative attitudes, they had to face a number of obstacles to arrive where they are today.

There are various types of intervention to prevent violence against women taken by the government agencies and right-based

organizations. Multisectoral Programmes to Prevent Violence Against Women which was mentioned earlier is currently the biggest one in the country. However, there are incidences of violence against women is frequently reported around the country. In the current context, safety of women in public place is a matter of concern. Then there is prevalence of child marriage which is forcing young girls to drop out from schools, making them vulnerable mentally and physically. Under this circumstances, fighting all kinds of violence against women should be prioritized and coordinated actions by all the relevant agencies is recommended.

There are still questions when it comes to women's economic empowerment in Bangladesh. Women in the country still face difficulties in accessing basic financial services. The financial service providers must be more responsive towards the banking and financial service needs of women, especially women from low-income backgrounds.

Finally, in respect to women's political empowerment, there are some areas the government needs to seriously look into for reducing the remaining gap. The government must take measures that will further strengthen women's position in politics and implement action plan on women's empowerment.

## Conclusion

In the last decade, under the visionary leadership of Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in educating women and ensuring quality health care and social safety, economic and political empowerment. The country has moved a long way in achieving the 2030 agenda of gender equity for Sustainable Development. Her government, in association with policy partners, the civil society and rights groups, continues to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Implementation of the National Women Development Policy 2011 has been making sure that women are entitled to equal opportunities in every sphere. Today, women in Bangladesh are encouraged to make legal rights claims, compete for elected office, access information and technology and embark on challenging professions. The government is now looking to further increase their participation in the mainstream workforce, thus creating opportunities for them to contribute towards building a sustainable future.

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