

# CHARTER OF DEMAND

## STRENGTHENING INTERGENERATIONAL AND INCLUSIVE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN BANGLADESH

This Charter of Demand, rooted in Bangladesh's intergenerational and inclusive women's movement, is a vital document. It voices the collective demands of women from diverse backgrounds and generations, aiming to achieve gender equality and empower women by addressing their multifaceted challenges and opportunities.

Prepared by:



বাংলাদেশ মহিলা পরিষদ



## Introduction

Women have long been a central force for social transformation in Bangladesh. There have been extraordinary revolutionaries who carried the torch and led millions of women through crisis and towards peace. From participating in the liberation war, rebuilding a war-torn nation, resisting the autocratic regimes and fundamental forces, to forming transnational solidarity through movements - women have played a pivotal role. Additionally, global influences such as the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 added further momentum. This resulted in a strong commitment towards the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Over the years, women's groups have mobilised and raised their voices on various issues, including gender-based violence (GBV), women's economic opportunities and participation, financing for gender equality, inclusion of persons with disabilities in the mainstream development process, representation in politics, reproductive rights, and inheritance and family law reforms. In the 1980s, 1990s and most recently in 2020, Bangladesh saw historic surges in the feminist movement and public outcry across the country, the latest one prompted by an increase in rape cases and acts of sexual violence<sup>1</sup>. Women's rights activists from across generations galvanised a robust movement to end rape and the prominent culture of impunity in the country. Yet, despite progress, deeply rooted discriminatory social norms emanating from patriarchal structures and unequal power distribution across institutions and communities continue to impede gender equality in Bangladesh.

This Charter of Demand, grounded in the intergenerational and inclusive women's movement<sup>2</sup> in Bangladesh, is a crucial document in this context. It represents a collective voice, uniting women from different backgrounds and generations who face multifaceted challenges and are deprived of certain opportunities. This document outlines collective demands to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women in Bangladesh, in all their diversity.

## Milestones

Over the past decade, the women's feminist movements contributed to significant achievements in gender equality, demonstrated by key legal reforms, increased women's participation in the labour

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<sup>1</sup> “,” - *YouTube*, 5 November 2023, [https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/eclinm/PIIS2589-5370\(21\)00097-3.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/eclinm/PIIS2589-5370(21)00097-3.pdf). Accessed 18 December 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Manusher Jonno Foundation, Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha, Nijera Kori, Nari Moitree, Campaign for Popular Education, Women With Disabilities Development Foundation, Ognie Foundation, BIWN, KF, NGCHF, BTUC, OGSB, Affasa, Oboyob, Kotha, Pragroso, Green Voice, Sex Workers Network, Sannoy, Diner Alo Hijra Shongho, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, Rajshahi Branch and Dinajpur Branch

force, improved access to education, higher representation of women in politics, and a reduction in maternal mortality. Notable reformed laws contributing to this progress include:

- The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act of 2010.
- The adoption of the National Women Development Policy in 2011, and the Hindu Marriage Registration Act of 2012.
- Prohibition of the controversial use of the two-finger test conducted for rape victims to prove they have been raped, in 2018.
- In 2022, repealing Section 155(4) of the Evidence Act, which previously allowed the questioning of a rape survivor's character, represented a significant step towards protecting survivors' rights.
- Road safety movements led by students have significantly contributed to increasing safety for women commuters, combating GBV, and improving women's participation in public spheres.

Bangladesh has significantly improved gender parity in school enrolment at both primary and secondary levels, leading to an equal ratio of boys and girls in primary education in most regions<sup>3</sup>. In politics, women's representation has increased from 45 parliamentary seats to 50. Additionally, quotas for women in government positions are contributing to gender diversity, which has translated into a more inclusive political landscape. The judiciary is witnessing a positive shift, with women holding high court and district judge positions, demonstrating their growing influence in the legal system. Economic empowerment initiatives support female entrepreneurs with a 10 per cent Small Enterprise Fund allocation and 10 per cent industrial plots. Rural women are gaining financial independence through collateral-free microcredit up to 2.5 million with a 5 per cent service charge<sup>4</sup>. Women's participation both in public and private sectors has increased exponentially. The ready-made garment industry has created numerous official sector jobs for women, expanding their opportunities for economic participation. Bangladesh has enhanced social welfare, providing allowances for destitute, pregnant, lactating, disabled, and divorced women, ensuring their well-being. Recognition of the "third gender" in 2013 and their increased political participation highlights progress despite societal challenges. However, while these achievements are commendable, it is important to acknowledge that challenges persist, and gender disparities remain in Bangladeshi society.

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<sup>3</sup> 11 June 2020, [https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4\\_956b\\_45ca\\_872f\\_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2020-06-16-11-37-6825948cef0521e3c99a18584cedf072.pdf](https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4_956b_45ca_872f_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2020-06-16-11-37-6825948cef0521e3c99a18584cedf072.pdf). Accessed 18 December 20

<sup>4</sup> Financing Solutions For Micro, Small And Medium Enterprises In Bangladesh." World Bank Documents, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/995331545025954781/Financing-Solutions-for-Micro-Small-and-Medium-Enterprises-in-Bangladesh.pdf>. Accessed 18 December 2023.

## Going forward

In recognizing the Government of Bangladesh's commendable achievements, it is crucial to acknowledge the persistent challenges and gender inequalities present in the societal landscape of Bangladesh. As we enter the next phase (9th 5 year plan) of government development priorities, this Charter of Demand serves as a beacon, guiding collective efforts to overcome obstacles and foster a genuinely equitable and empowering environment for all, compiled by women leaders and activists from across generations. This charter of demand particularly focuses on the areas of education, GBV, sexual reproductive health and rights, legal reform, women's participation, economic empowerment and decision-making, inclusive leadership, ensuring rights of marginalized communities such as access to education, eradication of child labour, rights of all women etc, mental health, effects of climate change, gender-responsive budget and good governance.

**Education:** As per the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the primary education dropout rate stands at 13.95%, with 13.19% for girls and 14.88% for boys. At the secondary level, the dropout rate is 35.98%, with 33.25% for boys and 40.78% for girls. In the higher secondary level, the dropout rate is 22.72%, comprising 21.69% for boys and 22.60% for girls<sup>5</sup>. The dropout rates diverge from the ideals of inclusive education which include lower enrollment in hill tracks, and 60 percent of the marginalized population in Bangladesh who have never attended school, with up to 90 per cent of children out of school in some areas. Restrictions in resources, opportunities, and experiences of stigmatization and negative attitudes from teachers, peers, and the public are responsible for this<sup>6</sup>.

### From the government, we demand:

- Ensuring a **supportive classroom and school environment** for the inclusion of children from marginalized communities.
- Establishing an accountability committee, involving administrators and local influencers, to enhance inclusive education in primary and secondary schools. Organizing **adult literacy programs** for parents of children from marginalized groups, providing economic support to engage them in productive activities. Implementing **government student loans and mandatory insurance** for a child's education from the primary level.

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<sup>5</sup> Bangladesh Education Statistics 2022, [https://banbeis.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/banbeis.portal.gov.bd/page/6d10c6e9\\_d26c\\_4b9b\\_9c7f\\_770f9c68df7c/Bangladesh%20Education%20Statistics%202022%20%281%29\\_compressed.pdf](https://banbeis.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/banbeis.portal.gov.bd/page/6d10c6e9_d26c_4b9b_9c7f_770f9c68df7c/Bangladesh%20Education%20Statistics%202022%20%281%29_compressed.pdf). Accessed 18 December 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Chowdhury, Kamrul Qader. "(PDF) INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN FROM MARGINAL GROUPS IN BANGLADESH: PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES." ResearchGate, 12 April 2021, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350822932\\_INCLUSIVE\\_EDUCATION\\_FOR\\_CHILDREN\\_FROM\\_MARGINAL\\_GROUPS\\_IN\\_BANGLADESH\\_PROBLEMS\\_AND\\_POSSIBILITIES](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350822932_INCLUSIVE_EDUCATION_FOR_CHILDREN_FROM_MARGINAL_GROUPS_IN_BANGLADESH_PROBLEMS_AND_POSSIBILITIES). Accessed 5 December 2023.

- Supporting girls' continued education and implementing **re-entry policies**, allowing young mothers to return to school immediately after childbirth.
- Promoting (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) **STEM** for women and girls through awareness campaigns and career counselling, institutional investment in labs and technical expertise with adequate instruments.
- Implementing effective measures, including temporary special measures like **scholarships, in line with Article 4(1) of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation No. 24 (1999) on women and health**. These measures aim to enhance access for women and girls to higher education, including in non-traditional fields of study.

**Gender-based violence:** Gender-based violence remains a pressing and complex issue in Bangladesh, a country with a rich cultural heritage, ever-changing patriarchal structures and a rapidly evolving social and religious landscape.

Sexual Harassment in Public Places: A study found that 36 per cent of women experience regular sexual harassment while walking in the streets, on public transportation, at stations and terminals, at education institutions, and workplaces, among other places<sup>7</sup>.

*From the government, we demand:*

- **Raising awareness** through educational campaigns and gender-sensitive curricula in schools and colleges to promote respect, consent, and gender equality. We demand the introduction of age-appropriate Comprehensive Sexuality Education within the national board structures, the removal of textbooks that perpetuate gender roles and biases, and the incorporation of gender icons in educational materials that can offer young girls and boys role models to emulate and help in their personal development.
- The order of high-court in institutionalising safeguarding policies to address bullying and sexual harassment in any institution or organisation. We also need to **ensure swift responses to report** sexual harassment within dedicated units and helplines, improve public transport security, **promote bystander intervention**, and create safe spaces for survivors to seek help and counselling.

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<sup>7</sup> Share-net Bangladesh. "SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN PUBLIC SPACES IN BANGLADESH." *Share-Net Bangladesh*, <https://www.share-netbangladesh.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Sexual-Harassment-in-Public-Spaces-in-Bangladesh.pdf>. Accessed 16 November 2023.

- **Training of law enforcement and legal professionals** to effectively investigate and prosecute sexual assault cases with a particular focus on the unique challenges faced by marginalized communities, including people with different sexual orientations, sex workers, indigenous women, and women with disabilities.
- Full ratification and implementation of the **United Nations Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, including removing current reservations.**
- Use of gender-neutral language to foster inclusivity and prevent violence and discrimination.

Domestic Violence: Bangladesh ranks one of the highest in the world with respect to violence against women and in terms of domestic violence, with 50 per cent to 70 per cent reporting abuse by their male partners. Additionally, 65 per cent of Bangladeshi men justify wife-beating, 38 per cent lack clarity on physical violence, and 40 per cent limit women's social roles<sup>8</sup>.

From the government, we demand:

- **Quick judgement** of cases of domestic violence and the facilitation of **effective mobile courts** to give the victims justice and hold perpetrators accountable.
- **Ensure social rehabilitation programmes, appropriate accommodation, and security** facilities for survivors and their children.
- Amend and implement **Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010** through proper monitoring, sensitization of **service providers**, and **prioritisation of** survivors' safety and mental health.

Child Marriage: In Bangladesh **51 per cent and 16 per cent** of women are getting married before **18 and 15 years** of age respectively<sup>9</sup>. The prevalence of child marriage has increased by at least 13 per cent due to school closures, isolation from friends and support networks, and rising poverty<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Smoker, Paul, et al. "(PDF) Domestic Violence in Bangladesh: Analyzing from the Contemporary Peace & Conflict Perspectives." *ResearchGate*, 4 February 2021, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349038995\\_Domestic\\_Violence\\_in\\_Bangladesh\\_Analyzing\\_from\\_the\\_Contemporary\\_Peace\\_Conflict\\_Perspectives](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349038995_Domestic_Violence_in_Bangladesh_Analyzing_from_the_Contemporary_Peace_Conflict_Perspectives). Accessed 16 November 2023.

<sup>9</sup> UNICEF. "A Profile of Child Marriage in South Asia." *UNICEF Data*, [https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Profile\\_of\\_child\\_marriage\\_in\\_South\\_Asia.pdf](https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Profile_of_child_marriage_in_South_Asia.pdf). Accessed 16 November 2023.

<sup>10</sup> HOSSAIN, MD JAMAL. "COVID-19 and child marriage in Bangladesh: emergency call to action." *PubMed*, 23 November 2021, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34841091/>. Accessed 16 November 2023.

From the government, we demand:

- Removal of the clause that allows marriages to take place under “special cases” and **effective interventions to prevent child marriage**, including through making **information and services available** for especially children and adolescents.
- Ensuring a **uniform definition of “a child”** across existing laws.

Cyber violence: Women and girls encounter extensive GBV, hate speech, abuse, and sexual harassment in the digital space. These online issues can escalate into real-life threats, extortion, and blackmail, highlighting the need for regulations that address cybercrime while respecting freedom of expression<sup>11</sup>.

From the government and civil society, we demand:

- **Revision of certain provisions of the Digital Security Act** to align with international human rights standards, working with civil society and the UN to ensure that new data protection laws and regulations meet these standards and proper digital literacy of women and girls to mitigate risks and threats.
- **Immediate response from the cyber police center** and local police station, gender sensitisation of both units, and ensuring safety of the complainant. Fast-track the investigation to track digital footprints and bring the perpetrators to justice. Additionally, establishment of an effective helpline centre to deal with online harassment and awareness building about its proper utilization can be beneficial in this regard.
- Targeted **programmes on online harassment and bullying** to be developed and prioritized.

Violence on marginalized communities: Incidents of rape have escalated among women from minority groups in Bangladesh. The compounded risk of violence increases for religious minorities, women with disabilities, children of sex workers, ethnic minorities, and gender-diverse communities, among others. Approximately 78 percent of young women and girls with disabilities experience sexual and physical abuse. The difficulty in voicing their experiences arises from factors such as communication barriers, social isolation, and pervasive social stereotypes. Among them, 18 per cent endure repeated abuse<sup>12</sup>. Research also indicates that around 95 per cent of those who experience sexual and gender-based violence in the Chittagong Hill Tracts are afraid of being

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<sup>11</sup> Bangladesh Legal Aid & Services Trust. “Report of Expert Consultation Responding to Violence against Women and Girls in the Cyber Age.” *Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust*, <https://blast.org.bd/content/report/Report-of-Expert-Consultation.pdf>. Accessed 16 November 2023.

<sup>12</sup> Jahan, Nilima. “Violence against young women and girls with disabilities: An everyday affair.” *The Daily Star*, 10 December 2021, <https://www.thedailystar.net/star-youth/news/violence-against-young-women-and-girls-disabilities-everyday-affair-2914141>. Accessed 5 December 2023.

stigmatized, leading to 60 per cent of them abstaining from pursuing legal remedies<sup>13</sup>. Communal violence has also escalated in recent years, resulting in attacks, vandalism, and arson based on ethnicity, religion, and locality, among other factors.

*From the government, we demand:*

- Detailed **gender, disability, and ethnicity-disaggregated data**. In addition, further disaggregation according to age, socioeconomic background, nature of violence, and police report status is strongly advised for all incidents of GBV.
- Investigation of **GBV related to land grabbing**, as urged by CEDAW committee in 2016, to ensure accountability.
- Ensuring access to **free legal counsel and protection from harassment for survivors and their families**.
- Re-traumatizing procedures are avoided, interpretation services are provided, and **separate funds for indigenous women, sex workers, and gender-diverse populations are allocated**.
- **An adequate gender budget, its proper implementation and monitoring, and allocation for marginalized women** in order to support their rights and well-being.
- Improve public institutions' transport and infrastructure considering the particular needs of Persons/Women with Disabilities. **Sensitize law enforcement agencies** as well as community members to mitigate ethnocentric biases.

**Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR):** Bangladeshi laws do not adequately address various real-life experiences affecting women, such as maternal health complications, sexual crimes, and non-consensual pregnancies. SRHR discrimination intersects with other forms of marginalization, such as discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation, climate crisis, and disability

Decriminalizing abortion: The Penal Code of 1860 addresses various pregnancy termination cases using the term "miscarriage" instead of "abortion."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Manusher Jonno Foundation. "Study Report 7 X 9.5 Part 2." *Manusher Jonno Foundation*. <http://www.manusherjonno.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Study-Report-GBV-on-CHT.pdf>. Accessed 16 November 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Karobi, Samia Jaman. "Abortion Laws and Bangladesh in 2022 by Samia Jaman Karobi :: SSRN." *SSRN Papers*, 4 April 2022, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=4070049](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4070049). Accessed 16 November 2023.



From the government, we demand:

- The **removal of Section 312, 314-316 under the penal code** that does not recognize a woman's bodily autonomy.

Maternity rights: Under Section 46 of Bangladesh Labour Act (2006), working mothers are to be allotted 4 months of maternity leave, 8 weeks of prenatal leave and 8 weeks of postnatal leave.

From the government, we demand:

- Ensuring that **factories and all other workplaces are compliant with parental leave and benefits as per the labour law.**
- Ensure **proper implementation of day care centers with early childhood development (ECD) facilities within** the factory or workplace premises, ensuring that supervisors and duty bearers are sensitized. Moreover, allow pregnant or elderly workers to take periodic rest, reduce overtime, and schedule regular health check-ups.

SRHR of older persons, youth, women with disability, sex workers, trans people, and others: To improve SRHR and services, we need **improved access to healthcare**, enactment of relevant policies, training for healthcare providers, establishment of support networks, and research on the specific health needs of older persons.

From the government, we demand:

- **Non-discriminatory policies enforced within healthcare (including accessibility to fertility treatments) and social service facilities**, accompanied by clear consequences for any staff members found engaging in discriminatory practices.

**Law Reformation:** Most laws in Bangladesh carry the colonial legacy, which is more than two centuries old, even though some changes have been made to meet global human rights standards and regulations.

From the government, we demand:

- **A comprehensive review and amendment process to update and eliminate archaic colonial laws that discriminate against women;** other genders, and sexually diverse and non-binary groups, with particular attention on property rights, inheritance laws, and marital regulations.

- Ensuring **stringent measures to combat GBV and to ensure the safety and security of women in public and private spaces** are introduced and enforced.
- Ensuring **access to justice and compensation funds**, particularly for marginalized communities like women with disabilities, sex workers, gender-diverse populations and non-binary groups, and establishing support services like legal aid and crisis intervention mechanisms for women. Additionally, we propose the establishment of dedicated gender courts to enhance and ensure access to justice for women.
- **Initiate effective preliminary and follow-up investigation** after a case is filed by the victim to prevent them from enduring prolonged suffering in the pursuit of justice.
- **Simplified legal language** to ensure accessibility for all, including availability of diverse languages to cater to ethnic minorities, and expanding on terminology, such as the meaning of "third gender".

Changing the definition of rape: The existing definition of rape focuses primarily on vaginal penetration and does not encompass other acts of sexual assault, such as oral or anal penetration, which can result in severe trauma and harm to victims. To address this, the legal definition of rape in Bangladesh should be broadened to include all forms of non-consensual sexual acts. Moreover, the definition of rape in section 375 Penal Code 1860 includes an exception for marriage.

From the government, and civil society, we demand:

- **The revision and expansion of the legal definition of rape** to encompass all forms of non-consensual sexual acts, including within marriage.
- **Public awareness campaigns** on the importance of consent. In addition, the media and society need to put an end to victim blaming and morality judgement on women.

Ensuring property rights: Prevailing inheritance laws, patriarchal values, and societal norms in Bangladesh contribute to a discriminatory environment. **Issues related to inheritance are regulated by personal laws based on the individual's religion, with Muslim women being subject to Sharia Law.** Under Hindu law and Christian colonial law too, women have distinct inheritance rules, which further with cultural barriers, results in them having no property under their names. Unmarried daughters have priority, but those without sons and those who are widows

have limited rights for all religious groups in Bangladesh<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, accurately identifying actual khas land (government-owned land) is an issue<sup>16</sup>. No comprehensive research has been conducted to assess the true nature and extent of khas land distribution, including the various problems associated with allocating these lands to genuinely landless individuals. This includes examining the role of power dynamics in the process of depriving the poor of their inherent rights to own khas land.

*From the government, we demand:*

- **Reforming inheritance laws**, particularly prioritizing the fair distribution of property and recognition of gender-specific challenges regarding equal inheritance. Additionally, we demand the implementation of the Uniform Family Code.
- **Establish a robust legal framework** that acknowledges and addresses historical injustices, thereby promoting equality, justice, and the protection of rights for ethnic minorities and all other women.
- **A detailed survey on the current situation of land ownership**. We are confident that a uniform family code can help ensure equality and justice in family law matters.

**Women's participation, economic empowerment, and decision-making:** Traditional norms, values, and religious doctrines often limit women's potential, their visibility in public spaces, and their decision-making at home.

*From the government, and civil society, we demand:*

- **Gender equality is promoted through education and awareness campaigns** that challenge stereotypes and promote the value of women's participation in all aspects of society.
- **Proper incentives for women-led businesses/entrepreneurship**, ensure minimum wage particularly for factory workers, guarantee equal payment of workers, and promote women's participation in politics can enhance their economic independence and social status.

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<sup>15</sup> Jinnah, Shah I Mobin. "Land and Property Rights of Rural Women in Bangladesh." *ohchr*, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/CEDAW/RuralWomen/CDABangladesh.pdf>. Accessed 16 November 2023.

<sup>16</sup> The officially identified khas land in Bangladesh is estimated at 3.3 million acres, including agricultural and non-agricultural areas as well as water bodies. However, this figure most likely underestimates the actual extent due to unrecorded land portions and waterbodies not yet designated as khas. The discrepancies result from challenges in the official land record system and disputes between the government and alleged owners, hindering an accurate assessment of Bangladesh's total khas land.

- **Women's rights are enforced**, and policies ensuring equal access to education and job opportunities are implemented. Furthermore, to close the industry-academia gap, prioritize skills development that are required for jobs, we need stronger collaboration between education and industry.
- **Enhancing skills of both women and men** by involving industry professionals in curriculum development to integrate all genders in professional care work and ensure female-friendly workplaces, flexibility at work, security, and fair treatment.
- **Addressing gender disparities** in the workplace and enforcing laws to boost female workforce participation and promoting visible role models from diverse backgrounds to encourage career growth and break gender barriers in the country.
- **Engagement with grassroots and marginalized communities** should be prioritized to promote leadership, including, among gender diverse populations and non-binary groups, women with disability, migrant women, women affected by climate change, and indigenous women.

Care work: In the context of Bangladesh, care work, including caring for the children and elderly, is neither acknowledged nor recognized to be a form of paid work. Women spend 1.2 hours in unpaid caregiving services for household and family members, whereas the man spends only 0.2 hours per day<sup>17</sup> This invisibilization of the overwhelming burden of care work on women results from gender stereotypes, which essentialize care work as women's work and free men from their basic responsibilities. Unless we acknowledge care as work, we shall be complicit in perpetuating the patriarchal structure which oppresses women.<sup>18</sup>

*From the government, we demand:*

- **Recognition of unpaid care work at the state level**, for it to be included in the national GDP, investment in the care economy, and the introduction of educational programmes from early childhood that encourage the division of household labour. The government must make awareness and basic skill development (caregiving) programs compulsory as part of the curriculum at school, regardless of gender.

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<sup>17</sup> TIME USE SURVEY 2021, 3 July 2023, [https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4\\_956b\\_45ca\\_872f\\_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2023-07-23-04-53-6417fa2e9d03538a1342942614845984.pdf](https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4_956b_45ca_872f_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2023-07-23-04-53-6417fa2e9d03538a1342942614845984.pdf). Accessed 14 December 2023.

<sup>18</sup> The Prime Minister of Bangladesh also stated recently that the authorities concerned need to bring women's unpaid household work into the calculation of Bangladesh's gross domestic product, *The Daily Star*, 4 April 2023, <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/include-womens-unpaid-work-gdp-calculation-pm-3288691>. Accessed 14 December 2023.

**Inclusive leadership in Women's Movement:** Women's rights organisations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) are typically heterogeneous in nature, and many of them are hierarchical.

*From civil society organisations and women's rights groups, we demand:*

- **Inclusive leadership which involves promoting the exchange of knowledge and leadership, and initiating mentorship opportunities** that facilitate skills development across diverse generations. We demand for an inclusive structure to ensure more equitable power distribution and decision-making, including the representation of grassroots leaders within national decision-making processes.

**Ensuring rights of marginalized communities:** Marginalized communities in Bangladesh, including indigenous women, women with disabilities, sex workers, and sexual minorities, face exploitation and discrimination, particularly in urban areas. The pandemic exacerbated educational disparities, with limited access to remote learning for many children in rural regions. The global COVID-19 pandemic also amplified the risks of violence, child marriage, and child labour, disproportionately affecting girls and vulnerable groups. Dalit women struggle with limited access to education, healthcare, and political participation, aggravated by the notion that Dalits are "untouchable". Freedom of expression is under threat, with excessive police force used to suppress protests, impacting workers and minority rights. Addressing these issues is critical for equity and justice.

*From the government, we demand:*

- **Access to education in one's mother tongue** to enhance the overall accessibility of education in marginalized regions and to have the choice to celebrate their identities.
- **Policies to eradicate child labour** are developed and enforced, focusing on vulnerable groups. Support for families to access alternative sources of income.
- **Ensuring equal rights for all women, sexual minorities, gender diverse and non-binary individuals** in decision-making processes at home and in political spaces.

**Mental health:** In Bangladesh, less than 0.11 percent of the population have access to free essential psychotropic medications. Few healthcare workers in Bangladesh are trained in providing mental health services (0.49 per cent), and there are even fewer psychiatrists (0.16 per 100,000

population)<sup>19</sup>. At a macro level, lack of healthcare expenditure at the state level, poor advocacy, and limited research further exacerbate the problem.

*From the government, we demand:*

- **Mental health services are integrated into primary healthcare facilities** and that specialized training for healthcare providers is provided to recognize and address gender-specific mental health issues, ensuring culturally sensitive and inclusive care.
- **A climate and gender budget** and for solutions to be community- and women-led.

**Gender budget:** Gender equality will be a distant goal without adequate funding, human resources, and prioritisation. If current trends continue, more than 340 million women and girls will still live in extreme poverty by 2030<sup>20</sup>. Furthermore, the backlash on women's movements and women-led organisations has increased exponentially.

*From the government, we demand:*

- **Adequate implementation, allocation and monitoring of the Gender-Responsive Budgeting plan**<sup>21</sup> and for the state and development actors to be aligned in their work and implement programmes in solidarity.
- **Inter-ministerial coordination** and for funds to be allocated separately on each issue, as well as on a needs-basis.

**Good governance:** Our final demand is good governance because none of the demands above can be fulfilled without proper government structures, monitoring, accountability, and social welfare systems that can extend their reach to those who are in the most disadvantaged or in marginalized positions.

*From the government, we demand:*

- **Inclusion and representation of women and platforms to raise our voices** and be part of policy development from the initial stages.
- **Addressing fundamentalism and extremism and establishing inclusive spaces**, building coalitions across sectors, promoting cultural and mindset shifts that limit one's choice.

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<sup>19</sup> M.Tasdik Hasan. "(PDF) The current state of mental healthcare in Bangladesh: part 1 – an updated country profile." *ResearchGate*, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353981890\\_The\\_current\\_state\\_of\\_mental\\_healthcare\\_in\\_Bangladesh\\_part\\_1\\_-\\_an\\_updated\\_country\\_profile](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353981890_The_current_state_of_mental_healthcare_in_Bangladesh_part_1_-_an_updated_country_profile). Accessed 16 November 2023.

<sup>20</sup> United Nation Bangladesh. "UNSG's Message On The International Day Of The Girl Child." *United Nations in Bangladesh*, 9 October 2023, <https://bangladesh.un.org/en/248792-uns-g%E2%80%99s-message-international-day-girl-child>. Accessed 16 November 2023.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/9.%20Bangladesh.pdf>

- **Peaceful and fair national elections** entail ensuring a tranquil and just electoral process with balanced representation. It involves not only the participation of women voters but also the inclusion of individuals with diverse gender identities in prominent political leadership roles across all regions of the country.

### **Bangladesh Mahila Parishad and Bonhishikha - unlearn gender**