

# 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.

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## 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, and 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 sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), 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 2020, Bangladesh saw historic surges in the feminist movement and public outcry across the country, the most recent one prompted by an increase in rape cases and acts of sexual violence<sup>1</sup>. Bangladesh signed the CEDAW with reservations to two articles- 2 and 16.1 (C). Women's movement endorsed it wholeheartedly. They have



Photo: Shrumanika, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad

worked relentlessly for law reform and reproductive health rights and pushed policies to minimise the gender gap. The women's movement was instrumental to the fall of the autocratic regime in the 1990s. During the democratic governments, the neoliberal nation-state received massive funds to promote gender and development. Bangladesh has had a promising foundation for advancing gender equality, with women leaders serving as head of state since 1991. However, this has not yet fully translated into a significant reduction in the gender gap or substantial progress in addressing gender-based violence. The gruesome cases of rapes in 2020 led to a robust movement to end rape and the prominent culture of impunity in the country by women's rights activists across generations.

Most recently, the 'Quota Reform Movement' stirred up the nation. Students have been protesting for quota reform since 2018, and, as a result, the whole quota system was cancelled by the government. The writ against this was petitioned, and the high court ruled in favour of the quota

<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.

with the provision of reform. In 1985, 56% of government jobs were reserved for various groups as part of affirmative action, under which 30% of seats were reserved for descendants or family members of 1971 freedom fighters, 10% for women, 10% for districts based on population and 5% for ethnic minorities<sup>2</sup>. The central contention was around the 30% reservation for freedom fighters and their children and grandchildren. Following the July uprising, on 23 July 2024, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court ordered 93% of recruitment in government jobs to be based on merit, 5% to be reserved for the children of Freedom Fighters, 1% for the ethnic minorities and 1% for the third gender and the disabled people<sup>3</sup>. The removal of the 10% women's quota<sup>4</sup>, however, contradicts Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDGs 4 and 8, and reflects the increased vulnerabilities faced by women and marginalised groups in Bangladesh<sup>5</sup>.

The verdict came a bit late and at the cost of hundreds of lives and a few thousand injured nationwide<sup>6</sup>. This led to a mass uprising for the 'anti-discrimination movement', which led to the fall of the last regime. Significant numbers of girls coordinated the movement, and women of all ages joined the protests in droves. Many of the women's organisations were vigilant regarding the erasure of the women's quota but protested the repression by the state. Unfortunately, women who have been an integral part of the protests' coordinating body failed to secure any position in different reform commissions of the interim government, and their visibility in other political and public spheres has remained very low. Roughly around 50 members<sup>7</sup> are there in all the commissions and of these members, only five are women and only one woman has been appointed to the chief position, and that is in the Women's Affairs Reform Commission. Young women have remained absent both in the interim government structure as well as in any of the commissions or decision-making positions. Both erasure of the women's quota and inadequate representation of women, especially young women and marginal groups in the decision-making body may pose trepidation in creating an inclusive society and the state. These systemic barriers, like gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices must be addressed by ensuring equal opportunities in education, employment, and leadership. It is critical to create supportive spaces where women are empowered to contribute, and their voices are considered pertinent.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/history-the-quota-system-bangladesh-3653326>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/notification-reformed-quota-system-issued-following-apex-court-verdict-anisul-902316>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/quota-govt-jobs-new-system-applicable-all-grades-3660201>

<sup>5</sup> The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics' (BBS) Quarterly Labour Force Survey 2023 indicates a rise in unemployment among women compared to the previous year. Of the 23.5 lakh unemployed individuals, 7.8 lakh are women, and 15.7 lakh are men, up from 6.6 lakh women in 2022. Moreover, the 2023 survey shows a decline in the number of employed women. The 2021 BBS survey on "Gender-Based Employment and Wage" found that only 19.72% of key public administration positions were held by women, while men occupied the majority (5,072 roles).

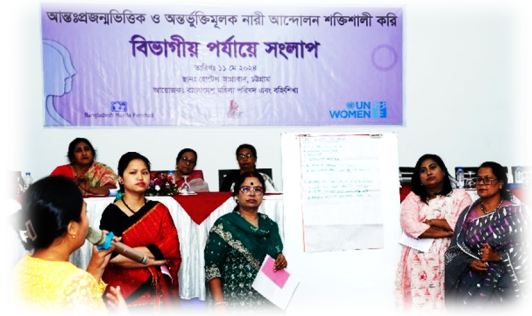
<sup>6</sup> <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/wzj6sx6gzu>

<sup>7</sup> The total membership of the six commissions is 50. Among them, there are 15 former bureaucrats, two former police officials, eight university teachers, five judges, six lawyers, six student representatives, and eight individuals from other professions (including NGO professionals, human rights activists, and experts). Of these members, only five are women and only one woman has been appointed to the chief position among the 10 commissions, and that is in the Women's Affairs Reform Commission.

This Charter of Demands, first developed in 2023 by Bangladesh Mahila Parishad and Bonhishikha supported by UN Women Bangladesh, emanated from an intergenerational and inclusive women's movement - holding significant importance in this context. It represents a collective voice, bringing together women from diverse backgrounds and generations who face various intersecting challenges and are often deprived of equitable opportunities. It has been extended to the grassroots level to substantiate the Charter of Demands further. This process involved engaging women, men, youth, activists, human rights defenders, NGOs, CBOs, CSOs, lawyers, journalists, women with disabilities, activists from diverse gender identities, indigenous communities, sex workers and state and non-state duty bearers across four divisions - Rajshahi, Chottogram, Sylhet and Barisal. List of participants are available in Annex I. The dialogues, framed through an intersectional and intergenerational approach, sought to ensure that the charter accurately reflected their demands and to gather additional recommendations based on local, social and cultural experiences.



Photo: Bangladesh Mahila Parishad and Bonhishikha



Consequently, the document has been updated in November 2024 to reflect the recent civil movement and reform initiatives that also reflected the power of youth leadership, and their potential as a changemaker. Hence, this document is built on the momentum, recognising the past successes of the women's movement in the country and advancing towards a more women-friendly, gender-responsive, and equitable society by eliminating all forms of discrimination that hinder our citizen's growth and potential. This Charter of Demands particularly focuses on the areas of education, SGBV, sexual and reproductive health and rights, legal reform, women's participation, economic empowerment and decision-making, inclusive leadership, ensuring rights of marginalised

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.

### **Demands for Immediate Action (within 3-6 months):**

These demands require urgent attention and should be implemented immediately to address critical issues affecting women and marginalised communities.

#### **Eliminating Sexual and Gender Based Violence:**

1. Implement the judgement based on the Writ Petition No 5916/2008<sup>8</sup> of the high court division to institutionalise safeguarding policies to address bullying and sexual harassment in any institution or organisation. Enacting a comprehensive Sexual Harassment Prevention and Protection Law to enable educational institutions, workplaces and all public spheres, to be free of violence for all, especially women, marginalised communities and diverse gender individuals.
2. Full ratification of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and withdraw reservation from Article 2 to eliminate all discriminatory laws and rules and enact new laws to promote women's human rights and Article 16.1(c) to ensure equal rights and responsibilities in marriage and divorce, upholding commitments to ensure equal rights and access for women and Bangladeshi citizens.
3. Ensure implementation of CEDAW and Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (PFA) through enhanced policies, adoption of laws, monitoring and accountability mechanisms.
4. Amend and implement the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 with proper monitoring, service provider sensitisation, and a focus on survivors' safety and mental health. Ensure prompt investigations and judgments in domestic violence cases and facilitate effective mobile courts to deliver justice for survivors and hold perpetrators accountable.
5. Eliminate the special provision of 'Child Marriage Restraint Act of 2017', which allows child marriage in "special cases," such as "accidental" or "illegal" pregnancies, or marriages intended to protect a girl's "honour."
6. Establish and reinforce an effective centralised hotline call centre similar to 999 (a simple, easy-to-remember 3 or 4-digit number, such as 1111 or 2222) that provides immediate support for victims of violence, including cybercrime and sexual violence. Ensure quick access to help and guidance, and train staff handling these calls to manage such cases with sensitivity.

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.supremecourt.gov.bd/resources/documents/276907\\_Writ\\_Petition\\_5916\\_08.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov.bd/resources/documents/276907_Writ_Petition_5916_08.pdf)

7. Revise rape law to ensure inclusion and diversity of identities: expand the legal definition of rape to encompass all forms of non-consensual sexual acts, including rape within marriage and ensure it applies to all genders. Revise Section 146 (3) of the Evidence Act, 1872 (amended) concerning rape to eliminate any form of "victim blaming" in cases of sexual violence, regardless of class, caste, ethnicity, religion, age, or gender identity. Establish reparation mechanism for rape survivors ensuring individual needs as per their socio-economic circumstances.
8. Ensure monitoring so that incidents of rape are not resolved through *grameen shalish* (community-led courts) and are treated as punishable offenses. Additionally, any verdict reached through *shalish* that involves a rape survivor marrying their rapist should also be considered a punishable offense.
9. As per CEDAW Article 6, state parties must take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress trafficking and the exploitation of women, effectively enforcing prevention against coercing women and girls into forced sexual relationships or sex work.
10. Enact a new Digital/Cyber Security Act that conforms to international human rights standards. Refine the definition of cyber laws to address AI-related issues considering the current security threats.

### **Legal Reform:**

11. Amend the Constitution to uphold a framework that ensures the separation of state affairs from religious influence, fostering equality, inclusivity, and the protection of individual rights while respecting the diverse faiths and beliefs of all citizens. Additionally, recognising 41 other languages alongside Bangla in the constitution.
12. Following Convention 107 of the 'Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention 1957', continue recognising Indigenous communities as "adibashi" to uphold their land rights.
13. Take steps to ensure safety and security of women, marginalised communities by acknowledging the current communal and mob violence faced by women, and marginalised communities including intersex, transgender, ethnic and religious groups, and indigenous persons. Addressing fundamentalism and extremist narratives by promoting communal harmony and cultural diversity through nationwide campaigns and community initiatives.

### **Access to Education and Employment:**

14. Continue to have a quota for girls, women, gender-diverse communities, Indigenous communities, Dalits and other marginalised communities, and students with special needs throughout the course of 12 years of education.
15. Revise the quota system published in July 2024, reintroduce a separate quota for women in public service; and untangle the quota for transgender individuals from that for people with

disabilities. Establish a dedicated quota for transgender, gender-diverse, and intersex individuals, as well as separate quotas for marginalised groups like Indigenous communities, Dalits, ethnic and religious minorities, and highly vulnerable groups such as the children of sex workers and tea garden workers.

16. Ensuring the ratification of ILO's C190 convention on eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work, and designing pathways for implementing, creating awareness about and monitoring relevant measures to enable inclusive and non-discriminatory workplaces for all. It is important to expand and diversify the definition of work by considering informal workers, domestic workers, home-based entrepreneurs, gig workers, and such.
17. Increase the stipend amount for girls to ensure their uninterrupted access to education and to advance gender equity by improving literacy rates among them.

### **Inclusive Healthcare:**

18. All youth involved in the July uprising should receive professional mental health support through their educational institutions. Additionally, it is essential to extend mental health support to the families, especially mothers of these students.
19. Enable and encourage mental health support services being available and accessible to teachers from around the country, to establish a strengthened schooling system.
20. Create more awareness and access to services related to HIV tests and medical care, at both local and national levels. Sensitise healthcare workers and professionals to provide sensitive, non-judgemental support to patients, ensuring their dignity and privacy.
21. Ensure inclusive and sensitised mental health and healthcare services to returnee migrant workers facing different forms of health issues.

### **Good governance and leadership:**

22. The citizen charters of ministries need to be made more accessible and visible to the larger public, and steps taken to promote active participation by citizens through information and knowledge-sharing initiatives.
23. Ensure inclusion and representation of women in politics to raise their voices and be part of policy development from the initial stages. Ensure involvement of women in decision-making roles, including reform commissions, ministry advisor roles, and consultation sessions.
24. Ensure meaningful, sustainable change through the effective implementation of gender-responsive budgeting by securing adequate allocation, and rigorous monitoring for these budgets. Prioritise sufficient national budget resources for education, health, socio-economic advancement, and the quality of life for marginalised communities including

women, diverse gender individuals, ethnic and religious minorities and indigenous communities.

## **Demands to be Prioritised for Medium-Term Actions (within 6-12 months)**

These demands should be addressed in the medium term and require planning, capacity-building, and some systemic changes to ensure proper implementation.

### **Education and Economic Empowerment:**

1. Institutionalise including a comprehensive range of gender options beyond "man" and "woman" in different forms and documents, to ensure inclusivity and respect for diverse identities.
2. Implement effective measures, that includes temporary special measures like scholarships, in line with Article 4(1) of CEDAW and CEDAW 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. Introduce both need-based and merit-based scholarships for all to discourage child labour, dropouts in schools, especially for children of marginalised communities.
3. Adapt the educational curriculum to address the evolving needs of different communities, with a focus on marginalised and indigenous groups. This includes comprehensive gender and sex education as well as vocational and life skills training.
4. Introduce educational programmes from early childhood in school curriculum to promote the equitable division of household labour and develop caregiving skills for all students, regardless of gender.
5. Acknowledge the contributions of *Birangana* by integrating their stories and achievements into the educational curriculum.
6. Provide Training of Trainers (TOT) for teachers on topics such as sex, gender, disability and inclusion, and sensitise them on how to deal with specific situations and individuals.
7. Recognise unpaid care work at the state level, include it in the national GDP, and increase investment in the care economy.
8. Empower women in the garment sector with digital banking services (for instance- Bkash or Nagad) enables them to manage their own bank accounts, receive salaries, and make independent financial decisions. Introduce personal financial management education through these financial service providers for women and youth.
9. Ensure recognition of women farmers and fish farmers in the agriculture sector of Bangladesh and highlight their contribution to the country's GDP through disaggregated data collected in the national census. Establish and monitor systems to ensure women



farmers are provided farmer cards and have access to the necessary support services and benefits as their male peers.

### **Access to Justice and Legal Reform:**

10. Revisit the anti-discrimination bill to ensure no citizen in Bangladesh faces discrimination based on religion, language, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, granting marginalised communities access to education, jobs, healthcare, and housing. Similarly, those continuing with their traditional jobs should be paid standard wages set by the government.
11. Recognise sexual and gender-based violence against gender-diverse communities legally, medically, and socially.
12. Ensure a uniform definition of "a child" across existing laws.
13. Full implementation of the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy, 2015 is essential to combat child labour in domestic work. Additionally, workers should be registered at police stations and ward offices, and legal protections must differentiate between full-time and part-time workers.
14. Ensure the registration of marriages of all religions and inter-religious partnerships, with proper age verification using school admission forms, birth registration certificates, or NIDs. Mandate that all marriages, including those conducted in religious centres, temples and mosques, and those through traditional indigenous rituals, are all officially registered. This will enable rigorous enforcement of Section 9 of the Prevention of Child Marriage Act 2017. Reinforce the 2015 announcement from Law and Justice Division that issuing marriage and divorce affidavits through Notary Public is illegal under The Muslim Marriage and Divorce Registration Act (1974) to prevent child marriages conducted through notarisation.
15. Provide training for marriage officiants, such as Kazis and priests, on the legal consequences and harmful impacts of child marriages and take action to curb the increasing trend of marriages involving migrant workers, exacerbated by the economic crisis. Ensure monitoring and accountability for relevant actors involved in the marriage system.
16. Train and recruit more female officers in law enforcement and legal professionals to provide gender-sensitive support for survivors. Mandate the training of police officers, prosecutors, legal advocates and medical professionals to handle cases involving marginalised communities including women, transgender, intersex and hijra individuals sensitively.
17. Train law enforcement and legal professionals to effectively investigate and prosecute sexual assault cases, focusing on the unique challenges faced by marginalised communities, including individuals from gender diverse communities, sex workers, Indigenous women, and women with disabilities. Ensure that these services are easily accessible without

judgement or bias. Strengthen witness protection measures to encourage reporting and deter harassment.

18. Establish support services such as legal aid and crisis intervention mechanisms for women. Additionally, we propose creating dedicated gender courts which will prioritise cases related to SGBV and gender issues and ensure timely access to justice for women.
19. Enhance lawyers' understanding of financial compensation, reparation and establish relevant laws, implementing compulsory compensation based on domestic violence survivors' social and economic status.
20. Investigate SGBV related to land grabbing, as urged by the CEDAW committee in 2016, to ensure accountability. Ensure access to justice and reparation for marginalised communities, including women with disabilities, sex workers, Dalits, hijras, other religious minorities, and gender-diverse populations.
21. Implement public awareness campaigns on the importance of consent and monitor the media and law enforcement bodies to ensure an end to victim-blaming and traditional, moral judgments against women in society.
22. Establish district-level cyber security cells to track suspects' devices and respond immediately. Create a coordination system between cyber security cells and local police stations, and train officials in gender sensitisation and understanding digital threats. Fast-track investigations to trace digital footprints and bring perpetrators to justice without delay.
23. Recognise sex workers as labourers and establish their work to be deserving of labour rights, social protection, and inclusion in GDP calculations.
24. Reformation of Section 312<sup>9</sup> and 316<sup>10</sup> under the penal code which does not recognise a woman's right to bodily autonomy, and can hold the woman responsible for injury, miscarriage and termination of pregnancy.
25. Take steps to curb and address fundamentalism and extremism effectively, through campaigns encouraging diversity and communal harmony, establishing inclusive spaces by building coalitions across sectors, and promoting cultural and mindset shifts that limit one's choice.

### **Good Governance and Inclusive Leadership:**

26. Conduct comprehensive mapping of marginalised communities at regional and rural levels to identify their needs and inclusion into local government systems through proportional representation. Establish dedicated ministry and land commission to address the unique

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<sup>9</sup> Section 312 - Of the causing of Miscarriage, of Injuries to unborn Children, of the Exposure of Infants, and of the Concealment of Births. This section indicates women might face punishment for "voluntary miscarriage".

<sup>10</sup> Section 316 - Of the causing of Miscarriage, of Injuries to unborn Children, of the Exposure of Infants, and of the Concealment of Births.

needs of the Indigenous communities and ensure their voice in national decision-making spaces through representation.

27. Ensure that the electoral process is inclusive and representative through direct election of women to reserved seats and ensure at least 50% representation of women in parliament. Additionally, proportional representation for marginalised groups such as Dalits, Biharis, Hijras, Indigenous, gender-diverse individuals, and other marginalised groups need to be established to ensure their voice in government.
28. Establish the need for inclusion and diversity within political parties by reinforcing the mandate to have at least 33% women in leadership roles in their party's structure. Inclusive policies should also be established in the manifesto of all political parties.
29. Peaceful and fair national elections that ensure a tranquil and just electoral process with balanced representation. This includes the active participation of women voters from all backgrounds and the inclusion of individuals with diverse gender identities in prominent political leadership roles across all regions of the country.
30. Empower the Anti-Corruption Commission, Legal Reform Commission, Women's Affairs Reform Commission, Media Reform Commission to provide more effective oversight of the police, addressing corruption in recruitment and political bias with enhanced neutrality and authority.
31. Ensure inclusivity by involving women and marginalised communities in budget spending decisions, raising awareness among women about allocated funds and their intended benefits. Promote transparency and accountability in budget allocation and spending, with better inter-ministerial coordination for targeted funds based on specific needs.
32. Establish a climate and gender budget to advance community- and women-led solutions, especially for vulnerable groups.

### **Demands to be Prioritised for Long-Term Actions (within 2 years)**

These demands require systemic change, policy reforms, and structural improvements and should be integrated into long-term national strategies, Operational and action plans.

#### **Access to Justice and Legal Reform:**

1. Conduct a comprehensive review and amendment process to update and eliminate archaic colonial laws that discriminate against women, gender diverse groups, focusing particularly on property rights, inheritance laws, and marital regulations.
2. Reform inheritance laws to prioritise fair property distribution and recognise gender-specific challenges regarding equal inheritance. Establish a specific legal framework to protect the property rights of third-gender individuals, including Hijras and intersex persons. The lack of such laws renders them vulnerable and without adequate legal

- protection, perpetuating their marginalisation. Additionally, implement a 'Uniform Family Code' to ensure equal rights in private laws for all individuals, regardless of gender identity.
3. Reform the law enforcement authorities, specifically the police to ensure more inclusivity in the institutions through increased women in decision-making, review salaries and working conditions to combat corruption and improve the force's reputation. Revise recruitment and training processes to emphasise integrity, community engagement, empathy, and ethical conduct, and establish public feedback mechanism and community engagement to build a more trustworthy police force and foster a more responsive and citizen-centric law enforcement.
  4. Establish dedicated units within law enforcement to handle sexual harassment and gender-based violence reports with urgency. Set up special units must be trained to handle cases involving marginalised groups (e.g, women with disabilities, Indigenous women, and gender-diverse individuals). Introduce and enforce stringent measures to combat SGBV and ensure the safety and security of women in both public and private spaces. Activate legal aid offices, social services, and social welfare departments, and strengthen referral systems to ensure gender-sensitive behaviour.
  5. Ensure legal language is simplified for accessibility, including providing diverse language options for ethnic minorities and expanding terminology, such as the definition of "third gender." Increase the capacity of police officers, especially women officers to eliminate language barriers when collecting evidence, allowing Indigenous and marginalised communities to communicate effectively and understand legal terms in their languages.
  6. Establish social rehabilitation programmes, appropriate accommodations, and security measures for SGBV survivors and their children ensuring access to free legal counsel and protection from harassment. Avoid re-traumatising procedures for survivors, provide interpretation services, and allocate separate funds for women with disabilities, Indigenous women, Dalits, Hijras, sex workers, and gender-diverse populations.
  7. Establish recognition of climate refugees within the country and ensure social protection for them under national measures and not exclude them based on geographical location.
  8. Establish specific laws needed to address the rights and social status of needy, disabled, or neurodiverse women placed in rehabilitation centres. This includes specifying the duration of stay and ensuring appropriate treatment and support services.
  9. Introduce a 'Sex Worker Protection Act' to safeguard the rights and well-being of sex workers, preventing young girls from exploitation and ensuring their access to education, healthcare, housing, rehabilitation, and relief.
  10. Establish a robust legal framework that acknowledges and addresses historical injustices while promoting equality, justice, and the protection of rights for ethnic minorities and all women.

11. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs can be separated into two distinct entities: the Ministry of Women's Development Affairs and the Ministry of Children's Development Affairs.

### **Inclusive Education:**

12. Develop curriculum tailored to the diverse needs of different regions and communities, such as textbooks in Indigenous languages, braille for the visually impaired, and allocation of sign language interpreters in the educational institutions. Include anti-violence and anti-discrimination topics in the educational curriculum to promote communal harmony.
13. Establish secondary schools near tea gardens and remote areas to reduce dropouts of children from these communities after primary level due to safety, cost and commute challenges faced.
14. Introduction of stipends for transgender, third gender and intersex individuals in schools and colleges to support their access to education and address financial barriers.
15. Implement the mandatory 12-year education as envisioned by the policy makers for upcoming government plans and ensure scholarships for women until secondary education. Allow age relaxation for students re-enrolling in school for those who missed out on education earlier and Second Chance Education due to poverty, child marriage and/or childbirth.
16. Incorporate mental health issues in the primary school curriculum to foster early awareness and understanding.
17. Ensure a supportive classroom and school environment for the inclusion of children from marginalised communities, including children with disabilities, transgender, tea garden workers' children, sex worker's children etc.
18. Establish an external accountability committee involving administrators and local influencers to enhance inclusive education in primary and secondary schools. This committee should be able to set criteria, measures for the institutions to follow, monitor progress, engage in building capacity of the institutions, and also take steps to deal with non-compliance, complaints and hold the institutions accountable.
19. Promote STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education for women and girls through inclusive awareness campaigns, career counselling, and institutional investments in laboratories, technical expertise, and essential resources. These efforts should aim to enhance their participation in technology and emerging sectors like renewable energy, while fostering a supportive policy environment that challenges gender-based barriers on both the demand and supply sides.
20. Ensure budget, space and resources to facilitate women's sports through educational institutions. Ensure structural designs of educational institutions are updated to make them

accessible for people with disabilities, such as ramps, holding bars, tactile paving, accessible toilets, etc.

21. Strengthen collaboration between education and industry to close the industry-academia gap and prioritise skills development for jobs. Involve industry professionals in curriculum development to enhance the skills of both women and men, integrating Dalits, Hijras, Indigenous, and gender-diverse individuals into professional care work.

### **Employment and Economic Empowerment:**

22. Enforce Section 46 of the 'Bangladesh Labour Act' (2006) to grant working mothers four months of maternity leave, eight weeks of prenatal leave, and eight weeks of postnatal leave. Ensure that factories and all workplaces comply with labour laws regarding parental leave and benefits. Enforce laws to protect women from discrimination related to pregnancy or maternity leave in hiring, job return, career gaps, and career progression.
23. Ensure the proper implementation of day care centres with Early Childhood Development (ECD) facilities within factory and workplace premises, while sensitising supervisors and duty bearers.
24. Establish policies and practices that provide proper incentives for women-led businesses and entrepreneurship. Ensure minimum wage for factory workers and guarantee equal pay to enhance economic independence and improve the social status of women.
25. Enforce women's rights and implement non-discriminatory policies to ensure equal access to education and job opportunities by promoting merit-based recognition to foster equality and empowerment in the workplace. Ensure workplaces are female-friendly, offer flexibility, and provide security and fair treatment for all.
26. Establish anti-discrimination policies and practices to address gender disparities in the workplace, ensure equal pay, enforce laws to boost female workforce participation, and promote visible role models from diverse backgrounds, identities, and abilities. This will encourage career growth and break gender barriers in the country.
27. Expand the jurisdiction of the main court to include oversight of labour court decisions.
28. Reform policies to prioritise women, especially divorced, abandoned, widowed and single women in *khas* land distribution, ensure their names are included on land deeds, provide equitable inheritance and land ownership rights, recognise them as farmers, guarantee equal access to agricultural resources, and revise cultural practices to secure indigenous women's land rights. Remove the need for an "able son" as a criterion for women to be able to access and use *khas* land.

## **Access to Healthcare:**

29. Establishing dedicated washroom facilities in every institution and climate-affected area is crucial for promoting equitable access to proper menstrual hygiene management, ensuring that all individuals, particularly women and girls, can manage their menstrual health with dignity and comfort.
30. Establish systems to provide post-crisis mental health support that addresses issues such as trauma, violence, and losses caused by climate change and disasters, ensuring these mental health services are offered at no cost.
31. Reinforce counselling sessions that require male partners to participate with women during Antenatal, Postnatal Care, and Family Planning Services (ANC/PNC/FP) in government hospitals. This involvement can improve maternal health outcomes, support family planning decisions, and promote consensual pregnancies.
32. Ensure the enforcement of non-discriminatory policies within healthcare and social service facilities, including access to fertility treatments, to provide SRHR services for all. Establish clear consequences for any staff members engaging in discriminatory practices.
33. Establish separate medical arrangements tailored to the healthcare needs of the Hijra, intersex, transgender and gender-diverse communities. This should ensure discouraging sex-assignment surgery of intersex infants, enable sensitised psychosocial counselling for all gender-diverse and intersex children, and gender-affirming therapy and medical support for all.
34. Ensure the integration of mental health services into primary healthcare facilities, providing specialised training for healthcare providers to recognise and address gender-specific mental health issues.
35. Implement a Universal Health Care system that provides free healthcare for children under five and individuals over 65, as envisioned by policymakers in upcoming government plans.

## **Good Governance and Inclusive Leadership:**

36. Implement policies and practices to promote and enable greater participation of women in political spaces, focusing on women's leadership, sensitising male counterparts, and creating women-friendly spaces.
37. Ensure equal representation of men and women, as well as the inclusion of Dalits, Hijras, Indigenous, and gender-diverse individuals from the local community, in local administration (e.g., chairperson, UP member), including in the Chittagong Hill Tract and other Indigenous areas. Establish an embedded capacity-building mechanism for these grassroots-level women and representatives to actively engage in political processes.
38. Collect gender, disability, and ethnicity-disaggregated data to properly measure the gender equality outcomes and assess policy impact. Additionally, further disaggregation by age, sex,

urban-rural, socioeconomic background, and type of violence, along with comprehensive monitoring of police investigations and case progress, is essential for all incidents of SGBV. Investigation reports must be made publicly available to ensure transparency and accountability.

39. Conduct a rigorous survey of people with disabilities to collect gender-segregated data and identify those in need of and eligible for disability stipends. Revise the allocated stipends to reflect current living costs, with a special focus on women with disabilities.
40. Improve public institutions' transport and infrastructure to meet the specific needs of People/Women with Disabilities and sensitise law enforcement agencies and community members to reduce ethnocentric biases.
41. Implement an adequate gender budget with proper monitoring and allocations to support the rights and well-being of marginalised women.
42. Implement the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Accord, ensuring accountability for human rights violations, including land grabbing and violence against Indigenous women by declaring a timeline for implementing all provisions of the Accord, outlining the methods and responsible entities for this process while monitoring its implementation, particularly focusing on demilitarising the region.

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# **Annexe 1: Participants in the divisional dialogues and consultations**

List of Organisations and Individuals who participated in the consultations, divisional dialogues and the validation workshops:

1. National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh
2. Manusher Jonno Foundation
3. Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha
4. Bangladesh Nari Sramik Kendra (BNSK)
5. Nijera Kori
6. Nari Moitree
7. Naripokkho
8. Sangat Bangladesh
9. SAJIDA Foundation
10. Bangladesh Society for the Change and Advocacy Nexus (B-SCAN)
11. BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD)
12. Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE)
13. Oxfam Bangladesh
14. Ognie Foundation Bangladesh
15. Bangladesh Indigenous Women Network (BIWN)
16. National Girl Child Advocacy Forum
17. Bangladesh Trade Union Centre
18. Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD)
19. Bangladesh National Woman Lawyers' Association (BNWLA)
20. Shakti Foundation
21. Badabon Sangho
22. Jatio Nari Sramik Trade Union Kendro
23. Sex Workers Network
24. YWCA Bangladesh
25. Feminists Across Generations
26. Swayong
27. Obhijan
28. SPAS Bangladesh
29. Affasa
30. Oboyob
31. Kotha
32. Pragroshor

33. Women with Disabilities Development Foundation (WDDF)
34. Supporting People and Rebuilding Communities (SPaRC)
35. Sompurna
36. We Can
37. Dalit Nari Forum
38. Byanjona Foundation
39. Green Voice Bonhishikha, Rangpur
40. Nagorik Uddyog
41. Professor, North South University
42. Student, Dhaka University
43. Representative, Dhaka Metropolitan Police
44. UP members, Dhanghaat UP, Patiya, Chattogram
45. Surjer Hashi Clinic
46. Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society of Bangladesh (OGSB)
47. Youth Development for Sustainable Bangladesh (YDSB), Bandarban
48. Prothom Alo Bondhushava, Chittagong
49. Udichi, Chittagong Zilla Sangsad
50. Barnarekha Khelaghor
51. Chittagong Cultural Union
52. Anannya Bahumukhi Nari Kalyan Sangstha, Chittagong
53. Ain Sohayota Kendro, Chittagong
54. Shilpakala Academy, Chittagong
55. AUVIC Organization of Disabled People, Chittagong
56. Pathchola Foundation
57. Nari Udyog, Chittagong
58. Lawyer, Supreme Court
59. Teacher from Primary School, Chittagong
60. Nobojagoron Hijra Association, Chittagong
61. Students, University of Chittagong
62. Member of Adolescent Club, Chittagong
63. Students, University of Rajshahi
64. Students, Rajshahi City College
65. Akota Women's Association, Natore
66. Alor Michil Nari Kalyan Shongsthan, Rajshahi
67. Representative from Women and Child Tribunals, Rajshahi
68. Jatiya Adibashi Parishad, Rajshahi
69. Regional Cooperation Council, UNDP
70. Rajshahi Autism School
71. Representative of the Hijra community, Rajshahi
72. Representative of Rajshahi Police Force
73. Members of Adolescent Club, Rajshahi

74. Members of Adolescent Club, Sunamganj
75. Students, Sylhet Mahila College
76. Students, Shahjalal Science and Technology University
77. Sonak, Sylhet
78. UNICEF, Sylhet
79. Alokito Jubo Kalyan Sangstha, Sylhet
80. Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST)
81. Idea, Sylhet
82. Students, Sylhet Youth Academy
83. Ashar Alo Jubo Kallyan Songha, Sylhet
84. Khelaghor, Sylhet
85. Rahmaniya Disability Foundation, Sylhet
86. Surma Ondho Kalyan Samiti, Sylhet
87. Representatives of Sex Worker, Shondhanori Shongstha, Sylhet
88. Representative of the Hijra community, Sylhet
89. Tea Garden Worker, Sylhet
90. Rahmania Autism Foundation, Sylhet
91. Representative of the Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian Union Parishad, Sylhet
92. Representative from One Stop Crisis Centre, Sylhet
93. District Social Welfare Officer, Sylhet
94. Representative from the Sylhet Police Force
95. Representative from the Sylhet Judge Court
96. Women with Disabilities Welfare Organization, Barisal
97. Linkup, Barisal
98. Indigenous individual (Rakahin Polly), Bourguna, Barisal
99. Representatives from Hijra community (SDSED), Barisal
100. Individuals residing in the coastal region of North Lamsor, Barisal
101. Representatives from youth groups, Barisal
102. Member of Barisal Adolescent Club, Barisal
103. Local women entrepreneurs, Barisal
104. Women Workers Trade Union, Barisal
105. Autism Foundation, Bakergonj, Barisal
106. Representative from fisher community, Shyastabad, Barisal
107. Representative from the Barisal Cultural Organisation Coalition
108. Teacher from the Barisal Primary School
109. Representative from the Barisal Police Force
110. Union Parishad Member, Barisal
111. Sannoy
112. Diner Alo Hijra Sangho

## Annexe 2: About the Women's Movement in Bangladesh

In the 1980s, 1990s and 2020, Bangladesh saw historic surges in the Feminist movement and public outcry across the country, the most recent one prompted by an increase in rape cases and acts of sexual violence<sup>11</sup>. Bangladesh signed the CEDAW with reservations to two articles- 2 and 16.1 (C). Women's movement endorsed it wholeheartedly. They have worked relentlessly for law reform and reproductive health rights and pushed policies to minimise the gender gap. The women's movement was instrumental to the fall of the autocratic regime in the 1990s. During the democratic governments, the neoliberal nation-state received massive funds to promote gender and development. Bangladesh has had a promising foundation for advancing gender equality, with women leaders serving as head of state since 1991. However, this has not yet fully translated into a significant reduction in the gender gap or substantial progress in addressing gender-based violence. The gruesome cases of rapes in 2020 led to a robust movement to end rape and the prominent culture of impunity in the country by women's rights activists across generations.

Deep-rooted discriminatory social norms stemming from patriarchal structures and unequal power distribution across institutions and communities continue to hinder gender equality in Bangladesh. While the country has achieved accelerated income growth<sup>12</sup> and made substantial gains in poverty reduction, positioning it as one of the world's emerging economies, these advancements are disproportionate<sup>13</sup>. Bangladesh is set to graduate from the UN classification of Least Developed Countries (LDC) in 2026. Still, an analysis of its progress towards the SDGs reveals that vulnerable groups such as garment workers<sup>14</sup> and climate-affected people<sup>15</sup> and other marginalised communities remain at risk of being left behind. For example, Bangladesh's Human Development Index (HDI) value for 2021-2022 drops to 0.503 when adjusted for inequality, representing a loss of 23.9% from its original value of 0.661. Given these disparities, gender equality must be prioritised before, during, and after the LDC graduation process, with policies and actions guided by the voices of women and girls in all their diversity.

Similarly, youth engagement and leadership are critical to achieving sustainable development goals and driving positive change, especially in Bangladesh, where youth make up a significant portion of

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<sup>11</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>12</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/bangladesh/overview>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/bangladesh/overview>

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/SV244\\_230131.pdf](https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/SV244_230131.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.thedailystar.net/supplements/32nd-anniversary/towards-smart-bangladesh/news/overcoming-challenges-ldc-graduation-3244706>

the population. As a key demographic, young people must be actively involved in shaping policies that impact their lives. It is essential that they not only have a voice but also decision-making power in youth-related issues. This is because people within the same age group better understand each other's needs, capacities, and limitations.

Youth in Bangladesh and globally have continuously demonstrated their potential as changemakers<sup>16</sup>. They bring fresh perspectives, share power across generations, and push for an equitable and empowering agenda for all. Despite this, youth are often excluded from mainstream policy discussions, especially at the state level. With the youth population in Bangladesh growing by 15.81% in the last decade, now standing at 4.59 crore (45.9 million)<sup>17</sup>, the need for meaningful youth participation is more pressing than ever.

As of 2022, youth aged 15–29 made up 27.96% of Bangladesh's population<sup>18</sup>. This demographic offers immense potential for economic growth, often referred to as the demographic dividend, where a larger share of the population is of working age. However, according to reports published by leading newspaper, The Daily Star, the Prothom Alo and International Labour Organization (ILO), "Global Employment Policy Review 2023," approximately 41% of youth in Bangladesh are inactive, meaning they are neither in education, employment, nor receiving any job training. This figure is especially concerning among young women, with an inactivity rate of 61.71%, compared to 18.59% among men. The number of inactive youths is on the rise, with around 12.9 million young people in Bangladesh currently inactive. Factors such as early marriage for girls, lack of job skills, insufficient education, limited employment opportunities, and poor social conditions are contributing to this crisis. International comparisons show that youth unemployment is generally lower in developed countries, while nations like Bangladesh face higher rates of joblessness and inactivity.

Recent global discussions, including the SDG Summit in September 2023, emphasised the importance of youth engagement. The summit, marking the halfway point to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), called for accelerated action in key areas where progress had stalled, including education, digital transformation, and climate change. In particular, the summit highlighted the need for young people to be at the forefront of these efforts. Additionally, the Summit of the Future 2024 emphasised promoting inclusive, equitable, and sustainable digital development by fostering international cooperation to bridge digital divides, advance human rights, ensure gender equality, support environmental sustainability, and address the needs of developing countries. The commitment focuses on creating a safe, secure, and accessible digital future

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<sup>16</sup><https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/news/2024/03/shaping-the-agenda-youth-engagement-and-empowerment-at-the-68th-session-of-the-commission-on-the-status-of-women>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/youths-account-28pc-population-3293161>

<sup>18</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), "Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics Report 2022."

through innovation, partnerships, and a human-centric approach to emerging technologies. Its 'Pact for the Future' charts a path toward achieving the SDGs and responding to emerging challenges and opportunities that includes a Global Digital Compact and a Declaration on Future Generations. Similarly, the 68th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in early 2024 stressed the importance of youth-led initiatives in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. It called for increased investment in inclusive, affordable, and equitable education, including digital and vocational training, to empower young people, particularly girls, to overcome poverty and vulnerability.

Despite continuous advocacy by development organisations and women's rights organisations, progress toward gender equality in Bangladesh has been slow, with occasional reversals. While gender parity in school enrolment has improved at primary and secondary levels, leading to an equal ratio of boys and girls in primary education in most regions<sup>19</sup>, it declines at higher education levels for women. Regarding women's political participation, Section 65 of the constitution established reserved seats for women, initially providing 15 seats in 1972. This number increased to 30 in 1978, extended to 45 in 2004, and finally reached 50 seats in 2009. In 2018, the 17th amendment extended the tenure of these seats for another 25 years. Despite commitments in the then ruling party's manifesto to hold direct elections for 100 reserved seats and the National Women Development Policy 2011's commitment to increase women's seats in parliament to 33%<sup>20</sup>, these changes have not occurred. The extension contradicted prior commitments to increase representation. Women's groups have continuously advocated for direct elections to ensure genuine political empowerment, as MPs elected through reserved seats face significant limitations, including a lack of authority and constituency responsibilities, along with experiencing discrimination. Similarly, removing women's quotas from public services indicates a regressive shift in both public and private professional spheres for women's engagement. 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 wellbeing. 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 strongly embedded in Bangladeshi society.

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

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<sup>19</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>20</sup> <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEAAsia/Docs/Publications/2021/12/bd-Advocacy-Brief-s.pdf>

labour force, improved access to education, higher representation of women in politics, and reduced 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.
- Repeal of Section 155(4) of the Evidence Act in 2022, which previously allowed the questioning of a rape survivor's character, represented a significant step towards protecting survivors' rights.

In recognising Bangladesh's commendable achievements, it is crucial to acknowledge the persistent challenges and gender inequalities in the social landscape. As we enter the next phase of the Five-Year Plan of Bangladesh (expected from 2025-June 2030), which aims to have 'Sustainable and income equitable Growth for Upper Middle Income'. The past government's development priorities have been the health and education sectors, which have been severely impacted by COVID-19 and need urgent recuperation. This could lead to uneven growth, and a large portion of the population belonging to the marginal groups is likely to be left behind. There is a credible threat of reducing the budget for this group, especially after the graduation from the LDC as there is also a possibility of reduced funding for the social sector worldwide that will impact the most vulnerable groups disproportionately. In the aftermath of the regime's fall and attack on religious minorities, Indigenous communities, and gender-diverse groups, the inaction of the law-enforcement agencies made this assumption a reality. The flooding in the northeast made these groups even more vulnerable.

# Annexe 3: Sector-wise Demands & Recommendations

## A. Education:

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the primary education dropout rate is 13.95 per cent, with 13.19 per cent for girls and 14.88 per cent for boys. At the secondary level, the dropout rate is 35.98 per cent, with 33.25 per cent for boys and 40.78 per cent for girls. The dropout rate in the higher secondary level is 22.72 per cent, comprising 21.69 per cent for boys and 22.60 per cent for girls<sup>21</sup>. The dropout rates diverge from the ideals of inclusive education which include lower enrolment in hill tracks, and 60 percent of the marginalised 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 stigmatisation and negative attitudes from teachers, peers, and the public are responsible for this<sup>22</sup>. The Government of Bangladesh launched the Female Secondary Stipend and Assistance Programme (FSSAP) in the early 1990s to support girls' education. The programme initially provided stipends of 100 taka for grades 6 and 7, 120 taka for grade 8, and 150 taka for grades 9 and 10. However, these amounts have remained largely unchanged since the programme's inception, which has become a critical concern in light of the country's recent challenges. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the longest school closures in Bangladesh's history, contributing to a significant increase in the dropout rate among girls. One key factor exacerbating this issue is child marriage, often driven by the financial hardships faced by families.

Additionally, while the government provides stipends to support girls' education, students are often still burdened with additional fees imposed by educational institutions. These fees, often seen as a means of generating income or funding for the school, further strain families, particularly those already struggling economically, and can contribute to the financial pressures.

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<sup>21</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>22</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.



### **From the government, we demand:**

- Ensure a supportive classroom and school environment for the inclusion of children from marginalised communities, including children with disabilities, transgender, tea garden workers' children, sex worker's children etc.
- Ensure structural designs of educational institutions are updated to make them accessible to people with disabilities, such as ramps, holding bars, tactile paving, accessible toilets, etc.
- Increase the stipend amount for girls to ensure their uninterrupted access to education and to advance gender equity by improving literacy rates among them.
- Introduction of stipends for transgender, third gender and intersex individuals in schools and colleges to support their access to education and address financial barriers.
- Admission forms to include a comprehensive range of gender options beyond "man" and "woman" to ensure inclusivity and respect for diverse identities.
- Adapt the educational curriculum to address the evolving needs of different communities, with a focus on marginalised, indigenous groups and gender diverse communities. This includes comprehensive gender and sex education as well as vocational and life skills training.
- Provide Training of Trainers (TOT) for teachers on topics such as sex, gender, disability and inclusion, and sensitise them on how to deal with specific situations and individuals.
- Develop curriculum tailored to the diverse needs of different regions and communities, such as textbooks in Indigenous languages, braille for the visually impaired, and allocation of sign language interpreters.
- Include anti-violence and anti-discrimination topics in the educational curriculum.
- Acknowledge the contributions of *Birangana* by integrating their stories and achievements into the educational curriculum<sup>23</sup>.
- Establish secondary schools near tea gardens and remote areas to reduce dropouts of children from these communities after primary level due to safety, cost and commute challenges faced.
- Allow age relaxation for students re-enrolling in school for those who missed out on education earlier and Second Chance Education due to poverty, child marriage and/or childbirth.
- Establish an accountability committee involving administrators and local influencers to enhance inclusive education in primary and secondary schools.
- Promote STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education for women and girls through inclusive awareness campaigns, career counselling, and institutional

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<sup>23</sup> Birangana is the title awarded by the Government of Bangladesh to women raped during the Bangladesh Liberation War by the Pakistan army, Razakar paramilitaries, and their local collaborators.

investments in laboratories, technical expertise, and essential resources. These efforts should aim to enhance their participation in the renewable energy sector, while fostering a supportive policy environment that challenges gender-based barriers on both the demand and supply sides.

- Ensure budget, space and resources to facilitate women's sports through educational institutions.
- Implement effective measures, that includes 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.
- Increase compulsory education to 12-year for the 9th five-year plan. Ensure scholarships for women until secondary education. Restore the quota for girls, women, gender-diverse communities, Indigenous communities, Dalits, and students with special needs throughout the course of 12 years of education.

## **B. Sexual and Gender-based Violence:**

Sexual and 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. Bangladesh ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1984, committing to eliminate discrimination against women and ensure equality. Despite this, Bangladesh maintains reservations on Articles 2 and 16.1(c). Article 2 concerns the modification of social and cultural patterns to eliminate prejudices and practices that are based on the idea of inferiority or superiority of either sex. Article 16.1(c) pertains to equal rights and responsibilities in marriage and divorce, including the right to choose a spouse and enter marriage only with free and full consent. The country cites conflicts between CEDAW provisions and religious laws, particularly Sharia law, as justification for these reservations. These articles are fundamental to achieving gender parity and addressing systemic discrimination against women and contradicts Bangladesh's constitutional commitments<sup>24</sup> to gender equality and non-discrimination, particularly given provisions that ensure equal opportunities for women.

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<sup>24</sup> Article 19(3) states the state will ensure equal opportunities for women in every sphere; Article 28(1) prohibits discrimination on the ground of sex; Article 28(2) ensures equal rights of women in every sphere of the state and public life; and Article 28(4) allows the state to make special provisions in favour of women

**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 educational institutions, and workplaces, among other places<sup>25</sup>.

**From the government, we demand:**

- Introduce age-appropriate Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) within the national board structures and having teachers trained to conduct these classes sensitively, 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.
- Implement the judgement based on the Writ Petition No 5916/2008<sup>26</sup> of the high court division to institutionalise safeguarding policies to address bullying and sexual harassment in any institution or organisation. Ensure swift responses to sexual harassment reports within dedicated units and helplines, improve public transport security, promote bystander intervention, and create safe spaces for survivors to seek help and counselling by enacting 'Sexual Harassment Prevention and Protection' bill as a law.
- Train law enforcement and legal professionals to effectively investigate and prosecute sexual assault cases, focusing on the unique challenges faced by marginalised communities, including individuals with diverse sexual orientations, sex workers, Indigenous women, and women with disabilities. Ensure that these services are easily accessible without judgment or bias. Strengthen witness protection measures to encourage reporting and deter harassment.
- Recognise sexual and gender-based violence against gender-diverse communities legally, medically, and socially. Train police officers and medical professionals to handle cases involving transgender and hijra individuals sensitively. This training should include understanding anatomical differences, respecting gender identity, and ensuring that all interactions are free from secondary victimisation, such as unnecessary physical contact or verbal abuse.
- Full ratification of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and withdraw reservation from Article 2 to eliminate all discriminatory laws and rules and enact new laws to promote women's human rights and Article 16.1(c) to ensure equal rights and responsibilities in marriage and divorce, upholding commitments to ensure equal rights and access for women and Bangladeshi citizens.

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<sup>25</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.

<sup>26</sup> [https://www.supremecourt.gov.bd/resources/documents/276907\\_Writ\\_Petition\\_5916\\_08.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov.bd/resources/documents/276907_Writ_Petition_5916_08.pdf)

- Ensure implementation of CEDAW, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA) through enhanced policies, adoption of laws, monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

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

- Employ gender-inclusive language in anti-SGBV movements to foster inclusivity and prevent violence and discrimination against all genders.
- Raise social awareness about the rights and dignity of girls, women, gender-diverse communities, Indigenous communities, Dalit individuals, and other ethnic minorities.

**Domestic Violence:** Bangladesh ranks one of the highest in the world concerning 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 percent of Bangladeshi men justify wife-beating, 38 per cent lack clarity on physical violence, and 40 per cent limit women's social roles<sup>27</sup>.

**From the government, we demand:**

- Ensure prompt investigations and judgments in domestic violence cases and facilitate effective mobile courts to deliver justice for survivors and hold perpetrators accountable.
- Mandate the recruitment and training of women investigation officers and prosecutors in all thanas to provide gender-sensitive support to survivors and enhance their access to justice.
- Establish social rehabilitation programmes, appropriate accommodations, and security measures for survivors and their children.
- Enhance lawyers' understanding of financial compensation and establish relevant laws, implementing compulsory compensation based on victims' social and economic status.
- Amend and implement the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 with proper monitoring, service provider sensitisation, and a focus on survivors' safety and mental health.

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<sup>27</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.

**Child Marriage:** In Bangladesh, 51 per cent and 16 per cent of women are married before 18 and 15 years of age, respectively<sup>28</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>29</sup>.

**From the government, we demand:**

- Eliminate the special provision of Child Marriage Restraint Act of 2017, which allow child marriage in "special cases," such as "accidental" or "illegal" pregnancies, or marriages intended to protect a girl's "honour." This clause undermines efforts to combat child marriage and jeopardizes the rights and well-being of minors.
- Ensure the registration of all marriages with proper age verification using school admission forms, birth registration certificates, or NIDs. Provide training for marriage officiants, such as Kazis and priests, on the legal consequences and harmful impacts of child marriages and take action to curb the increasing trend of marriages involving migrant workers, exacerbated by the economic crisis. Mandate that all marriages, including those conducted in temples and mosques, are officially registered. Rigorously enforce Section 9 of the Prevention of Child Marriage Act 2023.
- Implement mandatory public surveys of local chairpersons every two years to ensure accountability.
- The Law and Justice Division reinforce its 2015 announcement that issuing marriage and divorce affidavits through Notary Public is illegal under The Muslim Marriage and Divorce Registration Act (1974). This enforcement is especially crucial in preventing child marriages conducted through notarization.
- Ensure a uniform definition of "a child" across existing laws.

**Cyber Violence:** Women and girls encounter extensive SGBV, 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>30</sup>.

**From the government, we demand:**

- Enact a new Digital/Cyber Security Act that conforms to international human rights standards. Collaborate with civil society organisations and the United Nations to ensure

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<sup>28</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>29</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.

<sup>30</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.

data protection laws and regulations comply fully with these standards. Additionally, foster digital literacy among women and girls to reduce vulnerabilities and mitigate potential risks in the digital environment.

- Refine the definition of cyber laws to address AI-related issues.
- Establish and reinforce an effective hotline call centre similar to 999 (a simple, easy-to-remember 3 or 4-digit number, such as 1111 or 2222) that provides immediate support for victims of violence, including cybercrime and sexual violence. Ensure quick access to help and guidance, and train staff handling these calls to manage such cases with sensitivity.
- Establish district-level cyber security cells to track suspects' devices and respond immediately, making justice accessible, reducing costs, saving time, and preventing evidence loss. Create a coordination system between cyber security cells and local police stations, and train officials in gender sensitisation and understanding digital threats. Fast-track investigations to trace digital footprints and bring perpetrators to justice.

#### **From the civil society we demand:**

- Develop and prioritise targeted programmes on online harassment and bullying, including mandatory push messages on digital literacy and safe-use guidelines in native languages through mobile phone companies.

**Violence in Marginalised Communities:** Incidents of rape and sexual violence have escalated among women from marginalised communities in Bangladesh. The risk of violence is compounded for religious minorities, women with disabilities, indigenous women, domestic workers, sex workers and 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 voicing their experiences arises from communication barriers, social isolation, and pervasive social stereotypes. Among them, 18 per cent endure repeated abuse<sup>31</sup>. In 2023, 23 domestic workers were victims of violence, including 11 fatalities, 10 injuries, and 2 reported suicides<sup>32</sup>. In the hill tracts area around 95 per cent of those who experience sexual and gender-based violence are afraid of being stigmatised, leading to 60 percent of them abstaining from pursuing legal remedies<sup>33</sup>. The non-implementation of the 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Accord has led to a worsening human rights situation in the CHT, marked by violence, land grabbing, and oppression. A study revealed that between 2004 and 2011, there were 1,487 documented cases of

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<sup>31</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.

<sup>32</sup> [https://bilsbd.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/BILS\\_Eng\\_Bulletin-January-to-to-March\\_2024.pdf](https://bilsbd.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/BILS_Eng_Bulletin-January-to-to-March_2024.pdf)

<sup>33</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.

human rights violations involving military personnel, including incidents of loss of life, looting, arson, destruction of places of worship, arrests, torture, physical abuse, and evictions<sup>34</sup>. In 2023, 240 human rights violations were reported, including arrests, raids, and kidnappings. There were 24 incidents of violence against Jumma women and children, with 25 women subjected to violations, including 12 rapes, 7 attempted rapes, and 2 attempted abductions and trafficking. One person was killed during these incidents<sup>35</sup>. This environment has created a pervasive structure of oppression across all aspects of life, perpetuated by military and security forces, police, and, at times, government officials and Bengali settlers. Communal violence has also escalated in recent years, resulting in attacks, vandalism, and arson based on ethnicity, religion, and locality, among other factors. According to a report by Prothom Alo<sup>36</sup>, after the fall of the Awami League government, from August 5 to 20, over 200 attacks occurred across more than 50 districts, primarily targeting minority communities, including the Hindu, Christian, Ahmadiyya, and ethnic minorities. At least 1,068 homes and businesses were damaged, and 22 houses of worship were attacked. The Bangladesh Christian Association reported attacks on multiple churches and Christian properties, while the Kapaeeng Foundation documented at least 10 attacks on ethnic minority communities in Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Naogaon, Chapainawabganj, and Thakurgaon.

**From the government, we demand:**

- Collect gender, disability, and ethnicity-disaggregated data to properly measure the gender equality outcomes and assess policy impact. Additionally, further disaggregation by age, sex, urban-rural, socioeconomic background, and type of violence, along with comprehensive monitoring of police investigations and case progress, is essential for all incidents of SGBV. Investigation reports must be made publicly available to ensure transparency and accountability.
- Investigate SGBV related to land grabbing, as urged by the CEDAW committee in 2016, to ensure accountability.
- Ensure survivors and their families have access to free legal counsel and protection from harassment.
- Avoid re-traumatizing procedures, provide interpretation services, and allocate separate funds for women with disabilities, Indigenous women, Dalits, Hijras, sex workers, and gender-diverse populations.
- Implement an adequate gender budget with proper monitoring and allocations to support the rights and well-being of marginalised women.

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<sup>34</sup> [https://www.iwgia.org/images/publications/0577\\_lgia\\_report\\_14\\_optimized.pdf](https://www.iwgia.org/images/publications/0577_lgia_report_14_optimized.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.pcjss.org/pcjss-annual-report-of-2023-on-human-rights-situation-of-cht/#:~:text=In%202023%2C%20240%20human%20rights,by%20the%20army%20and%2084>

<sup>36</sup> <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/97chuvmupe>

- Improve public institutions' transport and infrastructure to meet the specific needs of People/Women with Disabilities and sensitise law enforcement agencies and community members to reduce ethnocentric biases.
- As per CEDAW Article 6, state parties must take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress trafficking and the exploitation of women, effectively enforcing prevention against coercing women and girls into forced sexual relationships or sex work.
- Recognise sex workers as labourers and establish their work to be deserving of labour rights, social protection, and inclusion in GDP calculations.
- Introduce a Sex Worker Protection Act to safeguard the rights and well-being of sex workers, preventing young girls from exploitation and ensuring their access to education, healthcare, housing, rehabilitation, and relief.
- Following Convention 107 of the Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention 1957, continue recognising Indigenous communities as "adibashi" to uphold their land rights, remove military bases from their territories, and prevent land grabbing that contributes to violence against Indigenous women.
- Establish a dedicated ministry and land commission to address the unique needs of Indigenous communities in the plains and guarantee reserved seats for Indigenous groups in local government systems particularly in regions where they are the predominant population, to ensure their voices are heard and their interests are protected.
- Revisit the anti-discrimination bill to ensure no citizen in Bangladesh faces discrimination based on religion, language, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, granting marginalised communities access to education, jobs, healthcare, and housing. Similarly, those continuing with their traditional jobs should be paid standard wages set by the government.
- Full implementation of the Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy, 2015 is essential to combat child labour in domestic work. Additionally, Workers should be registered at police stations and ward offices, and legal protections must differentiate between full-time and part-time workers.
- The Government of Bangladesh must declare a timeline for implementing all provisions of the CHT Accord, outlining the methods and responsible entities for this process while monitoring its implementation, particularly focusing on demilitarising the region. Engage the High Commissioner of Human Rights with the Government of Bangladesh, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), and indigenous peoples for technical assistance and human rights training for both the Bangladesh Army and Indigenous communities.



## C. Health

**Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR):** Bangladeshi laws fail to fully address women's experiences, including access to sexual and reproductive health services for all, regardless of marital status, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, climate crisis, disability, or profession. Similarly, maternal health issues, sexual crimes, and non-consensual pregnancies remain growing concerns. SRHR discrimination intersects with various forms of marginalisation. To improve SRHR, there is a need for better healthcare access, relevant policies, provider training, support networks, and research on the health needs of older persons.

### **From the government, we demand:**

- Implement a Universal Health Care system that provides free healthcare for children under five and individuals over 65, as envisioned by policymakers in the 9th Five-Year Plan.
- Enforce Section 46 of the Bangladesh Labour Act (2006) to grant working mothers four months of maternity leave, eight weeks of prenatal leave, and eight weeks of postnatal leave.
- Ensure that factories and all workplaces comply with labour laws regarding parental leave and benefits.
- Enforce laws to protect women from discrimination related to pregnancy or maternity leave in hiring, job return, career gaps, and career progression.
- Ensure the proper implementation of daycare centres with Early Childhood Development (ECD) facilities within factory and workplace premises, while sensitising supervisors and duty bearers. Additionally, allow pregnant or elderly workers to take periodic rest, reduce overtime, and schedule regular health check-ups. Implement supportive policies for breastfeeding mothers, such as providing lactation rooms, flexible work schedules, and breastfeeding breaks. These measures will help mothers continue breastfeeding after returning to work, which is essential for infant health and development.
- Ensure the enforcement of non-discriminatory policies within healthcare and social service facilities, including access to fertility treatments, to provide SRHR services for all. Establish clear consequences for any staff members engaging in discriminatory practices.
- Establish separate medical arrangements tailored to the healthcare needs of the Hijra, intersex, transgender and gender-diverse communities.
- Reinforce counselling sessions that require male partners to participate with women during Antenatal, Postnatal Care, and Family Planning Services (ANC/PNC/FP) in government hospitals. This involvement can improve maternal health outcomes, support family planning decisions, and promote consensual pregnancies

- Establishing dedicated washroom facilities in every institution and climate-affected area is crucial for promoting equitable access to proper menstrual hygiene management, ensuring that all individuals, particularly women and girls, can manage their menstrual health with dignity and comfort.

**Mental Health:** In Bangladesh, less than 0.11 per cent of the population has access to free essential psychotropic medications. Few healthcare workers (0.49 per cent) are trained in providing mental health services, and there are even fewer psychiatrists (0.16 per 100,000 population). At a macro level, lack of healthcare expenditure at the state level, poor advocacy, and limited research further exacerbates the problem. The lack of resources to address mental health issues significantly affects individuals dealing with psychological trauma, particularly in the context of the July uprising. Such trauma can result in conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression for the students and protestors who witnessed or survived violent incidents

**From the government, we demand:**

- Ensure the integration of mental health services into primary healthcare facilities, providing specialised training for healthcare providers to recognise and address gender-specific mental health issues. This approach promotes culturally sensitive and inclusive care, especially for marginalised communities. Additionally, include diverse language options and interpreters for individuals with disabilities and Indigenous communities, ensuring respect for the privacy and dignity of all mental health service recipients.
- Establish systems to provide post-crisis mental health support that addresses issues such as trauma, violence, and losses caused by climate change and disasters, ensuring these mental health services are offered at no cost.
- Incorporate mental health issues in the primary school curriculum to foster early awareness and understanding.
- All youth involved in the quota reform movement should receive professional mental health support through their educational institutions. Additionally, it is essential to extend mental health support to the mothers of these students.

**D. Law Reformation and Access to Justice:**

Most laws in Bangladesh carry a colonial legacy that is over two centuries old, although some changes have been made to meet global human rights standards and regulations. However, the coexistence of secularism (Article 12) and Islam as the state religion (Article 2A) in the Bangladesh Constitution creates an inherent conflict and conceptual ambiguity, further complicating the legal framework. Moreover, laws related to marriage, property rights, inheritance, rape and gender-based

violence need reform. In Bangladesh, the legal framework does not recognise abortion as a reproductive right, and women may face penalties for "voluntary miscarriage." While procedures like menstrual regulation and medication for menstrual regulation (MRM) provide options for unplanned pregnancies, current laws do not permit abortion. Additionally, the Penal Code of 1860 uses the term "miscarriage" instead of "abortion," which affects how pregnancy termination cases are handled.

The existing definition of rape focuses primarily on vaginal penetration of a woman and does not encompass other acts of sexual assault, such as oral or anal penetration, or sexual penetration of boys, men, and individuals of other gender identities, which can cause severe trauma to victims. Moreover, the definition of rape in Section 375 of the Penal Code 1860 includes an exception for marriage.

In Bangladesh, women contribute 88% of agricultural labour but own only 4% of private land, facing systemic exclusion from land ownership, inheritance rights, and access to productive resources. Despite their significant role in food production and sustainable agriculture, women are not recognised as farmers and are deprived of government support. Inheritance laws, regulated by religion-based personal laws, further limit women's property rights. Muslim women follow Sharia law, while Hindu and Christian women face distinct, often restrictive inheritance rules, compounded by cultural and societal barriers. Unmarried daughters receive some priority, but widows and women without sons have limited rights across all religious groups. These discriminatory laws, combined with patriarchal values, create significant barriers to land ownership and property rights for women. The Khas Land Distribution Policy exacerbates this issue by prioritising families with capable sons, marginalising women-headed households and indigenous women. Even when women gain access to *khas* land, it is often tied to their husbands, denying them independent ownership. Outdated cultural norms and legal frameworks perpetuate these disparities, leaving women without equitable rights or recognition in agriculture.

**From the government, we demand:**

- Amend the Constitution to uphold a framework that ensures the separation of state affairs from religious influence, fostering equality, inclusivity, and the protection of individual rights while respecting the diverse faiths and beliefs of all citizens. Additionally, recognising 41 other languages alongside Bangla in the constitution.
- Conduct a comprehensive review and amendment process to update and eliminate archaic colonial laws that discriminate against women, other genders, and sexually diverse groups, focusing particularly on property rights, inheritance laws, and marital regulations.

- Reformation of Section 312<sup>37</sup> and 316<sup>38</sup> under the penal code which does not recognise a woman's right to bodily autonomy, and can hold the woman responsible for injury, miscarriage and termination of pregnancy.
- Introduce and enforce stringent measures to combat SGBV and ensure the safety and security of women in both public and private spaces.
- Train law enforcement and legal professionals to effectively investigate and prosecute sexual assault cases, focusing on the unique challenges faced by marginalised communities, including individuals from gender diverse communities, sex workers, Indigenous women, and women with disabilities. Ensure that these services are easily accessible without judgement or bias. Strengthen witness protection measures to encourage reporting and deter harassment.
- Establish support services such as legal aid and crisis intervention mechanisms for women. Additionally, we propose creating dedicated gender courts which will prioritise cases related to SGBV and gender issues and ensure timely access to justice for women.
- Enhance lawyers' understanding of financial compensation, reparation and establish relevant laws, implementing compulsory compensation based on domestic violence survivors' social and economic status.
- Initiate effective preliminary and follow-up investigation after the survivor files a case to prevent them from enduring prolonged suffering in the pursuit of justice.
- Ensure legal language is simplified for accessibility, including providing diverse language options for ethnic minorities and expanding terminology, such as the definition of "third gender." Increase the capacity of women police officers to eliminate language barriers when collecting evidence, allowing Indigenous and marginalised communities to communicate effectively and understand legal terms in their languages.
- Revise and expand the legal definition of rape to encompass all forms of non-consensual sexual acts, including within marriage, and ensure it applies to all genders.
- Revise Section 146 (3) of the Evidence Act, 1872 (amended) concerning rape to eliminate any form of "victim blaming" in cases of sexual violence, regardless of class, caste, ethnicity, religion, age, or gender identity.
- Ensure that incidents of rape are not resolved through *grameen shalish* (community-led courts) and are treated as punishable offenses. Additionally, any verdict reached through *shalish* that involves a rape survivor marrying their rapist should also be considered a punishable offense.

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<sup>37</sup> Section 312 - Of the causing of Miscarriage, of Injuries to unborn Children, of the Exposure of Infants, and of the Concealment of Births. This section indicates women might face punishment for "voluntary miscarriage".

<sup>38</sup> Section 316 - Of the causing of Miscarriage, of Injuries to unborn Children, of the Exposure of Infants, and of the Concealment of Births.

- Implement public awareness campaigns on the importance of consent and monitor the media and law enforcement bodies to ensure an end to victim-blaming and moral judgments against women in society.
- Reform inheritance laws to prioritise fair property distribution and recognise gender-specific challenges regarding equal inheritance. Additionally, implement a Uniform Family Code to ensure equal rights in private laws for all individuals, regardless of gender identity.
- Establish a robust legal framework that acknowledges and addresses historical injustices while promoting equality, justice, and the protection of rights for ethnic minorities and all women.
- Establish specific laws needed to address the rights and social status of needy, disabled, or neurodiverse women placed in rehabilitation centres. This includes specifying the duration of stay and ensuring appropriate treatment and support services.
- Establish a specific legal framework to protect the property rights of the gender diverse population. The lack of such laws renders them vulnerable and without adequate legal protection, perpetuating their marginalisation.
- Expand the jurisdiction of the main court to include oversight of labour court decisions.
- Activate legal aid offices, social services, and social welfare departments, and strengthen referral systems to ensure gender-sensitive behaviour.
- The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs can be separated into two distinct entities: the Ministry of Women's Development Affairs and the Ministry of Children's Development Affairs.
- Reform policies to prioritise women in *khas* land distribution, ensure their names are included on land deeds, provide equitable inheritance and land ownership rights, recognise them as farmers, guarantee equal access to agricultural resources, and revise cultural practices to secure indigenous women's land rights.

#### **E. Women's Participation, Economic Empowerment, Decision-Making and Care Work:**

The erasure of women's quota from public service has posed a significant threat to the affirmative action women have been receiving to empower themselves. Merging the quota for transgenders with people with disabilities also shows the patriarchal biases of the decision-making system and unclarity about these identities. Traditional norms, values, and religious doctrines often limit women's potential, visibility in public spaces, and decision-making at home; for gender-diverse groups, the situation is even more limited. Similarly, in Bangladesh, care work is primarily seen as women's responsibility, with significant disparities in unpaid domestic and caregiving activities.

Women spend an average of 5.8 hours daily on these tasks, while men spend only 0.8 hours, which is one-seventh of the time. In contrast, men dedicate 6.1 hours to employment-related activities, while women spend just 1.2 hours, five times less. This imbalance highlights the lack of recognition for women's work and underscores the need for social and economic reforms.<sup>39</sup> The invisibilisation of the overwhelming burden of care work on women results from gender stereotypes, which consider care work to be the “natural” role for women and does not recognise it as work, while freeing men from their responsibilities. Additionally, women's contributions are often overlooked because their identities are not acknowledged in traditionally masculine sectors. For example, women working in the fishing and farming sectors are rarely recognised and their contribution to the GDP is not taken into account, and even access to services and benefits for farmers are not open to them.

**From the government, we demand:**

- Revise the quota system published in July 2024, reintroduce a separate quota for women in public service; and have separate quotas for both transgender individuals and people with disabilities separately. Similarly, separate quotas for socially excluded groups like Indigenous communities, Dalits, ethnic and religious minorities, and highly vulnerable groups such as the children of sex workers and tea workers should be introduced.
- Promote gender equality through education and awareness campaigns that challenge stereotypes and highlight the value of women's participation in all aspects of society.
- Establish policies and practices that provide proper incentives for women-led businesses and entrepreneurship. Ensure minimum wage for factory workers and guarantee equal pay to enhance economic independence and improve the social status of women.
- Implement policies and practices to promote and enable greater participation of women in political spaces, focusing on women's leadership, sensitising male counterparts, and creating women-friendly spaces.
- Enforce women's rights and implement non-discriminatory policies to ensure equal access to education and job opportunities by promoting merit-based recognition to foster equality and empowerment in the workplace. Ensure workplaces are female-friendly, offer flexibility, and provide security and fair treatment for all.
- Strengthen collaboration between education and industry to close the industry-academia gap and prioritise skills development for jobs. Involve industry professionals in curriculum development to enhance the skills of both women and men, integrating Dalits, Hijras, Indigenous, and gender-diverse individuals into professional care work.

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<sup>39</sup> [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)

- Establish anti-discrimination policies and practices to address gender disparities in the workplace, ensure equal pay, enforce laws to boost female workforce participation, and promote visible role models from diverse backgrounds, identities, and abilities. This will encourage career growth and break gender barriers in the country.
- Ensure equal representation of men and women, as well as the inclusion of Dalits, Hijras, Indigenous, and gender-diverse individuals from the local community, in local administration (e.g, chairperson, UP member), including in the Chittagong Hill Tract and other Indigenous areas. Establish an embedded capacity-building mechanism for these grassroots-level women and representatives to actively engage in political processes.
- Conduct a rigorous survey of people with disabilities to collect gender-segregated data and identify those in need of and eligible for disability stipends. Revise the allocated stipends to reflect current living costs, with a special focus on women with disabilities.
- Recognise unpaid care work at the state level, include it in the national GDP, and increase investment in the care economy. Additionally, introduce educational programmes from early childhood in school curriculum to promote the equitable division of household labour and develop caregiving skills for all students, regardless of gender.
- Empower women in the garment sector with digital banking services (for instance- Bkash or Nagad) enables them to manage their own bank accounts, receive salaries, and make independent financial decisions.

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

- Create an inclusive leadership structure that ensures equitable power distribution and decision-making, incorporating grassroots leaders in national decision-making processes. This involves promoting knowledge exchange, fostering leadership, and providing mentorship opportunities to facilitate skills development across diverse generations. Women’s rights organisations, NGOs, and CSOs are often heterogeneous in nature, yet many remain hierarchical. Addressing this imbalance is essential for achieving inclusive leadership.
- Include Indigenous people, tea garden workers, Dalits, gender diver population and members of other marginalised communities in workplaces to promote diversity and inclusion. This approach will help break the cycle of poverty and discrimination while fostering a more equitable society.
- Initiate programmes that raise political awareness among women and other marginalised groups to encourage their active participation in governance.

## **F. Gender Budget and Good Governance:**

Gender equality will be a distant goal without adequate funding, human resources, and prioritisation. If current trends continue, globally, more than 340 million women and girls will still live in extreme poverty by 2030<sup>40</sup> and Bangladesh needs to act now to continue the progress it has made over time. Furthermore, the backlash on women's movements and women-led organisations has increased exponentially.

Good governance is crucial to achieving gender equality and addressing the demands outlined across various thematic areas. These demands cannot be met without effective government structures, monitoring, accountability, and social welfare systems that reach the most disadvantaged and marginalised communities.

### **From the government, we demand:**

- Adequate implementation, allocation, and monitoring of the gender-responsive budgeting plan<sup>41</sup> and the state and development actors must align their efforts to implement sustainable programmes in solidarity that continue beyond project periods.
- Ensure that the national budget provides adequate resources for education, health, socio-economic advancement, and overall quality of life for indigenous communities both in the hill tracts and in the plains. Additionally, establish a dedicated monitoring committee to ensure effective implementation of these allocations.
- Ensure women and communities are involved in budget spending decisions. Raise awareness among women about the budget allocated for them and ensure its proper implementation.
- Promote transparency and accountability in budget allocation and implementation.
- Disclose the citizen charter and promote active participation in knowledge-sharing initiatives.
- Ensure better inter-ministerial coordination and that funds are to be allocated separately on each issue and on a need basis.
- Improve the alignment between climate and gender budget to be utilised for community- and women-led solutions, focusing on the needs of the most vulnerable groups.
- Ensure inclusion and representation of women in platforms to raise their voices and be part of policy development from the initial stages. Ensure adequate representation of

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<sup>40</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>41</sup> <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/9.%20Bangladesh.pdf>



marginalised women by increasing the number of reserved seats for women and establishing clear criteria to enhance female participation based on merit.

- Reform the law enforcement authorities, specifically the police, as they are the first point of contact for citizens in case of violence, discrimination and support. Increase the number of women in decision-making positions within the police force. Conduct a comprehensive review of their salaries and working conditions to combat corruption and improve the force's reputation. Revise recruitment and training processes to emphasise integrity, community engagement, empathy, and ethical conduct, building a more trustworthy police force. Enhance community policing and establish a public feedback mechanism to bridge the trust gap between the police and the public. Encourage officers to engage actively with communities and address local issues to foster a more responsive and citizen-centric police force.
- Empower the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to provide more effective oversight of the police, addressing corruption in recruitment and political bias with enhanced neutrality and authority.
- Address fundamentalism and extremism effectively, establish inclusive spaces by building coalitions across sectors, and promote cultural and mindset shifts that limit one's choice.
- Peaceful and fair national elections that ensure a tranquil and just electoral process with balanced representation. This includes the active participation of women voters from all backgrounds and the inclusion of individuals with diverse gender identities in prominent political leadership roles across all regions of the country.
- Conduct a comprehensive mapping of marginalised communities at regional and rural levels to identify their concentrations to implement awareness-building sessions on good governance for these communities, facilitating a learning process that empowers them to express their needs and participate in elections without feeling excluded or marginalised.
- Ensure that the electoral process is inclusive and representative by reserving quotas for marginalised groups such as Dalits, Hijras, Indigenous, and gender-diverse individuals. By guaranteeing their representation in decision-making bodies, we can ensure their voices are heard and their interests adequately addressed.

**This Charter of Demands has been prepared by:**

**Bangladesh Mahila Parishad and Bonhishikha supported by UN Women Bangladesh**