



UNDP BANGLADESH

GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY

2023- 2026

FOREWORD

The global polycrisis that the world is currently facing has again demonstrated how every humanitarian and development challenge is worse for women – just because they are women. In fact, gender discrimination is one of the world’s most pervasive inequality and human rights violations.

At UNDP, we recognise that women’s empowerment and gender equality are cross-cutting issues that lie at the heart of human development. When we advance gender equality, we speed up progress on all the Sustainable Development Goals. Making gender equality a reality is therefore a core commitment for us.

UNDP Bangladesh has been supporting the Government for five decades to accelerate sustainable development and women’s empowerment. Over the last 20 years, the country has made remarkable progress in improving the lives of women and girls. Women are increasingly involved in public and civic spheres, maternal mortality rates are falling, there is greater gender parity in school enrolment, and women’s groups have mobilized themselves and ensured their voices are heard.

Persistent challenges remain, however, which threaten to stall or even reverse much of the progress achieved. Poverty, corruption, discriminatory laws, gender-based violence, child marriage, and climate change are among those challenges disproportionately affecting women and girls.

These inequalities are denying women and girls rights and opportunities and slow down the development of the country. Against this backdrop, we are working with our partners toward immediate-term solutions that directly reach individuals and communities, as well as longer-term reductions in structural barriers and transformative change for gender equality.

The UNDP Bangladesh 2023-2026 Gender Equality Strategy outlines the direction of our work on gender equality and women’s empowerment and is a tool to hold ourselves accountable to integrating gender equality into every aspect of our work. It builds on UNDP’s global expertise and the experience we have gained working on these issues in Bangladesh. It invites partnerships and collaboration with national and international partners to achieve common goals of a more just and equal world.

I am grateful to the stakeholders and colleagues whose contributions helped create a strategy that is reflective of the context in which we operate.

I invite you to read the strategy and learn more about how UNDP, together with our partners, is envisioning to support Bangladesh in advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Stefan Liller
Resident Representative
UNDP Bangladesh



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UNDP Bangladesh's Gender Equality Strategy (GES) 2023-2026 was drafted in the context of a myriad of global challenges. The localized impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, a global economic recession, increasing climate disasters, as well as political turmoil and democratic breakdown across the globe, threaten to halt or even reverse much of the progress that has been achieved in gender equality in Bangladesh over the past decades. Significant gender inequalities persist, denying women of rights and opportunities and slowing down the country's development.

With Bangladesh's graduation from its Least Developed Country (LDC) status ahead in 2026, the years leading up will be formative and will require increased investments into achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. After all, gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also the necessary foundation for sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and sustainable development for all.

UNDP Bangladesh is committed to supporting Bangladesh on this challenging but promising road ahead. This strategy outlines the future direction of our work on gender equality and women's rights as we seek to dismantle the underlying power structures and root causes that limit women's and girls' empowerment. Our strategy is aligned with the fourth global UNDP GES (2022–2025) and the UNDP Strategic Plan (2022–2025), including the Common Chapter of the Strategic Plan of UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and UN Women.

UNDP's approach to gender mainstreaming is three-fold: (1) to design and implement gender-specific interventions that uproot gender inequalities; (2) to address gender concerns in developing, planning, implementing, and evaluating all of our projects and programmes; and (3) to forge partnerships that accelerate the achievement of our common goals.

The approach is grounded in several core principles which guide our strategy:

Human Rights: Our strategy follows a human rights-based approach to development.

Leaving No One Behind: We consider the multiple intersections of inequalities and aim to reach those most marginalized with our work.

Transformation of Gender & Power Relations: We pursue initiatives that accelerate structural transformations for gender equality and remove the institutional, societal, political, and legal barriers women and girls face.

Engaging Men & Boys: We recognize men and boys as allies in closing the gender gap and address discriminatory attitudes, practices and oppressive forms of masculinity that impact both women and men.

Contextualization: We work in partnership with the Government of Bangladesh to follow a contextualized and country-driven approach that best addresses the unique challenges the country faces.

Monitoring & Accountability: We hold ourselves accountable for achieving our targets through rigorous monitoring and accountability measures.

Our GES is informed by extensive research on the unique political, social, and economic context in which we operate, the lessons learned from our experience of working with and for the Government of Bangladesh since 1972, as well as thorough internal and external consultations that have shaped our approach to accelerating progress on gender equality in Bangladesh. The strategy ensures women's empowerment is integrated into every aspect of our work and enables us to take results-oriented steps towards achieving gender equality in Bangladesh.



BANGLADESH: A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Since the World Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975, Bangladesh has been at the forefront among the LDCs in addressing gender disparities. Bangladesh's constitution recognizes equal rights for women and men in the public sphere, and a reasonably robust legal and policy framework guarantees women's rights. The National Women's Development Policy 2011 and its National Action Plan provide a base for government action to promote gender equality, and the 8th Five-Year Plan integrates gender equality issues across several sectors.

Bangladesh has experienced tremendous economic growth in the past decades and has met the criteria for LDC graduation by 2026. Similarly, it has made significant progress in women's empowerment across several areas. Bangladesh is currently ranked 71st among 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2022 of the World Economic Forum,¹ ahead of all its South Asian neighbors. The Government of Bangladesh has adopted Agenda 2030 as its development framework, demonstrating its commitment to achieving SDG 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment. Nonetheless, much more progress is needed to ensure that gender equality has a transformative and long-lasting impact on society.

We must undoubtedly celebrate the advances made in gender equality. Women are increasingly involved in public and civic spheres, with just over 20 per cent of parliamentary seats held by women (2022).² Maternal mortality rates are falling, fertility rates are declining, and there is greater gender parity in school enrolment. Women's groups have mobilized themselves and made sure their voices are heard on various issues, starting from violence against women, gender equality in securing economic opportunities and participation, equal representation in politics, reproductive rights, family law reforms and gender mainstreaming in public policies.



However, persistent challenges in Bangladesh threaten the progress achieved in the past 20 years. Significant gender gaps and discrimination against women persist, and existing inequalities have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, halting or even reversing much of the progress previously achieved. A high proportion of women still suffer gender-based violence, preventing them from reaching their full potential. Intersections of gender, class, and ethnicity lead women, especially from lower socio-economic strata and ethnic minorities, to be especially vulnerable.

Outlined below are both progress and key obstacles towards achieving gender equality and women's empowerment across different, albeit intersectional, thematic areas.

EDUCATION

Education, especially for women and girls, is the foundation on which sustainable development is built. Bangladesh has made significant advances in this realm and has successfully achieved gender parity in primary and secondary education – now a model for other countries. However, despite high rates of school enrolment for girls, Government data shows female literacy rates to be 4.5 per cent lower compared to those of male counterparts³ and dropout rates for girls at the secondary school level to remain at a high level of 36 per cent.⁴ The main factors contributing to these lost school years include child marriage, gendered household responsibilities, high levels of early pregnancies, lack of access to appropriate information on sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Research has found a positive association between female labor force participation and economic growth⁵ – increasing women's economic empowerment is thus not only a strategy for achieving gender equality but also for accelerating economic development for the whole of Bangladesh.

Since 1990, women's labor force participation has been steadily increasing but remains at an unsatisfactory level of 36 per cent (2020).⁶ Their participation remains highly concentrated in the informal sector and low-paid jobs, such as in the RMG sector, where approximately 63 per cent of workers are women.⁷

Microfinance has had a tremendously empowering effect on women: 92 per cent of borrowers are women,⁸ increasing their economic independence, social inclusion, and political participation. Nevertheless, systemic barriers continue to prevent women's economic empowerment: women account for only 5 per cent of Bangladesh's businesses are owned by women⁹, and only 25 per cent of women have an account at a formal financial institution.¹⁰ Furthermore, regardless of whether they are employed, they continue to take on the majority of unpaid domestic care work. Women are also disproportionately affected by unemployment, underemployment, and vulnerable employment.

Moreover, in Bangladesh, inheritance rights are governed by religious laws that are unequal and discriminatory towards women, affecting their economic and financial conditions. While Bangladesh is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), it has expressed reservations about Article 13 (a) of the convention, which grants equality to women regarding the right to family inheritance, as well as Article 2 which requires states parties to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to eliminate discrimination against women and Article 16.1(c) which concerns women's equal rights to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent.¹¹ Equal rights of women in all spheres in Bangladesh



is not only a question of women's development but also a fundamental human right that is yet to be guaranteed by the state.

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

In Bangladesh, women's political participation has been widely recognized as a driver of democracy and women's empowerment. Headed by the longest-serving female head of state, Bangladesh has 50 reserved seats for women in the parliament. The seats are allotted to the parties based on their proportional representation in parliament, but they are not elected and have no constituency. Women's political participation has thus not yet reached a satisfactory level, both at the national and local levels. Persistent gendered social norms and stereotypes, as well as early marriage and familial duties, act as barriers to women's rise to political leadership in Bangladesh. Increasing women's participation in the political sphere requires a whole-of-society approach that dismantles these barriers effectively.

GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING

Recognizing the importance of public investment in the advancement of women to achieve equality and sustainable development, the Government of Bangladesh introduced gender-responsive budgeting in 2009. Gender-responsive budgeting is now institutionalized across 43 ministries. However, financial constraints in the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) mean that there is a lack of human resources to effectively coordinate and monitor the activities of other ministries in addressing gender-specific needs. Moreover, the capacity of gender focal points across the ministries for gender-responsive budgeting is low. A lack of gender-disaggregated data and gender auditing of projects further weakens the initiative.

PERVASIVE SOCIAL NORMS AND STEREOTYPES

Patriarchal values, social norms, and gender-based discriminations permeate all levels of society in Bangladesh, acting as invisible barriers to long-term, comprehensive progress towards gender equality. These

norms and values tend to privilege men and boys' access to opportunities and control over resources. Studies in Bangladesh indicate that participation in income-generating activities positively affected women's ability to make household decisions such as major purchases, healthcare for themselves and their family members, and engagement in recreational activities.¹²

Women with higher levels of education and income-generating activities are more likely to be involved in decision-making with their partners and are more likely to seek out sexual and reproductive health services than those with lower levels. This underscores the importance of tackling social norms preventing women from accessing opportunities and controlling resources.

GENDERED IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is not a gender-neutral issue. The impacts of climate change are largely gendered, exacerbating the pre-existing inequalities and vulnerabilities women in Bangladesh face, including entrenched gender norms and reproductive responsibilities.

Women's lack of control over capital, limited economic opportunities, and lack of voice in decision-making further impede their ability to adapt to and overcome challenges posed by climate change. As their average income is much lower, female-headed households spend 30 per cent of their income on addressing the effects of climate change,¹³ double than households headed by men, further entrenching gender inequalities. Enabling women to adapt to climate change by recognizing their vital contributions to decision-making and giving them control over resources will significantly accelerate climate action. While Bangladesh has strong stand-alone policies in both climate change and gender equality, there remains a gap with regard to recognizing the interlinkages. The newly formulated Bangladesh Climate Change and Gender Action Plan aims to enable the gender-responsive implementation of the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) and the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC).

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

A survey from 2017-18 found that 52% of ever-married women aged 15-49 had experienced some form of physical or sexual violence by their current or former intimate partner.¹⁴ Despite celebrating the anniversaries of two landmark pieces of legislation recently – the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000 and the Domestic Violence Act, 2010 – limited capacities to enforce laws and persistent institutional barriers to reporting assault or seeking legal resources frequently prevent victims from receiving justice.

WOMEN IN STEM & DIGITALIZATION

When effectively capitalized on, digitalization presents a great opportunity for accelerating gender equality and women's empowerment. In Bangladesh, women's access to and use of digital technology is increasing, albeit mostly in the urban centers of the country. During the pandemic, for example, many women achieved self-reliance by engaging in e-commerce, a largely untapped opportunity until then. While the Government of Bangladesh is pursuing several initiatives to increase women's ICT skills, a significant digital gender gap remains, especially in rural areas of the country.

According to a GSMA 2020 report,¹⁵ Bangladesh has a 29 percent gender gap in the ownership of mobile phones and 52 percent in the use of mobile internet. This means women are 29 percent less likely than men to own a mobile phone and 52 percent less likely than men to use mobile internet.

Unlocking the immense potential of digitalization through skills development and e-governance could be catalytic for the advancement of gender equality in Bangladesh.

However, digitalization also presents a great risk: Women and youth are disproportionately affected by cyberbullying and harassment, with women's and men's experience of the digital space deeply influenced by norms of masculinity and femininity. Mental health issues caused by online harm are inextricably

linked to psychosocial issues, such as weaker interpersonal communication skills and capacity for social and civic belonging and for participating in everyday civil and political processes at work, both in the digital and offline space. Ultimately, and with limited mental health and psychosocial support available, online bullying and harassment further consolidate the very dynamics that fuel divisive and negative behaviors online and can perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes. Bridging the digital divide must thus be linked to initiatives that mitigate the harmful risks associated with the use of social media and digital technologies.

In addition, the underrepresentation of women and girls in the workforce and higher education with regard to the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) remains a problem that requires dedicated attention.

GENDERED IMPACTS OF COVID-19

In Bangladesh, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected women, widening existing gender-based disparities between women and men in terms of access to information, resources to cope with the pandemic, and its socio-economic impact. The gendered impact of COVID-19 includes:

- Increased risk and occurrence of GBV in the context of the pandemic and its socio-economic impacts.
- Unemployment and livelihoods impact disproportionately affecting women and girls.
- Unequal access to health, education, and WASH services.
- Unequal distribution of care and domestic work.

In light of these developments and a lack of gender-responsive policy responses, Bangladesh may experience a decline in women's empowerment and gender equality during the post-Covid period. Concerted efforts will be necessary to recover from the gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.



OUR GLOBAL VISION ON GENDER EQUALITY

The promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment (GEWE) is central to UNDP’s mandate and its development approach to deliver on Agenda 2030, which envisions a world “of universal respect for human rights and human dignity” in which “every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social, and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed”.

UNDP’s comparative advantage in many aspects of promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment arises from its strong institutional focus on human rights and sustainable human development; its role and reputation as a neutral party; its global experience and knowledge base; and its broad engagement with key stakeholders at international, national, and sub-national levels.

UNDP considers gender equality both as a goal in itself as well as one of six cross-cutting

signature solutions for advancing the future of development and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

UNDP’s Global Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2025 describes the future direction of UNDP’s work on gender equality and women’s empowerment and is directly aligned with the Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

The Strategy offers six ‘signature solutions’ related to poverty and inequality; governance; resilience; environment; energy; and gender equality, which mainstream gender across all of UNDP’s work to support governments shift systems and power structures that generate gender inequalities and women’s disempowerment. Through three ‘enablers’ – innovation, digital transformation, and financing for the SDGs – UNDP aims to accelerate progress toward gender equality.



UNDP BANGLADESH’S STRATEGY

Gender equality is a cross-cutting priority for UNDP, the achievement of which will not only advance women’s rights but also accelerate Bangladesh’s development overall. In line with UNDP’s Strategic Plan and UNDP’s Global Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2025, UNDP Bangladesh has developed its own Gender Equality Strategy 2023-2026, tailored to the local context, that will serve as a guide for mainstreaming gender equality throughout all aspects of our work.

The strategy builds on the accomplishments and lessons of our previous strategy and draws on insights from global and national consultations. It complements our Country Programme Document (CPD) 2022-2026 and outlines our intentions, motivations, and commitments to gender equality. It presents a tool to hold us accountable for our goals toward achieving gender equality and is a living document that can be adapted to the changing context and priorities of the country and UNDP.

The overall objective of the Gender Equality Strategy is to ensure gender equality and

women’s empowerment are consistently integrated into programme design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation and to strengthen CO capacities and policies with regard to gender, keeping in mind the country’s specific needs and strategic objectives.

The specific objectives of UNDP Bangladesh’s Gender Equality Strategy are:

1. To achieve gender equality results through UNDP Bangladesh’s programmes, both through **gender mainstreaming across all programming areas** as well as through implementing specific interventions dedicated to women’s empowerment in alignment with its CPD.
2. To ensure **institutional effectiveness for a gender-responsive and -transformative CO**, including gender-responsive policies, capacity building, as well as monitoring and evaluation.
3. To achieve **strong partnerships** with national and international partners for achieving gender equality results.

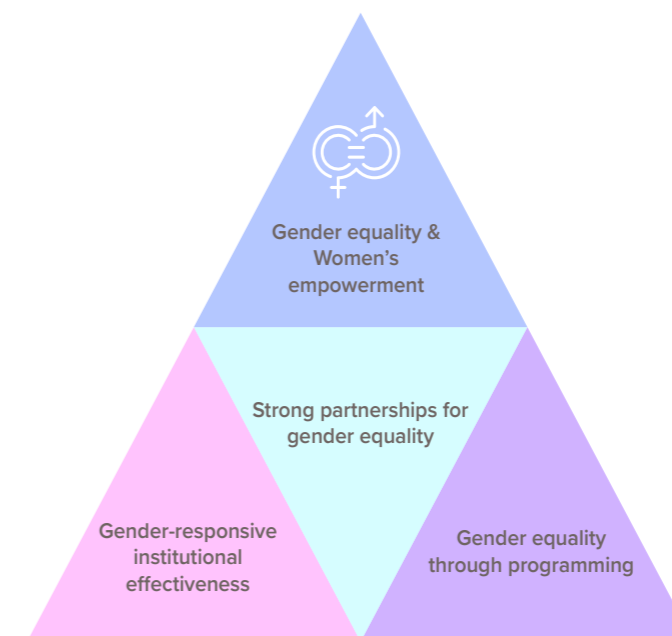


Figure 1: The specific objectives of UNDP Bangladesh’s Gender Equality Strategy

THREE ENABLERS

In line with the Global GES, UNDP Bangladesh will pursue three enablers to achieve gender equality:

- 1. Finance:** We are committed to mobilizing public and private sources of finance towards gender equality, including through gender-responsive fiscal policies. Efforts will be rooted in aligning public and private finance with gender equality commitments through SDG financing. We will support the Government of Bangladesh to strengthen its capacities on gender-responsive budgeting to ensure adequate resources are dedicated to gender-transformative initiatives.
- 2. Digitalization:** UNDP Bangladesh will support Bangladesh in closing its digital gender divide by enhancing women's access to technology and ICT and STEM education. We will capitalize on the opportunities provided by digitalization to further expand gender-inclusive e-governance across the country. Moreover, we will continuously explore opportunities for promoting women's economic empowerment through digital tools for income-generation and entrepreneurship. UNDP Bangladesh will also work toward making the digital space safe for women, including supporting women in dealing with online harassment and cyberbullying.
- 3. Strategic Innovation:** Through a portfolio approach, we will address the multifaceted root causes of gender inequality across all our projects and programmes. Through our Accelerator Lab, we will engage in sensemaking, collective intelligence and solutions mapping, with a focus on women's grassroots.



GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE PROGRAMMING

Our previous experience has taught us that achieving gender equality requires us to move beyond being merely gender-targeted - it is necessary to integrate gender mainstreaming across all aspects of programming to create gender-transformative results that address the root causes of inequalities and power imbalances. A dual approach of ensuring gender equality across all our programmes while simultaneously implementing interventions to empower women is key to attaining gender equality in a holistic and sustainable manner.

WHAT IS GENDER MAINSTREAMING?

According to the United Nations Economic and Social Council, 'gender mainstreaming' refers to 'a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated.'



Besides mainstreaming gender in all of our programming activities, UNDP Bangladesh will pursue specific interventions for gender equality that are designed to go beyond simply being gender-sensitive or -responsive but are gender-transformative, i.e., by addressing the root causes of gender inequality.

UNDP Bangladesh's CPD (2022-2026) has made women's empowerment an integral, cross-cutting element of all its outcomes to ensure gender equality is mainstreamed in all policies and programmes in the political, economic, and social spheres of life.

GENDER-EQUAL AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIES (SIGNATURE SOLUTION 1)

Eradicating poverty requires a major shift in economic thinking and a radical reconfiguration of economic power relations. Together with our partners, we will continue contributing to women's economic empowerment, employment, and access to and control over resources, particularly focusing on women in the informal economy.

This will entail increasing women's access to existing ICTs to reduce the gender-based digital divide and empowering women to manage production and market supply chains. We will ensure that women, especially those owning cottages or small/medium enterprises, will benefit from market-driven skills development, access to financial and non-financial services to adopt appropriate technologies, and innovative business models driving improved productivity, competitiveness, resilience and sustainability of enterprises and jobs.

UNDP will also provide modernized and mechanized employment training to increase women's participation in techno-based agriculture, as well as the RMG and IT sectors, and we will promote women in the STEM sector, where they are still critically underrepresented. Furthermore, UNDP Bangladesh will strengthen policy and regulatory frameworks enabling greater access to and utilization of inclusive, gender-responsive and resilient basic social and protection services.

By advocating for increased employment and economic opportunities for women, we aim to promote women as change agents and further reduce the gender gap.

INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE, PARTICIPATION, AND WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP (SIGNATURE SOLUTION 2)

Effective and inclusive governance is fundamental to an equal and just society. Higher levels of gender equality are directly associated with a lower propensity for conflict between and within states. Promoting women's participation and leadership in decision-making will continue to be a priority for UNDP Bangladesh in the coming years. We will advocate for an inclusive and participatory institutional ecosystem enabling women to act as change agents at all levels.

UNDP Bangladesh will support the Government and other duty bearers, along with all rights holders, to better uphold standards, practices and norms that promote social cohesion, human rights, non-discrimination and empowerment of women and other vulnerable groups. We will further support public institutions to ensure accountable and gender-responsive governance according to the rule of law. Furthermore, UNDP will ensure that civil society organizations, oversight bodies, and the private sector can better protect human rights and prevent discrimination. Specifically, we will continue to strengthen the capacity of police, in particular the Women Police Network and Prisons Directorate, to ensure gender-responsive justice in line with UN standards.

RESILIENT SOCIETY (SIGNATURE SOLUTION 3)

Creating a resilient society means that women must be at the heart of resilience-building measures against shocks and crises, including conflict, climate change, disasters, environmental degradation, and pandemics. In Bangladesh, like in many other parts of the world, women find themselves particularly vulnerable to the impacts of disasters due to restricted mobility and participation rooted in pervasive patriarchal norms. At the same time, women's leadership has been proven to be key in reducing disaster mortality. UNDP Bangladesh is committed to promoting women as agents of change in disaster risk reduction and management and giving them the tools

necessary to protect themselves and their communities against the impacts of frequent disasters.

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT (SIGNATURE SOLUTION 4)

Women commonly face higher risks and greater burdens from the impacts of climate change in situations of poverty. Their restricted, unequal participation in decision-making processes and labor markets compound inequalities and often prevent women from fully contributing to climate-related planning, policy-making, and implementation. However, women can and must play a critical role in responding to the increasing impacts of climate change.

UNDP Bangladesh will promote the gender-responsive management of natural resources to address the risks faced, especially by rural and indigenous women whose livelihoods depend on natural resources. We will promote women's leadership in decision-making on climate-responsive planning and budgeting and ensure their voices and concerns are adequately reflected in national and local policies and public investments. UNDP Bangladesh will partner with women-led organizations and build their capacity to lead climate action in their localities. Moreover, we will enhance the access of women-headed households and women-led organizations to innovative climate finance to enable them to build their resilience and accelerate climate action.

GENDER-INCLUSIVE ACCESS TO SUSTAINABLE ENERGY (SIGNATURE SOLUTION 5)

Energy plays a vital role in poverty eradication, economic growth, and sustainable infrastructure development of any country. Recent efforts to cut carbon emissions have created a breadth of new jobs in the energy sector, presenting new opportunities for employment. However, women are traditionally excluded from the sector due to social norms, a lack of education, and family responsibilities.



UNDP Bangladesh is committed to enhancing the access of communities, especially women, to clean energy and promoting women's leadership in expanding the green energy sector in Bangladesh. Benefits offered by renewable energy sub-sectors will be leveraged to improve women's livelihoods and employment opportunities.

WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY GENDER EQUALITY (SIGNATURE SOLUTION 6)

Achieving gender equality across all parts of society will be the foundation for a peaceful, equitable, and just society in Bangladesh. UNDP Bangladesh commits itself to promoting women's leadership and participation in decision-making, sustainable development, and sustaining social cohesion. We aim to build institutional and individual capacity for equal participation in social, economic, and political activities and address the harmful social norms perpetuating violence against women and their exclusion from the public sphere. To achieve this, we will mobilize our global knowledge and expertise to remove structural barriers and raise awareness on gender equality.

UNDP Bangladesh will particularly focus on preventing gender-based violence – still one of the most pervasive human rights abuses - across all its portfolios. We will support survivors, especially women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and work on behavioral change campaigns that address the root causes of violence against women. Recognizing the new risks and opportunities presented by digitalization, UNDP Bangladesh will leverage digital technologies to address cyber violence and harassment, especially against young girls and women.

Addressing the Strategic Gender Needs of women in Bangladesh will be another key focus of UNDP to enable women to have greater control over their lives beyond socially-defined gender roles. We will continue and deepen our work on tackling the unique challenges faced by transgender communities, persons with disability, and other vulnerable and marginalized groups of people in the country.

MOBILIZING MEN AND BOYS FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Achieving gender equality requires a transformation of the unequal power relations between men and women. This involves challenging toxic notions of masculinity and traditional perceptions of manhood that are often at the root of gender inequality and are harmful not only to women but also men. UNDP Bangladesh recognizes its opportunity and responsibility to engage boys and men as gender advocates to challenge social norms, behaviors and stereotypes that perpetuate gender inequalities.

We are committed to increasing the involvement of boys and men in our gender-transformative programming through awareness-raising campaigns, community-based intervention programmes, and education that promote women's empowerment and encourage men to question the inherent power dynamics in their actions and words. Within our own organization, we will create male peer groups for reflection and collective action to achieve organizational change toward a future without sexual harassment and exploitation in the workplace.



INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION

MATCHING GENDER EQUALITY AMBITIONS WITH FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The Gender Marker is a corporate tool to strengthen UNDP's programmes, ensuring that gender equality and women's empowerment are integrated into every aspect of UNDP's work. It is a crucial instrument in the Atlas financial system used to track and monitor financial allocations and expenditures to contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment. The Gender Marker requires managers to rate projects against a four-point scale.

UNDP has demonstrated that more robust gender equality results come from leadership, oversight, and resources. Therefore, all global, regional, and country programmes will set aside resources to ensure that gender equality results are met.

In line with the UN-SWAP requirements, a financial benchmark for resource allocation for gender equality and women's empowerment will be established at 15 per cent of the organization's resources. In the absence of corporate guidelines on gender marker rating and budget reference, the CO will establish a proxy budget reference for the gender marker following the gender coding system of four-point scales:

GEN0 – Zero contribution to gender equality

GEN1 – Contribution to gender equality in some way (5 % of the total project budget)

GEN2 – Gender equality is a significant objective (30 % of the total project budget)

GEN3 – Gender equality is a principal objective (100 % of the total project budget)

A gender-responsive organizational structure is essential for achieving more effective gender equality results in operations. As such, UNDP Bangladesh is committed to building a gender-responsive institutional structure at all levels of its work.

GENDER SEAL

The UNDP Gender Equality Seal is an innovation for organizational change that incentivizes COs to integrate gender equality into all aspects of their development work. Launched in 2011, the Gender Equality Seal serves as a certification programme and learning platform to support COs in addressing gaps, documenting, and sharing innovation and knowledge, and advancing organizational change for gender equality. Since 2011, more than 50 COs have been awarded a bronze, silver, or gold certification.

Over the period of the Strategic Plan 2018-2021, UNDP has expanded the Gender Equality Seal to ensure that more country offices benefit from capacity-building and organizational change for gender equality.

To ensure UNDP Bangladesh is a gender-responsive organization, the CO has enrolled in the Gender Seal certification process for 2021-22. This tool will not only reflect the achievements made in gender equality in the CO but also incentivize UNDP Bangladesh to meet corporate gender equality standards in all aspects of its work, including human resources and management, programme and project management, communication, knowledge management, partnerships, and results.



UNDP is actively engaged in various inter-agency task forces and coordination mechanisms, including the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action and the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality. UNDP also provides technical support to other UN agencies to adapt the gender marker and the Gender Equality Seal to their use. As a part of accountability and oversight, UNDP Bangladesh will implement and improve the gender marker as its primary tool for tracking resource allocations for gender equality.

As of 2022, GEN2 and GEN3 projects at UNDP Bangladesh make up 95% of total programme expenditure, while the cumulative budget makes up 93.6%. This highlights the CO's commitment to achieving gender equality through its programmes.

UNDP Bangladesh will aim to maximize its contributions to gender equality by further minimizing the number of GEN0 and GEN1 projects while achieving a higher share of GEN2, especially GEN3 projects.

WORKING TOWARDS GENDER PARITY

In line with the UN System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity promulgated by the Secretary-General, UNDP aims to achieve full gender parity among all staff and attain full parity among all senior management roles. UNDP aims to achieve tangible progress in transforming its culture and the quality of its working environment, whereby all staff have equal opportunities to grow, progress in their careers, and make a difference in an atmosphere of respect, care, and flexibility, free from any bias, discrimination, or harassment. UNDP recently approved a gender parity strategy in line with the System-wide Action Plan.

The global corporate UNDP goal for gender parity states that 45% of personnel at all levels should be women. Given the context of Bangladesh, however, the CO has set itself a target of achieving 40% by 2026. Ensuring a gender balance among CO staff has been a

continuous challenge at UNDP Bangladesh. The CO will therefore make concerted efforts to revise recruitment procedures to attract qualified women and maximize opportunities and capacity building for its female staff.

EQUAL AND INCLUSIVE WORK CULTURE

UNDP Bangladesh is determined to create an inclusive, diverse, and harmonious working environment that respects the dignity of all persons. Promoting a culture of equality, dignity, and respect requires changing values and beliefs that maintain hierarchies and reinforce exclusionary norms that create inequality. An inclusive and safe organization requires a gender-balanced and diverse workforce with zero tolerance for all prohibited conduct.

UNDP does not tolerate harassment and/or abuse of authority at the workplace or relating to work in any form. Such behavior or conduct is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations, the Staff Regulations and Rules, and the Standards of Conduct for the International Civil Service.

UNDP Bangladesh, in line with the Global UNDP Gender Equality Strategy and in full adherence to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, has set forth a system to promote zero tolerance of harassment and abuse of authority in all its forms, to foster an environment of mutual trust and safety in the workplace. Accordingly, we have taken initiatives to circulate UNDP's Policy on Workplace & Sexual Harassment and Abuse of Authority (PSHAA) and monitor its adherence strictly through a series of activities.

Sexual exploitation and sexual abuse represent a failure of protection that brings harm to those whom we are mandated to serve. United Nations Staff Regulations and Rules prohibit sexual exploitation and abuse. UNDP has several measures in place to prevent and respond to sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse.

These include the planned establishment of a free, 24-hour, international, and confidential helpline to allow staff to report incidences of harassment or abuse and receive counselling, a strengthened policy on protection against retaliation, and mandatory courses related to ethics, harassment, discrimination, and abuse of authority in the workplace, and sexual exploitation and abuse.

UNDP Bangladesh is committed to creating an environment where all staff is safe and respected, and the CO will continue its best practices and adopt new policies where necessary.

COMMUNICATION FOR ADVOCACY

UNDP's Communication Strategy is gender-sensitive and covers all means of communication, including traditional media and social media tools, to advocate for gender equality and promote results achieved. Guidance on gender-sensitive language is part of the Communication Strategy.

The Communication Strategy requires proactive and constant visibility throughout print media and social media of women's leadership roles and images of men and women acting outside of 'gender norms and stereotypes'. It advises that women shall not be depicted only as 'vulnerable groups' and that gender is reflected in communication in all areas of work, including those usually not seen as gender-related. UNDP Bangladesh will ensure gender-sensitive communication that reflects UNDP's values and commitment to gender equality.



PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION

We recognize that to achieve gender equality in Bangladesh, partnering and collaborating with different national and international stakeholders is imperative. UNDP Bangladesh has vast experience and a privileged position in bringing together different stakeholders and creating a productive policy dialogue to create lasting change towards gender equality in the country. Our partners include other UN agencies, international and local NGOs, civil society organizations, the private sector, academia and research institutes, and the Government of Bangladesh both at central and local levels.

GOVERNMENT

As one of the key actors for gender equality in the country, UNDP Bangladesh has been working closely with the Government of Bangladesh, specifically its national gender machinery, to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the country. The longstanding record of success in development programmes and developing the capacities of the governmental bodies is a testament to the success of this partnership. The Government has prioritized promoting gender equality and women's empowerment as a key development agenda and UNDP Bangladesh will continue to support the Government in building its capacities to promote gender equality across different levels.

INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION

Gender equality is a cross-cutting priority for all UN agencies, offering vast opportunities for inter-agency collaboration. Gender mainstreaming across all UN agencies has seen fruitful national and international cooperation. UNDP Bangladesh will continue closely collaborating with its UN partners to ensure a holistic approach to achieving gender equality in Bangladesh. Specifically, the CO will coordinate with UN Women for the implementation of its gender equality

initiatives. The memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed by UNDP and UN Women in July 2018 provided a framework of cooperation and strengthened collaboration between the two agencies. Joint activities outlined in the framework include legal and policy reforms to advance gender equality, gender-based violence, crisis/post-crisis response and early recovery, women's political leadership, and mobilizing the private sector to advance gender equality, economic empowerment, and energy.

This was reaffirmed by a joint statement in March 2022 delineating collaboration for the time period of 2022- 2026 that focuses on 1) promoting gender-responsive inclusive governance; 2) ending violence against women and enabling women's access to justice; 3) promoting women's economic empowerment and gender-responsive social protection; and 4) ensuring gender-responsive disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and humanitarian action.

UNDP Bangladesh will continue to collaborate closely with all UN agencies, specifically with UN Women, to address gender equality in line with mandates, areas of comparative advantage and country programme focus.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

UNDP recognizes that civil society actors often serve as both a driving force in guiding development policies and as a watchdog to ensure policies are implemented. A key aspect of our strategy is a continued close collaboration with civil society organizations working on gender equality and women's empowerment.



PRIVATE SECTOR

As the engine of growth, the private sector provides great opportunities for advancing women's rights and gender equality in Bangladesh. To this end, UNDP Bangladesh is committed to productively engaging and collaborating with the private sector to achieve greater economic and social empowerment of women.

ACADEMIA AND RESEARCH INSTITUTES

Academia and research institutions play a vital role in promoting gender equality in society. With vast methodological expertise to engender knowledge and innovative resolutions, academia and research institutions can support UNDP in their actions towards achieving gender equality and the SDGs. Therefore, UNDP Bangladesh will actively collaborate with academia and research organizations to accumulate knowledge and inventions, strengthen capacities, provide evidence-based outcomes to policy processes, and share experiences from the ground with the academic community.

ACCOUNTABILITY, MONITORING & EVALUATION

To ensure the principles and action points of this strategy are implemented throughout all aspects of our work, we have set in place accountability measures. Following the screening process for the Gender Seal and Gender Marker, UNDP Bangladesh has established a core gender institutional structure to ensure gender mainstreaming, which we will continue to follow. This strategy document serves as the primary unit of accountability for results alignment and resources assigned to the programme.

UNDP will use risk monitoring as a tool for early warning, risk management, risk mitigation and decision-making in line with the UNDP social and environmental standards and accountability mechanisms. Results-oriented monitoring will enhance accountability, and robust evaluations with strengthened gender aspects will generate evidence for the results achieved.

An annual action plan for the strategy will be developed by the Gender Focal Team of UNDP Bangladesh. There will be benchmarks and targets for each of the plans. This plan will be monitored on a quarterly basis and evaluated on an annual basis.

The Senior Management Team will monitor the implementation and evaluation process, and the results will be documented in the ROAR and other reporting documents. The Gender Focal Team will support monitoring and evaluation. The budget to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Action Plan will be part of the CO Monitoring and Evaluation budget.

ACTION PLAN

Output	Activities	Responsible Teams
Objective 1: Gender-transformative programming to achieve better results in addressing gender inequalities		
Gender mainstreaming in all programmes and policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure country programme documents, programmes and projects are informed by gender analysis and address structural barriers to gender equality. The results and resource frameworks must include at least one gender-specific outcome and indicative outputs and indicators. • Identify gaps in gender equality by collecting and analyzing sex-disaggregated data and develop strategies to close those gaps. • Invest resources and expertise into implementing strategies for gender equality. • Ensure that men and women can equally contribute to and benefit from direct outputs of UNDP projects. Gender parity will be the required standard for all programmes. • Conduct gender analysis and gender screening at the design stage, specifying intended beneficiaries, indicators, and benchmarks for achieving gender equality objectives. • Ensure that programme performance indicators are gender-sensitive. • Engage a gender specialist in project development, implementation, and evaluation. • Comply with the compulsory environmental and social screening procedure as an additional instrument helping assess the project's gender equality impact. • Utilize budget allocation mechanisms for gender equality. • Monitor and evaluate implementation and ensure institutional accountability at all stages. • Develop gender-sensitive communication, advocacy, and dissemination strategies. • Increase the capacity of project staff to conduct gender analyses in the project cycle. • Ensure that the TORs for Outcome Evaluations include an assessment of gender results. 	All programme and strategic units, Senior Management

Output	Activities	Responsible Teams
Objective 1: Gender-transformative programming to achieve better results in addressing gender inequalities		
Six Signature Solutions & Strategic Entry Points		
Gender-Equal and Sustainable Economies (Signature Solution 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate employment and access to and control over resources, particularly for women in the informal sector. • Conduct market-driven skills development. • Promote innovative business models. • Design and implement inclusive, gender-responsive and resilient basic social and protection services. • Provide modernized and mechanized employment training for women's participation in techno-based agriculture and the RMG and IT sectors. • Promote women in the STEM sector. 	All programme and strategic units
Inclusive Governance, Participation, and Women's Leadership (Signature Solution 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote social cohesion, human rights, non-discrimination and empowerment of women and other vulnerable groups. • Support public institutions to ensure accountable and gender-responsive governance according to the rule of law. • Protect human rights and prevent discrimination. • Ensure gender-responsive justice in line with UN standards. 	
Resilient Society (Signature Solution 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote women as agents of change in disaster risk reduction and management. • Enhance access of women to the tools necessary to protect themselves and their communities against the impacts of frequent disasters. 	
Women's Leadership in Environmental Management (Signature Solution 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote gender-responsive management of natural resources. • Facilitate women's leadership in decision-making on climate-responsive planning and budgeting. • Enhance the capacity of women-led organizations to lead climate action. • Enhance the access of women to innovative climate finance. 	

Output	Activities	Responsible Teams
Objective 1: Gender-transformative programming to achieve better results in addressing gender inequalities		
Six Signature Solutions & Strategic Entry Points		
Gender-Inclusive Access to Sustainable Energy (Signature Solution 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance access of women to clean energy. Promote women's leadership in expanding the green energy sector in Bangladesh. 	All programme and strategic units
Whole-of-society Gender Equality & Mobilizing Men and Boys for Gender Equality (Signature Solution 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tackle harmful social norms through awareness raising and behavioral change campaigns that encourage men to question the inherent power dynamics in their actions and words. Address structural barriers to gender equality and Strategic Gender Needs (e.g. land rights or inheritance law). Address root causes of gender-based violence and provide support to survivors. Leverage digital technologies to address cyber violence and harassment. Tackle unique challenges of transgender communities. Increase involvement of boys and men in UNDP's gender-transformative programming. Develop a Development Result Framework Matrix for Government ministries to measure and evaluate gender budget allocation and progress. 	
Objective 2: Institutional transformation towards a gender-transformative CO		
Working towards gender parity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that at least one woman is shortlisted for all interview assessments. If no female candidates are shortlisted, the vacancy announcement will be extended. Headhunt qualified female candidates. Attract and nurture the talent of young female staff, especially recent graduates, through targeted employment opportunities. 	Human Resources, Senior Management, Gender Focal Team

Output	Activities	Responsible Teams
Objective 2: Institutional transformation towards a gender-transformative CO		
Working towards gender parity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide gender sensitization workshops for the interview panels, hiring managers, and staff involved in the recruitment process. Ensure women are adequately represented in interview panels to prevent possibilities of bias. Ensure screening, written assessments, and interview panels are gender-balanced. Encourage female staff to apply for non-traditional positions. Develop/update the guideline for interviews to prevent any action or questioning that leads to gender-related discrimination during the recruitment process. Make staff aware of and make use of flexible working arrangements and parental policies. Highlight that qualified female candidates are strongly encouraged to apply in all vacancy announcements. Offer mentoring, capacity-building, and peer support to female staff to ensure career progression. Especially encourage transgender, tribal and indigenous people, persons with disability, and otherwise marginalized persons to apply to UNDP positions and ensure a safe and inclusive working environment for all. Promote women in managerial and leadership positions. 	Human Resources, Senior Management, Gender Focal Team
Continuous Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include results related to gender equality in staff work plans. Provide capacity-building on 'results-based reporting' from a gender perspective. Include a Standard Operating Procedure for Gender Mainstreaming in the induction package of newly recruited staff. Include specific gender responsibilities in ToRs and ensure these are monitored through performance management processes. Include at least one question on gender mainstreaming in the interview and written questions during the recruitment process. Make staff aware of the Gender Equality Strategy and their responsibility in implementing it. Arrange training for enhancing the capacity of staff on gender mainstreaming and the use of corporate gender tools such as the gender market. Arrange regular meetings of GFPs for regular sharing of gender-focused project initiatives and updates on planned activities. Provide regular mentoring of GFPs. Ensure staff have the necessary capacity to complete a gender analysis at the project design stage. 	

Output	Activities	Responsible Teams
Objective 2: Institutional transformation towards a gender-transformative CO		
An equal and inclusive work culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disseminate our policy on PSHAA and PSEA through sensitization events to UNDP personnel and external partners (GoB counterparts, implementing parties, NPD, DPD, FP). Ensure that all personnel are made aware of what to do in response to complaints of sexual harassment. Ensure all staff, irrespective of contract modality, have completed mandatory courses on PSHAA and PSEA and monitor its implementation through HR. Establish a reporting mechanism for SEA aligned with the mechanism developed by the joint UN PSEA network. Translate all policies and guidelines for PSHAA and PSEA into Bangla to ensure all staff understand the relevant policies well. Ensure that staff of every project with field reach are oriented on the SH, SEA, and AoA policies and that each project conducts a minimum of two awareness sessions with its project staff. Produce video materials on mechanisms to address PSHAA and PSEA. Conduct mandatory orientation to all service providers on PSHAA and PSEA. Hold at least two open and free dialogue-building activities on SHAA and SEA (e.g., film, awards, retreats) at the CO level to increase knowledge and change behavior within the organization. Conduct an online survey to assess progress and establish a new baseline, correcting the questionnaire used in 2019. 	Human Resources, Senior Management, Gender Focal Team
Communication for Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and disseminate guidelines for gender-sensitive language. Produce and disseminate gender-related articles, knowledge products, and communication products. Create a guideline for gender-responsive communication. Collaborate with social media influencers to widen outreach and reach new audiences for behavioral change campaigns. 	Communication Team

Output	Activities	Responsible Teams
Objective 3: Partnerships to strengthen collaboration for gender equality and women's empowerment		
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize high-level meetings with the national gender equality machinery, as well as line ministries, to agree on enhanced cooperation on gender-related issues and strengthen UNDP's contribution to national documents and strategies on gender equality. Support the Government in monitoring the nationalized SDGs gender-responsive indicators and achieving steady progress on the gender-related indicators. Strengthening working relationships with other ministries besides the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs (MoWCA) on progressing gender equality. 	All programme and strategic units, Senior Management, Partnerships
Inter-Agency Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present gender-related activities and share information on the collaborative works within other UN agencies. Develop joint programmes with other UN Agencies on gender equality when advantageous. Collaborate on policy advocacy to strengthen outreach, visibility, and impact. 	
Civil Society Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate dialogue and share knowledge with different women's organizations. Strengthen engagement and collaboration with women's organizations during project design and implementation. Build the capacities of CSOs to drive change in the country. Engage with faith-based organizations for behavioral change campaigns. Partner with youth organizations to amplify their voices and engage as a key group to influence attitudinal change. 	
Private Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pursue gender mainstreaming in the private sector, especially in non-traditional sectors, to ensure women's active participation. Support women entrepreneurs by increasing their access to gender-responsive business development networks and services. Identify opportunities for collaboration with the private sector in the programming cycle. 	

Output	Activities	Responsible Teams
Objective 3: Partnerships to strengthen collaboration for gender equality and women's empowerment		
Academia and Research Institutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest in creating and managing gender disaggregated knowledge to inform contextual and gender-responsive interventions across UNDP's programmatic portfolios. Work with academia and think tanks to advocate for evidence-based research on gender issues and design methodologies for gender-sensitive data generation and interpretation. Increase academia's engagement in multi-stakeholder processes and dialogues on gender equality and gender-responsive issues in achieving the SDGs. Reach out to new academic institutions and youth student groups to participate in advancing UNDP's mandate and organizing events to promote knowledge exchange within the network. Provide a platform for university students and academics to co-create research and resources 	All programme and strategic units, Senior Management, Partnerships
Accountability		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase transparency by creating a mechanism comprising civil society and external experts to guide and track the implementation of this strategy. Review the strategy once every two years through the Gender Focal Team led by the RR and DRR, with input from the wider staff. Adopt a Gender Equality Annual Action Plan and monitor its progress on a quarterly basis through the Gender Focal Team led by the RR and DRR and inform the wider staff. Generate reliable and timely gender-disaggregated data, compiling data from the gender marker, the results-oriented annual report and the Gender Equality Seal. Capture the key annual results (reported through ROAR) with special focus on GEN 2 and GEN 3 projects, highlighting transformative change. 	Gender Focal Team

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United Nations Development Programme in Bangladesh

IDB Bhaban
UN Offices, 18th Floor
Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar
Dhaka 1207, Bangladesh