

State of the Bangladesh Economy from a Gender Lens

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এসডিজি বাস্তবায়নে নাগরিক প্ল্যাটফর্ম, বাংলাদেশ

The economy is going through a rough patch

- Bangladesh's economy is going through a rebuilding process
- Some improvements are visible
 - ❖ Inflation control efforts were initiated
 - ❖ Remittance inflow remained buoyant
 - ❖ Exports rebounded
 - ❖ Foreign exchange reserves improved
 - ❖ Due external payments were made without drawing on reserves
 - ❖ Banking sector has seen improved governance

The economy is going through a rough patch

- Vulnerabilities are still prominent in many areas
- Revenue earnings did not improve much
- Public expenditure was below par
- Debt services liability has emerged as a burden
- Significant drop in private investment
- Growth rate has slowed down
- Employment significantly reduced

The tough economy is hurting women disproportionately

- Over the years, female labour force data, produced with weak definitions/concepts, misled the development narrative and policies

Indicator	ILOSTAT, 19th ICLS (2022)	LFS 2022 (13 th ICLS)
Employment-population ratio (%)	National: 46.8% Male: 75% Female: 19.1%	National: 59% Male: 77.2% Female: 41.2%
Labour force participation rate (%)	National: 49.55% Male: 78.5% Female: 21.3%	National: 61.2 Male: 80% Female: 42.8%
Unemployment rate	National: 5.6% Male: 4.5% Female: 9.7%	National: 3.5% Male: 3.5% Female: 3.6%

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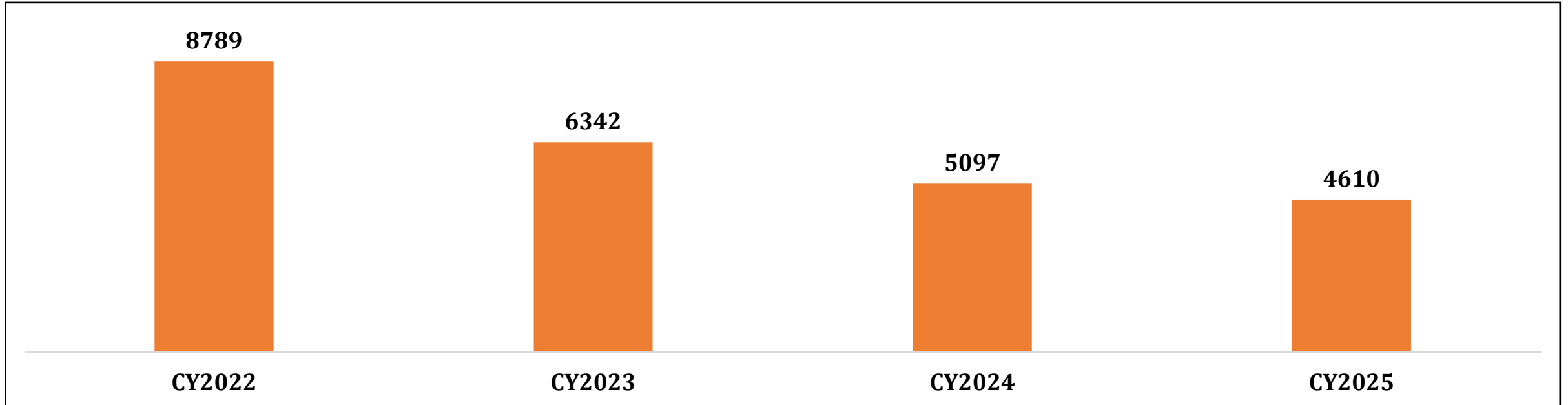
Indicator	ILOSTAT, 19th ICLS (2022)	LFS 2022 (13 th ICLS)
Youth unemployment rate (as % of total youth)	National: 16.8% Male: 14.8% Female: 22.7%	National: 8% Male: 10.2% Female: 5.7%
NEET youth (as % of total youth)	National: 30.9% Male: 11.1% Female: 49.3%	National: 22% Male: 16% Female: 27%
Share of informal employment (%)	National: 81.1% Male: 78.1% Female: 92.8%	National: 84.9% Male: 78.5% Female: 96.7%

The tough economy is hurting women disproportionately

- In the first half of the current fiscal year (FY2025), nationally, about **21 lakh jobs were lost** (same for both quarters)
- Among these, net job loss for **female workers was 18 lakh (85%)**
- In the second quarter (**Oct-Dec 2024**), **net job loss for female workers was 20 lakh (92%)**
- **Regrettably, sectoral employment data is not provided following 19th ICLS**
- **Let us recall that -**
 - **80.8% of employed women are in vulnerable employment**, characterised by low productivity and returns
 - Only **3% of employed women** have access to employer-contributed pension or retirement funds
 - Women are disproportionately engaged in unpaid care works
 - About two-third of the young women are NEET (not in employment, education or training)

The tough economy is hurting women disproportionately

The number of female workers who went for overseas employment (per month)



Source: BMET.

- **Jobs for women in the overseas market also declined over the last two-three years**
- **Also to be noted that many Bangladeshi female migrant workers were forced to work, faced physical violence and some even experienced sexual harassment**

Progress may not be sustainable, can decay

Global Gender Gap Index: Where does Bangladesh actually stand?

Country	Gender Gap Index- Rank (Score)	Economic Participation and Opportunity	Educational Attainment	Health & Survival	Political Empowerment
Bangladesh	99 th (.689)	146 th (.312)	125 th (.940)	129 th (.962)	7 th (.543)
Nepal	117 th (.664)	137 th (.475)	130 th (.923)	82 nd (.969)	51 st (.288)
Cambodia	102 nd (.685)	59 th (.717)	108 th (.968)	38 th (.978)	127 th (.080)

Source: Global Gender Gap Index, World Economic Forum.

- **Overstated women's advancement -a selection bias in data representation**

Progress may not be sustainable, can decay

- **Middle-class and rich families invest in daughters' education, but 33.4% of girls from the richest families marry before 18 years old, and 50% of middle-class girls do the same.**
- **64.5% of women do not look for jobs due to housework/family responsibilities**
- **While secondary school enrolment for females is relatively high (77.34%), tertiary enrolment drops significantly to 20.84%**
- **Enrolment in religion-based education institutions increased, often linked with economic and social vulnerability**
- **Share of female graduates in STEM fields is only 20.6%**
- **COVID-19 has raised concerns about whether the gender gap in education has widened due to school closures. Indeed, in recent years (post-COVID), progress in female enrolment in education (particularly at the secondary level) and dropout rate has not improved**

Progress may not be sustainable, can decay

- For child marriage, contraceptive use and child mortality rate, the progress were somewhat lost
- According to BANBEIS, the high school graduation rate has declined, and the dropout rate has increased, especially among girls, confirming apprehensions from independent studies during the early stages of the pandemic
- 63% of girls under 18 were married in 2022, a 10% increase from 2021
- % of girls marry by age 16, highlighting persistent challenges.
- The percentage of girls married under age 15 increased from 6.5% in 2022 to 8.2% in 2023
- Recent VAW survey indicates improvement, however, independent studies claimed that during the COVID period, it increased notably
- **Are the low hanging fruits in the area women empowerment disappearing?**

Takeaways for next budget and investment in gender rights

- **Economic empowerment are intertwined with Social and political priorities - a silo approach will not sustainable**
- **One of the guiding yardsticks to review the gender sensitivity of the budget should be to track investment (and policy attention) in the areas mentioned above: e.g., women's employment, skills, health, safety, etc., - the traditional government-reported 'gender budget' number may not be operationally helpful**
- **We may not be able to overcome or move away from a piecemeal project approach in the budget for the next fiscal year, but surely these issues should prominently feature in the forthcoming electoral debates**

Thank You



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