

# Implementing 2030 Agenda in Bangladesh

*Experiences of the Left Behind Communities*

*Edited by*

Debapriya Bhattacharya  
Mustafizur Rahman  
Towfiqul Islam Khan  
Shourza Talukder



Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh

এসডিজি বাস্তবায়নে নাগরিক প্ল্যাটফর্ম, বাংলাদেশ

# Implementing 2030 Agenda in Bangladesh

*Experiences of the Left Behind Communities*

**Edited by**

Debapriya Bhattacharya  
Mustafizur Rahman  
Towfiqul Islam Khan  
Shourza Talukder

**First Published**

June 2025

Publisher

**Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh**

Secretariat: **Centre for Policy Dialogue**

House 40/C, Road 11 (New)

Dhanmondi, Dhaka - 1209, Bangladesh

Telephone: (+88 02) 41021780, 41021781

E-mail: [coordinator@bdplatform4sdgs.net](mailto:coordinator@bdplatform4sdgs.net)

Website: [www.bdplatform4sdgs.net](http://www.bdplatform4sdgs.net)

Copyright

© Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh

Page layout and typesetting

*Ibrahim Moni*

**ISBN: 978-984-37-0623-2**

**Printed at**

Lithograph

41/5 Purana Paltan, Dhaka 1000

# Preface

## The Context

A key departure of the SDGs, as distinct from the preceding MDGs, is that it is envisioned to take a whole-of-society approach, encompassing the entire spectrum of involved activities—design, implementation, monitoring, and outcome assessment in view of the SDGs. Also to note, a key defining distinction of the SDGs is to leave no one behind in the process of SDG implementation. From these two vantage points, the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), which are geared to undertaking periodic reviews of the progress being made in terms of attaining the SDG goals and targets, are critically important milestones to learn about what has been achieved, where the gaps are and what needs to be done to address the unfinished agendas. In alignment with the two aforementioned features of the SDGs, all this has to be done in an inclusive manner and with particular focus on the left-behind and marginalised communities.

Against this backdrop, the present volume embodies an initiative on the part of the Citizen’s Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, to prepare a citizen’s report, keeping in the perspective the upcoming VNR 2025 to take place at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in New York on July 14-23, 2025, and putting the interests and concerns of the left-behind groups at the centre of focus.

## The Departure

As is known, the VNRs are prepared and presented by governments. The present Citizen’s VNR, while a distinct product, in a way complements the official VNR. The Citizen’s Platform contributed to the preparation of the country’s VNR, highlighting the interests of the marginalised and left-behind groups. This contribution is duly acknowledged in the official Bangladesh VNR 2025. The official VNR also incorporated the inputs of the Citizen’s

Platform in highlighting the perspectives of the left-behind communities. The present volume, however, is geared to both amplify voices and offer the perspectives of people on the ground in view of implementing the goals and targets of the SDGs.

As would be known to those familiar with the activities of the Citizen's Platform, a central focus of its activities is to put the spotlight on issues of interest to the left-behind and marginalised groups, and advance their causes in view of the SDGs. This is what the Citizen's Platform has been doing since it was launched in 2016. The Citizen's Platform's more than 150 partners work at the ground level, focusing on various SDG-related areas. It is strongly felt that there is an acute need to elaborate on the challenges faced by the left-behind groups, identify the gaps in implementation, and propose the interventions needed to address the challenges in the SDG-specific goal and target areas. This is particularly so as the SDGs are entering their final phase in the run-up to the year 2030. The Citizen's Platform looks at the SDG aspirations, from the perspectives of rights, accountability, and voice of the left-behind groups.

This year's VNR, the third of its kind in which Bangladesh will be participating, is unique in the sense that Bangladesh has undergone crucially important changes since the last VNR, where the country presented its progress report (2020). The student-led mass uprising of July-August 2024, followed by the political transition in August 2024, brought an Interim Government to power in Bangladesh, which will be presenting the VNR 2025. The transition has created a renewed opportunity to reset Bangladesh's development narrative and review the SDG progress in an evidence-based manner, with collective introspection, to understand and assess where the country actually stands in view of the SDGs implementation. This transition is also an opportunity for the Bangladesh civil society to present its own assessment of SDG progress in view of VNR 2025.

## **The Process**

This volume is the outcome of an endeavour led by the Citizen's Platform which was carried out in collaboration with a large number of its partners. To begin with, six population groups were identified taking note of their particular vulnerabilities and in consideration of their importance in implementing the SDGs by leaving no one behind: children, climate-vulnerable communities, Dalits and Adivasis, persons with disabilities, women, and youth. These groups were selected by taking into cognisance the acute vulnerabilities they face in the economy, society, and polity. For each

group, a dedicated team was constituted, which included an anchor partner organisation, associated organisations, and relevant experts in specific areas. Preparation of the volume thus followed a widely participatory process and inclusive approach.

To build a strong evidence base, a comprehensive data compilation effort was undertaken, with engagement of over 4,000 citizens.

The process involved:

- 18 consultations and workshops
- 54 focus group discussions (FGDs)
- 8 key informant interviews (KIIs)
- 3 surveys

Six group-specific policy briefs were prepared through the aforesaid interactive process. These briefs constitute the core chapters of this volume. Each chapter offers a focused analysis of the challenges and barriers faced by the specific group and embeds community-specific perspectives. The analysis highlights structural inequalities, implementation gaps, and emerging threats that could hinder progress towards achieving the SDGs in relation to the particular group.

Preparation of the briefs involved the collaboration of 42 partner organisations of the Citizens' Platform. These partners volunteered their time and effort and worked closely with the Citizen's Platform Secretariat to prepare the present volume, imbued by the shared objectives of amplifying the voices of marginalised communities and advancing their interests.

The six thematic chapters are preceded by an overview chapter, which captures the key insights drawn from the six group-specific chapters. The overview chapter offers a common thread by drawing on the findings of the White Paper, which highlighted how, in the past, macroeconomic policies and implementation processes often tended to undermine the interests of the most vulnerable people in society. The chapter points out how the COVID-19 pandemic accentuated the vulnerabilities of marginalised populations and distanced the country further from attaining its SDG commitments. Many new challenges have emerged thereafter, afflicting the left-behind groups disproportionately, and this has also been highlighted in the chapter. The chapter also explores the lessons learned, offers recommendations based on the six chapters, and underscores the need for informed and sound strategies in going forward.

## Major messages

### *Persistent setbacks in SDG implementation marked by asymmetrical progress*

Bangladesh's SDG progress is slowing and has revealed growing disparities across regions and communities. Rural and climate-affected areas face higher poverty, mortality, and poorer education than urban areas. Wealth inequality is widening, with the top 10 per cent gaining more while the bottom 50 per cent lose ground. Gender gaps persist as women dominate the informal sector, face a widening wage gap, and have limited digital and job access. Group-specific exclusions are equally evident, as Dalits, Adivasis, persons with disabilities, and climate-vulnerable communities continue to face systemic exclusion in access to land, jobs, services, and decision-making.

### *Deepening exclusion within LNOB groups*

The vulnerabilities of the left behind groups are multi-dimensional as it is shaped by overlapping factors, viz., poverty, caste and ethnicity, disability, gender, geography, climate risks, etc. The compounded disadvantages make some communities even “more left-behind.” Intersectional challenges are particularly severe; for example, Dalit women face the combined weight of caste-based stigma, gender inequality, and economic exclusion, while women with disabilities experience even deeper systemic barriers. Such intergenerational exclusion creates cycles of poverty, poor education, and political invisibility that are difficult to break.

### *Inadequate and poorly targeted financing*

Financing for inclusive development in Bangladesh remains inadequate and misaligned. Public budgets have prioritised large infrastructure over essential services like social protection, health, and education. Climate finance is similarly exclusionary – 90 per cent of projects exclude consultation with LNOB communities.

### *Unequal access to public services*

Marginalised communities continue to face inequitable access to basic public services. Dalits and Adivasis lack adequate healthcare infrastructure, while persons with disabilities encounter high treatment costs, stigma, and physically inaccessible facilities. Education gaps are stark – 60 per cent of children with disabilities remain out of school, and climate-affected areas see soaring dropout rates. Overall, 87.5 per cent of the population lacks full

access to basic services, with the marginalised groups bearing the brunt of systemic neglect.

### *Political transition: A turning point for inclusion*

The 2024 youth-led uprising and formation of the Interim Government marked a pivotal moment for reimagining Bangladesh's development path. It enabled renewed civic engagement, with greater civil society involvement in the 2025 VNR. Yet, deep-rooted constraints on participation persist, and inclusive policymaking remains in its early stages. This political shift presents a critical opportunity to address longstanding governance challenges and promote equity in SDG implementation—provided it is effectively leveraged.

## **The Value Addition**

As Bangladesh enters the final stretch towards the 2030 deadline, this volume provides evidential knowledge to stress the urgency of keeping the focus on Bangladesh's LNOB groups and underscores why there is a need for a whole-of-society approach in implementing the SDGs. The volume will hopefully help ensure that SDG implementation in Bangladesh will need to be aligned with the LNOB demands, through voice, advocacy, and impact. The idea is to add urgency to SDG implementation in Bangladesh by addressing the challenges facing the marginalised communities in Bangladesh.

The VNR exercise in Bangladesh this year is taking place against the backdrop of disquieting developments: globally, only 17 per cent of all SDG indicators are currently on track to meet their targets. In the particular context of Bangladesh, progress remains uneven, and in many areas, the country is falling behind. For LNOB groups, the gaps are even more acute and multidimensional. Unless targeted and inclusive measures are adopted, these communities risk being further marginalised and left behind in the final phase of SDG implementation.

To also note, a major constraint continues to be the lack of disaggregated data, which limits effective policymaking and undermines efforts to undertake targeted interventions and assess the progress made. This has been highlighted in the volume.

The present volume seeks to inform the national discourse and encourage actions that prioritise equity, inclusion, and accountability by offering evidence-based insights and policy recommendations in view of attaining the SDGs in Bangladesh by 2030.

## Acknowledgements

The present volume stands as a testament to a unique, CSO-led collaborative endeavour, which, in view of the upcoming VNR 2025, undertakes an assessment of the SDG implementation progress through the lens of marginalised communities in Bangladesh. In this process, a large number of organisations and individuals have contributed to shaping the volume. I would like to register my deep appreciation and gratitude to all of them.

I would like to extend my deep and heartfelt thanks to the 42 partner organisations of the Citizens' Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, who were part of the six group-specific teams which prepared the respective chapters of the volume. Without the support of the anchor organisations and associate organisations, this volume could not have been prepared. Their depth of knowledge about ground realities, sincere commitment and dedicated work were instrumental in preparing the volume. Special words of sincere appreciation go to the authors who are distinguished scholars in the respective fields of the six thematic chapters. They have put in enormous effort to prepare their respective chapters in a way that embeds the concerns and interests of left-behind groups in Bangladesh from the perspective of implementing the goals and targets of the SDGs. Sincere appreciation is also owed to government officials, private sector representatives, international development partners, and media professionals whose valuable insights in the course of the various consultations have enriched this volume.

Particular thanks are due to the SDG Coordinator's Office for their collaboration throughout this process. We are especially grateful to *Ms Lamiya Morshed*, Principal Coordinator for SDGs Affairs (Senior Secretary), and *Mr Shihab Quader*, Director General for SDGs (Joint Secretary), Chief Adviser's Office, Government of Bangladesh, for their kind support.

I owe a debt of gratitude to all colleagues at the Citizens' Platform Secretariat for their unwavering devotion and hard work, which has made this volume happen.

My esteemed colleague *Professor Mustafizur Rahman*, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and Core Group Member, Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, took upon himself the enormous task of editing the Group-specific reports and the overall volume. I express my sincere appreciation for his time, intellectual guidance, and unwavering commitment to maintaining the analytical rigour and coherence of this volume.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to *Mr Towfiqul Islam Khan*, Additional Director, Research, CPD and Member of the SDGs Working Team, Government of Bangladesh, for his leadership in guiding the research team throughout the preparation of this volume—from beginning to end. His thoughtful direction, analytical insights, and dedicated attention to detail have been invaluable in shaping the final outcome.

The appreciation extends to *Ms Shourza Talukder*, Senior Research Associate, CPD, who provided excellent drafting support and coordinated with the 42 partner organisations as also various government agencies that were involved in this collaborative initiative.

I would also like to put on record our sincere appreciation to *Ms Saba Sabnam*, Programme Associate, CPD, and *Mr Asir Newaj Khan*, Programme Associate, CPD, for their most valuable background research support.

*Mr Avra Bhattacharjee*, Additional Director, Dialogue and Outreach, CPD, deserves my deep appreciation for his important contributions in various capacities involving programme implementation and publication coordination in connection with this volume. Excellent publication support provided by *Mr Rifat Bin Aowlad*, Dialogue Associate, CPD, is highly appreciated. Special thanks are due to *Ms Tarannum Jinan*, Focal Point of the Citizens' Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, for her unwavering support in networking, mobilisation of partners and other relevant activities associated with preparing this volume.

Our profound gratitude to the Core Group members of the Citizens' Platform, and senior management and colleagues at CPD and the Citizen's Platform Secretariat for their firm commitment and continuing support towards this important civil society initiative of which this volume is the final result.



*Debapriya Bhattacharya, PhD*

Convenor, Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh  
and

Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

Date: June 2025



# Table of Contents

Preface	iii
Acknowledgements	viii
Acronyms	xiii
<b>SDGs Progress in Bangladesh</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>A Balance Sheet from Citizens' Perspectives</i>	
<b>A Dignified Future for Women</b>	<b>39</b>
<i>Progress, Gaps, and Next Steps</i>	
<b>Realising the Potentials of Youth</b>	<b>57</b>
<i>Bridging Aspirations and Realities</i>	
<b>Unlocking Children's Promises</b>	<b>77</b>
<i>An Assessment of Progress on SDG Implementation</i>	
<b>Rights, Access, and Participation</b>	<b>113</b>
<i>State of SDG Delivery for Persons with Disabilities</i>	
<b>Challenging Inequality and Marginalisation</b>	<b>133</b>
<i>How Far the Dalit and Adivasi Communities Have Come Towards Achieving the SDGs</i>	
<b>Dealing with Climate Vulnerabilities</b>	<b>149</b>
<i>An Assessment of Risks and Resilience for SDG Realisation</i>	



# Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADP	Annual Development Programme
AFHS	Adolescent-Friendly Health Services
ALRD	Association for Land Reform and Development
ANC	Antenatal Care
ATM	Automated Teller Machine
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BCCSAP	Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan
BCCTF	Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund
BDERM	Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement
BIGD	BRAC Institute of Governance and Development
BILS	Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies
BLAST	Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust
BMET	Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training
BMP	Bangladesh Mahila Parishad
BYLC	Bangladesh Youth Leadership Centre
CAMPE	Campaign for Popular Education
CAT	Convention against Torture
CDD	Centre for Disability in Development
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
CPD	Centre for Policy Dialogue
CRAC	Child Rights Advocacy Coalition in Bangladesh
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility

DGHS	Directorate General of Health Services
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DSS	Department of Social Services
DYD	Department of Youth Development
DYDF	Dhrubotara Youth Development Foundation
EARN	Economic Acceleration and Resilience for NEET
EGPP	Employment Generation Program for the Poorest
EMT	Executive Management Team
Educo	Education and Development Foundation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FLFP	Female Labour Force Participation
FY	Fiscal Year
FYP	Five-Year Plan
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GED	General Economics Division
GII	Global Innovation Index
GiHA	Gender in Humanitarian Action
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
HEKS	Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirchen Schweiz
HH	Household
HIES	Household and Income Expenditure Survey
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum
HPNSP	Health, Population and Nutrition Sector Programme
HSC	Higher Secondary Certificate
iBAS	Integrated Budget and Accounting System
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
ICF	Inner City Fund
ICMW	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families

ICPED	International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDSN	International Dalit Solidarity Network
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IISD	International Institute for Sustainable Development
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International Non-governmental Organisation
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
JFB	Joining Forces Bangladesh
KII	Key Informant Interview
LFS	Labour Force Survey
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
MBBS	Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery
MFS	Mobile Financial Services
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
MJF	Manusher Jonno Foundation
MMR	Maternal Mortality Ratio
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NAPVAWC	National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children
NCLS	National Child Labour Survey
ND-GAIN	Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NIMH	National Institute of Mental Health
NIPORT	National Institute of Population Research and Training
NPAN2	Second National Plan of Action for Nutrition
NSPD	National Survey on Persons with Disabilities
NSSS	National Social Security Strategy
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OP	Operational Plan
OPD	Organisations of Persons with Disabilities
PIB	Plan International Bangladesh

RPO	Representation of the People Order
SATA	State Acquisition and Tenancy Act
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SRMNCAH	Sexual, Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, and Adolescent Health
SSC	Secondary School Certificate
SSNP	Social Safety Net Programme
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
SVRS	Sample Vital Registration System
TB	Tuberculosis
TBIP	Transform of the Backwards Youth to Industrial Workers to Increase Productivity
TBS	The Business Standard
TDS	The Daily Star
TECUYB	Technology Empowerment Centre on Wheels for Underprivileged Rural Young People of Bangladesh
TIB	Transparency International Bangladesh
TUS	Time Use Survey
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UHC	Universal Health Coverage
UN	United Nations
UN CRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UN ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
UPS	Universal Pension Scheme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAT	Value Added Tax
VAW	Violence Against Women
VGf	Vulnerable Group Feeding
VNR	Voluntary National Review

VWB	Vulnerable Women Benefit
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WEF	World Economic Forum
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization
WVB	World Vision Bangladesh
YDI	Youth Development Index
YFC-BD	Youth for Change Bangladesh Foundation



# **SDGs Progress in Bangladesh**

*A Balance Sheet from Citizens' Perspectives*

*Mustafizur Rahman*

Distinguished Fellow  
Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

*Towfiqul Islam Khan*

Additional Director, Research  
Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

*Shourza Talukder*

Senior Research Associate  
Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)



## Context

### A Brief Introduction to Bangladesh's VNR Journey

As the world approaches the end-point of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Bangladesh reiterates its commitment to achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. To support the global follow-up and review process in connection with monitoring the SDG implementation, Bangladesh took part in two Voluntary National Review (VNR) exercises in 2017 and 2020. Bangladesh's VNR reports were presented at the UN High-Level Political Forums (HLPFs) held in respective years.

While both the aforesaid VNRs exemplify Bangladesh's commitment to advancing the SDGs, the country's experience in preparing and delivering the VNRs highlighted several limitations pertaining to both the process and the outcomes of the concerned endeavours. It is a matter of regret that Bangladesh's previous two VNRs were informed more by predominant government involvement than by truly national perspectives. This was primarily due to inadequate engagement of the concerned government entities with non-state actors (NSAs) in the VNR preparatory process. This was particularly manifested in limited participation and inadequate representation of NSAs, more so of the marginalised communities, in the course of both preparation and finalisation of the VNRs. While consultations with key stakeholders did take place, the VNR preparation process lacked a transparent feedback mechanism that could ensure that the insights of citizens, particularly the perspectives of the country's Leave no one behind (LNOB) communities, were incorporated in full into the final VNR reports.

The previous two VNRs essentially focused on the progress related to specific goals and target indicators. These formal review processes relied exclusively on official data, which suffered from limited disaggregation capabilities beyond gender and spatial dimension. Consequently, the actual state of development of LNOB communities was inadequately addressed in the previous VNRs of Bangladesh. This limitation, however, contradicts the fundamental principle of the SDGs, which aspires to have the interests of the left-behind groups at its core. By failing to include the perspectives and voices of marginalised communities adequately, the previous two VNRs were not able to convey a realistic picture as regards the state of SDG attainment in Bangladesh, from disaggregated and granular perspectives. This also undermined the agency of the left-behind groups and their potential contribution to SDG attainment. Accordingly, when VNRs do not

reflect the actual situation of the LNOB groups, and when these groups are not adequately consulted in the VNR preparation process, not only do they remain out of focus in the public discourse, but also the attainment of SDGs through an inclusive process remains a far cry.

To address the existing evidence gap and promote the cause of inclusive progress towards achieving the SDGs that leave no one behind, it is thus essential to adopt a ‘whole-of-society’ approach—one that transcends and goes beyond traditional governance frameworks (UNESCAP, 2025). A failure to implement a more inclusive and participatory model may not only result in ineffective policies but also exacerbate existing inequalities, compromise the principles of good governance, and ultimately obstruct the nation’s advancement towards attaining the SDGs.

### **The New Context: Opportunities and Challenges**

Two of the key factors driving the youth-led upsurge in Bangladesh during the July-August 2024 were rising inequalities (related to SDG 10) and an absence of distributive justice (pertaining to SDG 16) (White Paper Committee, 2024). Findings from the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2022, conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), indicate a worsening of income inequality in the nation, despite a relative decrease in the poverty rate. These corroborate the reasoning, underpinning the student-citizens movement mentioned above.

This paradox of falling poverty levels and rising income disparity highlight significant structural deficiencies in economic distribution. To note, the income share of the top 10 per cent of households increased by 7.4 per cent, from 2016 to 2022. In contrast, the income share of the bottom 50 per cent of households contracted by 5.8 per cent, (BBS, 2023a). Moreover, despite Bangladesh’s progress in poverty alleviation, the situation remains precarious; over 20 million individuals are at risk of falling back into poverty, as merely two days of missed work could lead to such an outcome (White Paper Committee, 2024).

The July-August 2024 youth-led uprising in Bangladesh manifested significant concerns regarding the fairness of the government’s recruitment system. The issue of special quota reservations, set at 56 per cent, was a focal point of discussion for years, since it limited opportunities for merit-based recruitment. While the quota system was intended to provide preferential access to government jobs for certain categories of job-seekers, there is a growing feeling among the youth that the system was tilted in favour of

some at the cost of others, and that it was not economically disadvantaged and marginalised groups that benefited from the system. The quota system in place stipulated that 30 per cent of government jobs are to be reserved for the children and grandchildren of freedom fighters, 10 per cent for women, 10 per cent for district quotas, 5 per cent for Indigenous communities, and 1 per cent for individuals with disabilities.

Despite their declared purpose, the quotas failed to meet the expectations of job market entrants who were most in need. The prolonged education-to-employment transition faced by many graduates further complicated the landscape. As evidenced by the Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2023, it was found that 32 per cent of recent graduates were unemployed. Furthermore, 19 per cent of graduates experienced a waiting period of up to two years to secure a job, while 16 per cent remained unemployed for over two years following graduation BBS (2024c). There is no denying that addressing the disconnect between education and labour market demands is crucial to alleviating economic exclusion and reducing frustration among the youth.

The shrinking civic space in Bangladesh undermined the opportunities for citizens' engagement in the development discourse. The 2023 rating by CIVICUS confirmed Bangladesh's constrained civic environment, with a score of only 20 out of 100 prior to July 2024 (CIVICUS, n.d.). On the other hand, such a scenario presents an important opening for strengthening the capacity and opportunity of the youth and civil society in Bangladesh to express their views, fostering a more vibrant and constructive dialogue within the community.

Convergence of economic inequality, systemic injustice in government employment, constraints as regards civic participation, and frustration of youth as regards lack of employment opportunities and rampant discrimination fuelled popular discontent and triggered the widely-participated protests of July-August 2024. The failure of the previous administration to appreciate, understand and address the sources of discontent served as a catalyst for mobilising the citizens.

Against the aforesaid backdrop, Bangladesh has undergone a crucial political transition following the fall of the previous government on August 5, 2025. This transitional phase had put in place an Interim Government, which has been tasked to address macroeconomic challenges, structural weaknesses, and longstanding inequalities in economy, policy and governance (White Paper Committee, 2024). The August changes have now created an opportunity for a wide-ranging national dialogue on structural reforms that

prioritise inclusivity and justice for all citizens. Such a defining transition does provide an opportunity to reshape the country's developmental trajectory, especially with respect to its commitment to achieving the SDGs.

The journey towards presenting Bangladesh's third VNR at the HLPF in 2025 was initiated by the previous administration. It is important that the interim government has not only reaffirmed its commitment in this regard, but has also expressed its willingness to ensure inclusivity in the preparation of the VNRs. The government's decision to integrate insights from the private sector, civil society and marginalised groups into the VNR report must be seen as a commendable step towards recognising diverse perspectives and exploring novel ways to achieve the SDG goals and targets in the process of preparing the VNRs.

Such an enlightened approach to the VNR preparation process provides a valuable opportunity to better assess the impact of development policies on the marginalised communities and to deal with bureaucratic obstacles and inertia that impede the implementation of the SDGs. By highlighting the embedded structural challenges, the VNR can more accurately reflect the socio-economic realities in which disadvantaged populations live, thereby reinforcing efforts to achieve the SDGs in an inclusive manner. This also offers an opportunity to reemphasise the importance of addressing data gaps and ensuring data integrity which are so crucial to measuring and monitoring SDG progress, and also implementing the SDGs.

In view of the above, the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, took a forward-thinking perspective and undertook a review of the SDGs that puts the voices of citizens at the centre of the SDG discourse, particularly focusing on issues of importance to the left-behind communities. This initiative exemplifies a proactive approach to ensure that the realities of marginalised groups are prominently featured in the country's VNR. In so doing, the present endeavour is geared to contributing to the government's broader commitment to sustainable development through a more inclusive and transparent evaluation and assessment of the SDG process and progress.

### **Global efforts at incorporating LNOB perspectives in to VNR reports**

The initiative undertaken by the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, through its citizen-led SDG review, aligns with global efforts to integrate the LNOB perspectives into respective VNRs. Countries around the world are increasingly making an effort to incorporate the voices of marginalised groups within their SDG reporting processes. In connection with the above, it is

pertinent to recall that Ireland has adopted an ‘open drafting approach’ in 2023, which ensured that stakeholder perspectives were meaningfully integrated into its VNR report. Countries such as Mongolia (2019), Austria (2024), and Belize (2024) have come up with separate reports on the ramifications of SDG implementation for LNOB groups in their respective national assessments. However, despite the adoption of these strategies, concerns persist regarding the inadequate availability of disaggregated data and an overreliance on qualitative assessments rather than quantitative evidence.

Furthermore, a significant challenge remains in assessing whether VNRs accurately reflect the conditions faced by marginalised groups. As reported in the Progressing National SDG Implementation Report 2023, only 20 per cent of VNRs presented at the HLPF in 2023 included adequate access to disaggregated data (Action for Sustainable Development et al., 2024). The discrepancies observed between government assessments and findings from civil society have raised questions regarding the reliability of official reporting. A pertinent example is Norway’s 2021 VNR report, which included distinct, goal-specific assessments from both government and civil society, revealing inconsistencies in fact-checking and reporting.

These challenges are further exacerbated by a lack of regular and persistent engagement of civil society in the VNR process. Among the VNRs submitted in 2023, only 38 per cent of countries characterised their institutional arrangements as multi-stakeholder, representing a significant decline from the previous year (Action for Sustainable Development et al., 2024). This downward trend indicates an increasing disconnect between governments and civil society organisations (CSOs) in shaping SDG implementation strategies. Consequently, the actual impact of SDGs on marginalised groups remains ambiguous and inadequately addressed.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The overarching objective of the present study is to generate disaggregated data and information at the community level from an SDG perspective. This includes evidence on policy impact to amplify the voices of marginalised communities and ensure their meaningful engagement in the overall delivery of SDGs in Bangladesh. The study aims to present an independent perspective, upholding the spirit of “leaving no one behind” as Bangladesh prepares the VNR 2025 report by making it more inclusive and positioning it as a “learning document” for policymakers to facilitate targeted policy decisions favouring the LNOB groups.

The specific objectives of the study are:

- i. To address an objective assessment of the progress towards achieving the SDGs from LNOB perspectives.
- ii. To address the information gap at the disaggregated level through broad-based participatory approaches that focus on upholding the rights of marginalised citizens and communities.
- iii. To generate knowledge and evidence that can be used as a tool for establishing accountability mechanisms on behalf of marginalised citizens and communities.
- iv. To promote collective participation among CSOs to pursue evidence-based policy advocacy in favour of marginalised citizens and communities.

Expected outcomes:

The study is expected to contribute to the following outcomes:

- i. An informed assessment as regards where Bangladesh's LNOB groups stand in view of attaining the SDGs.
- ii. Increased representation of left-behind citizens and communities in national policy discourse through the provision of improved and reliable data.
- iii. Meaningful reflection of the perspectives of left-behind citizens and communities in the VNR 2025 report, as well as in national development agendas and plans, particularly within the SDG delivery process, strengthened by an enhanced accountability framework.
- iv. Strengthened ownership and collective solidarity of Non-State actors in the VNR process through a coalition-based approach.

One anticipated spill-over outcome of the study is that it will enhance the capacity of CSOs, particularly in view of the VNR preparatory process. The knowledge and advocacy products developed through this study will serve as tools to guide them towards more effective engagement in policy advocacy on behalf of the core constituencies they represent.

## **Study Methodology**

*Conceptualisation of LNOB groups and key thematic focus groups for the purposes of this study*

Bhattacharya et al. (2017) have developed a conceptual framework aimed at identifying population groups that are most at risk of being marginalised.

The study identified “vulnerability” as the primary factor contributing to the exclusion of specific individuals, communities, or groups. Furthermore, the framework acknowledges the multiple dimensions of vulnerability that result in the marginalisation and deprivation of these populations. The criteria for assessing vulnerability include the following variables: income, occupation, gender, geographic location (for instance, char and haor regions), shock-induced factors, life cycle stages, civil identity, disability, educational attainment and skills, health status, occupation, religion and ethnicity, and sexual orientation (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Conceptualisation of LNOBs through Multiple Dimensions of Vulnerabilities**



*Source: Bhattacharya et al., 2017.*

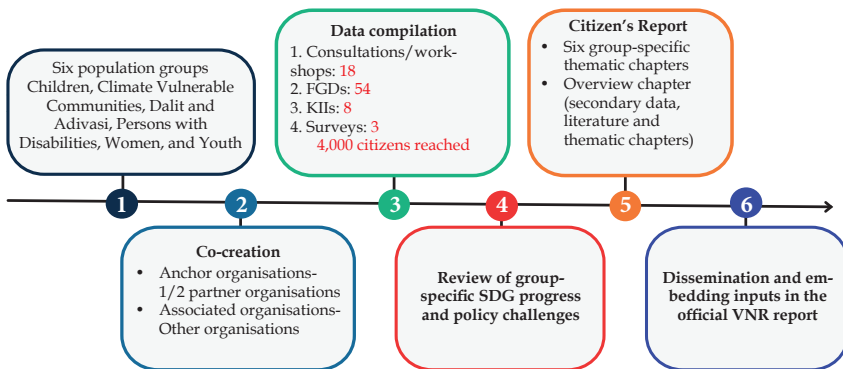
Citizen’s Platform initiated an assessment of Bangladesh’s progress in achieving the SDGs by incorporating the perspectives of marginalised communities and citizens. The Network opted for a group-specific analysis as opposed to a goal-specific review, differentiating itself from the formal VNR process in Bangladesh. Following its initial conceptual framework, the Citizen’s Platform has identified six thematic groups deemed most vulnerable to systemic exclusion. These groups comprise children, climate-vulnerable individuals, Dalits and Adivasis, persons with disabilities, women, and

youth. The identification of these groups stems from their exposure to multiple intersecting vulnerabilities, rendering them particularly susceptible to systemic exclusion, restricted access to resources, and substantial structural barriers.

*Design of the study*

To ensure a comprehensive analysis, the study adopted a participatory, evidence-based approach involving 42 partner organisations of the Citizen’s Platform. Primary data were collected through surveys, focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs), and stakeholder workshops, while secondary data came from government reports, SDG indicators, academic literature, and globally published sources. This overview chapter extensively references the aforementioned six thematic group-specific policy briefs prepared by dedicated teams from the partner organisations. These groups were formed based on expertise and programmatic focus. Each group produced a policy brief following a common structure: context, review of SDG progress, policy challenges, and suggestions as regards the way forward. A lead organisation in each group coordinated the research work and drafted the inputs. A summary of the methodological approach is presented in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Methodological Approach**



Drafts were meticulously refined through collaborative discussions and subsequently validated at a national conclave. Participants included key stakeholders such as government representatives, development partners, CSOs, media professionals, private sector entities, and marginalised communities. This approach ensured the incorporation of a wide array of perspectives, particularly from those individuals and groups most at risk of being excluded from progress towards the SDGs.

## Review of Bangladesh's SDG Progress from LNOB Perspectives

Global progress on the SDGs is currently at a critical juncture, as commitments to achieve the goals and targets by 2030 remain, by and large, off track. According to the United Nations (2024), only 17 per cent of all SDG indicators posted progress in line with the targets set. Understandably, developed countries have much greater capacity to mobilise resources for SDG implementation. On the other hand, developing countries encounter a multitude of compounding challenges. These include stagnant per capita GDP growth, increasing debt burdens, a considerable annual SDG investment gap of USD 4.0 trillion, and rising inequalities. Limited representation of developing countries in global economic decision-making exacerbates existing inequalities and poses a significant threat to sustainable development efforts (United Nations, 2024).

Bangladesh, like many developing countries, confronts a complex array of challenges related to implementing the SDGs. Although the country has made commendable progress in poverty alleviation, educational advancement, and increased energy accessibility, persistent systemic obstacles continue to hinder advancement in terms of other SDGs—particularly in relation to inequality (SDG 10), climate resilience (SDG 13), weak governance (SDG 16), and inefficient resource mobilisation (SDG 17) (UNESCAP, 2024). The observations presented here, based on six thematic policy briefs, offer a critical examination of the country's progress towards the SDGs through the lens of LNOB principles.

*Geographical disparities in SDG implementation are noteworthy.* Rural and remote areas continue to lag significantly behind, characterised by inadequate healthcare and limited access to quality education. This further widens the urban-rural divide. Regions that are particularly vulnerable to climate change, such as coastal and haor areas, experience severe adverse impacts from natural disasters, exacerbating existing inequalities and hindering SDG progress. Despite improvements in certain indicators, the targets set for 2030 remain unachieved. For instance, while the number of deaths and missing persons due to disasters decreased from 12,881 per 100,000 population in 2015 to 3,766 per 100,000 in 2021, this figure considerably exceeds the 2030 target of 1,500. The accompanying table provides an in-depth overview of regional disparities, highlighting the areas with both the strongest and weakest performance across selected SDG indicators.

**Table 1: Geographical Disparities in SDG Progress in Bangladesh: Selected Indicators**

SDG & Indicators	Lowest Case	Best Case	National Average	Target by 2030
SDG 1: Poverty rate	Madaripur (54%)	Noakhali (6.10%)	18.7%	0%
SDG 2: Food insecurity	Barishal (24%) Sylhet (24%) (WFP, 2024) <sup>1</sup> Poorest households (70% severe insecurity)	Dhaka (17%)	26% insecure overall (WFP, 2025) 22% moderate to severely insecure	0%
SDG 3: Infant mortality rate per 1,000 live births	Bandarban (86.4%)	Bagerhat (4.8%)	26.90 per 1,000	0%
SDG 3: Under-5 mortality rate per 1,000 live births	Bandarban (113.5%)	Magura (15.2%)	32.70 per 1,000	25%
SDG 3: Neonatal mortality rate per 1,000 live births	Bandarban (77.9%)	Madaripur (0%)	19.50 per 1,000	12%
SDG 3: Unmet need for family planning	Chuadanga (39.7%)	Nilphamari (15.7%)	25.8%	0%
SDG 4: Primary education completion rate	Narsingdi (64.4%)	Jhalokathi (86.9%)	77.4%	95%
SDG 4: Lower secondary completion rate	Cox's Bazar (52.2%)	Jhalokathi (83%)	68.8%	80%
SDG 4: Upper secondary completion rate	Cox's Bazar (33%)	Jhalokathi (63%)	47.4%	50%
SDG 5: Child marriage before age 15	Chapainawabganj (29.6%)	Sunamganj (0.6%)	8.3%	0%
SDG 5: Child marriage before age 18	Chapainawabganj (69.6%)	Sunamganj (10.4%)	41.6%	10%
SDG 6: Access to safe drinking water	Shariatpur (1.2%)	Dhaka (83.6%)	71.22%	100%

*(Table 1 contd.)*
<sup>1</sup><https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000161697/download/>

SDG & Indicators	Lowest Case	Best Case	National Average	Target by 2030
SDG 6: Access to proper sanitation services	Bandarban (15.90%)	Pirojpur (77.80%)	45%	80%
SDG 7: Access to electricity	Rangamati (51%)	Chandpur/ Narsingdi (99.90%)	97.50%	100%
SDG 9: Access to internet	Lalmonirhat (25.40%)	Munshiganj (67.60%)	45.70%	100%

*Source: BBS (HIES 2022; Poverty Map 2022; Food Security Statistics 2023; SVRS 2023; LFS 2023), SDG Tracker Bangladesh (Accessed: March 2025).*

The comparative analysis highlights regional disparities in the attainment of selected SDG indicators in Bangladesh. In the Dhaka Division, Madaripur grapples with severe poverty, whereas Narsingdi exhibits inadequate primary educational outcomes, and Shariatpur faces challenges related to insufficient access to safe drinking water. The Chattogram Division encounters significant healthcare disparities, particularly in Bandarban, which is characterised by high infant and child mortality rates, alongside limited access to public services in both Bandarban and Rangamati. Moreover, Cox’s Bazar reports some of the lowest upper secondary educational outcomes. Barishal Division struggles with pronounced food insecurity, particularly within the Barishal district, although Jhalokathi exhibits improved educational performance. In the Sylhet Division, impoverished households experience heightened food insecurity despite Sunamganj having the lowest child marriage rate in the region. Rajshahi Division’s Chapainawabganj is notable for gender disparities, evidenced by a high prevalence of child marriage. Lastly, in the Rangpur Division, Lalmonirhat is characterised by restricted internet access. These disparities underscore the urgent necessity for decentralised, region-specific interventions to address existing gaps.

*Furthermore, the absence of regularly updated and sufficiently disaggregated data presents a critical impediment to the effective evaluation of SDG implementation in Bangladesh.* Although there have been gradual improvements in the availability of data for some indicators, the scarcity of regularly updated and disaggregated data beyond gender and location severely constrains SDG tracking. According to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) SDG Gateway, only 65 per cent of the total indicators in Bangladesh have adequate data coverage, while 17.3 per cent suffer from insufficient data, and 16.9 per cent are devoid of data entirely. Recent statistics indicate that only 36.9 per cent of

indicators are currently updated, while 31.7 per cent are in the process of being updated; updates remain unavailable for 32.1 per cent (UNESCAP, 2024). Data availability is particularly low for certain goals, as evidenced by the unavailability of 84.6 per cent of indicators related to Goal 12 and 60 per cent for Goal 14 (UNESCAP, 2024). Regarding child-related indicators, data from UNICEF reveal that Bangladesh reports on 42 out of 48 child-specific SDG indicators, yet many of these remain outdated or off-track, with some that were last updated in 2019 (UNICEF, 2023).

Importantly, lack of disaggregated data, beyond gender and geographic location, further constricts the ability to assess the status of the LNOB groups. Communities such as Dalits, Adivasis, and persons with disabilities are frequently excluded or inadequately represented in national statistics, complicating targeted policymaking. Additionally, reports indicate that nearly 50 per cent of SDG indicators in Bangladesh remain unmonitored. Also, allegations of data manipulation concerning official data have been noted (Rahman, 2021). These deficiencies hinder the capacity of relevant agencies to monitor SDG progress and formulate inclusive, evidence-based policy measures.

*Lastly, access to essential services – especially healthcare and quality education – continues to pose significant challenges for the marginalised groups, with persons with disabilities facing particularly severe barriers.* Insufficient access to basic services compromises the ability of marginalised communities to fully engage in social, educational, and economic activities. According to the Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2023, 87.5 per cent of the population lacks access to all eight basic services, with none having access to all (BBS, 2024a). Furthermore, the majority of individuals have access to fewer than six services, underscoring the extent of service deprivation across Bangladesh (BBS, 2024a). This pervasive inequality in access to essential services contributes to rising disparities, with marginalised groups being especially susceptible to multidimensional vulnerabilities, including on the grounds of gender, location, and ethnicity (Matin, 2018). For Dalits and Adivasis, healthcare access is further compromised by infrastructural deficits and discrimination. In rural areas inhabited by Dalits, 89 per cent share latrines, 43 per cent use hanging toilets, and 90 per cent lack roofing on latrines due to prevailing social stigma (Nagorik Uddyog & BDERM, 2015). Adivasis, particularly those living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), experience inadequate healthcare infrastructure, low immunisation coverage, and widespread exclusion from safety nets.

Disabilities are a multifaceted phenomenon that often go unrecognised in policy discourse. The barriers faced by individuals with disabilities are exacerbated by systemic exclusion (Figure 3). While 61.9 per cent of individuals with disabilities accessed healthcare within the past three months, and 92.3 per cent did so within the previous year, significant challenges persist. High treatment costs affect 81 per cent of these individuals, while 30.8 per cent cite a lack of familial support as an obstacle to access (BBS, 2022). Furthermore, inadequate healthcare infrastructure, which includes poorly designed ramps, inaccessible water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities, and discriminatory treatment from healthcare professionals, deters many from seeking formal healthcare. Consequently, only 22.5 per cent of individuals with disabilities access services provided by government hospitals, whereas a substantial share, 40.5 per cent, depend on informal healthcare providers, such as village practitioners (23.8 per cent) and drug stores (16.7 per cent) (BBS, 2022).

**Figure 3: Systemic Challenges Faced by Persons with Disabilities**



*Source: Authors' elaboration.*

Access to education for individuals with disabilities is similarly constrained. Findings from the National Survey on Persons with Disabilities (NSPD) 2021, conducted by the BBS with technical support from the UNICEF, indicate that 60 per cent of children with disabilities aged 5 to 17 years are not enrolled in any form of education (BBS, 2022). This concerning statistic stems from various barriers, including inaccessible school infrastructure, a shortage of trained professionals with expertise in inclusive education, and pervasive social stigma. Without disability-friendly classrooms, restrooms, and transportation, many children with disabilities are physically unable to attend school, particularly in rural regions, where nearly 41 per cent of children with disabilities lack access to any educational facilities (BBS, 2022).

Moreover, employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities remain critically low, with only 33.8 per cent of working-age individuals with disabilities employed, primarily in informal sectors. A majority, 54.4 per cent, rely on self-employment; however, only 2.7 per cent of this group receives any formal vocational training (BBS, 2022). Workplace discrimination, inaccessible environment, and inadequate financial support further impede economic inclusion. The one per cent employment quota for government jobs, which is earmarked for this group, is insufficient, particularly since the quota has to be shared with individuals of the third gender. These are indicative of a broader failure to establish inclusive systems that address multidimensional vulnerabilities.

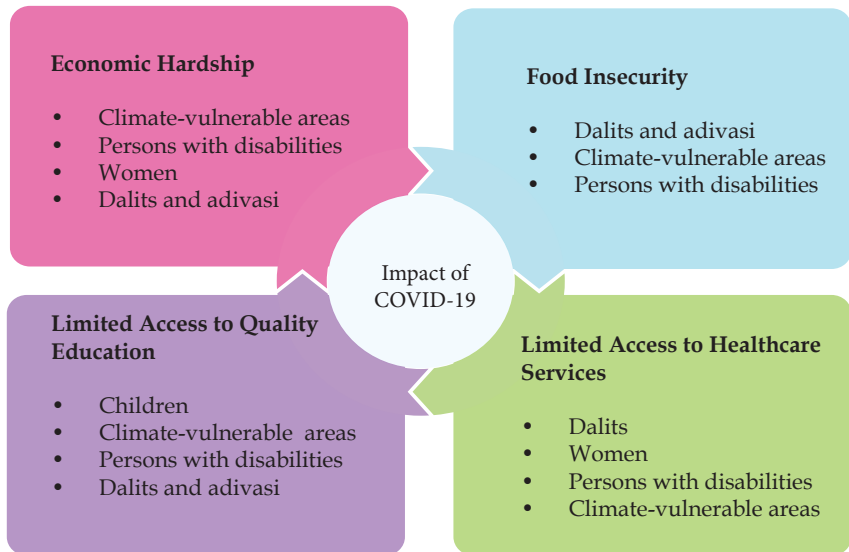
*The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified existing inequalities in Bangladesh, disproportionately affecting disadvantaged groups and highlighting critical gaps in education, employment, health, and digital access.* As has been a common phenomenon in many developing countries, the socio-economic aftermath of the pandemic had unveiled longstanding structural vulnerabilities which particularly affected the disadvantaged groups. Even prior to the crisis, ineffective governance systems created significant obstacles for left-behind communities in accessing quality education, decent work, and public services (Shah, 2005). The onset of the pandemic starkly revealed the extent of economic hardships, marked by widespread job losses and income instability that particularly impacted these people (Rahman, 2021).

The adverse economic impact varied across disadvantaged communities due to overlapping vulnerabilities (Figure 4). The most severely affected groups included climate-vulnerable communities, individuals with disabilities, female-headed households, Dalits, and Adivasis (Bhattacharya et al., 2024a). These groups experienced compounded challenges, leading to an increase in national poverty levels and the emergence of a new demographic of “new poors.” Furthermore, food insecurity became more intense, with Dalit and Adivasi communities reporting reduced food intake, while climate-vulnerable populations and individuals with disabilities faced more acute nutritional deficits due to income loss (Bhattacharya et al., 2023).

Beyond economic ramifications, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated systemic inequalities, particularly in terms of access to education and healthcare. Educational disruptions became pronounced for disadvantaged communities, as lockdown-induced online learning led to a significant increase in student dropouts. Digital divide significantly impacted climate-vulnerable populations, individuals with disabilities, and Dalits and Adivasis (Bhattacharya et al., 2024b). Additionally, Dalits, owing to the specific

nature of their occupations, faced heightened exposure to COVID-19, while entrenched societal stigma and discrimination exacerbated their situation by hindering their access to essential healthcare services. Individuals with disabilities encountered additional disadvantages due to healthcare services being physically inaccessible. Moreover, there was a rise in non-institutional births during the pandemic, disproportionately affecting women in climate-vulnerable areas who experienced difficulties in accessing formal healthcare facilities (Bhattacharya, 2024a).

**Figure 4: Most Impacted Groups during the COVID-19 Pandemic**



*Source: Authors' assessment.*

Gender disparity remains a significant challenge across all six thematic groups (Figure 5). Despite progress in terms of certain indicators, systemic gender inequality continues to restrict access to rights, resources, and opportunities for women and girls across marginalised groups. Bangladesh's fall to 99th in the Global Gender Gap Report 2024 – dropping 40 ranks from the previous year – illustrates this widening divide (WEF, 2024). Although ranked first in South Asia, women in Bangladesh continue to face persistent challenges in such areas as education, healthcare, economic participation, and representation.

**Figure 5: Systemic Challenges Faced by Women**



*Source: Authors' elaboration.*

Despite advancements in specific SDG 3 (Health) indicators for women in Bangladesh, inequality in terms of various economic dimensions remains significantly pronounced. The proportion of women engaged in informal employment has risen from 91.8 per cent in 2016–2017 to 95.7 per cent in 2023, indicating their concentration in unpaid care and domestic roles. Consequently, the gender wage gap has widened, with men earning 1.3 taka for every 1 taka earned by women (WEF, 2024). Additionally, the shares of youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET) among women remain disproportionately high, with 61.7 per cent of NEET youth being female, despite a national reduction overall (BBS, 2024b). Intersecting inequalities are particularly acute for women with disabilities who experience systemic exclusion from education, healthcare, and employment; their employment rate stands at a mere 12.8 per cent, in contrast to 47.6 per cent among men with disabilities (BBS, 2022). Furthermore, women's economic vulnerability is exacerbated by significant deprivations in view of property rights, as religious inheritance laws often supersede constitutional guarantees of equality.

Gender-based violence continues to be a pressing issue, with 38 per cent of ever-married women reporting experiences of intimate partner violence (BBS, 2016) and 23 per cent of women facing gender-based violence over their lifetimes (WEF, 2024). While reported incidents of violence have decreased by 31.3 per cent from 2020 to 2024, underreporting and delays in national data collection obscure the true magnitude of the problem (BMP, n.d.). Marginalised groups, including indigenous, Dalit, and disabled women,

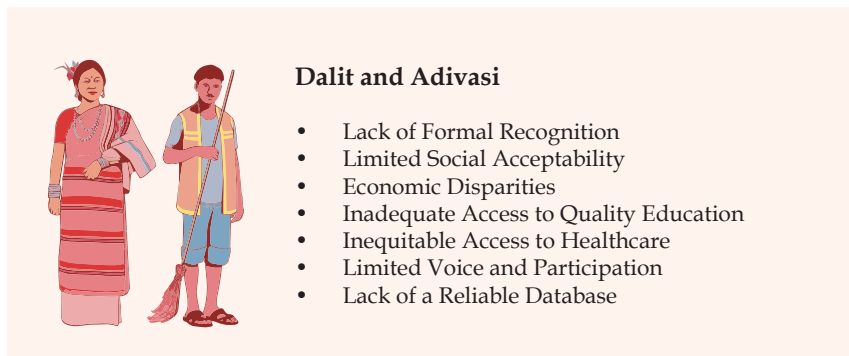
are subjected to compounded vulnerabilities, with 73 per cent of disabled women reporting experiences of sexual violence (CDD, 2022). Alarming, the rates of child marriage have risen, with 41.6 per cent of women aged 20-24 having been married before the age of 18 in 2023, an increase from 31.3 per cent in 2020, disproportionately affecting rural and economically disadvantaged women.

Digital exclusion further exemplifies structural gender inequality; rural women encounter significantly greater barriers than their urban counterparts, particularly due to limited access to education, information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, and restrictive cultural norms (Zahan, 2021).

Globally, achieving gender parity remains an elusive goal, with current projections indicating that it will take as long as 134 years to attain this target, far exceeding the 2030 SDG timeline (WEF, 2024). Bangladesh mirrors this global trend, where persistent gender disparities continue to obstruct progress in terms of ensuring gender parity.

*Dalits and Adivasis remain the most politically and economically marginalised.* Despite national improvements, Dalit and Adivasi communities in Bangladesh continue to face discrimination driven by their multidimensional vulnerabilities, viz., lack of legal recognition, land dispossession, poor educational access, caste and ethnicity-based social stigma (Bhattacharya et al., 2017) (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Systemic Challenges Faced by Dalit and Indigenous Population**



*Source: Authors' elaboration.*

Economic insecurity remains a significant challenge, particularly for Dalits, who are predominantly engaged in caste-defined, hazardous occupations

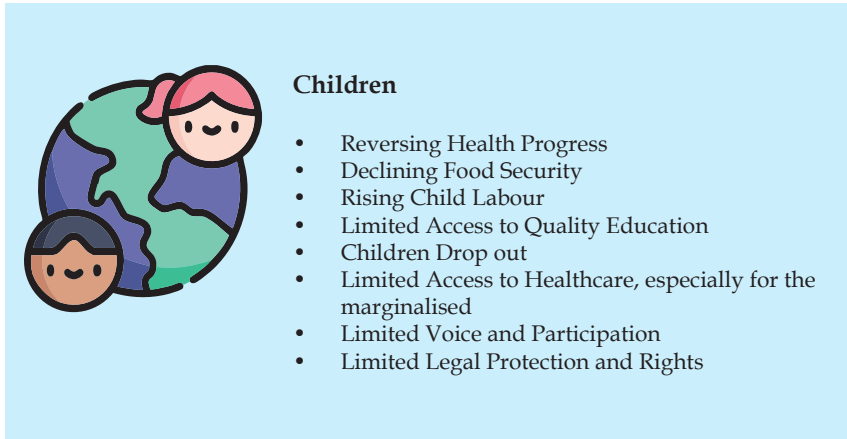
that lack legal and labour protections. Consequently, approximately 77 per cent of this population cohort faces heightened risk of unemployment (Christian Aid et al., 2017). Furthermore, in their respective communities, the persistence of poverty contributes to child labour, while access to quality education remains severely restricted. Adivasis, primarily reliant on agriculture and forestry, encounter issues such as land encroachment, wage discrimination, and limited access to credit. Inadequate implementation of government job quotas further exacerbates the decline in employment opportunities, compelling many individuals to enter low-paying, informal segments of the labour market.

This economic exclusion is further intensified by gendered marginalisation. Dalit women are often relegated to exploitative, low-wage manual labour, whereas Adivasi women, especially those in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), face challenges including displacement, denial of inheritance rights, and patriarchal control (Islam, 2023). Their exclusion from avenues of justice, education, and leadership perpetuates gender inequality and restricts socio-economic advancement (Siddequa & Sultana, 2019).

Political exclusion further entrenches these inequalities, as the voices of Dalits and Adivasis are largely absent from governance, national planning, and institutional decision-making processes. For Adivasis, language barriers and cultural disconnections from mainstream systems compound their exclusion from legal protections and public services. In the absence of formal platforms for engagement, these communities remain marginalised from policies affecting their rights and development.

This interconnected political and economic marginalisation creates a cycle of structural exclusion that spans generations. Such intergenerational marginalisation further impedes upward mobility, entrenching these communities in persistent vicious cycles of poverty and social exclusion.

*The decline in indicators related to children's health, nutrition, and child labour signifies a troubling reversal in progress, which poses a significant threat to attaining the long-term sustainability of the SDGs (Figure 7).* While Bangladesh has achieved notable advancements in reducing neonatal and under-five mortality rates over the past decades, recent data indicate that this progress is stalling and, in some instances, even reversing. According to the Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2023, improvements in child-related indicators have begun to recede (BBS, 2024a). This regression can be partially attributed to a lack of regular vaccination and a dearth of coverage, particularly in remote and rural areas.

**Figure 7: Systemic Challenges Faced by Children**

*Source: Authors' elaboration.*

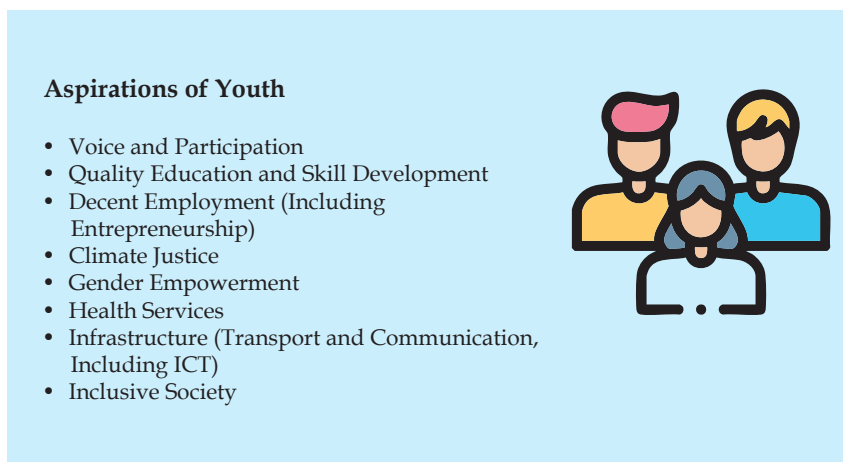
Nutrition indicators present a concerning trend. Demographic and Health Survey 2022 indicates a significant decline in dietary adequacy, with only 61 per cent of children receiving minimum acceptable meals, a decrease from 81 per cent in 2017. Currently, chronic malnutrition affects 24 per cent of children aged 6–59 months (WFP, 2025). Despite some advancements in reducing stunting, stagnation in exclusive breastfeeding, a deterioration in diet quality, and persistently elevated wasting rates suggest an impending nutritional crisis. Structural factors such as food price inflation, climate-related agricultural challenges, and an increasing income-consumption gap have exacerbated food insecurity, particularly among marginalised communities. These issues are reflected in deteriorating health outcomes, evidenced by pneumonia-related mortality rates for children under five (34.9 per cent) and infants (39.3 per cent), significantly surpassing the national average of 3.6 per cent (BBS, 2024a).

Child labour represents a major area of regression in view of SDG progress in Bangladesh. The rate has risen by 4.7 per cent since 2013, reflecting the increasing economic pressures on low-income households (SDG Tracker accessed in 2025). Sub-national consultations conducted by Save the Children reveal that a large number of Santal children enter agricultural work as early as the ages of 7 to 8. With the SDG target aimed at eliminating child labour by 2025, Bangladesh is presently far from realising this objective. Furthermore, lack of a child-specific indicator under SDG 10 (Reducing Inequality) acts as a deterrent in view of developing inclusive, targeted policies necessary to address these multidimensional vulnerabilities (JFB, 2024). In light of this, without concentrated investment in child-centred

healthcare, nutrition, and education systems, particularly in the context of disadvantaged communities, Bangladesh risks reversing decades of progress and undermining the country's long-term commitments to the SDGs.

*Despite progress in youth representation, structural inequalities continue to marginalise the youth.* The aspirations of youth, highlighted during the consultation conducted under this study, indicate a need for a long journey ahead (Figure 8). Appointment of youth advisers by the Interim Government should be seen as a welcome shift following the youth-led uprising. However, absence of representation from marginalised youth groups indicates critical gaps in ensuring youth well-being. As a result, important issues impacting the lives of marginalised youth remain overlooked. These, in the end, deepen existing inequalities. Moreover, structural issues such as the lack of disaggregated data obscure the true extent of adverse impacts faced by marginalised youth and work against the design of effective policy responses. These systemic exclusions in governance are mirrored in the socioeconomic domain, particularly in education and employment.

### Figure 8: Aspirations of Youth



*Source: Authors' elaboration from the Youth Consultation conducted under this study.*

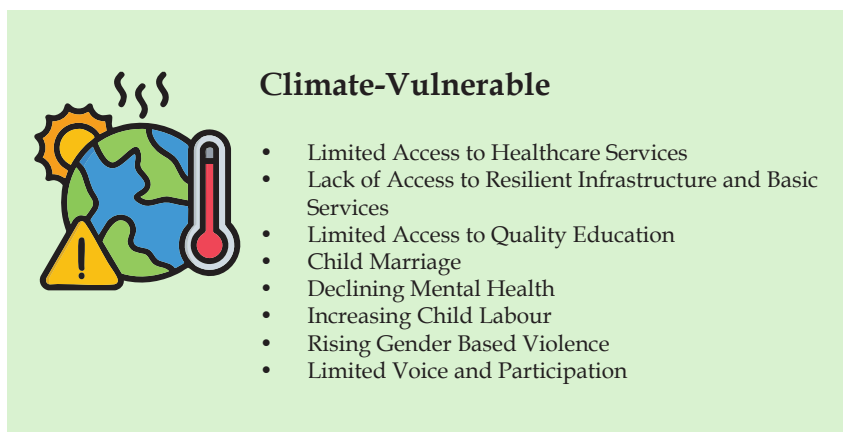
Significant disparities between educational outcomes and labour market demands impede youth employability. Approximately 32 per cent of young individuals reported dissatisfaction as regards the alignment between education and job market requirements, highlighting systemic deficiencies in the education system. This challenge is exacerbated by a scarcity of decent employment opportunities, despite the youth unemployment rate declining from 10.6 per cent to 7.3 per cent, according to the LFS 2023. Nonetheless,

the proportion of youth engaged in informal employment has risen from 31 per cent to 38.3 per cent (BBS, 2024b). This validates the exposure of young workers to job insecurity, low wages, and inadequate protections in the labour market.

Gender disparities continue to be a significant concern, as female youth represent approximately two-thirds of the NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) population (LFS, 2023), despite an overall decrease in NEET rates. Persistent digital divides disproportionately affect women and marginalised groups, with only 66 per cent of youth having regular internet access. Internet usage is notably higher among men, at 77 per cent, compared to only 56 per cent for women (British Council, 2024). This digital gap restricts access of female youth to online education and employment opportunities, thereby limiting their engagement in digital advocacy. Furthermore, young women increasingly encounter hostility and abuse in both digital and physical environments, adversely affecting their participation and advocacy efforts (BIGD, 2024b).

*Climate-vulnerable communities in Bangladesh face a multitude of challenges that impact their health, education, and participation in policymaking* (Figure 9). The 2022 ND-GAIN index indicates that Bangladesh ranks as the 24th most vulnerable among 182 countries, exhibiting the same deterioration since 2020. Climate-related shocks continue to present significant obstacles to life and livelihoods, particularly for the most vulnerable groups. In 2024, extreme climate events disrupted the education of approximately 30.3 million students, posing a considerable threat to their future prospects (UNICEF, 2024). Prevalence of child labour has escalated, with climate-vulnerable areas accounting for 45 per cent of this increase, underscoring the severe economic pressures faced by these communities (U.S. Department of Labour, 2021). Health vulnerabilities have also intensified; the 2022 Haor floods resulted in 82.6 per cent of the affected population suffering from waterborne diseases (Nahar, Islam, & Mahiuddin, 2021). In coastal regions such as Satkhira, 49.4 per cent of individuals experience stress, 25.1 per cent suffer from anxiety, and 22.5 per cent endure depression at a time when mental health services remain grossly inadequate. Additionally, rising salinity levels have contributed to an increase in cervical cancer and menstrual health issues among women, thereby exposing significant gaps in reproductive healthcare services.

**Figure 9: Systemic Challenges Faced by the Climate-Vulnerable Population**



*Source: Authors' elaboration.*

In climate-vulnerable communities, gender disparities have become increasingly pronounced as economic disempowerment and gender-based violence (GBV) escalate in disaster-prone areas. Following Cyclone Amphan, reports indicate a surge in GBV cases by 65 per cent, with 71 per cent of women in flood-affected regions experiencing an increase in abuse (BIGD, 2024a). Child marriage represents a significant concern, with rates reaching 60 per cent in coastal districts, surpassing the national average of 44.4 per cent. The incidence of early marriages has risen by 39 per cent as a direct consequence of disasters (IRC, 2023; Jahan, 2024). Women disproportionately bear the burden of unpaid labour, accounting for 60 per cent of those responsible for collecting water and cooking fuel in disaster-affected areas (Mitchell et al., 2014). Nevertheless, their participation in decision-making remains limited, as women account for only 20 per cent of the local disaster management committee members (UN Women, 2023). Furthermore, climate finance remains largely inaccessible to marginalised groups, as evidenced by the fact that 90 per cent of projects developed under the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCTF) were designed without consultation with women and girls (UN Women, 2023). In the absence of systemic reforms, Bangladesh risks failing to meet its commitments to climate-vulnerable populations within the SDG framework.

## Policy Challenges

Bangladesh has put in a comprehensive array of institutional, legal, financial, and regulatory policies aimed at addressing inequalities and promoting inclusive development for marginalised communities. Nonetheless, implementation of these policies leaves much to be desired due to

governance inefficiencies, legal ambiguities, financial mismanagement, and structural obstacles that perpetuate exclusion of left-behind groups. Despite the country's commitment to international human rights conventions, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), these commitments have not been effectively translated into robust national-level protection mechanisms.

Institutional barriers continue to undermine the execution of protective laws and policies for marginalised groups. Weak law enforcement is evident across all marginalised groups. Furthermore, inadequate inter-ministerial coordination has impeded policy execution, as overlapping mandates and fragmented responsibilities lead to inefficiencies in service delivery. For instance, although the Children Act (2013, amended in 2018) and the National Children Policy (2011) are designed to safeguard children's rights, enforcement is deficient, particularly regarding child labour legislation. Similarly, Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act (2013) and the National Disability Policy (2006) provide a legal framework but suffer from ineffective implementation, insufficient service coverage, and a lack of institutional coordination. The implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Accord (1997), which promised to secure Indigenous land rights and self-governance, has been hindered by administrative complexities and political resistance. Additionally, the National Youth Policy (2017, Draft) remains to be finalised despite its importance, reflecting institutional inertia.

Critical legal and regulatory deficits, along with discriminatory provisions and delayed reforms, reinforce structural exclusion and legal insecurity. The existence of legal loopholes has compromised the effectiveness of several policies. For example, the Child Marriage Prevention Act 2017 permits exceptions under article 19, "special circumstances," thereby undermining efforts to eradicate underage marriage. The Labour Act 2013 (Amendment) does not extend protection to informal workers, a demographic where Dalit and Adivasi women and children feature prominently. Although the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act (amended in 2020) aims to mitigate gender-based violence, its enforcement is impeded by societal stigma and judicial bottlenecks. Moreover, critical legal instruments such as the Sexual Harassment Prevention and Protection Law (2021) and the Anti-Discrimination Bill (2022) remain in draft form, leaving Dalits, Adivasis, and women without the necessary legal protections. The Jalmahal Policy, which is intended to regulate access to water resources, systematically disadvantages Dalit and Adivasi fisherfolk, illustrating structural bias within regulatory mechanisms. Similarly, the State Acquisition and Tenancy Act (1950), which

was designed to govern land ownership, has further marginalised Adivasis by failing to recognise indigenous land claims.

Bangladesh’s budgetary priorities reveal a structural bias favouring infrastructure development over inclusive growth, thereby undermining equitable development. The country’s budget allocations inadequately reflect the needs of marginalised groups, resulting in a significant misallocation of resources toward infrastructure-heavy projects rather than social welfare and economic inclusion programmes. Priority sectors for marginalised communities—such as education, health, agriculture, local government and rural development, science and information and communication technology (ICT), and social protection—received only half of the planned allocation earmarked for the Annual Development Programme (ADP) in 8FYP, while physical infrastructure projects exceeded their planned allocations by 98 per cent (Table 2).

**Table 2: ADP Allocation for FY2025: Plan vs Reality**

Sectors	Share of ADP in FY2025 (%)	Share of ADP in FY2025 as per 8FYP (%)	Allocation in ADP FY2025 (Crore Tk.)	Allocation planned for ADP FY2025 in 8FYP (Crore Tk.)	Difference between actual allocation vs 8FYP (Crore Tk.)
Transportation and Communication, Power and Fuel, Housing and Community Facilities, Industrial and Economic Services, Environment, Climate Change and Water Resources	60.3	36.2	153,889	133,020	20,869
Education, Health, Agriculture, Local Government and Rural Development, Science and ICT, Social Protection	35.9	54.9	91,509	201,840	<b>-110,331</b>
General Government Services, Defence, Public Order and Safety, Religion, Culture and Entertainment	3.8	8.9	9,643	32,670	-23,027

Source: Khan (2024).

The Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP, 2009) and the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) delineate long-term resilience strategies; however, they fail to prioritise the needs of the LNOB groups, particularly women and populations vulnerable to climate change. Of the USD 3.3 billion climate budget, only a modest share is allocated for gender-responsive initiatives.

Absence of disaggregated data systems continues to hinder effective policymaking in Bangladesh. At present, there is no unified national database available for tracking LNOB populations, including individuals with disabilities, Dalits, and indigenous communities. Furthermore, lack of gender-disaggregated data in climate finance inhibits policymakers' ability to assess whether funds are reaching the most at-risk populations. Additionally, outcomes in terms of youth employment as a result of vocational training programmes are not readily available due to lack of structured monitoring mechanisms. Youth-targeted programmes, such as the Automobile Driving Training Project (2021–2023) and TECUYB (2022–2024), also lack follow-up mechanisms, rendering long-term impact assessments unattainable. In the absence of robust monitoring and evaluation systems, the policy feedback loops remain ineffective.

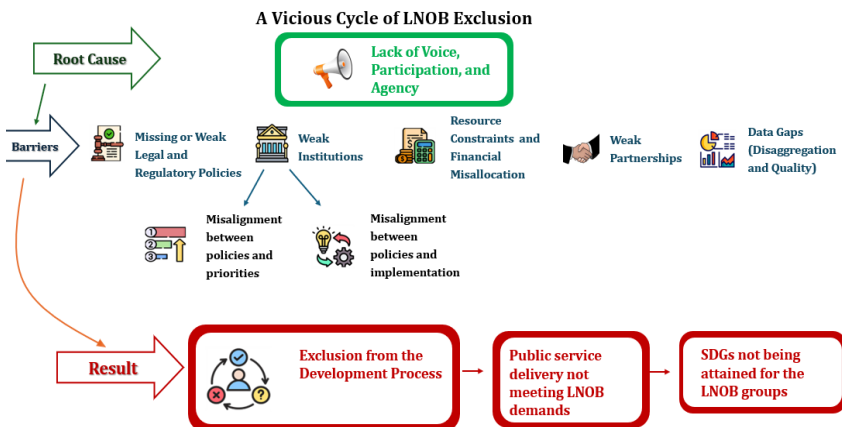
Marginalised communities frequently find themselves excluded from policy formulation and decision-making processes which reduces their capacity to advocate in favour of their own rights. Although youth, women, and representatives from Indigenous communities are present in governance structures, their participation tends to be symbolic rather than substantive. Policy design is predominantly top-down, with limited engagement from those most affected. For instance, 90 per cent of projects funded by the BCCTF were developed without consulting women or LNOB groups, undermining the planning for inclusive climate resilience.

The persistent misalignment between policy design and the ground realities faced by LNOB groups leads to exclusion errors, misallocation of resources, and a failure to address group-specific needs. Policy objectives often do not accurately reflect the lived experiences of LNOB communities. Social protection measures outlined in the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) fail to include targeted beneficiary identification, resulting in exclusion errors (Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, 2024). Despite the existence of multiple laws and plans intended to support LNOB populations, their content frequently neglects to prioritise issues such as disability access, Indigenous land rights, and caste-based exclusion. This misalignment results in a diversion of resources and neglect of pressing needs.

Furthermore, gaps between policy design and implementation, coupled with poor coordination and a lack of accountability, deter marginalised groups from accessing basic services. Even when policies are aligned with the needs of these communities, practical execution of the policies often falls short of the intended outcomes. Implementation is plagued by inadequate coordination among ministries, inadequate capacity within local administrations, and a lack of robust accountability mechanisms. For example, although policies are in place to promote inclusive education and healthcare, many individuals still encounter barriers to accessing these services due to structural obstacles and discrimination. Monitoring frameworks are often weak or non-existent, allowing persistent gaps in service delivery to remain unaddressed.

The aforesaid systemic barriers trap marginalised groups in a cycle of exclusion, limiting their participation in development and leaving their needs unaddressed (Figure 10). This further complicates the attainment of the SDGs and makes it increasingly difficult.

**Figure 10: A Vicious Cycle of LNOB Exclusion**



Source: Authors' elaboration.

## Learnings and Outlook

As was noted at the outset, Bangladesh is at a critical juncture in its pursuit of the SDGs, where the ongoing marginalisation of the country's most vulnerable groups directly threatens socio-economic equity and sustainable progress towards attaining the SDGs by 2030. A significant obstacle to effective SDG implementation is the widespread absence of disaggregated data, which obscures existing inequalities and hinders the development of effective policy responses. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

champions inclusivity, yet Bangladesh's SDG reports notably lack LNOB-specific indicators, severely hindering the assessment of policy effectiveness.

The "Pact for the Future" underscores the acute need for disaggregated data to drive meaningful policy reforms. However, the pervasive "tyranny of the average" – where progress is evaluated through broad national or global aggregates – continues to conceal the disproportionate challenges faced by marginalised populations. Without robust data collection, transparent monitoring, and effective feedback mechanisms, structural inequalities will persist and continue to remain unaddressed. Furthermore, weak enforcement, fragmented institutional coordination, and bureaucratic inefficiencies severely limit the impact of existing laws and stymie policy implementation. The exclusion of LNOB groups from governance and decision-making processes results in top-down policies that do not reflect the realities they live in and experience on a daily basis. The lack of formal engagement mechanisms reinforces this exclusion and diminishes the effectiveness of SDG-related interventions.

It is imperative for Bangladesh to address these systemic challenges in a decisive manner to achieve inclusive and equitable development, in alignment with SDG aspirations. Against this backdrop, the following recommendations demand urgent consideration.

First, establish a national LNOB data framework in alignment with the "Pact for the Future" to dismantle the "tyranny of the average." This framework must ensure regular collection of disaggregated data on gender, ethnicity, disability, and socio-economic status across all SDG indicators. Enhanced collaboration among government agencies, civil society, and academia is crucial for ensuring accurate and transparent data. Additionally, leveraging technology-driven monitoring systems will facilitate real-time progress in terms of tracking the changing scenario and establishing accountability in the data generation process.

Second, institutionalise the representation of LNOB groups in the various decision-making bodies. It is necessary to mandate the inclusion of individuals from marginalised communities in both national and local governance processes and ensure amplification of their voices with a view to fostering inclusive governance.

Third, capitalise on the current window of opportunity presented by the Interim Government to rectify long-standing governance failures and systemic inequalities. Expedite implementation of the pending legislative

reforms, strengthen the rule of law, and put in place accountability mechanisms to ensure that policy implementation is transparent and devoid of political bias.

Fourth, eliminate legal loopholes and fortify policy execution. No doubt, there is surely a need to establish a dedicated body under the Interim Government to expedite legislative reforms that address systemic injustice faced by the LNOB groups, and closely monitor their implementation. A step in this direction may include reviewing, finalising, and implementing the draft Anti-discrimination Bill.

Fifth, focus on enhancing governance and public service delivery. Prioritise inclusive and quality services in sectors such as education, health, and social protection, ensuring that the needs of LNOB groups are met and that they have access to essential services. There must be an emphasis on the equitable distribution of public assets and resources, particularly for vulnerable populations.

Sixth, strengthen partnerships between state and non-state actors to adopt a “whole of society” approach that ensures collective endeavours to support marginalised groups and promote inclusive development.

Seventh, mobilise financial resources and advance fiscal reforms. Optimise the utilisation of available financial resources and enhance fiscal space to ensure that priority sectors for LNOB groups are appropriately funded, bridging gaps between planned and actual allocations in the current public expenditure frameworks.

Eighth, advocate in favour of political commitment and urge political parties to incorporate SDG goals targeted at marginalised communities in their respective electoral manifestos. It is essential that these commitments transcend electoral cycles, fostering sustained political support for inclusive development.

By adopting a human rights-based, data-driven, and participatory development approach, Bangladesh can transform its SDG commitments into concrete benefits for the LNOB groups. The government must not only commit to collecting and making good use of disaggregated data but also ensure that all marginalised voices are woven into the fabric of policy and governance processes by taking advantage of this data, for tracking, monitoring and accountability purposes. This approach is critical for delivering inclusive and equitable development, ensuring that no one is left behind on the road to 2030. That an inclusive development could be a

powerful tool and driver towards accelerated economic development must inform Bangladesh's development philosophy. In this sense, LNOB-friendly development ought to be both a powerful input in view of Bangladesh's SDG implementation process, and a necessary outcome in view of the outcomes of the country's development endeavours.

## References

- Action for Sustainable Development, BOND, Cooperation Canada, Forus, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), Save the Children, & Sightsavers. (2024). Progressing national SDG implementation: An independent assessment of the Voluntary National Review reports submitted to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2023. International Institute for Sustainable Development. <https://www.progressingsdgs.org/eighth-edition-2023>
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2024a). Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2023. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. <https://bbs.gov.bd/site/page/ef4d6756-2685-485a-b707-aa2d96bd4c6c/->
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. (2024b). Quarterly labour force survey 2023: Flyer October to December [Flyer]. [https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/96220c5a\\_5763\\_4628\\_9494\\_950862accd8c/2024-01-25-10-03-aad49f9f12bf7ab7c20903972607f7a3.pdf](https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/96220c5a_5763_4628_9494_950862accd8c/2024-01-25-10-03-aad49f9f12bf7ab7c20903972607f7a3.pdf)
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2024c). Labour force survey 2023: Bangladesh. [http://203.112.218.101/storage/files/1/Publications/LFS/LFS\\_2023%20Full%20Book-Online%20Upload%20Copy.pdf](http://203.112.218.101/storage/files/1/Publications/LFS/LFS_2023%20Full%20Book-Online%20Upload%20Copy.pdf) (Page 32)
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics(BBS). (2024d). Poverty map of Bangladesh 2022. <https://socialprotection.gov.bd/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Paper-4-Poverty-Map-of-Bangladesh.pdf> (Page 32)
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2023). Final report: Household income and expenditure survey (HIES) 2022. <https://objectstorage.ap-dcc-gazipur-1.oraclecloud15.com/n/axvjbnpqprylg/b/V2Ministry/o/office-bbs/2024/12/22b6e770f6a84cd9a48ff636ae506818.pdf> (Page 32)
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2022). Preliminary report: national survey on persons with disabilities (NSPD) 2021. [https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4\\_956b\\_45ca\\_872f\\_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2022-06-13-15-24-ca6f018ab83c88a4db8ff51386439794.pdf](https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4_956b_45ca_872f_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2022-06-13-15-24-ca6f018ab83c88a4db8ff51386439794.pdf)
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2016). Violence against women (VAW) survey 2015. Statistics and Informatics Division, Ministry of Planning. <http://203.112.218.65:8008/WebTestApplication/userfiles/Image/LatestReports/VAWSurvey2015.pdf>

- Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP). (n.d.). Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP) VAWD Charts. <https://mahilaparishad.org/vawg/>
- Bhattacharya, D., Khan, T. I., Khan, S. S., Sinha, M. M., Fuad, S. M., Biswas, S. & Muzib, A. (2017). Quest for Inclusive Transformation of Bangladesh: Who Not to be Left Behind. Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh. [https://bdplatform4sdgs.net/knowledge\\_product/quest-for-inclusive-transformation-of-bangladesh-who-not-to-be-left-behind/](https://bdplatform4sdgs.net/knowledge_product/quest-for-inclusive-transformation-of-bangladesh-who-not-to-be-left-behind/)
- Bhattacharya, D., Bari, E., & Khan, F. B. (2023, July). Vaccinations, food consumption and access to health services: Evidence from marginalised communities in Bangladesh (Working Paper No. 2). Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh. <https://bdplatform4sdgs.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Vaccinations-Food-Consumption-and-Access-to-Health-Services.pdf>
- Bhattacharya, D., Bari, E., Khan, T. I., Chowdhury, F. S., & Altaf, N. M. (2024a). The economic impact of COVID-19 and lockdowns on disadvantaged households in Bangladesh. In D. Bhattacharya & T. I. Khan (Eds.), *COVID-19 and Bangladesh: Inclusion, disaggregation and transition* (pp. 48-67). Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/COVID-19-and-Bangladesh-Inclusion-Disaggregation-and-Transition/Bhattacharya-Khan/p/book/9781032632681>
- Bhattacharya, D., Altaf, N. M., Khan, T. I., & Bari, E. (2024b). New realities in the education sector confronting the disadvantaged communities. In D. Bhattacharya & T. I. Khan (Eds.), *COVID-19 and Bangladesh: Inclusion, disaggregation and transition* (pp. 141-161). Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/COVID-19-and-Bangladesh-Inclusion-Disaggregation-and-Transition/Bhattacharya-Khan/p/book/9781032632681>
- BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD). (2024a). Climate change, disasters, and gender-based violence: An overview of Bangladesh's policies & status. <https://bigd.bracu.ac.bd/climate-change-disasters-and-gender-based-violence-an-overview-of-bangladeshs-policies-status/>
- BRAC Institute of Governance and Development. (2024b). Pulse survey December 2024. <https://bigd.bracu.ac.bd/pulse-survey-december-2024/>
- Center for Disability in Development (CDD) (2022). Inclusive community-based mental health services (ICMHS) [Policy brief]. [https://cdd.org.bd/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Policy-Brief\\_ICBMH-\\_CDD.pdf](https://cdd.org.bd/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Policy-Brief_ICBMH-_CDD.pdf)

- Christian Aid, Nagorik Uddyog, & Research Development Center. (2017). Dalits in Bangladesh: An action research for an evidence-base for the dalit population in Bangladesh. <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1dBRvigorDOOWFKMEkUwcKBw8m1U434c1>
- Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh. (2024, May). Social protection: Challenges in implementation and the way forward (Policy Brief No. 007). <https://bdplatform4sdgs.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/007-Social-Protection.pdf>
- CIVICUS. (n.d.). CIVICUS Monitor. <https://monitor.civicus.org/>
- IRC. (2023, December 6). Bangladesh: IRC study reveals a staggering 39% surge in child marriage due to climate change. The IRC. <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/bangladesh-irc-study-reveals-staggering-39-surge-child-marriage-due-climate-change>
- Islam, M. T. (2023). Laws and policies that discriminate against ethnic minorities in the plainlands of Bangladesh. In M. Guhathakurta, S. Hossain, & B. D'costa (Eds.), *Towards equality and inclusion* (pp. 53–56). Christian Aid and Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust.
- Jahan, N. (2024, March 28). An alarming upswing in child marriage. The Daily Star. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/alarming-upswing-child-marriage-3576476>
- Joining Forces Bangladesh (JFB). (2024). Child rights in Bangladesh: Where we are.
- Khan, T. I. (2024, June 10). Presentation on national budget 2024–25 and prevailing situation: What did the disadvantaged citizens get? [PowerPoint slides]. Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh. <https://bdplatform4sdgs.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Presentation-on-National-Budget-2024-25-and-Prevailing-Situation.pdf>
- Matin, K. A. (2018). Economic growth and inequality in Bangladesh. *Bangladesh Journal of Political Economy*, 34(1), 259–300. Bangladesh Economic Association. <https://doi.org/10.18356/2227-3182>
- Mitchell, S., Rabbani, M. G., Mainuddin, K., Seal, L., Emran, D. A., Tuhin, M. H., & Khan, Z. M. (2014). Assessment of women's livelihood needs in Bangladesh. [https://wrd.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/74027\\_assessmentofwomenslivelihoodneedsin.pdf](https://wrd.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/74027_assessmentofwomenslivelihoodneedsin.pdf)
- Nagorik Uddyog & BDERM. (2015). Equity watch 2015: Access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) for Dalits in Bangladesh: Challenges and way forward. <https://bderm-bd.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Equity-Watch-WASH.pdf>

- Nahar, N., Islam, S., & Mahiuddin, S. (2021). Flash flood impacts on the life and livelihood of women at haor areas in Bangladesh. *National Geographical Journal of India*, 67(3), 322-333. <http://dx.doi.org/10.48008/ngji.1780>
- National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT), & ICF. (2023). Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2022: Key Indicators Report. Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: NIPORT and ICF. Retrieved from <https://www.dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/PR148/PR148.pdf>
- Rahman, M. M. (2021). Achieving Sustainable development goals of agenda 2030 in Bangladesh: The crossroad of the governance and performance. *Public Administration and Policy*, 24(2), 195-211. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/PAP-12-2020-0056>
- Shah, A. (Ed.) (2005). Public sector governance and accountability series: Public expenditure analysis. The World Bank. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/786601468139801976/pdf/343780PAPER0Pu101OFFICIAL0USE0ONLY1.pdf>
- Siddequa, A. S., & Sultana, M. S. (2019). Casual analysis of the violence against dalit women at Munshiganj district of Bangladesh. *Jagannath University Journal of Arts*, 9(1). [https://jnu.ac.bd/journal/assets/pdf/9\\_1\\_352.pdf](https://jnu.ac.bd/journal/assets/pdf/9_1_352.pdf)
- U.S. Department of Labor. (2021). 2021 findings on the worst forms of child labour: Bangladesh. [https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child\\_labour\\_reports/tda2021/Bangladesh.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child_labour_reports/tda2021/Bangladesh.pdf)
- UN Women. (2023). CCGAP rapid appraisal: A review of progress and challenges. [https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/final\\_ccgap\\_rapid%20appraisal\\_bco\\_9-dec-clean-copy.pdf](https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/final_ccgap_rapid%20appraisal_bco_9-dec-clean-copy.pdf)
- UNICEF. (2024). Learning Interrupted: Global snapshot of climate-related school disruptions in 2024. UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/guatemala/media/7656/file/Global-snapshot-climate-related-school-disruptions-2024.pdf.pdf>
- UNICEF. (2023). Progress on Children's Well-Being: Centring child rights in the 2030 Agenda; For every child, a sustainable future. UNICEF Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring - Data and Analytics Section. Retrieved from [https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/SDG\\_Progress-on-Childrens-Well-Being-Centring-child-rights-in-the-2030-Agenda-For-every-child-a-sustainable-future-web.pdf](https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/SDG_Progress-on-Childrens-Well-Being-Centring-child-rights-in-the-2030-Agenda-For-every-child-a-sustainable-future-web.pdf)

- United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP). (2024). Data availability and challenges to achieve sustainable development goals in Bangladesh. *Asia-Pacific Sustainable Development Journal*, 31(2), 161-179. <https://doi.org/10.18356/26178419-31-2-12>
- United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP). (2025). Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2025: engaging communities to close the evidence gap. <https://unescap.org/kp/2025/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2025>
- United Nations. (2024). The Sustainable Development Goals report 2024. <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2024.pdf>
- White Paper Committee. (2024). White paper on state of the Bangladesh economy: Dissection of a development narrative. Government of Bangladesh.
- World Economic Forum (WEF). (2024). Global gender gap report 2024. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2024/in-full/benchmarking-gender-gaps-2024-2e5f5cd886/>
- World Food Programme (WFP). (2025). WFP Bangladesh country brief: February 2025. <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/wfp-bangladesh-country-brief-february-2025>
- Zahan, I. (2021, April). Bridging the digital gender divide: Challenges and opportunities in Bangladesh [Policy brief]. BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD). [https://bigd.bracu.ac.bd/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Policy-Brief\\_Digital\\_gender\\_Divide\\_BIGD\\_2021.pdf](https://bigd.bracu.ac.bd/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Policy-Brief_Digital_gender_Divide_BIGD_2021.pdf)

## Annex

**Table A: Review of SDG Progress from the Perspectives of six LNOB Groups**

LNOB Group	Disaggregated Data Availability	Key Challenges	Most Affected SDGs	Comments
Children	Lack of disaggregated data Among the 42 Child-specific indicators, many remain off-track/outdated	Rising malnutrition, increasing child labour, particularly among the marginalised groups, reversal in neonatal and under-five mortality, and child marriage	SDG 2 (Hunger), SDG 3 (Health), SDG 5 (Gender), SDG 8 (Decent employment)	Moderate progress; however, concerns remain as regards reversals in health and nutrition
Climate-Vulnerable Communities	Absence of disaggregated data	High displacement, health vulnerabilities, rising child labour in climate-vulnerable areas, worsening gender violence, lack of climate finance access	SDG 1 (Poverty), SDG 13 (Climate), SDG 5 (Gender), SDG 3 (Health)	One of the most vulnerable groups due to climate shocks
Dalit & Adivasi	Absence of disaggregated data Data manipulation	Discrimination in access to jobs, healthcare, land rights, existing gender disparity, exclusion from decision-making	SDG 1 (Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender), SDG 10 (Inequality), SDG 16 (Governance)	Most politically and economically marginalised
Persons with Disabilities	Data discrepancies between official statistics and realities, lack of disaggregated data	Limited access to healthcare, employment, severe gender employment gap	SDG 3 (Health), SDG 5 (Gender), SDG 8 (Employment)	Least included in terms of access to opportunities

LNOB Group	Disaggregated Data Availability	Key Challenges	Most Affected SDGs	Comments
Women	Underreporting and delays in data collection, particularly on gender-based violence issue, lack of disaggregated data	High gender gap, increased share in informal employment declining contraceptive use, lack of political representation	SDG 5 (Gender), SDG 8 (Employment), SDG 16 (Governance)	Strong policy focus, however, persistent institutional loopholes and structural barriers
Youth	Absence of disaggregated data	Education-to-employment gap, digital divide, informal job precarity, rising female NEET youth unemployment, lack of representation of marginalised youth	SDG 4 (Education), SDG 5 (Gender), SDG 8 (Decent employment), SDG 9 (Innovation), SDG 16 (Governance)	Moderate improvements, however, gender disparity remains a challenge. Concerns remain regarding the participation and representation of marginalised youth.

*Source: Authors' assessment based on the six thematic policy briefs.*

# A Dignified Future for Women

*Progress, Gaps, and Next Steps*

## Anchor organisations

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad and Oxfam Bangladesh

## Associate organisations

ActionAid Bangladesh

Association for Land Reform and Development

Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad

BRAC

Concern Worldwide Bangladesh

Good Neighbors Bangladesh

JAAGO Foundation

Jago Nari

Light House

Nagorik Uddyog

Oxfam Bangladesh

Underprivileged Children's Educational Programme (UCEP) Bangladesh

WaterAid Bangladesh

World Vision Bangladesh

Youth for Change Bangladesh Foundation

## Penholder

*Umme Marzana*

Lecturer, Department of Economics,

East West University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

## Key Messages

- Bangladesh has made commendable progress in areas of gender equality and women's rights, which is manifested in rising female labour force participation, a significant reduction in maternal mortality rate and landmark legal reforms in support of women's rights.
- Despite the progress made, gender-based violence remains a significant concern, the gender wage gap has widened, and informal employment continues to remain dominant in the context of female labour force participation, and all these undermine job security and social protection of women.
- Women from marginalised communities continue to face systemic barriers in accessing education and healthcare, and in having political representation, and these problems are accentuated because of the absence of evidence-based policies based on updated, nationally representative, gender-disaggregated data.
- The government must involve civil society organisations (CSOs) to enhance women's social and economic empowerment and security by building strong partnerships geared towards the enforcement of gender-equal policies, expanded social protection, legal reforms, increased investment in education, healthcare and digital access, and political representation.

## Context

Women constitute nearly half of Bangladesh’s population. Although the female labour force participation rate has increased from 36.3 per cent in 2016-17 to 41.5 per cent in 2022-23 (BBS, 2023), and the female literacy rate has increased by 14 per cent compared to 2016-17, it is still significantly below male literacy rates and consequently the national average rate (BBS, 2023). There is a gender gap in Bangladesh in educational attainment – the proportion of males who obtained SSC, HSC, graduate or equivalent and higher degrees was higher than that of their female counterparts.

Addressing the marginalisation of women is not solely a matter of gender equality, but is intrinsically linked with the broader SDG objectives, including poverty eradication, access to quality education, decent employment, good health and well-being, and effective climate action. Various groups of women continue to face systemic exclusion in Bangladesh. They include girls, older women, indigenous women, women with disabilities, women employed in the informal sector, migrant women, women engaged in domestic and unpaid care work, women adversely impacted by climate change or natural disasters, and rural women. Indeed, these are the groups that represent the marginalised women of Bangladesh.

The chapter focuses on one of the central “leave no one behind (LNOB)” groups in the context of the 2030 Agenda - women. It aims to examine both the enabling and hindering factors, including relevant policies supporting women’s empowerment. The objective is to identify the existing gaps that impede progress towards achieving the SDG targets. By looking into the multiple layers of women’s identities and experiences, the chapter underscores the underrepresentation of these groups in national data and sheds light on the importance of data disaggregation beyond geographical location. It is argued that disaggregation will facilitate a more clearer understanding of the state of women and will help design more targeted policies.

Even after notable progress, women in Bangladesh continue to face marginalisation because of the multidimensional systemic challenges in accessing their social, economic, and political rights. According to the latest SDG ranking, Bangladesh’s position is 107<sup>th</sup> out of 167 countries; this is a marginal improvement from the 109<sup>th</sup> position held in 2020. Bangladesh’s records indicate that it is faltering across seven SDG areas. In terms of the goals, this chapter assesses the country’s performance, which is not encouraging in the case of goals 5, 8, 14, and 17, whereas it has experienced some moderate improvement in goal 3.

Bangladesh ranks 99<sup>th</sup> out of 146 economies in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2024, which is a significant drop of 40 positions in the global ranking compared to its position in 2023. Even after this fall in performance, Bangladesh continues to maintain its comfortable position as the South Asian leader for the 10<sup>th</sup> consecutive year. The country has been able to reduce its gender gap from 72.6 per cent in 2020 to 68.9 per cent in 2024.

Despite significant contributions they are making towards the country's economic progress, women, particularly those from marginalised communities, continue to face gender-based discrimination in education, healthcare, political involvement, and the labour market. This results in their limited access to decent work opportunities, inadequate job security, insufficient social protection, limited access to financial services, and limited career advancement.

### **Methodology**

The chapter is the outcome of a collaborative effort involving 22 CSOs. Representatives of these organisations actively participated in brainstorming sessions, data collection, and validation workshops. Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP) and Oxfam Bangladesh served as the anchor organisations for this initiative. Secondary data were provided by 10 participating CSOs. Additionally, an expert interview was conducted with Dr. Maleka Banu, General Secretary, BMP, to enrich the analysis.

### **Review of SDG Progress**

Women's contributions in all aspects of society, from decision-making to community-building, are crucial to achieve the SDGs. SDG 5 is a stand-alone goal that explicitly focuses on gender equality in all spheres of life. However, when half of the country's population is made up of women and girls, it is of heightened importance to follow up on the state of women in view of other SDGs as well.

### **Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages**

Maternal mortality ratio (MMR) in Bangladesh declined from 163 in 2020 to 136 in 2023 (BBS, 2024a). Percentage of births attended by skilled health personnel increased from 52.7 per cent in 2017-18 to 69.8 per cent in 2022, surpassing the target set by the 4th Health, Population and Nutrition Sector

Programme (HPNSP) 2017–22. However, disparities continue to persist, particularly among rural and lower-income women who lag behind in accessing antenatal care services. It is to be noted that, contraceptive use decreased from 62.3 per cent in 2020 to 61 per cent in 2023, with unmet family planning needs remaining higher among younger and rural women.

Furthermore, there is a persistent gap in gender-disaggregated data on mental health. Evidence from the COVID-19 pandemic indicates that women experienced significantly higher mental and physical health impacts compared to men (UN Women, 2020).

### **Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**

In 2023, the High Court Division of Bangladesh passed a historical verdict that recognised that a mother’s name alone is sufficient to be identified as a guardian for children in official documentation, effectively amending a 134-year-old law. Another significant milestone was the 2022 reform of the “Evidence Act,” which removes section 155(4). This has ensured that rape complainants are now protected from character assassination by the defence in court proceedings. These amendments are the outcome of persistent activism on the part of CSOs and human rights organisations fighting for gender equality over the past years.

Gender-based violence (GBV) continues to remain a critically important concern in Bangladesh. According to the data collected from various leading national dailies, the number of women and girls subjected to various forms of violence, such as rape, gang rape, murder, and child marriages, was 3,440 in 2020. This number started to come down from 2023, with the total number of cases reaching 2,937, and declined further to 2,525 in 2024 (BMP, n.d.). However, the prevalence of GBV intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to be a significant concern to this day.

According to the nationally representative Violence Against Women (VAW) survey, 38.8 per cent of ever-married women (age 15 and above) have reported facing physical, sexual and/or emotional violence by their intimate partner in the last 12 months (BBS, 2016). Key findings of the VAW survey 2024 indicate that similar instances in that year have reduced to 22.8 per cent (BBS, 2025); however, it remains significantly high compared to the SDG target of eliminating all forms of violence against women and children (by 2030).

Adolescent girls and rural women remain particularly vulnerable to GBV. The Global Gender Gap Report 2024 reports that 23 per cent of women in

Bangladesh experienced GBV at some point in their lives. A report by the UNDP (2022) indicates that domestic violence and sexual assault incidents increased during the pandemic era, especially in hard-to-reach remote regions such as coastal areas like Cox's Bazar, as well as the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). However, the availability of up-to-date national and disaggregated GBV data at national and local levels remains rather limited.

The mean age at marriage for females declined somewhat in 2023 compared to 2020. However, the proportion of women aged 20–24 who were married before the age of 18 rose to 41.6 per cent in 2023, a notable increase from 31.3 per cent in 2020. This is higher among rural women. The highest prevalence of early marriage is observed among women from the lowest income group, women with no formal education, and women residing in the Rajshahi division.

Although women's share of unpaid labour has decreased to 45.9 per cent since 2016, they spent an average on 5.8 hours per day for unpaid care work, compared to just 0.8 hours for their male counterparts (BBS, 2023c).

In 2024, Bangladesh occupied 7<sup>th</sup> position in the Political Empowerment component of the Global Gender Gap Index. Women comprised 20 per cent of the members of parliament in 2024 compared to 20.9 per cent in 2020. About 15 per cent of Interim Government advisors are women. However, with only 23 per cent representation in national and local government, Bangladesh remained below the global average (in 2023). As regards asset and digital ownership, 32.0 per cent of women in Bangladesh owned land (BBS, 2019), and 68 per cent of married women owned a mobile phone in 2022, which increased from 60 per cent in 2017-18.

Bangladesh has been implementing gender budgeting since 2009; it currently encompasses 44 ministries. In FY2019-20, the proposed gender budget accounted for 30.8 per cent of the total budget and 5.5 per cent of the GDP. However, in FY2024-25, the allocation increased to 34.1 per cent of the total budget, though its share in the GDP declined to 4.9 per cent (Khatun et al., 2024).

### **Goal 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all**

In 2023, almost all working women, 95.7 per cent, were engaged in informal employment; this was a rise from 91.8 per cent in 2016-17. In contrast, male participation in the informal sector was significantly lower. Across the

country, the rate of informal employment among females was the highest in the Sylhet division. Female employment accounted for 74.1 per cent of workers in the agricultural sector of Bangladesh, compared to 28.8 per cent for males. The aforesaid female participation rate was a sharp rise from 59.7 per cent in 2016-17.

The ratio of average monthly earnings between male and female paid employees rose from 1.11:1 in 2016-17 to 1.34:1 in 2023. This reflects a widening gender wage gap and speaks of a bleak outlook. In the agricultural sector, women constitute a larger share of the workforce, they earn almost half of what their male counterparts do. Furthermore, the labour force survey (LFS) reported a declining share of women in high-status occupations.

In 2016-17, the female unemployment rate (6.7 per cent) was more than double that of male (3.1 per cent). However, the LFS 2023 report indicates a positive shift, with the female unemployment rate declining to 3.2 per cent, while that of the male increased somewhat to 3.4 per cent. This is reflective of positive development in narrowing the gender gap.

In 2020, 21,934 females left Bangladesh for overseas jobs as migrant workers; the number was 61,158 in 2024 (BMET, n.d.). International migration rate for women increased from 0.52 per 1,000 in 2020 to 1.44 per 1,000 in 2023.

However, despite the growth of women in employment and migration, the share of women account holders in banks and other financial institutions remained almost unchanged between 2021 and 2023, standing at 24.8 per cent in 2023. It was lower than the national average, and their male counterparts.

### **Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development**

The World Risk Index 2023 ranks Bangladesh 9<sup>th</sup> globally in terms of climate disaster risk. Even though Bangladesh is considered a champion in view of disaster risk management, frequent natural disasters accentuate economic vulnerability, particularly of those people who depend on marine and aquatic resources. Women workers constitute a significant part of those who are involved in the country's aquaculture sector. However, their contributions are often overlooked and underrepresented in the GDP estimation. Their work spans from fishing and farming to processing. Opportunities ought to be created for greater inclusion of women in higher levels of business and decision-making. Many women face challenges such as a lack of formal recognition for being unregistered, limited access to

finance, and lack of decision-making power. These often contribute to the persistent undervaluation of their labour (Yi, 2022).

### **Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable development**

In 2023, 45.7 per cent of the population had access to the internet, of whom 39.7 per cent were women. Although female internet usage has increased from 33.4 per cent in 2021, women continue to lag behind compared to men, highlighting a persistent digital gender divide.

#### **Marginalised Women**

Vulnerabilities of marginalised women often relate to issues of employment identity, absence of national identity, and disability. Information provided by the Kapaeng Foundation and Bangladesh Indigenous Women’s Network suggests that at least 191 incidents of violence against Indigenous women were documented between 2018 and 2021. Dalit girls, often among the most illiterate group, are at a heightened risk of trafficking, forced labour, prostitution, and early and forced marriages. Illegal land acquisition is reported to be a major contributing factor to underpinning the helplessness of Indigenous and Dalit women.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the persistent reality of untouchability limits their access to reproductive health services.

According to the 8<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2020), approximately 8-9 per cent of the population in Bangladesh suffers from some form of disability. However, disaggregated data specific to disabled women remains sparse. The crude disability rate among females (per 1,000 individuals) increased from 24.4 in 2021 to 27.8 in 2023. Women with disabilities experience multiple forms of discrimination, including barriers to education, healthcare, employment, and social services. The pandemic further exacerbated these challenges for women with disabilities, with many reported experiencing incidents of violence (CDD, 2022).

Over 7 per cent of the women in the country are aged 60 years and above (BBS, 2023b). However, due to a lack of disaggregated data, it is difficult to portray the forms of discrimination faced by older women, who are often perceived as a burden for the household. Eventually, their vulnerabilities remain largely unaddressed in policy discourse. Although the “National Policy on Older Persons” was launched in 2013, its implementation leaves much to be desired.

---

<sup>2</sup>[https://aidstream.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/documents/OVOF\\_Narrative-report\\_2023-20240429010428.pdf](https://aidstream.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/documents/OVOF_Narrative-report_2023-20240429010428.pdf)

The government needs to adopt more proactive and visible measures to recognise the contributions of marginalised groups such as the Rohingya community, tea garden workers, and domestic aides as also the sex workers. They must be included in Social Safety Net Programmes (SSNPs) and ensure that social protection coverage for them is adequate and sustainable. There is a discrepancy between overall budget expansion and the tangible support received by individuals. For instance, the government's budget allocation for the Allowances for the Widow, Destitute and Deserted Women programme increased by 39.1 per cent between FY2020-21 and FY2023-24; however, allowance for the beneficiaries increased by only 10 per cent.

## **Policies and Initiatives**

The progress that has been achieved in areas concerning women's health can be attributed, to a larger extent, to the nearly 14,500 community clinics across the country. These clinics serve as comprehensive centres for health care, family planning, and nutrition services, with approximately 3,000 of those having skilled birth attendants.<sup>3</sup> CSOs are also playing a valuable role in improving women's reproductive and overall health. For instance, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh implemented a midwifery-led model to improve the health of the marginalised, climate-vulnerable island communities between 2022 and 2024. In the course of this initiative, 31,586 households were visited, 406 vulnerable pregnant women received cash support, and 8,106 couples received family planning services.

Women's poor mental health condition is sometimes attributed to the pressure of the multiple roles and responsibilities they have to assume within their families and communities. Higher prevalence of domestic violence and other negative experiences also contributes to this. To address such issues, the National Mental Health Strategic Plan 2020-2030 of Bangladesh was developed by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare with a view to creating a more accessible, inclusive, and effective mental health service system. However, concerns remain regarding its implementation.

The Constitution of Bangladesh<sup>4</sup> clearly demonstrates the country's firm stance against discrimination of any type. Bangladesh formally ratified the UN "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination

---

<sup>3</sup><https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/promote-community-clinics-developing-world-pm-3423316>

<sup>4</sup>[http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-details-367.html#:~:text=29,per cent20service per cent20of per cent20the per cent20Republic](http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-details-367.html#:~:text=29,per%20cent20service%20of%20the%20Republic).

against Women” (CEDAW) in 1984. Several initiatives have been adopted to eradicate all forms of gender-based discrimination and to raise gender sensitivity.<sup>5</sup> In November 2020, an amendment was made to the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, which now ensures that the death penalty is the highest punishment for those found guilty of rape. However, the definition of rape itself requires amendment. World Vision Bangladesh launched an initiative titled ‘Men Care Approach’ in FY2023-24 to prevent violence against women and girls through increased engagement of men. Training sessions for couples under this initiative led to 91 per cent of the women participating in the decision-making process and a significant reduction in GBV.

The Bangladesh Law Commission and National Human Rights Commission, in collaboration with CSOs, drafted the first anti-discrimination law in 2022. Even though the draft was tabled in the Parliament, the draft law has yet to be enacted. Moreover, the law does not criminalise discrimination; the redressal mechanism is a lengthy process, which could demotivate the victims seeking justice. There is no stand-alone law to combat sexual harassment across all spheres. While private organisations have adopted their own sexual harassment policies, the proposed Sexual Harassment Prevention and Protection Law 2021 still remains under consideration.

Asset ownership remains a significant challenge for women in Bangladesh, as land ownership regulations are dictated by respective religious laws, which take precedence over the constitutionally defined equal rights of land ownership for men and women. Hindu women are denied exclusive rights to their father’s or husband’s property. In contrast, according to Sharia Law in Islam, Muslim daughters are eligible to inherit half of what their brothers can. Under the Khas Land Settlement Policy, agricultural khas land can be allocated to widows, abandoned, or divorced women only if they have an adult son without any disability.

There is a lack of up-to-date, nationally representative gender-disaggregated data on mental health issues. According to a UN report,<sup>6</sup> women’s mental and physical health was more disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh compared to that of men. However, there was no recognition of this in the policies.

---

<sup>5</sup>Such as the National Women Development Policy in 2013, National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and Children 2013-2025, National Plan of Action for Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking 2018-2022, National Children Policy 2011, Domestic Violence Act 2010, Domestic Violence Rules 2013, and Domestic Workers Protection & Welfare Policy 2015.

<sup>6</sup>[https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/COVID19/Unlocking\\_the\\_lockdown\\_UNWomen\\_2020.pdf](https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/COVID19/Unlocking_the_lockdown_UNWomen_2020.pdf)

According to UNICEF (2020), progress towards achieving the SDG target of ending child marriage must be at a 17 times faster pace than that of the rate observed over the past decade. Financial strains, conservative traditions,<sup>7</sup> weak implementation of policies, limited awareness, and misuse of the special clause in the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 2017 by families are key barriers in this regard.

In addition to their household responsibilities, women are engaging more and more in agricultural work. However, they and their families are often hesitant to be identified as “farmers.” This reluctance stems from prevailing social norms that link women working in the fields or in public space with perceived loss of dignity (Begum & Sharma, 2024).

The Bangladesh Labor Act 2006 has been amended multiple times to provide better protection for workers’ rights. However, it does not fully align with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) standards. The law promotes equal pay for equal work, but the gender pay gap continues to widen. Female workers in the informal sector lack legal protections, and in the ready-made garment sector men often earn more due to their ability to negotiate better and have contracts and pay structures that ensure higher wages (Smith et al., 2024). Moreover, there are no monitoring bodies to ensure workers receive their weekly holidays, compensatory leaves, or overtime allowances which disrupts enforcement of such entitlements (Ferdous, 2023).

The situation of female migrant workers remains a matter of concern. The majority of the women migrate to Middle Eastern countries to work as domestic helps and often enjoy little to no protection. They have to go through complex and costly procedures necessitated by brokers, experience workplace violations and GBV and face risks of trafficking, food deprivation, and wage theft. According to the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, 709 Bangladeshi female migrant workers died in various countries between 2017 and 2022. While the Overseas Employment and Migrant Workers Act 2016 aims to support decent work for all migrant workers and make it easier for them to find employment abroad, the number of dedicated projects for them is rather small. Also, gender-disaggregated remittance data is not available. The Bangladesh Migration Compact Taskforce, launched in 2022, aims to ensure safe, orderly, and regular migration; however, the efficacy of its work needs to be raised further.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup><https://archive-knowledgehub.brac.net/xmlui/handle/123456789/803>

<sup>8</sup><https://bangladesh.iom.int/news/bangladesh-migration-compact-taskforce-ensure-safe-orderly-and-regular-migration>

The advantages of digitisation may be fully realised when these are used to uplift the lives of those who are left behind. One such example is the Tottho Apa: Empowering Women through ICT towards Digital Bangladesh Project launched by the Jatiyo Mohila Sangstha under the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in April 2017. The project's first phase, implemented in 13 upazilas, was successful, and the second phase, spanning five years, is being rolled out in 492 upazilas. The project aims to reach one crore rural women with a view to empowering them by equipping them with digital tools and usable information.

## Way Forward

### *Expanding the Role of CSOs and Non-State Actors*

More space for CSOs and non-state actors is necessary to mobilise and publicise women-friendly initiatives, raise awareness about these at the grassroots level, and ensure accountability from the government. Some studies indicate that, if the world is going as it is now, it will take another 300 years to achieve gender equality.<sup>9</sup> Hence, affirmative actions in the form of women-centric policies are essential to lift the left-behind female community up in the social ladder.

### *Gender Sensitive Recovery and Economic Inclusion*

The pandemic brought a surge in gender-based violence, child marriages, and school dropouts, mostly among rural and urban poor girls. A large part of the dropouts was because of a lack of access to technology. Women, especially small entrepreneurs, were disproportionately affected by the pandemic since government initiatives to overcome the pandemic-induced poverty had largely overlooked them.

### *Women's Political Representation*

Political representation of women is crucial to ensure that the voices of all women are heard. There are provisions in the law that guarantee reserved positions for women; however, women must not be confined to those token positions and should have greater representation.

### *Strengthening Health and Social Protection*

The health budget is dismally low. The remit of social protection tools will need to be widened further to include all women and girls. Proper implementation

---

<sup>9</sup><https://bangladesh.un.org/en/222911-300-years-needed-reach-full-gender-equality-un-secretary-general-antonio-guterres-stresses>

of menstrual and sanitation facilities in schools and access to abortions are crucial steps forward. Lack of political representation, such as the absence of female heads in local representative bodies, makes it difficult for women and girls to access financial, educational, and healthcare facilities.

### *Legal Reform and Rights to Equality*

Bangladesh had voiced reservations as regards Articles 2 and 16(1)(c) of CEDAW on grounds of religious sentiments and that these contradict religious practices. However, this stance goes against women's rights, e.g. land ownership rights of women.

### *Addressing Gender-Based Violence*

The country has gone through a significant political shift after the previous government was overthrown in August, following the student-led anti-discrimination protests. The CSOs and experts, though hopeful of the "New Bangladesh," are cautious. They are concerned about women's safety issues in view of the sharp rise in gender-based insecurity and violence that women face in public spaces. This results in decreased mobility of women due to a rise in harassment and the incidence of mob justice. These disproportionately affect the minority communities in particular. Communal violence and harassment of the transgender community have also emerged as major concerns.

### *Gender Budgeting*

The goal of gender budgeting is to ensure that budget allocations at all levels are made with the gender perspective in mind. The government has committed that gender budgeting will be given due priority in the upcoming budget. However, this will be possible only with greater interministerial coordination and a transparent way of monitoring how money is allocated and spent on different groups of women beneficiaries.

### **Key Recommendations**

- Ensure employment protection for women working in the informal sector, ensuring that gender-sensitive language is the norm across all sectors, and mobilising ICT to inculcate the knowledge that is required to enhance women's capabilities.
- Women's contribution to domestic and care work should be recognised and valued. Measures should be taken to include the economic value of women's unpaid work in the GDP.

- An initiative needs to be taken to enact the Uniform Family Code regarding existing discriminatory personal laws relating to marriage, divorce, inheritance, child custody, and adoption.
- Amendments to the Cyber Security Act 2023 are necessary to better address gender-based cybercrimes, especially in the context of implementing the emerging AI technology.<sup>10</sup>
- The 17th Amendment of the Constitution needs to be amended with the provision of at least one-third reserved seats for women and the introduction of direct election in those seats. Political parties should follow the provisions of the Representation of the People Order (RPO) by the Election Commission and include at least 33 per cent of women in leadership positions at all levels.
- Increased investment in strengthening local government bodies and one-stop crisis centres is required.
- Reservations as regards certain provisions of the CEDAW must be withdrawn on an urgent basis, and enforcement of a Uniform Family Code must be seen as essential to secure equal rights for all women.
- Continuation of the women-friendly initiatives implemented by the previous government will need to be ensured.
- Government and NGOs should take coordinated steps to reintegrate returnee migrants into society and ensure that their mental, physical, and financial health-related issues are adequately addressed.
- Introduce a gender-disaggregated expenditure tracking system at all administrative levels.

---

<sup>10</sup>Online presence became more prominent nationwide during the post-pandemic era as more and more people look out for internet based solutions for their education, entertainment, consumption, and income generating-needs. According to ActionAid Bangladesh, 63.5 per cent women faced online violence (such as stalking, trolling, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, and deep-faking) in 2022 (50.2 per cent in 2021).

## References

- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2016). Violence against women (VAW) survey 2015. Statistics and Informatics Division, Ministry of Planning. <http://203.112.218.65:8008/WebTestApplication/userfiles/Image/LatestReports/VAWSurvey2015.pdf>
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2018). Labour force survey (LFS) 2016-17. Information System through Panel Survey (LMIS) Project. [http://203.112.218.65:8008/WebTestApplication/userfiles/Image/LatestReports/LFS\\_2016-17.pdf](http://203.112.218.65:8008/WebTestApplication/userfiles/Image/LatestReports/LFS_2016-17.pdf)
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2023a). Household income and expenditure survey (HIES) 2022. Statistics and Informatics Division, Ministry of Planning. [https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/57def76a\\_aa3c\\_46e3\\_9f80\\_53732eb94a83/2023-04-13-09-35-ee41d2a35dcc47a94a595c88328458f4.pdf](https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/57def76a_aa3c_46e3_9f80_53732eb94a83/2023-04-13-09-35-ee41d2a35dcc47a94a595c88328458f4.pdf)
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2023b). Population and housing census (PHC) 2022: National report. [https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4\\_956b\\_45ca\\_872f\\_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2024-01-31-15-51-b53c55dd692233ae401ba013060b9cbb.pdf](https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4_956b_45ca_872f_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2024-01-31-15-51-b53c55dd692233ae401ba013060b9cbb.pdf)
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2023c). Time use survey (TUS) 2021: National report. [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)
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2024a). Bangladesh sample vital statistics (SVRS) 2023. [http://nsds.bbs.gov.bd/storage/files/1/Publications/SVRS/SVRS per cent202023 per cent20Final per cent20Report\\_web.pdf](http://nsds.bbs.gov.bd/storage/files/1/Publications/SVRS/SVRS per cent202023 per cent20Final per cent20Report_web.pdf)
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2024b). Labour force survey (LFS) 2023. [http://nsds.bbs.gov.bd/storage/files/1/Publications/LFS/LFS per cent202023 per cent20Final per cent20report\\_compressed.pdf](http://nsds.bbs.gov.bd/storage/files/1/Publications/LFS/LFS per cent202023 per cent20Final per cent20report_compressed.pdf)
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2025). Key findings of violence against women (VAW) Survey 2024. [https://bangladesh.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/report\\_documents/2025-03/VAW\\_KEYFINDINGS\\_2024\\_Publihed%2027FEB2025.pdf](https://bangladesh.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/report_documents/2025-03/VAW_KEYFINDINGS_2024_Publihed%2027FEB2025.pdf)
- Bangladesh Mahila Parishad. (n.d.). VAWD charts. <https://mahilaparishad.org/vawg/>

- Bangladesh Planning Commission. (2020). 8th Five Year Plan July 2020–June 2025. Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. <https://oldweb.lged.gov.bd/UploadedDocument/UnitPublication/1/1166/8FYP.pdf>
- Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET). (n.d.). Statistical reports. <https://old.bmet.gov.bd/BMET/statisticalDataAction>
- Center for Disability in Development (CDD). (2022). Inclusive community-based mental health services (ICMHS) [Policy brief]. [https://cdd.org.bd/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Policy-Brief\\_ICBMH\\_CDD.pdf](https://cdd.org.bd/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Policy-Brief_ICBMH_CDD.pdf)
- Ferdous, S. R. (2023). Labor standards, labor policy, and compliance mechanism: A case study in Bangladesh. *Taylor & Francis*, 65(2), 256–272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0023656X.2023.2272124>
- Khatun, F., Saadat, S. Y., Huq, P. K., & Hasan, I. (2024). Gender budget of Bangladesh: Pursuing parity. Center for Policy Dialogue, Independent Review of Bangladesh’s Development. <https://cpd.org.bd/resources/2024/08/Gender-Budget-of-Bangladesh-Pursuing-Parity.pdf>
- The Daily Star. (2023, September 20). Promote community clinics in developing world: PM. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/promote-community-clinics-developing-world-pm-3423316>
- United Nations (UN). (2023). 300 years needed to reach full gender equality: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stresses the importance of having women’s contribution in technology and innovation. United Nations. <https://bangladesh.un.org/en/222911-300-years-needed-reach-full-gender-equality-un-secretary-general-antonio-guterres-stresses>
- United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). (n.d.). Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2024. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2024-en.pdf>
- United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). (2020). Ending child marriage: A profile of progress in Bangladesh. UNICEF. [https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/media/4526/file/Bangladesh per cent20Child per cent20Marriage per cent20report per cent202020.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/media/4526/file/Bangladesh%20per%20cent20Child%20per%20cent20Marriage%20per%20cent20report%20per%20cent202020.pdf)
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2022). Gender-based violence: Taking stock of Bangladesh’s shadow pandemic. <https://www.undp.org/bangladesh/blog/gender-based-violence-taking-stock-bangladeshs-shadow-pandemic>

United Nations Women. (2020). Unlocking the lockdown: The gendered effects of COVID-19 on achieving the SDGs in Asia and the Pacific. UN Women. [https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/COVID19/Unlocking\\_the\\_lockdown\\_UNWomen\\_2020.pdf](https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/COVID19/Unlocking_the_lockdown_UNWomen_2020.pdf)

Yi, E. J. A. (2022, February 2). Supporting women fish farmers in Bangladesh to recover pandemic losses. World Bank Blogs. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/endpovertyinsouthasia/supporting-women-fish-farmers-bangladesh-recover-pandemic-losses>

## Annex

Thirty-two participants were present during the validation workshop (arranged by BMP) held on December 9, 2024. The following CSOs were present:

- Light House
- YFC-BD
- BRAC
- WVB
- AAB
- ALRD
- BLAST
- GNB
- BMP
- Oxfam in Bangladesh

# Realising the Potentials of Youth

*Bridging Aspirations and Realities*

## **Anchor organisation**

ActionAid Bangladesh

## **Associate organisations**

World Vision Bangladesh

Educo Bangladesh

Access Bangladesh Foundation

Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center

Youth Policy Forum

Save the Children

Good Neighbors Bangladesh

Bandhu Social Welfare Society

Youth for Change Bangladesh Foundation

UCEP Bangladesh

Caritas Bangladesh

JAGO NARI

Plan International

SERAC Bangladesh

## **Penholder**

*Sarah Enamul Haque*

Senior Lecturer, Department of Economics

East West University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

## Key Messages

- Youth are driving progress in key areas such as education, employment, digital inclusion, and civic engagement. This progress is evident in rising literacy rates, a decrease in overall unemployment, and an increasing number of youth taking on leadership roles in governance and social change.
- Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a crucial role in empowering youth. They provide many necessary resources, viz., skills training, employment support, digital literacy programmes, and grassroots advocacy, all of which support youth in unlocking their potential and contributing meaningfully to society.
- A number of social phenomena, such as early marriage, have worsened over time. Access to mental health and reproductive health services remains inadequate, particularly in rural areas. Moreover, young people with tertiary education are facing high unemployment rates, while access to quality education that matches job market needs remains limited.
- Youth unemployment, particularly among the tertiary graduates, remains a significant challenge, compounded by rising NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) rates in urban areas. In addition, youth from marginalised communities – such as those with disabilities and those from the sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) community, as well as those working in informal sectors face systemic exclusion, inadequate mental and psychological health support, and limited access to equitable opportunities.
- Youth should be granted formal roles in decision-making processes, and they should be supported through dedicated institutions and targeted policies focused on broadening their overall development. Such efforts should go beyond just sports. Necessary policy changes should include improving the collection, availability and access to disaggregated data, expanding beyond gender and location and increasing funding for quality education and mental health services. Implementation of inclusive employment strategies designed for marginalised youth groups must be done through wide-ranging consultation with the youth, employees, investors, and relevant policymakers.

## Context

### Background

Youth constitute a significant part of Bangladesh's demographics. According to the Bangladesh National Youth Policy 2017, persons aged 18-35 years are considered to be "youth" comprising one-third of the total population of Bangladesh (BBS 2023a). Nearly half of the working-age population of Bangladesh is made up of youth (BBS, 2024). This indicates how influential the "bulging" youth cohort is in shaping the narrative of the country's growth and development. Thus, the youth are not structurally predisposed to be left behind, neither at present nor in the future, if Bangladesh's premise and potential are to be realised to the fullest extent.

The anti-discrimination July Movement 2024 reconfirms the power and resilience of youth to break the cycle of oppression and their dream of a new Bangladesh that ensures justice and opportunities for all.

In order to achieve the core principle of the 2030 Agenda to "leave no one behind," it is essential to identify vulnerable youth and address policy-level challenges. Such efforts would guide the government, CSOs, and the private sector, to effectively steer youth development and support future priorities, particularly in terms of aligning with the goals and targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In connection with this, the country recognises sixteen different categories of marginalised youth in Bangladesh, e.g., unemployed youth, female youth, unskilled/low-skilled youth, and youth engaged in the informal sector, etc. (National Youth Policy, 2017). To gain more insights, an online survey was conducted with participants of 510 youths of Bangladesh (aged 18-35 years). The survey revealed that the most vulnerable categories among them are the youth who are Not in NEET (41 per cent), followed by the economically vulnerable youth/poor youth (26 per cent) and youth with disabilities (19 per cent).

The primary objectives of this chapter are to assess the progress and challenges in achieving youth-focused SDG targets, explore opportunities for greater youth involvement in the implementation and accountability of SDGs, evaluate government and CSO efforts to advance youth agendas, analyse policies impacting the youth, identify existing policy gaps, and propose actionable recommendations to strengthen youth-related initiatives.

## State of Affairs

The *Commonwealth Global Youth Development Index 2023* indicates that Bangladesh achieved a “medium level of youth development” on the Youth Development Index (YDI), with a score of 0.7. The report also demonstrated that the country attained the largest improvement in the YDI in the South Asia region, followed by Nepal, Bhutan, and Afghanistan.

Despite the aforementioned positive developments and also the increase in the youth labour force participation rate from 48.7 per cent in 2016-17 to 61.20 per cent in 2023 (BBS 2018; 2024a), the situation regarding youth unemployment in Bangladesh continues to remain a major concern. As per the Labour Force Survey (LFS) in 2023, the unemployment rate among youth (between 15 and 29 years of age) decreased from 10.6 per cent in 2016-17 to 7.3 per cent in 2023, indicating moderate improvements. However, this rate is still more than double the national unemployment rate of 3.6 per cent. Moreover, unemployed youth comprised a staggering 78.9 per cent of the total unemployed population in 2023 (BBS, 2024a).

Indeed, the NEET youth aged between 15 and 24 years are the potential entrants to the labour market. Accordingly, a high NEET rate and a lower youth employment rate indicate lower job opportunities in the labour market. In 2023, 19 per cent of youth were not in NEET. This is a significant improvement over the figure of 30 per cent in 2016-17. Moreover, gender disparity among youth remains a significant challenge. Among NEET youth, females constituted 61.1 per cent in 2023, which marks a decrease from 87 per cent reported in the LFS 2016-17. However, this still indicates that a substantial proportion of young women remain engaged primarily in household chores or face institutional barriers, both of which significantly limit their participation in the labour market. It must also be noted that urban NEET has increased from 30.5 per cent in 2016-17 to 58 per cent in 2023.

According to LFS 2023, 38 per cent of those engaged in informal employment belong to the youth population (aged 15–29 years),<sup>11</sup> with young females accounting for more than half of this group. This indicates an almost equal share of males and females among all informally employed youth. Moreover, this situation requires particular attention, as the proportion of youth and specifically young females in informal employment has risen compared to LFS 2016–17, when youth comprised 31 per cent and young

---

<sup>11</sup>According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), youth refer to all individuals aged between 15 and 29. (<https://ilostat.ilo.org/methods/concepts-and-definitions/description-youth-labour-market-statistics/>).

females made up 32 per cent of those in informal employment. Alarming, almost 61 per cent of underutilised<sup>12</sup> persons in the country belong to the youth community, with a higher proportion among the male cohort. On the other hand, in the RMG sector, the majority of workers belong to the 15-34 age group.

Disaggregation in terms of the education level reveals that in 2016-17, youth who completed secondary and higher secondary education had the highest proportions of youth unemployment, at 28 and 22 per cent, respectively. Compared to that in 2023, youth who completed tertiary education have the highest proportion of youth unemployment, at 31 per cent, followed by the secondary level, at 21 per cent, for both males and females in rural and urban areas. This points to an alarming situation as regards the high and increasing share of university graduates among the unemployed youth. The data also reveals that almost 95 per cent of youth are literate, with similar proportions for male and female youth, as well as rural and urban youth (BBS 2018; 2024a).

According to the Population and Housing Census 2022, 27.8 per cent of the ethnic population are youth aged 15-29 years, where 27 per cent are ethnic males and 28.6 per cent are ethnic females. However, due to the lack of group-specific disaggregated data, the challenge of a targeted policy approach contains to persist.

Considering the demographic opportunity of youth in Bangladesh, the Ministry of Youth & Sports (MoYS) has kept a provision of Taka 4,207,300 for youth development expenditure for 2024-2025, which is 9 per cent more than that of the 2023-2024 budget allocation for youth development. However, it is important to note that the youth development budget has been more than doubled for the purpose of mainly constructing and upgrading stadiums and establishing training centres, instead of focusing on the current needs of the marginalised youth.

## Methodology

This chapter is based on the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data sources (including official and non-official data) to assess SDG progress in terms of enabling youth to secure an improved life, with special attention to data gaps to identify successes and challenges. Furthermore, gaps and barriers of youth are identified by examining the policies, programmes,

---

<sup>12</sup>Labour underutilisation covers three components: unemployment, time-related underemployment, and potential labour force.

and challenges affecting youth in accessing equitable opportunities and resources under the SDG framework.

This chapter has been designed following a mixed-method analysis. To capture the findings, the following tools were used:

- Secondary data review using national statistics.
- Primary survey was conducted to collect the needed data to prepare the chapter through an online survey of youth across Bangladesh. (50.4 per cent female, the majority being students, belonging to non-diverse, Muslim and Bengali communities, living in rural and urban areas.).
- 13 FGDs with youth (youth with disabilities, gender diverse youth, Adivasi youth).
- KII with six resource persons (Thana Youth Development Officer, DYD officer, Deputy Director of Department of Youth Development (DYD), Director, Department of Labour, Ministry of Labour & Employment, Deputy Director, Department of Social Services, Ministry of Social Services).

In total, 18 organisations working in the youth development sector collaborated with the team to help capture the findings to generate this youth chapter. The secondary data review made available the knowledge about the existing situation as regards youth in terms of achieving specific SDGs. The 13 FGDs conducted with youth from the marginalised groups provided the unique challenges youth face in Bangladesh, in line with achieving the SDGs. The inclusion of the KII reports from youth-centric resource personnel helped capture the key challenges and actionable recommendations to mitigate those challenges.

## **Review of the SDG Progress**

The online survey states that 38 per cent of the youth of Bangladesh agreed they have enough support to engage in SDG planning and implementation of SDGs, whereas about 36 per cent were neutral, and about 17 per cent disagreed that the youth have enough support.

The section below covers all the relevant SDG indicators that impact youth's development and overall well-being to understand the SDG progress at present and assess the future priorities.

### **Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages**

#### **3.1 Reduce the global maternal mortality ratio (MMR)**

According to Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2023, the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) for females aged 15-49 has improved by dropping from 163 (per 100,000 live births) in 2020 to 136 in 2023, but was still far from the 2030 target of 70. The number of births attended by skilled health personnel increased to 90 per cent in 2023 from 72 per cent in 2020, surpassing the target of 80 per cent by 2030. However, the picture for young mothers is quite the opposite. The highest MMR is for youth aged 25-29 at 214 per 100,000 live births, which is higher than the average and highest in all age groups. These findings urge more sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) awareness campaigns dedicated to young women and men to reduce the MMR across Bangladesh.

#### **3.7 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services**

As per the Demographic and Health Survey key indicators reports, in 2017-18, around 62 per cent of women of reproductive age (15-49 years) met their need for family planning using any modern method, which increased to 64 per cent in 2022, still a long way to go to meet the 2030 target of 100 per cent. Compared to this, there are fewer females in the youth category (15-29 years) at 52 per cent on average. As age advances, the percentage also rises, implying that older youth have better access to modern family planning methods.

The adolescent birth rate per 1,000 women in the 15-19 age group has declined in Bangladesh from 74 in 2020 to 68 in 2024 (UNFPA, 2024), which is still significantly higher than the 2030 target of 50. With the expansion of higher education for women, increased labour force participation, and delayed marriage, this is likely to continue to fall in the future.

In addition to the government's initiatives for improving maternal health such as in the 7th Five-Year Plan, the National Population Policy (2012), Health Policy (2011), and Maternal Health Strategy 2011-2016, YFC-BD's Y-Moves Project and Bandhu Social Welfare Society took many initiatives to empower marginalised youth with SRHR knowledge.

In multiple FGDs, the youth of Bangladesh have opined that SDG progress is best seen through increased access to healthcare in line with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being). Immunisation campaigns have reduced child mortality, yet rural healthcare remains inadequate, with limited reproductive health services and mental health support.

In emphasising the inadequate access to health, a Thana Youth Development Officer stated that the youth are grappling with poor access to healthcare services. He reiterated the need for healthcare services that are suitable and accessible for the youth. To provide better health care services, targeted advocacy and campaigns need to be arranged for the marginalised youth. He also suggested more skills development training programmes to prepare youth for the current and emerging needs of industries and employment opportunities. Youth involvement in decision-making and including them in the SDG implementation processes are necessary for ensuring equity and holistic development of the young workforce. The expert also suggested some major challenges impeding the development of the youth population, e.g., lack of knowledge about SRHR, lack of mental health awareness, depression due to unemployment, and lack of skills and economic opportunities.

Remarkably, the online survey report indicates very divided remarks as regards the success of public services by the youth: while 30 per cent of youth agreed to receive adequate service from the public service providers to the youth in terms of mental, physical health, and well-being, 25 per cent of respondents disagreed with it. Notably, the largest portion of the respondents, almost a third, have remained neutral; whereas around 46 per cent of respondents agreed that public service institutions are adequately addressing the reproductive health and rights of young women through service delivery, while 16 per cent of them disagreed with it. However, about 32 per cent of the youth were neutral about it.

## **Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**

### *5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence*

Violence Against Women Survey by BBS (2016) reveals that about 55 per cent of ever-married women faced physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner in the last 12 months. Among them, 32 per cent of women belong to the 15-29 age group. On average, 32 per cent of women are victims of various types of violence. Additionally, 6.2 per cent of women and girls aged 15 years and above were subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months in 2015; 11 per cent of women in the age bracket 15-19 years reported to have been subjected to this type of violence. However, the situation somewhat improved in 2024, as around 41 per cent of ever-married women faced physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner in the last 12 months, which was a far cry from the 2030 target of 0 per cent.

Complementing the government's National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and Children 2018-2030, ActionAid Bangladesh's youth team covered 18 areas of Bangladesh, aiming to enable youth to enjoy basic human and democratic rights. In addition, the YFC-BD's Y-Moves Project is actively advocating against GBV at the grassroots level.

### *5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices*

In 2023, 8.2 per cent of young women aged 20-24 years were victims of child marriages (before 15), and 41.6 per cent had early marriages (before 18). This indicator deteriorated significantly since 2019, with the figures being 5 per cent and 31.3 per cent, respectively. The SDG target is to reduce early marriage to 10 per cent and eliminate child marriage by 2030.

Apart from the government's National Action Plan to End Child Marriage 2018-2030, there is also the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017. YFC-BD conducted eight outreach campaigns to raise awareness about the adverse implications of child marriage. Good Neighbours Bangladesh's youth development project caused 3,000 members to commit to ending child marriage.

### *5.4 Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work*

The Time Use Survey (TUS) conducted by BBS in 2021 reveals that male youth (aged 15-24 years) spent 1.9 per cent of their time on unpaid domestic and care work, whereas their female counterparts spent 23 per cent on the same. The 2030 target for males and females of 10 per cent and 20 per cent has been achieved to some extent. This pattern is consistent with the proportion of total men and women aged 15+.

### *5.b Enhance the use of enabling technology*

Demography and Health Survey 2022 reveals that among unmarried male and female youth (aged 15-19), almost 68 per cent of males and 29 per cent of females own a mobile phone, whereas among married women aged 15-49 years, 68 per cent own a mobile phone. Among (employed) youth belonging to the 18-24 age group, almost 84 per cent own a mobile phone, while 99.3 per cent use a mobile phone according to the survey on ICT Use & Access by Individuals and Households 2022 by BBS. However, the SDG 2030 target is set at 100 per cent.

ActionAid Bangladesh has provided capacity-building support to 4,365 youth in 2023-2024 alone. Furthermore, through the Safe Digital Space for Girls and Youth project, YFC-BD enhanced the digital literacy of over 146,000 girls and youth. Youth Policy Forum's programme led to enhanced transparency and improved consumer protection in the mobile financial services (MFS).

Although significant progress has been made toward gender equality through increased awareness and improved legal protections, persistent societal and cultural norms continue to hinder progress. Such barriers limit women's opportunities to participate fully in leadership roles and employment.

Diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) community also faces significant stigma and religious barriers to gender equality, along with a lack of effective measures that could provide equal rights for people of different genders.

**Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all**

**8.3 Promote development-oriented policies**

As per LFS, the proportion of informal employment for youth aged 15-29 increased from 31 per cent in 2016-17 to 38.3 per cent in 2023. In 2023, 46 per cent of the youth in informal employment were males, while almost 41 per cent and 70 per cent of the male youth were from rural and urban areas, respectively.

According to the online survey report, 9 per cent of young respondents believe that Bangladesh has achieved significant advancement in attaining decent work and economic growth.

ActionAid Bangladesh's Young People has achieved self-employment for 310 youth in 2023-2024 alone through various capacity development programmes. Save the Children's Education for Empowerment empowered adolescents and youth in Bangladesh, building their skills and capabilities. In addition, World Vision Bangladesh's Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) for youth, especially school dropouts, provide basic education and skills training. In the Bangladesh Youth Leadership Centre's Ventures, 37 start-ups have received support, and over 200 entrepreneurs have been trained to scale their businesses. Access Bangladesh Foundation trained 3,245 youth with disabilities to enhance their employability, created

1,890 self-employment opportunities and facilitated 735 wage employment for youth with disabilities.

### ***8.5 Achieve full and productive employment and decent work***

LFS reveals that the average monthly earnings of young workers aged 15-29 years only somewhat improved in 2023 over the baseline 2016-17, from BDT 10,831 to BDT 11,951. It must be noted that the youth group in 2014 belonged to 15-24 age group. Thus, the comparison may not be accurate.

According to the Bangladesh Education Statistics 2021 report, young girls' participation in higher secondary education is 49.9 per cent, which is somewhat higher than boys' participation of 48.5 per cent. A significant growth has been observed in girls' education participation compared to 38.01 per cent in the year 2016. This provides a promising prospect in terms of raising the literacy rate of youth. In line with the results of this data, the online survey also concluded significant progress in quality education, as 9 per cent of respondents noted this growth.

The government of Bangladesh has several programmes to address issues concerning the NEET cohort among its youth, including the Economic Acceleration and Resilience for NEET (EARN) project and the 7th Five-Year Plan (7FYP). In addition, BYLC's USAID Bijoyee project has engaged nearly 2,800 NEET youth and under ActionAid Bangladesh, 397 young people secured leadership positions while supporting 85 youth-led organisations in 2023-2024.

### ***8.8 Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environment***

According to LFS data, 21.7 per cent of youth aged 15-29 years reported occupational injury or illness in 2023 compared to 29.5 per cent in 2016-17. Among those youth, about 8 per cent were female in 2023, which is an improvement from 18 per cent in 2016-17.

A large part of the youth are unable to secure jobs due to the lack of skill development opportunities, limited job opportunities, and an immense amount of competition in just about any existing job. A 24-year-old male participant mentioned, *"We want jobs, but we don't have the skills they ask for in interviews."* Analysing this, we can see a gap between the reality of employers and potential employees, leading to youth NEET being severely disadvantaged, posing challenges to achieving SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). The young women also fall victim to workplace

discrimination and harassment. They are struggling with education defunct to the job market and limited sustainable employment opportunities, specifically pointing out some obstacles to the development of other marginalised groups, such as women, social discrimination and stigma, as well as institutionalised discrimination against women.

Creative education, counselling, and technical training are pertinent to addressing unemployment. Marginalised groups require targeted support through psychosocial counselling, family engagement, and inclusion in practical work. A government official from the Department of Labour shared that there is significant progress in youth empowerment relevant to the SDGs. He also pointed out the establishment of daycare centres and the eradication of hazardous child labour.

In line with the above findings, about 44 per cent of young respondents from the survey perceived that there is moderate progress in youth's status in terms of securing economic development and decent work, whereas almost 36 per cent of youth felt there is low progress in SDG 8. About 31 per cent disagreed that Bangladeshi youth have adequate access to quality training and skill development for availing job opportunities, while almost 30 per cent agreed, and about a fourth were neutral that youth have access. Almost 32 per cent of participants disagreed that Bangladesh's education system is aligned with the job market, whereas almost 27 per cent were neutral, and 26 per cent agreed that there is alignment.

## Policy Challenges

The National Youth Policy 2017 (draft), formulated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Government of Bangladesh, aims to increase youth participation in national development while offering vocational training, skills development, and educational support to empower the youth, complemented by the National Plan of Action for its implementation. 'Automobile Driving Training Project', initiated from January 2021 to December 2023 has trained over 12,000 till June 2023; *TECUYB* in its 2nd phase, from January 2022 to December 2024, has technologically empowered almost 2,800 underprivileged rural youth by June 2023 by reducing the skill and information technology gap between urban and rural youth; 640 educated job-seekers benefited through *freelancing training* from July 2022 till June 2024. One of the government officials from the Department of Youth Development (DYD) said that the department, with its pragmatic, skill-based approach, had till now provided 300,000 youths with Karmomukhi Shikkha to develop self-sufficiency. (Replicating the model of DYD nationwide and

tracking progress to ensure that the trained youth are employed.) Citing successful cases such as the Transform of the Backwards Youth to Industrial Workers to Increase Productivity (TBIP) project and Labour Welfare Centres that support marginalised communities, he stressed the need for practical and entrepreneurial education.

Although the National Youth Policy 2017 lays out comprehensive strategies, its implementation has been rather uneven, with a lack of clear mechanisms for monitoring progress. The Policy is yet to be reviewed, even after 5 years of the draft formulation. Youth participation in national-level decision-making had remained symbolic, with youth not being adequately involved in governance beyond token representation. However, it is to be said to what extent the inclusion of the two new youth advisors in the new interim government will change the narrative that was mainstreamed during the regime of the previous government nationwide.

The case for creating a separate ‘Ministry for youth development’ should be strongly advocated and pursued, particularly because the budget allocation tends to focus more on “sports” than “youth”.

The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) introduced the National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) to formulate a comprehensive social safety system. Employment Generation Program for the Poorest (EGPP), Vulnerable Women Benefit (VWB) Program, Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF), Universal Pension Scheme (UPS) do have a positive impact on the youth, albeit indirectly. However, there is no programme that directly addresses youth and supports their well-being. Considering the demographic size and the fact that any current vulnerability can worsen in adulthood, the allocation of social security funds for marginalised youth needs to be prioritised.

## Way Forward

### **Recognise and track the most vulnerable among the youth**

Citizen’s Platform has identified youth as a systematically vulnerable community facing many challenges because of their inexperience; however, it is critically important to focus on the most marginalised youth in the spirit of upholding the LNOB lens. Marginalised youth in employment and education, such as youth employed in informal sectors, youth in low-paying and long working hours jobs, unemployed youth, uneducated youth and NEET, need to be recognised in policy documents, but “hijra” youth, young sex workers, and physically and mentally disabled youth tend to remain

out of focus. The omission of the other indicators under the relevant goals reflects the fact that youth disaggregated data is still limited. To mention a few, data on youth-specific digital engagement, the inclusion of young people with disabilities, diseases, mental illness, tobacco-dependence, and experiences of overseas employment, crime, violence, peace and, security are still inadequate/missing and cannot yet be compared across time with up-to-date evidence.

### **Separate “Youth” from “Sports”**

Currently, youth and sports fall under the same ministry – the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS). However, as “youth” has been recognised both nationally and internationally as a priority group from the perspective of realising the SDGs and the overall economic growth of Bangladesh, the youth must get a separate ministry dedicated to youth development issues. From the budgetary perspective, the proposed National Budget FY2024-25 has allocated MoYS a higher funding than the previous years, but it is misleading because most of the higher development funds are targeted at building infrastructure for sports rather than empowering the youth to improve their status.

### **Ensure quality education for youth**

The young generation deserves an opportunity to avail of a global standard education; therefore, the next SDG priorities call for additional funding for reforming and reshaping the education sector, reducing bureaucratic delays, and improving financial management to ensure the timely and full utilisation of allocated resources. The education budget for Bangladesh in FY2024 was 12 per cent of the total budget, which is not adequate to address the multi-faceted challenges the education sector of Bangladesh is grappling with.

### **Give special attention to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) indicators**

There is a dearth of up-to-date national statistics concerning youth for many of the indicators. However, with increasing globalisation and changing times, new health challenges arise. Therefore, a pressing need is felt to tackle mental and physical illnesses among youth attributable to cancer, diabetes, heart and breathing diseases, depression, suicide, drug abuse, and tobacco and alcohol dependency, to mention a few. Although data exist for the total population, disaggregation at age groups is necessary to assess how the growing youth population is faring.

## **Reduce the unemployment rate**

The next SDG priorities should include the unemployment issues, as the unemployment rate among graduates is the highest across all educational levels. This is a crucial goal since it is directly linked to education and training programmes that enhance the technical skills of the youth, making them more equipped to compete in the national workforce and global job markets.

Given the high numbers of unemployed youth, self-employment, vocational training, as well as fair opportunities, both in public and private sectors, can significantly reduce the job gaps. Skills-based jobs will help to employ NEET youth to address the crisis of unemployment. Experts suggest that skills training, digital literacy, and regional job creation are a must to create equal job opportunities across Bangladesh. Systemic exclusion of marginalised youth, including youth with disabilities, transgender youth, and youth vulnerable to climate change, needs to be addressed through inclusive policies and efforts. Furthermore, targeted campaigns are needed to make Bangladeshi youth more aware of SDGs.

## **Focus on the development of marginalised youth**

Making all sectors accessible and inclusive for marginalised people is the only way to make youth development inclusive. Lack of accessibility of institutions and programmes is the reason behind the lack of involvement of youth with disabilities in governance or SDG implementation processes. Inclusive policies, proper legal frameworks, targeted interventions and empowerment through awareness building, quality education, employment revamping, leadership building, and inclusive opportunities will bring a change in the implementation of SDGs where the “Leave No One Behind” principle can truly translate into actions. Marginalised groups, including individuals with disabilities and climate-affected youth, require targeted support through psychosocial counselling, family engagement, and inclusion in practical work. Systemic exclusion of marginalised youth, including youth with disabilities, transgender youth, and youth vulnerable to climate change, needs to be addressed through specialised inclusion efforts.

## **Involve youth in post-uprising reforms**

An overall lack of involvement of youth in Bangladesh’s governance structure and the implementation of SDGs is a common feature of Bangladesh. Youth’s formal representation in decision-making processes is

almost absent, despite their active and lending participation in root-level activism and community development at local levels.

In the Bangladesh 2.0 phase, the role of youth in civic and political life has never been more critical. It is important to incorporate youth contributions to formulate post-uprising reforms, especially in education, training, and employment. The youth movement that led to the regime changes of August 05th; now needs to be taken to its next logical stage, by giving the youth a voice and empowerment.

It must be realised that the underutilisation of youth talents and labour was what led to the growing dissatisfaction of youth and their questioning of the reservation of more than half the public jobs for certain groups. The new interim government include two young advisors. They are advocating for people's voting rights, the restoration of democracy, and the elimination of discrimination and injustice from society. To keep the momentum going, youth may be mobilised in a way that blends young and seasoned politicians in every ministry. Bright young people committed to the life of public service may be selected through a competitive process. They may then be put under the mentorship of experienced and honest policymakers to gain experience and learn the ropes of policymaking and statecraft.

In further validating the importance of youth engagement in the governance structure, the online survey found that 32 per cent of respondents agreed that youth should have scope and space to participate in the governance structure and have a say in the decision-making process (30 per cent were neutral and 27 per cent disagreed with this view).

## References

- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2024a). Labour force survey 2023 Bangladesh. [http://nsds.bbs.gov.bd/storage/files/1/Publications/LFS/LFS%202023%20Final%20report\\_compressed.pdf](http://nsds.bbs.gov.bd/storage/files/1/Publications/LFS/LFS%202023%20Final%20report_compressed.pdf)
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2024b). Bangladesh sample vital statistics 2023. [http://nsds.bbs.gov.bd/storage/files/1/Publications/SVRS/SVRS%202023%20Final%20Report\\_web.pdf](http://nsds.bbs.gov.bd/storage/files/1/Publications/SVRS/SVRS%202023%20Final%20Report_web.pdf)
- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Bangladesh. (2023). Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2022 Key Indicators Report. Retrieved from <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/PR148/PR148.pdf>
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2023a). Population and Housing Census 2022 (National Report Volume I). [https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4\\_956b\\_45ca\\_872f\\_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2024-01-31-15-51-b53c55dd692233ae401ba013060b9cbb.pdf](https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4_956b_45ca_872f_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2024-01-31-15-51-b53c55dd692233ae401ba013060b9cbb.pdf)
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2023b). Report on Time Use Survey 2021. Retrieved from [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)
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2023c). Survey on ICT Use and Access by Individuals and Households 2022. Retrieved from [https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4\\_956b\\_45ca\\_872f\\_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2023-07-09-09-26-e60a80d559ab625529faa94185d8f4e3.pdf](https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4_956b_45ca_872f_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2023-07-09-09-26-e60a80d559ab625529faa94185d8f4e3.pdf)
- Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics. (2022). Bangladesh education statistics 2021. [https://banbeis.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/banbeis.portal.gov.bd/npfblock/Bangladesh%20Education%20Statistics%202021\\_compressed-1-235.pdf](https://banbeis.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/banbeis.portal.gov.bd/npfblock/Bangladesh%20Education%20Statistics%202021_compressed-1-235.pdf)
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2021). Bangladesh sample vital statistics 2020. [https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4\\_956b\\_45ca\\_872f\\_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2021-06-28-07-11-c1784c6fe700cf52ff934e8dd7cf9147.pdf](https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4_956b_45ca_872f_4cf9b2f1a6e0/2021-06-28-07-11-c1784c6fe700cf52ff934e8dd7cf9147.pdf)
- International Labour Organization. (2020). Understanding the gender composition and experience of ready-made garment (RMG) workers in Bangladesh. Retrieved from [https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/@ilo-dhaka/documents/publication/wcms\\_754669.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/@ilo-dhaka/documents/publication/wcms_754669.pdf)

- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Bangladesh. (2019). Bangladesh demographic and health survey 2017-18 Key indicators. Retrieved from <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/PR104/PR104.pdf>
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2018). Labour force survey 2016-17 Bangladesh. [https://mole.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mole.portal.gov.bd/page/ac7088c7\\_a211\\_4905\\_9ff3\\_1e62af00c837/LFS\\_2016-17\\_compressed.pdf](https://mole.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mole.portal.gov.bd/page/ac7088c7_a211_4905_9ff3_1e62af00c837/LFS_2016-17_compressed.pdf)
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2016). Report on Violence Against Women (VAW) Survey 2015. Retrieved from <http://203.112.218.65:8008/WebTestApplication/userfiles/Image/LatestReports/VAWSurvey2015.pdf>
- Ministry of Finance, Government of Bangladesh. (2024). Development budget (In Brief). Retrieved from [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget\\_mof/04f27617\\_11c7\\_4b09\\_aa1f\\_44a22090fb0b/37-136d%20\(1\).pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/budget_mof/04f27617_11c7_4b09_aa1f_44a22090fb0b/37-136d%20(1).pdf)
- Ministry of Youth and Sports, Government of Bangladesh. (2017). National youth policy 2017. Retrieved from [https://dyd.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/dyd.portal.gov.bd/policies/21e565b2\\_252f\\_4f80\\_bfce\\_31a1cb33163d/Draft%20English%20Version%20of%20National%20Youth%20Policy%202017%20\(1\).pdf](https://dyd.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/dyd.portal.gov.bd/policies/21e565b2_252f_4f80_bfce_31a1cb33163d/Draft%20English%20Version%20of%20National%20Youth%20Policy%202017%20(1).pdf)
- The Commonwealth. (2024). Global youth development index update report. Retrieved from [https://production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2024-04/commonwealth-global-youth-development-index-update-report-2023\\_d19495\\_0.pdf?VersionId=IMu\\_XWyj0uzq\\_9dZdjtSY07mYCPUWAza](https://production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2024-04/commonwealth-global-youth-development-index-update-report-2023_d19495_0.pdf?VersionId=IMu_XWyj0uzq_9dZdjtSY07mYCPUWAza)
- United Nations Population Fund. (n.d.). World population dashboard Bangladesh. Retrieved January 23, 2025, from <https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population/BD>

## Annex

*List of organisations involved in conducting FGDs and KIIs:*

- Access Bangladesh Foundation
- Bandhu Social Welfare
- Caritas Bangladesh
- EDUCO
- Good Neighbours Bangladesh
- JAGO NARI
- Plan International
- Save the Children
- SERAC Bangladesh
- UCEP Bangladesh
- World Vision Bangladesh
- Youth for Change Bangladesh Foundation



# Unlocking Children's Promises

*An Assessment of Progress on SDG Implementation*

## **Anchor organisation**

Save the Children in Bangladesh

## **Associate organisations**

Bandhu Social Welfare Society

Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center

BRAC

Campaign for Popular Education

Caritas Bangladesh

Education and Development Foundation

JAAGO Foundation

Light House

Plan International Bangladesh

SOS Children's Villages Bangladesh

The Fred Hollow Foundation Bangladesh

World Vision Bangladesh

Youth for Change Bangladesh Foundation

## **Penholder**

*Md. Zafar Sadique*

Advisor, Investment in Children

Save the Children in Bangladesh

## Key messages

- Absence of robust, disaggregated data limits the ability to track child-related SDG progress. Strengthening national data systems, integrating multiple sources, and using technology-driven solutions are essential for effective policy responses.
- Marginalised children, including those living in urban informal settlements, remote and disaster-prone regions, and ethnic communities, face severe inequalities in accessing services, particularly education, healthcare, and social protection services. Targeted investments and interventions are required to bridge these gaps.
- Despite Bangladesh's track record in adopting child-focused policies, weak enforcement, dated legal provisions, and lack of institutional coordination have limited their impacts. Urgent and concrete measures are needed towards strong enforcement and robust oversight of policy implementation.
- The growing violence of child rights in the form of online abuse and violence by teen gangs, and also risks arising from climate-induced vulnerabilities, mental health problems and social and behavioural changes, calls for targeted policy reforms increased investment, and establishment of a dedicated child rights oversight body.

## Context

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has underscored the importance of protecting and promoting the well-being of children worldwide. Children in Bangladesh face a diverse range of vulnerabilities that demand urgent attention on the part of all concerned stakeholders to achieve the SDGs. Their challenges are multifaceted, deeply rooted, and shaped by socioeconomic, geographic, and systemic factors, including relevant policies that intersect to create compounding disadvantages. As Bangladesh prepares to present its third VNR report at the 2025 HLPF, a focused review on children and their vulnerabilities is necessary to highlight progress, identify gaps, and come up with policies that safeguard the future of Bangladesh's youngest citizens.

The 2030 Agenda Declaration emphasises that those who are vulnerable must be empowered. Those whose needs are reflected in the Agenda include all children, youth, persons with disabilities (of whom more than 80 per cent live in poverty), people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants (Para 23).

Children in Bangladesh face multiple vulnerabilities that impede their ability to fully benefit from, and contribute to, Bangladesh's sustainable developmental progress. Children from economically fragile households and communities facing social and cultural disruptions, such as those from low-income families with limited access to fundamental rights, urban children in informal settlements, children from indigenous and minority communities, children with disabilities, adolescent girls, and those living in coastal, remote, and disaster-prone areas require targeted interventions to ensure equitable progress.

These vulnerable groups of children face systemic barriers in accessing education, healthcare, protection, and economic opportunities, eventually perpetuating the cycles of poverty and exclusion and leading to adverse outcomes. Without addressing these challenges, Bangladesh risks leaving a significant part of its population behind, ultimately slowing its progress towards sustainable development.

As noted, children comprise about 40 per cent of Bangladesh's population and are an important stakeholder group in achieving Bangladesh's sustainable

development objectives. As the country navigates its demographic dividend and deals with its youth bulge, ensuring the well-being and development of its children has emerged as a key driver for long-term progress.

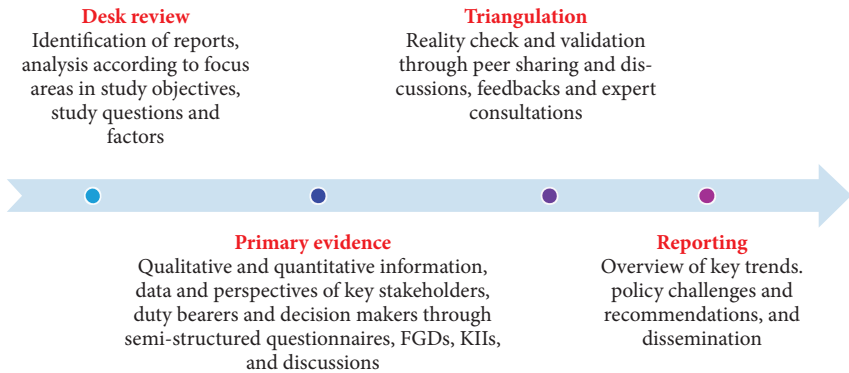
Over the past five years, the country has faced multiple challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, global supply chain disruptions, and inflationary pressure driven by geopolitical conflicts and other factors. These have disproportionately affected the most marginalised populations, including children, exacerbating vulnerabilities and deepening inequalities.

With Bangladesh's upcoming graduation from least developed country (LDC) status, the years ahead will be critical and important in terms of investing in human capital, and this will call for increased attention to child-focused programmes, policies, and strategies for inclusive development.

### **The process**

The primary objective of this chapter is to review Bangladesh's progress in advancing children's well-being in alignment with the SDGs, with a core focus on VNR 2025 priority areas (i.e., Goals 3,5,8,14, and 17), and to identify the existing challenges and gaps in this progress. Specifically, the report seeks to review the progress and limitations in achieving child-focused SDG targets, putting emphasis on enabling factors and barriers that influence outcomes. It also aims to assess the initiatives undertaken by the government and the complementary supportive role played by civil society organisations (CSOs) to enhance children's rights, development, and protection. Furthermore, the chapter examines policies impacting children's well-being, identifies critical policy gaps, and provides actionable recommendations to strengthen child-focused programmes and interventions for a more inclusive and sustainable future.

This assessment employs a mixed-method approach, combining a comprehensive review of secondary data with qualitative assessment through consultations and expert opinion. The study team performed a resource mapping exercise, and a secondary data review identified relevant stakeholders and examined government, CSO, and academic reports on child-focused SDGs to track progress and identify policy gaps and persisting challenges.

**Figure 1: Analytical Framework**

*Source: Author's elaboration.*

Following the above, different stakeholder groups were engaged in collecting primary data. Field-level information has been collected through a total of 14 consultations with children (hereinafter referred to as 'consultations', unless otherwise stated) and one with parents (see Annexe Table 1 for details), alongside in-depth discussions with experts. Sub-divisional level consultations have been conducted, ensuring representation of different children's groups such as children engaged in work, school-going marginalised children, children from Adivasi, Bede and horizon communities, and children engaged with CSO activities from 16 districts. Different children's groups provided additional insights into their experiences with SDG targets. Save the Children in Bangladesh, along with support from the Citizen's Platform Secretariat and partners, coordinated workshops, focus group sessions, and validation work to ensure comprehensive feedback.

### **Limitations of the chapter**

The study serves as an alternative citizen's view regarding Bangladesh's VNR 2025 process, assessing SDG progress with a focus on key child-related priorities. It highlights a number of critically important areas, such as ensuring good health and well-being for all children, addressing gender issues linked with child marriage, and examining decent work conditions, including child labour concerns. The chapter also discusses various forms of development partnerships under the ambit of Goal 17, including financing, technology, capacity building, and systemic issues for development, with an emphasis on children's participation as key stakeholders in decisions that are in their best interests.

However, due to the specific priority areas of the current VNR cycle, this review provides limited coverage of other areas concerning children, such as poverty, food security and nutrition, inclusive education, sanitation and hygiene, child protection, violence against children, governance, and broader child rights issues.

## Review of SDG Progress

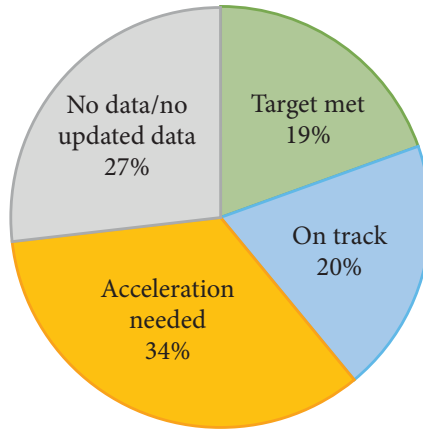
Bangladesh has demonstrated a strong commitment to the SDGs since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, achieving notable progress despite facing various socioeconomic challenges in the course of the journey so far. However, the 2024 SDG Index ranked Bangladesh at 107<sup>th</sup> position (Sachs *et al.*, 2024). With 29.7 per cent of SDG targets achieved or on track, highlighting significant systemic challenges in important areas such as safeguarding gender equality, ensuring decent work, reducing inequality, and advancing climate action. The ranking underscores the need for enhanced efforts in view of sustainable practices, resource mobilisation, and tackling policy gaps to achieve SDG targets by 2030.

While all 17 SDGs are relevant for children, UNICEF (2023) has identified 48 child-specific indicators<sup>13</sup> across various goals to track. Bangladesh has data on 42 of the 48 indicators. While many available indicators entail urgent attention and accelerated push to meet the targets, several indicators require appropriate levels of data disaggregation and information update since 2019 (Figure 2). JFB (2024) highlights the absence of a child-specific indicator for SDG 10 on reducing inequality a critical gap in ensuring equal opportunities for all children to grow to their full potential. Consultation respondents across locations also highlighted the persistent rise of inequality in Bangladesh over the years and its adverse impact on securing children's rights.

From a child rights perspective, SDG progress is crucial for enabling a healthy, safe, and equitable environment for children. This chapter examines the SDG progress in Bangladesh, in line with the VNR priorities, on Goals 3 (Good Health and Well-being), 5 (Gender Equality), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 14 (Life Below Water), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), highlighting key issues, trends, policy gaps, and challenges associated with these goals.

---

<sup>13</sup>14 indicators are related to survival, 14 are for learning, 8 are for protection, 6 are related to environment, and 6 are related to child poverty measures. However, the relation of child-related indicators to official SDG indicators is complicated. While official SDG indicators have a broader scope, UNICEF monitors only the child-focused elements from those.

**Figure 2: Bangladesh's Child-related SDG Indicators**

*Source: Author's elaboration from UNICEF, 2023.*

### **SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being**

**Key issues.** SDG 3 focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all, a goal central to children's survival, development, and overall quality of life. In Bangladesh, children face significant health challenges, including malnutrition, limited and unequitable access to quality healthcare services, and high rates of communicable and non-communicable diseases. Early marriage and consequentially high adolescent birth rates further compound the challenges. Vulnerabilities to injuries and fatalities caused by traffic accidents, drowning and suicide have also remained as elements of concern as far as children were concerned. These highlight the urgent need for improved mental health and psychosocial support services for children and greater public awareness about these problems. Bangladesh experiences one of the highest out-of-pocket health expenditures in the region. Investments in public health infrastructure and support remain insufficient, leading to suboptimal health outcomes for children. The low density and uneven distribution of health workers, particularly in remote areas, further hinder access to essential healthcare services.

UN 2030 Agenda visioned a world with equitable and universal access to quality education at all levels, health care, and social protection, where physical, mental and social well-being is assured.

*Progress trends – SDG 3*

**Child and maternal mortality.** Bangladesh has made commendable progress in reducing neonatal and under-five mortality till 2020 through expanded immunisation programmes and initiatives like community clinics. Expanded antenatal care (ANC) services, increased access to skilled birth attendance, mass awareness, and several NGO interventions have contributed to notable improvements in reducing maternal mortality in recent times. Sub-national consultations also reflect positive community perceptions about these improvements. However, recent BBS (2024) data show reversed neonatal and under-five mortality trends, with inconsistent immunisation coverage, particularly in remote and rural areas, contributing to this regression.

**Table 1. Progress in Key Health-related Indicators**

Neo-natal mortality Baseline: 20 (2015) Progress: 16 (2021) 20 (2023) Target: 12 (2030) Status: <b>Trend reversed</b>	U5 mortality Baseline: 36 (2015) Progress: 28 (2021) 33 (2023) Target: 25 (2030) Status: <b>Trend reversed</b>	Maternal mortality Baseline: 181 (2015) Progress: 136 (2023) Target: 70 (2030) Status: <b>Off track</b>	Adolescent birth rate Baseline: 75% (2015) Progress: 72% (2021) 84% (2023) Target: 50% (2030) Status: <b>Trend reversed</b>
--	---	---	--

*Source: BBS (2024); NIPORT & ICF (2023) and GoB (n.d.).*

As regards maternal mortality, a significant decline has been observed, thanks to a drastic improvement in the urban regions—56 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2023 from 135 deaths in 2022. However, the precision of this estimate is unsure due to the limited sample size. In contrast, maternal mortality in rural areas remains high, reflecting signs of stagnation and persistent disparities. Given the current trends, achieving the 2030 maternal mortality reduction targets appears highly unlikely.

**Nutrition outcomes.** Child malnutrition continues to be a key public health concern. The 2022 data on the practice of exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months shows a reversal trend (Table 2). 49 per cent of children aged 6-23 months consume an

**Anaemia**

Baseline: 40% (2012)  
 Progress: 37% (2019)  
 Target: 20% (2030)  
 Status: Slow progress; No updated data

unhealthy diet, and one-third regularly drink sweet beverages. Children’s consultations revealed that rising food prices have forced poor households to cut their expenditures on nutritious foods and protein, while meal skipping among children has become frequent. Demographic and Health Survey 2022 recorded that 61 per cent of children now consume minimum acceptable meals compared to 81 per cent in 2017. Undernutrition, driven by the lack of availability of affordable food, is evident in high wasting rates that lead to prolonged illness and long-term health consequences for children.

**Table 2: Current Nutrition Indicators of Bangladesh Children**

Exclusively breastfed Baseline: 55% (2014) Progress: 65% (2017) 55% (2022) Status: <b>Trend reversed</b>	Minimum Diet Score Baseline: 23 (2014) Progress: 35 (2017) 29 (2022) Status: <b>Trend reversed</b>	Stunting Baseline: 42% (2012-13) Progress: 24% (2022) Target: 16% (2030) Status: <b>On track</b>	Wasting Baseline: 9.6% (2012-13) Progress: 11% (2022) Target: 5% (2030) Status: <b>Off track</b>
--	---	--	---

*Source: BBS (2024); NIPORT & ICF (2023) and GoB (n.d.).*

**Child deaths caused by different diseases.** Communicable diseases remain a leading cause of death among newborns and under-5 children in Bangladesh. Vector-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue, waterborne illnesses like cholera and diarrhoea, and respiratory infections like pneumonia pose significant health risks. Pneumonia (42 per cent of deaths) and diarrhoea (11 per cent of deaths) are the leading causes of death in children aged 1-11 months. Tuberculosis in children also remains a key public health concern. Many NGOs undertake extensive work to combat diseases such as malaria and TB. Additionally, climate-induced changes, such as intense heat and cold waves, further exacerbate infections and heat-caused complications among children. Consultations with children indicate that many in their communities who are engaged in economic work, staying in informal settlements, or exposed to various calamities suffer from respiratory infections, skin diseases, waterborne diseases, and other long-term health issues more frequently.

As noted, non-communicable diseases or chronic diseases are increasingly affecting children, often resulting from a combination of genetic, physiological, environmental, and behavioural factors. Marginalised children are disproportionately impacted because of unhealthy dietary patterns, limited access to safe food, clean air, and water, as well as exposure to pollution.

**Fatal causes of injuries.** Drowning, suicide, and road traffic injuries are three prime causes of fatalities among children aged 0-17 in Bangladesh (Rahman & Rahman, 2020). Bangladesh has one of the highest drowning fatality rates anywhere, with drowning being the leading cause of death (46 per cent) among children aged 1-4 years (NIPORT & ICF, 2023). On average, 40 children drown every day, although comprehensive national data on children’s drowning incidents are not available. Community-led interventions, such as caregiver supervision or home-based crèches, have been shown to reduce drowning by 88 per cent in rural households (Alonge *et al.*, 2020). Other practical measures identified through NGO interventions are swimming lessons, first aid training, fencing around neighbourhood waterbodies and awareness campaigns to enhance prevention efforts. Building on these findings, the government of Bangladesh approved a three-year-long USD 32 million project in 2022 to scale up drowning prevention efforts. This initiative includes establishing 8,000 community daycare centres and providing survival swimming lessons.

The latest data shows an increasing trend in suicide mortality rates, particularly following the COVID-19 period. While no official data exists on child suicidal mortality, evidence from over 150 national and local dailies compiled by Aachol Foundation revealed that over 500 students have died by suicide annually since 2022, of which 50 per cent was made up by school students (Anadolu Agency, 2023; TDS, 2024; TBS, 2025). Emotional distress is identified as the leading cause, accounting for over 30 per cent of cases, followed by issues related to relationships, mental health conditions, issues at school, and domestic violence or different types of abuse. Female students represented 60 per cent of the cases. However, the actual scope of the crisis may be far greater, as many deaths and attempts remain unreported, particularly in rural areas, and out-of-school children, who often lack access to institutional support, are excluded from available data. Children are increasingly becoming vulnerable to road

#### ***Suicide mortality***

Baseline: 7.7%  
Progress: 8.8% (BBS, 2024)  
Target: Reduce 3.5% (2025) and 2.4% (2030)  
Status: Reversed trend; No official child suicide data

#### ***Traffic injury death***

Baseline: 0.01 (2015)  
Progress: 0.01 (2021)  
Target: 0.01 (2030)  
Status: Lack of child data

traffic injuries. Consultation with children revealed that children engaged in transport sectors are prone to traffic accidents. However, the lack of a comprehensive traffic injury database makes it difficult to assess the extent of child fatalities and injuries. The government introduced the Road Transport Rules in 2022 to clarify provisions in the newly overhauled Road Transport Act of 2018. However, road transport discipline remains challenging due to weak oversight of enforced traffic laws and a lack of awareness, resulting in reckless driving, unhealthy competition among public transport operators, driver fatigue and mental stress caused by excessive work hours and traffic congestion.

***Adolescence and mental health concerns:*** Despite the nationwide implementation of adolescent-friendly health services, adolescents encounter multiple social barriers in accessing sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information and services (Ainul *et al.*, 2017).

Mental health, a taboo in Bangladeshi society, is a growing concern for children in Bangladesh, with 12.6 per cent of children experiencing mental disorders according to the National Mental Health Survey 2018-19. The current mental health expenditure is only 0.44 per cent of the total public health budget (Hasan *et al.*, 2021). Most people afflicted with the situation usually do not seek medical help or consult a specialist, and mental health problems often remain unrecognised due to social unawareness. Qualified mental health specialists are usually located in big cities, and the high cost of accessing their services makes treatment inaccessible for many. Children with disabilities who require more mental support face significant barriers, including discrimination, exclusion and neglect, limited accessibility and inadequate support in primary and mental health services.

***Access to public health services:*** JFB (2024) highlighted persistent disparities in accessing primary health services based on economic class (urban poor), geographic locations and hard-to-reach areas (i.e., chars, haors and CHTs<sup>14</sup>), and other characteristics (including ethnicity). Sub-national consultations conducted for this report also support this statement. Government policy provides free primary healthcare access for children under 5. Demographic and Health Survey (2022) data indicate that gaps exist in access to health facilities for childbirth and ANC between the poorest and richest wealth quintiles. Several consultations revealed that children and mothers from all fronts are not getting better services (child-related) at government hospitals, and many prefer local pharmacies over primary healthcare facilities in the

---

<sup>14</sup>hard-to-reach rural areas includes char (riverine silt islands), haors (low-lying depressions filled with water during the rainy season), coastal belts and Chattogram hill tracts (CHTs), among others.

case of general diseases and consultations. Respondents also argued that they face discrimination at government hospitals where nepotism and bribery to access services are pervasive. The discussion also revealed the common problems in government hospitals, i.e. unequal distribution of health workers, lack of diagnostic test facilities, limited availability of essential medicines, and lack of availability of paediatrics.

**Health financing:** Public spending on health remains low, with only 5 per cent of total government expenditure, while out-of-pocket costs remain disproportionately high and account for 74 per cent of total expenditure for health. WHO and World Bank (2023) estimate that medicines account for up to 70 per cent of out-of-pocket spending, and such spending is a major driver of financial hardship. This financial burden makes quality, affordable healthcare inaccessible for low-income households, particularly affecting children.

<p><b>Net ODA to medical research and basic health sector</b>                      Baseline: USD 177m (2015)                      Progress: USD 617m (2023)                      Target: USD 500m (2030)                      Status: Target met</p>	<p><b>Health spending as a share of HH spending</b>                      Baseline: 24.7% (HIES, 2016)                      Progress: 24.4% (WHO, 2023)                      Target: 15% (2030)                      Status: Off track</p>	<p><b>Universal Health coverage</b>                      Baseline: 52% (2016)                      Progress: 54% (2019)                      Target: 100% (2030)                      Status: Off track</p>
--	---	---

Mahumud *et al.* (2019) argued that socioeconomic inequality undermines universal health coverage in Bangladesh, with teenage pregnancy, maternal education gaps, inadequate care, low immunisation, and climate-induced diseases significantly impacting children’s health and well-being, particularly among disadvantaged families.

## SDG 5: Gender Equality

**Key issues.** SDG 5 seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, with an emphasis on eradicating harmful practices such as child marriage, which remains prevalent in Bangladesh despite ongoing efforts. Adolescent pregnancy is directly associated with early marriage, which has negative impacts on their health, education, and economic opportunities. GBV is another significant barrier to gender equality, affecting women, girls, and marginalised groups disproportionately. GBV cases, domestic violence and online harassment, have surged due to heightened economic stress and digital exposure in the post-COVID-19 period. Gender inequality often intersects with other factors, such as disability, old age, poverty, ethnicity,

or living in remote areas, leading to severe financial and social exclusion (ADB, 2022). Girls face greater climate vulnerability due to restricted access to information, which heightens risks of GBV, child marriage, and challenges in maintaining menstrual hygiene (Akter, 2022; Gomes et al., 2022; GiHA, 2023).

The UN Agenda 2030 Vision envisions a world which invests in its children and in which every child grows up free from violence and exploitation (Para 8).

### *Progress trends – SDG 5*

**Gender parity.** Bangladesh ranks 99<sup>th</sup> out of 146 economies in the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index 2024, marking a sharp decline of 49 places from its 50<sup>th</sup> position in 2020—the steepest drop among all reported countries. The country performed strongly only in the political empowerment subindex, securing the 7<sup>th</sup> position, while it experienced significant setbacks in child-related subindices, such as economic participation (146<sup>th</sup>), education (125<sup>th</sup>), and health (129<sup>th</sup>). Bangladesh’s female labour force participation rate remains below 50 per cent.

Women remain underrepresented in STEM occupations compared to men. While Bangladesh has made commendable progress in achieving gender parity in school enrolment, girls continue to lag behind

boys in areas such as educational quality, STEM education, and online skilling, particularly in fields such as AI, big data, programming, networks, and cybersecurity.

*“My elder brother is a youth with disabilities, my mother always encourages me in my education. She continually inspiring me to continue my studies, as girls and boys have equal rights to grow. She believes I can achieve great things in future just like other boys”*

**Ratri. 15. Fulbaria. Jamalour**

**Child marriage.** Bangladesh experiences a high prevalence of child marriage, with 51.4 per cent of girls getting married before the age of 18. A Save the Children (n.d.) survey conducted in 2024 revealed 62.3 per cent of early marriage at informal settlements in Dhaka and Chattogram cities. Legislative changes, awareness campaigns and grassroots programmes have

contributed to some decline in child marriage rates, but cultural and socioeconomic factors continue to impede progress at a faster pace. Child marriage remains high, particularly in Rajshahi and Khulna regions. Several children's groups, during sub-national consultations, opined that child marriage has increased in their communities in recent times. In Santal communities, almost every girl gets married before the age of 18. On the other hand, in Bede communities, many boys also get married before 21 years of age.

***Child marriage before 18***

Baseline: 59 (DHS 2017-18)

Progress: 51.4 (MICS 2019)

51.0 (DHS 2022)

40.8 (SVRS 2022)

41.6 (SVRS 2023)

Target: 10 (2030)

Status: Off track

Despite government efforts to increase girls' enrolment and retention, dropout rates among adolescent girls remain high, with early marriage being a key factor (CAMPE, 2023), while Asadullah et al. (2024) argue that educational interventions alone cannot resolve the issue. A holistic approach, including legal enforcement, community awareness, and economic support, is essential to keeping girls in school as well as tackling child marriage.

***GBV and violence against women and children.*** A BRAC study documented a nearly 70 per cent increase in violence against women and girls during the country's 2020 lockdowns due to COVID-19 (Sharmin *et al.*, 2020). A Plan International Bangladesh (2021a) study highlights that girls and women experienced physical, mental, and emotional harassment in various settings such as families, educational institutions, workplaces, society, and social media. During sub-national consultations, participating children shared that they feel safer at home and in schools compared to before. However, the situation has worsened on their way to school and within community spaces. The rise of teen gangs in communities is becoming a significant issue. Additionally, digital violence is also rising; with increased internet penetration and online exposure, children, especially girls, become vulnerable to cyber threats, harassment, and exploitation (Plan International Bangladesh, 2021b).

Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC) remains a critical issue in Bangladesh, disproportionately affecting vulnerable children, including those engaged in labour, domestic work, and street life. Child workers, particularly in informal sectors, face physical abuse, exploitation, and hazardous working conditions, with girls often at risk of sexual violence. Children engaged in domestic work, largely girls, endure long hours, restricted mobility, and

frequent mistreatment, including verbal, physical, and sexual abuse (BILS, 2023). Consultation with children engaged in domestic work also reveals that children often face physical and mental violence. Children living on the street and in informal settings and lacking family protection, face deprivation extreme poverty, malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, and violence and are highly exposed to trafficking, exploitation, and police harassment. According to BBS and UNICEF (2023), eight in ten children living and working on the streets reported abuse or harassment by pedestrians.

During natural calamities, children in shelter homes face increased risks of abuse, including sexual violence and neglect, as weak monitoring and overcrowded facilities create unsafe environments. Despite legal frameworks, gaps in enforcement, social norms, and economic vulnerabilities perpetuate these risks.

### **SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth**

*Key issues.* SDG 8 promotes inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all, with a focus on protecting children from child labour. Child labour has been a longstanding social condition in Bangladesh. Bangladesh faces high rates of child labour, particularly in informal sectors, exposing children to hazardous working conditions and depriving them of education and development opportunities, while social protection investment for children remains inadequate.

#### *Progress trends – SDG 8*

*Issues of child labour.* According to the National Child Labour Survey (NCLS) 2022, approximately 3.5 million children aged 5 to 17 or 8.9 per cent of total children in Bangladesh are engaged in economic work. Seventy-seven per cent of them are boys. Child labour<sup>15</sup> has increased over the past decade, rising to 1.8 million in 2022 from 1.7 million in 2013. Of these, about one-third, or 1.07 million, are involved in hazardous work, putting their health, safety, and development at risk. These children are predominantly employed in sectors such as agriculture, domestic service, and informal industries, which often operate outside regulatory oversight. Sub-national consultation reveals that many Santal children, both girls and boys, are involved in work in the

---

<sup>15</sup> Child labour is defined as work that exceeds a certain number of hours based on a child's age and the type of work. For children aged 5 to 11, it includes at least 1 hour of economic work or 28 hours of domestic work per week. For those aged 12 to 14, it involves at least 14 hours of economic work or 28 hours of domestic work weekly. For adolescents aged 15 to 17, child labour occurs when a child works 43 or more hours per week in either economic or domestic activities.

agriculture sector at a very early age of 7-8 years. With the SDG target to eliminate child labour by 2025, Bangladesh is miles away from achieving this.

### **Biru's dreams on hold**

The Santal community in Natore, one of Bangladesh's 64 districts, faces greater discrimination and deprivation than others. Around 45 families, comprising over 300 people, live in an informal settlement on abandoned government land near the township. They struggle to access government healthcare services and do not receive free medicines that the state provides, forcing them to buy medicines privately. Their access to clean drinking water is also compromised, as their community is located beside North Bengal's largest leather warehouse, exposing more children to contamination and health hazards. Child marriage is widespread, with most girls married off before the age of 18 due to social pressure, poverty, and insecurity. Many become young mothers more frequently, exposing both young mothers and their newborns to serious health, nutrition, and socio-economic challenges.

Biru (pseudonym), a 16-year-old from the Santal community, is engaged in economic activities while striving for education. He completed fifth grade at a flexible NGO school near his home while working. However, he is now unable to enrol in the mainstream sixth grade due to national education policies that does not enroll in the mainstream sixth grade due to national education policies that is not allow admission to children over 13 years of age. With no government provisions for working children at Natore and limited non-formal alternatives, hundreds face uncertain access to their future education.

To safeguard the future of these children and uphold their right to education and access to essential services, the government must address policy gaps and take decisive actions to prevent systemic exclusion, ensuring no child is left behind due to bureaucratic red tape, neglect, or state inaction.

*Source: Based on consultation with children engaged in work held in Natore, Bangladesh (2024).*

***Budget for child-focused social protection.*** Government of Bangladesh claims to have increased budget allocations for social protection over the years. However, experts argue that many components included in these allocations do not strictly qualify as social protection measures, and the programmes that are undertaken suffer from mistargeting and inadequate coverage issues.

Children's representation in the social safety net programme (SSNP) spending remains disproportionately low. Estimates by Save the Children (n.d.) indicate that the budget share for 17 identified child-focused programmes within the SSNP decreased to 6.9 per cent in 2023 from 7.7 per cent in the fiscal year 2022. The fiscal year 2025 SSNP budget further raises concerns, as it reflects the withdrawal or completion of programmes related to street children without any announced plans for renewal.

## **SDG 14: Life Below Water**

**Key issues.** SDG 14 aims to conserve and sustainably use marine resources, which is essential for the livelihoods of coastal communities and environmental health. Children in Bangladesh's coastal regions are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of environmental degradation, pollution, and climate change, which threaten food security, health, and future opportunities.

### *Progress trends – SDG 14*

Efforts to protect marine ecosystems in Bangladesh include restrictions on overfishing, pollution controls, and coastal preservation initiatives. In 2022, the government declared approximately 8.8 per cent of its Exclusive Economic Zone as Marine Protected Areas, aiming to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. However, enforcement remains weak, and pollution from industrial waste and plastics continues to degrade marine environments, impacting biodiversity and communities reliant on fisheries.

Consultations with children reveal that many are unfamiliar with the concept of the blue economy. However, youth activists have been actively engaged in organising activities and campaigns on environmental conservation, including safe and sustainable use of marine resources. The growing participation of children and young people in coastal cleanup programmes highlights increasing awareness among younger generations.

## **SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals**

**Key issues.** SDG 17 emphasises the importance of strengthening partnerships for sustainable development. Robust partnerships are essential at local, national, and international levels amongst duty bearers, rights holders (i.e. children, parents and community) and relevant stakeholders to support resource mobilisation, knowledge sharing, and technical cooperation for child rights and welfare.

### *Progress trends – SDG 17*

**Partnership and association.** Bangladesh is engaged in various international and regional partnerships to support SDG initiatives, including alliances with UN agencies and development organisations. Bangladesh has seen increased engagement of CSOs and international agencies in advancing child rights within the SDG framework. UNICEF and INGOs such as Save the Children and child rights alliances (i.e., CRAC, B, JFB, etc.) have

collaborated with the government on child-focused SDG implementation. However, challenges remain in coordinating the efforts among diverse stakeholders and securing sustained financial and technical support.

NGOs working on child rights play a vital role in facilitating the development of child associations, enabling children to voice their concerns and participate in decision-making processes. Sustainability of these associations remains a challenge due to the absence of legal provisions for their registration.

**Birth registration.** Birth registration is mandatory in Bangladesh, and it is an important identification to access various rights of children. In many instances, a lack of birth registration documents makes it difficult to accurately determine a child's age and gain access to many fundamental rights. Currently, only 40 per cent of children aged 0-5 years in Bangladesh are birth registered, which is only 32.5 per cent in urban areas (BBS, 2024). Save the Children Survey 2024 found that about 75 per cent of children at informal settlements in Dhaka and Chattogram remain outside the birth registration scopes.

**Financing for children.** Another important issue is the underfunding of child-focused programmes. Bangladesh government reported a child-focused budget from fiscal year 2016 to fiscal year 2020, integrating a child module in the integrated budget and accounting system (iBAS) with a target to raise investment in children to 20 per cent of the national budget. However, this reporting has been stopped since 2020. Save the Children estimated that allocation is somewhat below 15 per cent of the national budget for FY2025 for programmes towards children. The 2025 budget allocated only 1.8 per cent of GDP to education, far below the global recommendation of 4-6 per cent. CSOs have advocated for increased investment, proper implementation and better management of child-focused programmes with the highest priorities and efficiency.

**Child participation.** There is no established institutional mechanism in place to ensure children's responsible participation in the public decision-making process in Bangladesh. Participants in the sub-national consultation said that they have very little opportunity to talk publicly about their needs. Participation of children in the policy-making process and SDG monitoring is still limited. While some initiatives, such as the Child Parliament, have provided platforms for children's voices, their recommendations are hardly heard and integrated into national policy decisions.

**Data sensitivity.** As a critical enabler, updated and appropriately disaggregated child-specific data are essential for effective monitoring of

the SDG progress. Different administrative records, NGO/CSO-generated programme data and technology-enabled system data can play an important role in tracking progress and identifying gaps. Recognising the need for better coordination, relevant ministries have initiated efforts to integrate their Management Information System (MIS) data to enhance service delivery for the targeted population.

## Policy Challenges

The Constitution of Bangladesh provides explicit guarantees to exercise a wide range of civil and political rights for every citizen. Bangladesh has been a party to ratify all nine core human rights treaties (ICCPR, ICESCR, CRC, ICERD, CEDAW, CAT, ICMW, CRPD), and the one on protection from enforced disappearance (ICPED) in August 2024.

## Policy landscape

In the last decade, GoB has undertaken a number of child-focused acts, policies, strategies and action plans to address systemic barriers, strengthen child rights, and create a more child-friendly environment (Annexe Table 2). Key legal and operational frameworks such as the Children Act, National Children Policy, Education Policy, Health Policy, and the National Social Security Strategy provide a strong foundation for protecting and promoting child rights, survival, and development. Bangladesh has undertaken comprehensive sectoral policies as well. For example, Bangladesh has demonstrated a significant commitment to health sector development. According to WHO (2024), the country has national policies or guidelines covering all 14 areas of sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health (SRMNCAH), ensuring comprehensive support for mothers, newborns, and adolescents.

A number of new acts and policies have also been formulated to support vulnerable groups of youth, persons with disabilities, and domestic workers; longstanding problems like malnutrition, mental health, child marriage, child labour, repression against women and children, climate; and issues such as skills, TVET, and ICT development. Most recently the Child Daycare Act 2021 and the Cyber Security Act 2023 were enacted to provide support and security from emerging challenges.

The government has introduced new acts and policies addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, including youth, persons with disabilities, and domestic workers. Longstanding child-related issues such as malnutrition,

mental health, child marriage, child labour, violence against women and children, and climate resilience have also been prioritised. Furthermore, policies have been formulated to advance skills development, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and ICT development. In the recent past, to respond to emerging challenges, the government has enacted laws such as the Child Daycare Act 2021 and amended the Cyber Security Act 2023 to provide protection and online security. These initiatives reflect Bangladesh's continued efforts to strengthen legal protections and create a safer, more inclusive environment for children and young people.

### Emerging challenges

Despite significant progress in formulating child-friendly policies and legal frameworks, several challenges persist in effectively implementing and monitoring these initiatives. The following key gaps require urgent attention.

Firstly, *policy gaps* remain a critical barrier to achieving child rights. Many policies and action plans either lack proper implementation mechanisms, or are outdated and require urgent attention for renewal. For example, (i) though the Children Act is a key legal framework for “children in conflict with the law” or “children in contact with the law,” it lacks specific rules for implementation; (ii) key issue-specific national action plans such as the national nutrition action plan, the violence against women and children action plan, and the child labour elimination plan are nearing their completion dates, thus, requiring their renewal to maintain progress; (iii) some policies or programmes do not cover critical issues, such as the Labour Act's exclusion of domestic workers or the Health, Nutrition, and Population Sector Programme's limited focus on disability inclusion; (iv) certain legal provisions undermine child protection efforts, such as Article 19 of the Child Marriage Prevention Act, which allows exceptions to the minimum legal marriage age providing legal support to child marriage; (v) important pending legislations, including the Anti-Discrimination Bill 2022 and the National Skills Development Policy 2020, should be finalised to address key child rights concerns. Finally, emerging issues such as the rising burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) among children require new policy responses to ensure adequate healthcare provisions.

Secondly, *implementation gaps* continue to undermine policy effectiveness. Although Bangladesh has introduced several child-focused programmes, but weak enforcement and governance issues delimit their success. For example, despite the inclusion of children in the National Social Security

Strategy (NSSS), undergoing programmes and schemes fail to reach many marginalised children due to the absence of a credible database, poor targeting, leakages, and inefficiencies. Reports from government agencies and CSOs highlight several barriers, including a lack of skilled personnel, limited community engagement, a lack of transparency, and corruption. Bureaucratic inefficiencies often result in resource misallocation, preventing programmes/schemes from achieving their intended impact.

Thirdly, *monitoring and coordination gaps* present a major challenge in tracking child rights and development progress and ensuring accountability. The absence of disaggregated child-specific data makes it difficult to assess the extent of challenges faced by marginalised groups such as ethnic minority children, children with disabilities, and children living in urban slums. While government agencies collect administrative data, there is a lack of coordination between ministries and non-governmental stakeholders, leading to inefficiencies in programme monitoring. Expanding data collection efforts by incorporating NGO-generated reports, technology-driven tracking systems, and community-based monitoring can help create a more comprehensive understanding of child rights issues. Additionally, enhancing public accountability and engaging citizens, including children, in programme monitoring can improve the transparency and effectiveness of child-focused initiatives.

Lastly, *investment gaps* remain a significant barrier to achieving child-related SDGs. The lack of adequate financial resources restricts the government's ability to implement essential child welfare programmes. According to UNICEF (2023), before the COVID-19 pandemic, an annual funding gap of USD 39 billion prevented the achievement of child-related SDG targets in low- and middle-income countries. However, Bangladesh has not conducted a similar analysis to assess its own financing needs. Islam and Biswas (2014) indicated that inadequate investment in the healthcare sector is a major constraint, impacting the accessibility and quality of child health services adversely. In the absence of a time-bound child financing strategy, the government cannot assess required investment needs for child-focused programmes, strategic allocation of resources, and also leverage international development assistance to ensure sustainable progress in areas of child rights.

In summary, while Bangladesh has made impressive strides in strengthening child-focused policies, significant gaps persist in *policy formulation, programme implementation, monitoring, and strategic investment*. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated, multi-sectoral approach involving

government agencies, civil society, development partners, the private sector, and community engagement, including children's participation. Strengthening policy frameworks, improving enforcement mechanisms, enhancing data-driven decision-making, and increasing financial commitments are prerequisites for achieving equitable progress for all children in Bangladesh.

#### 4. Way Forward

Over the past five years, Bangladesh has consistently fallen behind in meeting the child-related SDG targets by 2030. Persistent challenges such as poverty, inequality, child labour, child marriage, and inadequate access to quality health and education services continue to hinder progress. Vulnerable groups – particularly those in urban slums, hard-to-reach areas, disaster-prone regions and those from marginalised and Indigenous groups – remain disproportionately affected. This triggers disparities and undermines the state's commitment to the principle of leaving no one behind.

To accelerate progress, a multi-sectoral, child-focused approach is essential. This requires strengthening institutional frameworks, prioritising investments in marginalised communities, and addressing emerging threats such as cybercrime and online exploitation. Furthermore, sustainable development cannot be achieved without addressing deeply rooted societal norms and behaviours that perpetuate inequality and limit opportunities for children, especially girls.

The following recommendations outline a comprehensive strategy to address these challenges and advance the rights and well-being of every child in Bangladesh. Through strengthened stakeholder collaboration, data-driven decision-making, and a commitment to inclusivity, Bangladesh can build a resilient framework for achieving the SDGs, placing children at the heart of its development priorities.

***Strengthen the policy frameworks.*** To address policy gaps, the government must establish a systematic mechanism for regularly reviewing, updating, and enacting child-focused laws, policies, and action plans. New strategies should be renewed with clear implementation guidelines and measurable targets and aligned with global commitments. Legal inconsistencies must be addressed to remove provisions that weaken child protection efforts. Additionally, better coordination between ministries is required to align policies across sectors, preventing duplication and ensuring integrated support for children's rights and well-being.

***Prioritise investments in children.*** The government must prioritise investment for all children through a time-bound cost plan based on the requirements of financial resources. As of now, investments remain insufficient to address inequalities faced by vulnerable children, including those in urban informal settlements, street situations, children engaged in work, ethnic communities, disaster-prone areas, and children with disabilities and vulnerable girls requiring protection.

To bridge these gaps, the government must develop a child budget framework for integrated tracking of progress and it should expand direct programmes for children in the social protection budgets to ensure targeted interventions for the most at-risk groups. Increased investment in universal health coverage, community-based health services, and quality education will play a critical role in securing children's long-term well-being and development.

***Strengthen data collection for evidence-based decision-making.*** Robust and disaggregated data systems are essential to identifying and addressing disparities across key sectors, such as health, education, and child protection. Reliable and timely data ensures that policies and interventions are targeted effectively and reach the most vulnerable children.

CSOs and NGOs generate valuable programme data, while administrative records and technology-driven big data initiatives can provide additional insights into monitoring developmental outcomes of child-centric programmes. Encouraging collaboration between government and non-government stakeholders can help improve data accuracy and coverage. Policymakers must prioritise data-driven decision-making to guide resource allocation and track progress to reach the last mile.

***Strengthen national oversight mechanisms.*** While Bangladesh has enacted important laws to tackle child marriage, child labour, and unsafe working conditions, enforcement remains weak. A cross-sectoral national committee with adequate resources should be established to monitor progress, enforce commitments, and ensure proper implementation of child protection laws and policies.

Ensuring oversight at the local, regional, and national levels will be crucial to addressing longstanding issues. Strengthening the capacity of law enforcement agencies, child welfare committees, and community-based organisations can help drive accountability and improve outcomes for children. A dedicated government entity or directorate can be established

to integrate and oversee the implementation of all programmes addressing gender equality, health, education, nutrition, child protection, and child rights, as well as measure the outcomes. This body should focus on implementing comprehensive child development policies and action plans that support the physical, mental, and social well-being of children across Bangladesh.

***Promote behaviour change efforts for gender equality and child protection.*** Achieving lasting change requires shifting societal attitudes that reinforce discrimination and harmful practices. Sustained behaviour change campaigns can challenge gender stereotypes, forestall child marriage, prevent violence against children, and create a more inclusive and protective environment.

Learning from CSOs' best practices can help advance innovative solutions. Collaboration with CSOs, educators, media professionals, community people, religious leaders, and policymakers can amplify advocacy efforts. Engaging children, parents, and young people can be agents of change in promoting child rights and gender equality.

By implementing these strategies with priorities and commitment, Bangladesh can create an inclusive and protective environment where every child has the opportunity to thrive. This will ensure meaningful progress towards achieving child-related SDG targets by 2030.

## Reference

- Ainul, S., Ehsan, I., Tanjeen, T., & Reichenbach, L. (2017). Adolescent friendly health corners (AFHCs) in selected government health facilities in Bangladesh: An early qualitative assessment. Washington, DC & Dhaka, Bangladesh: The Evidence Project/Population Council. Retrieved from [https://evidenceproject.popcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Bangladesh-AFHC-Report\\_2017.pdf](https://evidenceproject.popcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Bangladesh-AFHC-Report_2017.pdf)
- Akter, S. (2022, September 30). The impact of climate change on gender inequality in Bangladesh. Australian Outlook. <https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/the-impact-of-climate-change-on-gender-inequality-in-bangladesh>
- Alonge, O., Bishai, D., Wadhvaniya, S., et al. (2020). Large-scale evaluation of interventions designed to reduce childhood drownings in rural Bangladesh: A before and after cohort study. *Injury Epidemiology*, 7(17). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-020-00245-2>
- Anadolu Agency. (2023, January 28). Nearly 600 students in Bangladesh committed suicide in 2022: Report. Anadolu Agency. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/nearly-600-students-in-bangladesh-committed-suicide-in-2022-report/2799845>
- Asadullah, M. N., Hossain, S., & Wahhaj, Z. (2024, October 12). Act against discrimination: New strategies to prevent child marriage in Bangladesh. The Daily Star. <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/act-against-discrimination-new-strategies-prevent-child-marriage-bangladesh-3725766>
- Asian Development Bank (ADB). (2022). Gender equality and social inclusion diagnostic for the finance sector in Bangladesh. Manila, Philippines: Asian Development Bank. Retrieved from <https://www.adb.org/publications/gender-equality-social-inclusion-finance-bangladesh>
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2024). Bangladesh sample vital statistics 2023. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. Retrieved from <https://bbs.gov.bd/site/page/ef4d6756-2685-485a-b707-aa2d96bd4c6c/->
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2023). National child labour survey Bangladesh (NCLS) 2022. Retrieved from <https://webapps.ilo.org/surveyLib/index.php/catalog/8653/related-materials>
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), & UNICEF. (2023). Survey on street children 2022. Dhaka: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/data-situation-children-bangladesh>

- Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS). (2023). Policy brief on protecting the rights of domestic workers in Bangladesh. Retrieved from <https://bilsbd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/policy-brief-30-03-2023.pdf>
- Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE). (2023). Education Watch 2023: School Education in Bangladesh - Post-Pandemic Resilience and Sustainability. Dhaka: CAMPE. Retrieved from [https://www.campebd.org/Files/30032024043348pmEducation\\_Watch\\_Report\\_2023\\_Full\\_English\\_for\\_Web.pdf](https://www.campebd.org/Files/30032024043348pmEducation_Watch_Report_2023_Full_English_for_Web.pdf)
- Child Rights Advocacy Coalition in Bangladesh (CRAC, B). (2024). Children in Bangladesh: progress towards commitments January 2023-August 2024. Retrieved from <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1MvhU8JMaHUTxJSSYAJHOGeLSknyzm-dl/view>
- Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Working Group Bangladesh. (2023). Rapid gender analysis: Chattogram division flash flood and monsoon rain 2023. ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/rapid-gender-analysis-chattogram-division-flash-flood-and-monsoon-rain-2023-giha-working-group-bangladesh>
- Girls Not Brides. (n.d.). Child marriage in Bangladesh. Retrieved from <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/bangladesh/>
- Gomes, C., Dias, J. M., & Cerdà, A. (2022). Exploring the gender and climate change nexus, and empowering women in the southwestern coastal region of Bangladesh for adaptation and mitigation. *Climate*, 10(11), 172. <https://doi.org/10.3390/cli101101727>
- Government of Bangladesh (GoB). (n.d.). Sustainable development goals (SDGs) Bangladesh Progress Report. Retrieved from <https://sdg.gov.bd/>
- Hasan, M. T., Anwar, T., Christopher, E., Hossain, S., Hossain, M. M., Koly, K. N., Saif-Ur-Rahman, K. M., Ahmed, H. U., Arman, N., & Hossain, S. W. (2021). The current state of mental healthcare in Bangladesh: Part 1 - An updated country profile. *BJPsych International*, 18(4), 78-82. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bji.2021.41>
- Islam, A., & Biswas, T. (2014). Health system in Bangladesh: challenges and opportunities. *American Journal of Health Research*, 2(6), 366-374.
- Joining Forces Bangladesh (JFB). (2024). Child rights in Bangladesh: where we are.
- Mahumud, R. A., Alam, K., Renzaho, A. M. N., Sarker, A. R., Sultana, M., & Sheikh, N. (2019). Changes in inequality of childhood morbidity in

- Bangladesh 1993–2014: A decomposition analysis. *PLOS ONE*, 14(6), e0218515. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0218515>
- National Institute of Population Research and Training (NIPORT), & ICF. (2023). Bangladesh demographic and health Survey 2022: Key Indicators Report. Dhaka, Bangladesh, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: NIPORT and ICF. Retrieved from <https://www.dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/PR148/PR148.pdf>
- Plan International Bangladesh (PIB). (2021a). Exploratory research on challenging the fear of violence. [https://plan-international.org/uploads/sites/72/2022/06/FoV\\_Exploratory-Research-on-Challenging-Fear-of-Violence.pdf](https://plan-international.org/uploads/sites/72/2022/06/FoV_Exploratory-Research-on-Challenging-Fear-of-Violence.pdf)
- Plan International Bangladesh (PIB). (2021b). Online safety for children: Addressing digital violence in Bangladesh. Retrieved from <https://plan-international.org/bangladesh/publications/online-safety-children/>
- Rahman, A. K. M. F., & Rahman, A. (2020). The landscape of fatal injuries in Bangladesh: Findings from a nationwide health and injury survey. *Injury Prevention*, 30(Suppl 1), A129. <https://doi.org/10.1136/injuryprev-2020-savir.322>
- Sachs, J. D., Lafortune, G., & Fuller, G. (2024). The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future. Sustainable Development Report 2024. Paris: SDSN, Dublin: Dublin University Press. <https://doi.org/10.25546/108572>. Retrieved from <https://s3.amazonaws.com/sustainabledevelopment.report/2024/sustainable-development-report-2024.pdf>
- Save the Children. (n.d.). A Review of Bangladesh’s national budget for FY2022-23: Analyzing the Priorities Set for Every Child. May 2023. Unpublished report
- Save the Children. (2025). A Study on Urban Informal Settlements in Dhaka and Chattogram. Presented internally at a seminar at Save the Children Bangladesh country office on 11 February 2025.
- SDG Action Alliance in Bangladesh. (2023). Bangladesh country position paper: Bridging the gap for advancing rights to universal health coverage! Retrieved from <https://gcap.global/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Bangladesh-Position-Paper-on-UHC-2023.pdf>
- The Business Standard (TBS). (2025, January 18). 310 students died by suicide in Bangladesh in 2024: Study. Retrieved from <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/310-students-died-suicide-bangladesh-2024-study-1045656>

- The Daily Star (TDS). (2024, January 27). 513 students died by suicide last year: Aachol Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/513-students-died-suicide-last-year-aachol-foundation-3529596>
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2023). Progress on Children's Well-Being: Centring child rights in the 2030 Agenda; For every child, a sustainable future. UNICEF Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring - Data and Analytics Section. Retrieved from [https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/SDG\\_Progress-on-Childrens-Well-Being-Centring-child-rights-in-the-2030-Agenda-For-every-child-a-sustainable-future-web.pdf](https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/SDG_Progress-on-Childrens-Well-Being-Centring-child-rights-in-the-2030-Agenda-For-every-child-a-sustainable-future-web.pdf)
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2021). Bangladesh: Women and health. Retrieved from <https://apps.who.int/iris/rest/bitstreams/1418617/retrieve>
- World Health Organization (WHO) & The World Bank. (2023). Tracking universal health coverage: 2023 global monitoring report. Geneva & Washington, DC: World Health Organization and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank. Retrieved from <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/374059/9789240080379-eng.pdf?sequence=1>
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2024). Sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health: Report on the 2023 policy survey. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240100176>

## Annex

**Annex Table 1: FGD Consultation**

Sl. No.	Organised by	Consultation group
1	WVI	12-18 years
2	WVI	12-18 years
3	WVI	12-18 years
4	WVI	12-18 years
5	WVI	12-18 years
6	WVI	12-18 years
7	WVI	12-18 years
8	WVI	12-18 years
9	Educo	Children engaged in work (Domestic work, Leguna driver, day labour)
10	SCI	12-18 years
11	SCI	Adivasi (Urao and Cole)
12	SCI	Children engaged in work, Santal community, Horizon community (Agriculture, motor mechanic)
13	SCI	Mothers who became married before 18
14	SCI	Children engaged in work (plumber, electrician, construction worker)
15	SCI	Children from Bede community

**Annex Table 2: National Plans and Policies for Children’s Rights and Protection**

<p><b>Central</b>  National Children Policy, 2011  Births and Deaths Registration Act, 2004 (amended in 2013) and Rules, 2017  National Social Security Strategy, 2016-2030</p> <p><b>Health and Nutrition</b>  National Health Policy, 2008  National Strategy for Adolescent Health, 2017-2030  Bangladesh National Strategy for Maternal Health, 2015-2030  National Mental Health Policy, 2019  National Mental Health Strategic Plan (2020-2030)  National Nutrition Policy, 2015  Second National Plan of Action for Nutrition (NPAN2), 2016-2025  National Food and Nutrition Security Policy (NFNSP) Plan of Action, 2021-2030</p> <p><b>Education</b>  National Education Policy, 2010  Master Plan for ICT in Education in Bangladesh, 2012-2021  Integrated TVET Development Action Plan, 2018-2030</p> <p><b>Protection</b>  Children Act, 2013 (amended in 2018)  Early Childhood Care and Development Policy, 2013  Child Day Care Act 2021  Cyber Security Act, 2023</p> <p><b>VAWC</b>  Prevention of Repression against Women and Children Act 2000 (amended in 2003)  National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and Children 2013-2025  National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and Children 2018-2030 (multisectoral programme)  Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010 and Rules, 2013  Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy 2015</p>	<p>Pornography Control Act, 2012  Human Trafficking Deterrence and Suppression Act, 2012</p> <p><b>Child Labour</b>  Labour Act, 2006 (amended in 2013)  National Child Labor Elimination Policy, 2010  National Plan of Action to Eliminate Child Labour (2020-2025)</p> <p><b>Youth</b>  National Youth Policy, 2017  NPA for Implementation National Youth Policy, 2017  National Skills Development Policy 2011  National Action Plan 2022-2027 for Skills Development</p> <p><b>Women</b>  National Women Development Policy, 2011  National Action Plan for the Implementation of Women Development Policy 2013  Prevention of Child Marriage Act, 2017 and Rules, 2018  National Plan of Action to End Child Marriage, 2018-2030</p> <p><b>PwD</b>  Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013  Disability Welfare Act, 2001  National Policy for the Disabled, 2013</p> <p><b>Climate</b>  Bangladesh Delta Plan, 2100  Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan (MCP), 2022-2041  National Adaptation Plan (NAP), 2022  Disaster Management Act, 2012  National Disaster Management Policy, 2015  National Strategy on Internal Displacement Management, 2021  National Plan for Disaster Management, 2021-2025</p>
--	---

Source: Author’s compilation.

## Annex 1: Children-focused SDG Progress Review 2025 in Bangladesh

### Consultation Guideline (for consultation with Children)

Target participants: Girls and boys aged 12-18

Principles: Allow Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI); child-friendly approaches; participatory methods

Number of participants: 10-15

Location: Sub-national (specify)

Priority SDG areas

SDG 3 : Good Health and Well-being

SDG 5 : Gender Equality

SDG 8 : Decent Work and Economic Growth

SDG 14 : Life Below Water

SDG 17 : Partnerships for the Goals

#### *Consultation Objectives*

- Assess children’s perspectives on progress in achieving SDG 3, 5, 8, 14, and 17 since VNR 2020
- Identify perceived progress and gaps in services and/or issues related to children
- Understand the challenges children face in accessing services, tackling issues or participating in decision-making processes
- Gather recommendations from children for policymakers

#### *General instructions*

- The discussion may last between 60 and 75 minutes
- Conduct consultation in a semi-structured way
- Collect and preserve participant contact information in a *participant list* to facilitate future validation and research purposes
- Take notes and keep a transcript/record of discussion (e.g., using audio recorder)
- Use child-friendly materials such as posters, flashcards to explain concepts
- Adapt tools that are accessible by children with disabilities

#### *Safeguarding*

- Ensure a safe, inclusive space where all children feel comfortable sharing

- The participation is voluntary and participant can withdraw at any time
- Must obtain informed consent from parents and participants

*Ethical considerations*

- Take consent from participants while recording the session
- Respect confidentiality and anonymity

Conduct the session in three following parts:

Part 1: Introduction (15 minutes)

**Build rapport**, explain the purpose of the discussion, ensure confidentiality, and set ground rules. (Example: “We are here to listen to your experiences and ideas about how we, together, can make children’s lives and the world better”). Use a **warm-up activity** (e.g., an icebreaker game) and introduce the participants to each other.

**Explain key terms** like SDGs in simple language with visuals or stories

Part 2: SDG-specific Questions for Discussion (45 – 50 minutes)

Divide the SDG discussion into five sections, one for each SDG

**SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being**

Key issues to cover: Child mortality (neonatal, under-5); maternal mortality; communicable diseases (HIV, malaria), drug usage and water-borne diseases; MHPSS and suicide mortality; children’s road traffic injuries; adolescent birth rate; coverage of essential health services; health workers.

*Indicative questions*

**Progress:** What changes have you noticed in health services since a few years ago (e.g., since 2020)? Have you seen any new change that helps poor, other community (ethnic) or disable children to get access?

**Access:** Can you and your friends easily get medical help when needed? Which children are currently not getting health care and medicine? Why?

**Challenges:** What problems do children face in staying healthy in different

places (e.g., in schools, homes, or communities)?

**Recommendations:** Are we achieving the health SDG by 2030? What can be done to make health services better for you?

## SDG 5: Gender Equality

Key issues to cover: Domestic violence; GBV and children; child marriage; time spent on unpaid domestic/care work

### *Indicative questions*

**Progress:** Have girls and boys in your community become **more equal behaviour/service/support** in schools or at home? How?

**Discrimination:** Do you know anyone who has faced unfair treatment because they are a girl or a boy? What happened?

**Challenges:** What stops girls or boys from feeling safe or equal in your community?

**Recommendations:** What changes do you suggest to enjoy their rights equally by girls and boys in a safe environment?

## SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

Key issues to cover: Child labour; children engaged in hazardous works; adolescents (aged 15-18 years) not in education, employment or training; government spending on social protection and employment generation

### *Indicative questions*

**Progress:** Do you see children working in your community? What types of work do they do? Is there any progress in preventing child labour in Bangladesh?

**Access to Skills:** Are there programmes to help young people learn skills for the future? Have you participated in any? Did you find that useful?

**Challenges:** What happens if child labour persists? What problems do children face when trying to get skills?

**Recommendations:** How can the government or others help children prepare for their future jobs and achieve SDG 8?

## SDG 14: Life Below Water

Key issues to cover: Coverage of marine protected areas; proportion of fish stocks

### *Indicative questions*

**Awareness:** Do you know why rivers and the ocean are important for our lives? Have you heard about *blue economy* in Bangladesh?

**Progress:** Have you seen any changes in how we take care of water, rivers, or the ocean?

**Challenges:** What problems do you see with water pollution or lack of protection of fish and water animals?

**Recommendations:** What can children do to help protect water? How can adults support you?

## SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

Key issues to cover: Finance; technology; capacity-building; systemic issues such as multi-stakeholder development effectiveness, commitments to public-private and civil society partnerships; data, monitoring and accountability

### *Indicative questions*

**Awareness:** Have you heard about how governments or local NGOs / CSOs work together to solve child-related problems?

**Participation:** Have you or your friends ever been asked to share your thoughts with adults about these issues? Are you a part of an organisation? How it works?

**Challenges:** What makes it hard for children to have their voices heard by adults?

**Recommendations:** What can be done to ensure children can contribute to making our country better? How can children and young people make a good partnership with government and CSOs?

Part 3: Wrap-up and Reflection (10 minutes)

- Summarise the key points shared by participants
- Conduct the individual perception survey (Quick Review)
- Conduct a quick activity to gather any final thoughts (e.g., “Draw or write one thing you would change to make life better for children”)
- Thank participants for their time and contributions

**Annex 2: Children’s Dozen Questions to Quick SDG Review  
(Individual participants to fill in)**

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender:  F  M  Prefer not to disclose

Age:  12-14  15-18 Location (Upazilla and Zilla): \_\_\_\_\_

-2 = Completely disagree; -1 = Partially disagree; 0 = indifferent; 1 = Partially agree; 2 = Completely agree

Assessment Questions	Your Response					Your Comments
	-2	-1	0	1	2	
Do you think Bangladesh have progressed much on preventing child mortality?						
Do you think children from all fronts have better access to essential health care services these days?						
Do you think children feel safer at home than before?						
Do you think children feel safer at school than before?						
Do you think children feel safer in the community than before?						
Do you think government has taken stronger stance to prevent child marriage in recent years?						
Do you think we know how to take care of water, rivers, or the ocean?						
Do you think we have made progress to stop engaging children in hazardous works in recent years?						
Do you think that young children are aware of different life skills programmes?						
Do you agree that children have enough scopes to participate in decision making process?						
Do you feel that children today are able to jointly work with government/CSOs and speak up for their rights?						
Do you think the government is doing its best to achieve goals that help children?						

# Rights, Access, and Participation

*State of SDG Delivery for Persons with Disabilities*

## **Anchor organisation**

Sightsavers Bangladesh

## **Associate organisation**

Access Bangladesh Foundation

CBM Global Disability Inclusion

Center for Disability in Development

Disability Alliance on SDGs Bangladesh

Fred Hollows Foundation

Habitat for Humanity International Bangladesh

Manusher Jonno Foundation

Resource Integration Centre, and Sightsavers

## **Penholder<sup>16</sup>**

*Khandoker Shohel Rana*

Advocacy and Communications Coordinator

Sightsavers Bangladesh

---

<sup>16</sup>Supported by: Dr. Nafeesur Rahman, Consultant, Disability Alliance on SDGs Bangladesh; Juliet Rossette, Urban Program and Policy Manager, Habitat for Humanity International Bangladesh and Asia Pacific; Shoeib Shazzad Khan, Sr. Programme Coordinator, Manusher Jonno Foundation; Baishakhi Ghosh, Project Coordinator, Access Bangladesh Foundation.

## Key Messages

- Government will need to take targeted actions to strengthen technical skills through proactive collaboration with NGOs and advocacy groups, and ensure that SDGs are achieved by realising the potentials' of the demographic dividend in a way that no person with disabilities is left behind.
- Involving person with disabilities and their organisations in decision-making is necessary to ensure that their rights are protected and development is inclusive.
- All children with disabilities have a right to access quality and inclusive education and employability-enhancing skills training, which will, in turn, empower them as citizens and stakeholders in the development process.
- User-friendly infrastructure and transportation will ensure equal access to public services and must be seen as a fundamental right of persons with disabilities.

## Context

Persons with disabilities in Bangladesh constitute a significant share of the total population of the country. Data shows that a total of 11.9 million individuals (6.9 per cent of the country's population) belong to the group of persons with disabilities. Of these, 2.2 per cent have severe disabilities, and 1.1 per cent are completely disabled (Habitat for Humanity International Bangladesh, 2023). These individuals are vulnerable not only due to their physical constraints but also because of the compounded challenges they face in their everyday activities. These challenges include limited access to safe and affordable housing, higher rates of poverty, poor health outcomes, lower levels of educational attainment, and reduced economic participation, all of which are exacerbated by their specific levels of vulnerability.

However, the major challenge in planning adequate disability programmes in Bangladesh lies in the lack of reliable and comparable data on disability. For example, different sources provide conflicting information on the number of persons with disabilities in the country, which complicates effective policymaking and designing inclusive services.

For instance, according to the Disability Information System of the Department of Social Services (DSS),<sup>17</sup> 2.2 per cent (3,545,772 individuals) of the total population are identified as persons with disabilities, based on the Population and Housing Census 2022. Among them, 2.6 per cent are male, and 1.7 per cent are female. In contrast, the National Survey on Persons with Disabilities (NSPD) 2021, conducted by the BBS, estimates that 2.8 per cent of the population lives with at least one form of disability, with 3.3 per cent of males and 2.3 per cent of females being affected.

Furthermore, the Population and Housing Census 2022 reports that only 1.4 per cent of the population, which is equivalent to 2,361,604 individuals, have disabilities, with 1.6 per cent of males and 1.2 per cent of females being defined as such.

The above highlights the existing data discrepancies and underscores the challenges in collecting accurate data on persons with disability. Such discrepancies particularly persist due to the absence of a linkage between the disability database and the government's death registration system. Consequently, data on deceased individuals remains in the database, affecting the accuracy of data on persons with disabilities.

---

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.dis.gov.bd/> (Accessed on December 14, 2024).

This lack of an accurate and reliable database deters the government from designing effective and efficient development plans for this particular vulnerable group. Moreover, lack of access to essential services such as education, healthcare, mobility, and information, along with the inaccessibility of service centres, compounds the vulnerabilities of persons with disabilities. These instances are especially acute for women and girls with disabilities, whose specific needs are often overlooked.

## Objectives

This specific thematic group's VNR report aims to assess the progress on the selected SDGs and reaffirm its commitment towards accelerating and ensuring the rights and protections of persons with disabilities in line with the 2030 Agenda.

Specifically, the objectives of the report are the following:

- Showcase the country's policy actions and initiatives to safeguard the rights and protect the interests of persons with disabilities, particularly in the context of addressing Leave No One Behind (LNOB) and promoting inclusive and sustainable development;
- Identify and analyse the existing gaps and barriers by examining relevant policies, programmes, and challenges that are adversely impacting persons with disabilities;
- Provide an in-depth review of the progress made so far in terms of the selected SDGs; and
- Propose a set of actionable recommendations to ensure the rights and protection of persons with disabilities through inclusive and targeted interventions.

## Methodology

The methodology adopted for preparing this report included the following:

### a) Secondary Literature Review

A comprehensive analysis was undertaken by using various secondary sources. Relevant disability-focused project reports and other information available in the public domain were the main sources of the secondary literature review.

## **b) Consultation Workshops**

Consultation workshops were held with the representatives of organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and other relevant stakeholders from 25 districts across six divisions. The consultations were as follows:

- i. Chattogram (Chattogram and Sylhet Divisions), held on 10-11 November 2024, with 16 representatives participating from 14 organisations across six districts, including Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and Hatiya Island.
- ii. Sirajganj (Rangpur and Rajshahi Divisions), held on 19 - 20 November 2024, with 18 representatives participating from 14 organisations across nine districts.
- iii. Jhinaidah (Khulna and Barishal Divisions), held on 10 - 11 December 2024, with 19 representatives participating from 16 organisations across ten districts.

## **c) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**

Six FGDs were conducted by different organisations at their respective project locations. The details are as follows:

- i. Two FGDs were conducted by Access Bangladesh Foundation, held on 27 November 2024 at Dhamrai, Dhaka, and 28 November 2024 at Shyamnagar, Satkhira, respectively, with a total of 24 participants (13 male, 11 female) from different age groups of persons with disabilities.
- ii. Four FGDs were conducted by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) and its partners, held on 30 November at Chuadanga Sadar and Alamdanga Upazila and on 1 December at Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP), Dhaka. A total of 30 participants were part of the discussion, representing different age groups belonging to persons with disabilities.

## **Review of the Progress of the Targets**

### **SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages**

According to the NSPD 2021, 61.9 per cent of persons with disabilities had access to healthcare services in the three months preceding the survey period. Additionally, 92.3 per cent received healthcare services at some point in the last twelve months prior to the survey. Among those who faced difficulties in accessing healthcare services within the last three-month period, the main challenges they faced were higher treatment costs (indicated by 81 per cent) and lack of family support (indicated by 30.8 per cent).

About one-fourth (22.5 per cent) of those who received health services in the last twelve months received them from government health facilities such as medical college hospitals, district hospitals, and upazila health complexes. Other government health centres (i.e., maternal and child welfare centres, union health and family welfare centres, rural dispensaries or community clinics) had only a marginal share (4.03 per cent). In contrast, non-government healthcare service providers had a significant role in providing healthcare services to those. Among them, village practitioners (23.8 per cent), allopathic drug stores (16.7 per cent), private hospitals (15.1 per cent), and MBBS doctors (13.3 per cent) were the most commonly accessed medium of healthcare services.

Consequently, due to a lack of accessible and convenient livelihood opportunities as well as economic stability, persons with disabilities are failing to secure safe shelters with basic amenities and adequate food for their family members. Equitable access to adequate and affordable housing remains a significant challenge for persons with disabilities in disadvantaged communities. In climate-vulnerable areas, which are frequently affected by cyclones, floods, waterlogging, tidal surges, etc., homes are often damaged or destroyed completely. This exacerbates the vulnerability of persons with disabilities living in poverty and extreme poverty, leaving them and their families among the most severely affected. Furthermore, rebuilding safer and more resilient housing is often unaffordable for them.

Housing interventions contribute to decent livelihoods for persons with disabilities by enhancing the availability of disability-friendly new houses with water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities. These initiatives contribute to improved living standards and social security. Family members were provided with sweat equity during the construction process. This not only reduced labour costs but also helped enhance their knowledge and skills, advocating for community ownership and long-term sustainability (Habitat for Humanity International Bangladesh, 2023).

Applying for and availing disability cards poses significant challenges for many persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities often face harassment during the disability diagnosis process, especially when the disabilities are not immediately visible. Social service officers rarely accompany the applicants to assist with the diagnosis, leaving them vulnerable to further humiliation. Furthermore, assistive devices are often unavailable or unaffordable, and most individuals are unaware of any government subsidies for assistive devices. Persons with disabilities feel that the government's publicity on this issue is not adequate.

Healthcare facilities in Bangladesh largely fall short of addressing the specific needs of persons with disabilities. The majority of healthcare centres lack separate systems for specific service delivery for persons with disabilities, and the infrastructure is physically inaccessible, as most washrooms are not even wheelchair friendly. Additionally, government hospitals often suffer from poor hygiene conditions. Even though they are mostly structured with ramps, they are poorly designed and practically unusable. Private hospitals offer no accessibility features at the local level. Moreover, incidents of humiliation and mistreatment by hospital staff further discourage persons with disabilities from accessing essential healthcare services.

The eye care landscape in Bangladesh highlights a significant gap in service provision and infrastructure, particularly at rural and upazila (sub-district) levels. Currently, the country has 141 hospitals offering eye care services, primarily operated by government institutions (50 per cent), NGOs (40 per cent), and the private sector (10 per cent). Cataract surgeries account for approximately 70 per cent of all eye surgeries in Bangladesh (Fred Hollows Foundation, 2023).

However, the major challenge in this regard is the inadequacy in the number of ophthalmologists. Their work suffers due to a scarcity of ophthalmic nurses and paramedics. Equipment inadequacies and maintenance issues further impede service quality. Travelling long distances to access eye care services further exacerbates the difficulties, especially for those with limited transportation facilities or financial constraints. Primary facilities are generally accessible to individuals with disabilities, but there are opportunities for improvement. High ticket costs act as financial barriers, along with concerns about the ticket validity in accessing suitable eye care services. This challenge was particularly severe in ethnic and slum (informal settlement) communities and among persons with disabilities.

*Specific challenges identified through community consultation*

- There is a lack of universal health coverage for persons with disabilities, leading to unaffordable healthcare costs and limited access to essential services. Many health centres are inadequately equipped, lacking both trained professionals to address the specific needs of persons with disabilities and the necessary infrastructure for mobility. They lack accessible furniture, equipment, and physical facilities.
- Healthcare facilities lack dedicated service counters, doctors, and accessible toilets for persons with disabilities, often requiring them to

wait in long queues without any prioritisation. Women and girls with disabilities face compounded challenges, including inappropriate behaviour from service providers.

- Healthcare facilities do not offer discounts for persons with disabilities regarding fees, medications, or tests. Moreover, services like eye care and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are largely inadequate and under-supported.
- There is no targeted allocation in the healthcare budget for ensuring proper healthcare services for persons with disabilities.
- There is no effective mechanism for monitoring services delivered or for reporting abuse, mistreatment, or denial of services for persons with disabilities.
- According to the Neuro Development Trust Act, the scope and application of nursing and physiotherapy for specific disabilities are rather scant.
- Persons with disabilities go through widespread harassment in applying for and obtaining the Disability (Golden Citizen) Card.

### **SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**

“Once I visited Dhamrai Upazila Health Complex and was humiliated by a compounder. He insulted me, saying, ‘Why didn’t you take off your shoes before entering the doctor’s room? Don’t come to the hospital again.’ I felt deeply distressed but couldn’t say anything because of my disability.”

Women with disabilities face widespread discrimination arising from the intersection of gender and disability. They are often deprived of education, healthcare, employment, decision-making and leadership opportunities. They face humiliation and neglect from both family and society, and are perceived as a burden. Social exclusion intensifies their marginalisation, leaving many without access to basic education in reproductive health, relying only on family members in this regard. Moreover, the absence of representation of persons with disabilities, particularly women, in government action plans and decision-making processes further exacerbates their challenges and exclusion from national development agendas.

**Identified progress:** There have been notable improvements in terms of inclusion and recognition of women with disabilities in Bangladesh. Women with disabilities are included in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Daycare centres have

been established within victim support centres, and one-stop crisis centres at police stations provide services to women and children with disabilities. Additionally, the process of filing cases at the police station has become more accessible for persons with disabilities, marking a positive step towards inclusive justice.

There is a limited but improved state of property ownership for women with disability, and their access to education has also improved through both government and NGO interventions. Participation of women with disabilities in the decision-making process at the family and, to some extent, societal level has experienced some positive development. Also, social attitudes towards persons with disabilities, especially women, have been increasingly positive.

*Specific challenges identified through community consultation:*

- Women and children with disabilities are largely absent or not significantly given importance in the existing laws related to gender discrimination. Despite being included in national and international legal frameworks, such as Section 39 of the National Women's Development Policy of 2011 and the CEDAW Charter, the implementation of these acts and the participation of these marginalised groups in mainstream activities are far from inclusive. Negative societal attitudes towards women with disabilities are further hindering their inclusion.
- Safety and security need to be ensured for women with disabilities to represent and participate without any barriers in public and community activities. Additionally, women with disabilities often struggle to ensure their property rights.
- There is a significant gap in awareness of SRHR for women and girls with disabilities, and the gap persists as they are discouraged from seeking relevant support and are not provided with relevant information.
- Women with disabilities are often discouraged and, to some extent, restricted by their families and also face social stigma when they decide to

“Since childhood, I have faced exclusion and humiliation due to my disability. I have an impairment in my left hand; thus, I rarely leave the house and interact with others. Even my own family seldom took me out to visit my relatives. At school, my friends often made hurtful remarks, and because of I dropped out of school.”

form their own families.

- Persons with disabilities are often deprived of the country's civil and political rights, even though these are part of their fundamental human rights.
- Legal and judicial services are, by and large, inaccessible to persons with disabilities; more specifically, police stations, court complexes, bar associations, etc., are not disability-friendly.
- Speech, hearing, and intellectual disabilities are not taken into consideration when taking testimonies. There is a shortage of qualified and trained persons to take such testimonies.

### **SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all**

According to the NSPD 2021, only one-third (33.8 per cent) of persons with disabilities aged 15-64 years (i.e., working age) are employed; among those, 47.6 per cent are males, compared with 12.8 per cent females. Employment among persons with disabilities has higher rates in rural areas (35.6 per cent) than in urban areas (25.9 per cent). Among the children with disabilities (aged 5-17), 4.8 per cent are employed, where 6.7 per cent are boys and 2.0 per cent are girls. Most employed working-age persons with disabilities are mainly self-employed (54.4 per cent), followed by those working in "household or family business" (18.1 per cent) and in "private organisations" (16.4 per cent).

However, among the employed persons with disabilities, access to skills training remains alarmingly low, with only 2.7 per cent having received some form of training. Among those who have received training, the highest percentage were trained in computer skills (35.6 per cent), followed by required training to work in the readymade garments sector (15.2 per cent) and in handicraft or cottage-based work (12.4 per cent).

As per the Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2022, only 0.8 million persons with disabilities are employed in Bangladesh. A host of challenges, including workplace inaccessibility, skills mismatches, delayed implementation of quotas, and pervasive discrimination, particularly for women and those with severe disabilities, hinder their integration into the labour market.

Persons with disabilities face significant barriers to employment and skills development as they struggle to do work that is physically demanding. Workplaces and training facilities are often inaccessible or inadequate, and few employment opportunities are tailored to their specific needs. Training programmes, when available, are inaccessible due to distance, travel costs,

and lack of caregiver support. Furthermore, workplaces often have limited reasonable accommodations, and negative attitudes from colleagues create an unhelpful environment for persons with disabilities.

*Identified progress:* In terms of employment generation for persons with disabilities, there has been some encouraging development. The reinstatement of the quota system has gradually increased job opportunities for persons with disabilities in both the public and private sectors. Job fairs are being organised, specifically for persons with disabilities, and on-the-job training opportunities for them have seen some rise. The number of entrepreneurs with disability is gradually increasing. Disability-friendly trades and residential skills training opportunities in technical education have risen, and battery-operated rickshaws are preferred for persons with disabilities. Furthermore, online-based business opportunities, ICT-based skills development, and interventions by OPDs and NGOs have further broadened employment prospects. Opportunities to participate in vocational education have also increased. Consequently, the increased employment opportunities led some persons with disabilities to gain financial independence and enabled them to form and support their own families.

*Specific challenges identified through community consultation:*

- Skill-based training centres are inaccessible and inadequately equipped for the specific needs of persons with disabilities.
- Existing policies are not inclusive in addressing the diverse needs of persons with disabilities.
- Negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities in the workplace tend to make them more vulnerable, because their peers are not sensitised towards specific vulnerabilities afflicting persons with disabilities.
- Persons with disabilities often do not have adequate capital to start their own businesses, and they face significant challenges in securing bank loans due to systemic barriers and limited financial inclusion initiatives.
- There is a lack of adequate accommodation in skills development centres and workplaces for persons with disabilities.
- Training courses are not tailored and accessible to address specific forms of disabilities.
- The majority of the markets and shopping malls do not have disability-friendly infrastructure; thus, they are not accessible for large sections of persons with disabilities.
- The combined one per cent quota is not adequate for persons with disabilities and third-gender individuals.

- Due to limited social and family awareness, family members are often unwilling or unsupportive when it comes to the marriage of persons with disabilities, especially for women with disabilities.

### **Goal 17: Strengthen means of implementation, and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development**

Strengthening the means of partnership for implementation of this goal calls for inclusive participation, resource mobilisation, and enhancing regional and international cooperation and coordination. It also involves the transfer, dissemination, and diffusion of environmentally sound technologies, promoting innovation, establishing effective capacity-building mechanisms, ensuring policy coherence, fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships, and establishing a high-quality, disaggregated data system.

However, for Bangladesh, there are still miles to go in achieving this goal. Participants in the consultation workshops and FGDs noted the lack of representation of persons with disabilities in government action plans and decision-making processes. While OPDs are consulted during union-level budget preparation, there is minimal inclusion at the upazila, district, and divisional levels.

“I am a postgraduate but had to marry an uneducated, non-disabled man because of my disability. Despite my qualifications, I couldn’t secure any suitable job. After a lot of effort, I finally got an opportunity in a garment factory without special benefits or reasonable accommodation. The workplace environment was not inclusive. Colleagues often made hurtful remarks, like – ‘She’s working here because she couldn’t get any job elsewhere’, and ‘Even though she has a leg impairment, look how stylish she is!’ Those remarks are very vicious.”

*Joni Akhter*  
(women with physical disabilities)

Participants strongly emphasised the importance of ensuring the representation of persons with disabilities in health, employment, gender equality, and partnership-related SDG implementation. They stressed the urgency of establishing accessible infrastructure across all institutions and increased coordination among organisations working for and with persons with disabilities. They also urged government officials to adopt a more inclusive attitude and ensure better publicity of the facilities available for persons with disabilities.

Participants also discussed issues related to the lack of awareness-raising programmes on the SDGs and the localisation of the SDGs. OPDs are mostly excluded from government development initiatives and often left out of project planning and decision-making processes, limiting their influence on disability rights policies. Improved

accessibility in public and private institutions, along with strict enforcement of disability rights-related laws and penalties for violations, is necessary. These measures are crucial for fostering inclusion, equity, and a dignified life for persons with disabilities.

## Policy Challenges

### *Policy initiatives and actions*

Bangladesh has made noteworthy progress in addressing the rights of persons with disabilities since the last VNR in 2020. Key developments include the amendment of the Copyright Act 2023 in alignment with the Marrakesh Treaty and the approval of the Bengali Braille guideline in August 2024. The former government had also initiated the formulation of a separate operational plan for disability and mental health under the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) since July 2024, along with a review of the small and medium enterprises (SME) policy to integrate persons with disabilities into the policy. Inclusion of persons with disabilities in the national Five-Year Plan was one of the major initiatives in this connection. Additionally, the inclusion of the workforce of persons with disabilities in the BBS's quarterly labour force survey was another notable initiative; however, this needs to be expanded further. The quota system for persons with disabilities was reinstated, though the allocation was reduced; it is considered a positive step forward. In addition, several other initiatives are also underway. However, regrettably, these are not adequately implemented and monitored accordingly.

Despite facing a reduction in funding facilities, NGOs and CSOs continue to implement initiatives that promote the rights of persons with disabilities, including efforts to prevent avoidable blindness, provide rehabilitation, promote inclusive education, and empower young people economically. OPDs also collaborate with national and international NGOs at both the national and local levels. However, they often face challenges in registering and continuing their programmes without regular financial support. Government funding is essential to sustain such OPDs. Additionally, several notable alliances and forums are working to ensure the rights and protections of persons with disabilities, engaging in the development and influence of relevant policies. The Disability Alliance on SDGs Bangladesh serves as a collective platform for bringing together organisations working on addressing the challenges faced by persons with disabilities. This platform engages persons with disabilities in monitoring the progress of SDG implementation. Platform members are conducting their respective programmes in alignment with at least one of the SDG targets.

Equal Bangladesh<sup>18</sup> is a coalition campaign aimed at promoting disability rights and inclusive policies in Bangladesh. It advocates for the proper implementation of the Rights and Protections of Persons with Disabilities Act 2013, ensuring that disability rights are embedded into national legislation and aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). Furthermore, the Bangladesh Business Disability Network<sup>19</sup> serves as a collaborative platform that includes businesses, industry, employers' organisations, selected NGOs, and OPDs. It primarily focuses on facilitating disability and workplace diversity in Bangladesh from business and human rights perspectives.

## Policy limitations

### Knowledge and Data Gap

- i. No indicators or targets related to persons with disabilities are specifically identified in the government's SDGs roadmap, limiting its scope for tracking inclusive progress.
- ii. Absence of reliable national data as regards persons with disabilities stems from a high degree of lack of consistency across the various datasets.

### Inadequate Infrastructure and Services

- i. Doctor-to-patient ratio in Bangladesh is very low by any standard. According to the DGHS data, 35,503 doctor positions were approved in various categories of government hospitals, however, only 29,561 doctors are currently in service.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, the World Bank data indicate that as of 2021, the doctor-to-patient ratio in Bangladesh stood at only 0.7 per 10,000 people<sup>21</sup>.
- ii. Absence of occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, orthotics and prosthetics experts, clinical psychologists, etc., within the healthcare system is a continuing challenge in proper rehabilitation.

<sup>18</sup><https://campaigning.sightsavers.org/equal-bangladesh/>

<sup>19</sup><https://www.bbdn.com.bd/> (Accessed on December 14, 2024)

<sup>20</sup><https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/health/new-manpower-structure-devised-govt-hospitals-811242> (Accessed on December 14, 2024)

<sup>21</sup>[https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.MED.PHYS.ZS?end=2021&locations=B-D&name\\_desc=false&start=2010](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.MED.PHYS.ZS?end=2021&locations=B-D&name_desc=false&start=2010) (Accessed on December 14, 2024)

- iii. Many infrastructures at the healthcare centres are inaccessible to persons with disabilities. There is only one hospital bed available for every 990 patients.<sup>22</sup>
- iv. Service providers are not oriented on how to address the specific needs of persons with disabilities.
- v. Accessible financial services for persons with disabilities are, by and large, absent. This includes limited access to mobile banking services, banks, and Automated Teller Machine (ATM) booths, etc.

### **Limited Opportunities for Economic Empowerment and Social Protection**

- i. Many elderly persons with disabilities possess certain sets of skills but have limited access to financial support and training opportunities to effectively utilise those skills, which would have strengthened their economic empowerment.
- ii. Employment policies in the corporate and private sectors are not disability-inclusive, and peer employees are not sensitised towards persons with disabilities.
- iii. Under the social protection scheme, the monthly disability allowance is now BDT 850 only. This is inadequate considering the rising living costs and ongoing inflationary situation in the country.

## **Way Forward**

### **Knowledge Generation and Accessible Data Bank**

- A dedicated disability data centre must be established with standardised data collection tools to generate reliable and disability-disaggregated data. Such data must be consistent and comparable, and linked to other datasets in relevant agencies, such as BBS, DGHS, DSS, etc.
- An SDG scorecard aligned with the SDG implementation action plan can be initiated to monitor and assess progress according to national priorities and targets. This database must be available in the SDG Tracker.

### **Infrastructure and Service Development**

- To ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities, public service institutions must have appropriate equipment and infrastructure such as ramps, accessible WASH facilities, and elevators. Proper implementation of the Bangladesh National Building Code along with

---

<sup>22</sup><https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/health/bangladesh-has-one-hospital-bed-990-patients-health-minister-801238> (Accessed on December 14, 2024)

accessible public transport and open spaces such as parks, is essential.

- Continued medical support is needed, including free medicine and other facilities for women and children with disabilities, along with sign language training for healthcare staff to improve communication and improve the quality of care provided.

### **Active Participation/Engagement in Policymaking Process**

- As emphasised by the UN CRPD, persons with disabilities and OPDs must be included at all levels of decision-making. Their voices should be integrated into the planning and implementation stage. Furthermore, in line with the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act 2013, disability committees need to be activated to ensure effective coordination to secure the rights of persons with disabilities.

### **Ensure Economic Empowerment through Employment**

- Employment opportunities for persons with disabilities should be prioritised, with the state taking the lead. Their participation in economic activities needs to be actively supported, especially in employment and skills training, and in their engagement with SMEs.
- Assistive devices should be prioritised, with VAT exemption. Financial services such as deposits and loans for persons with disabilities should also be tax-free and offered on favourable terms without collateral requirements.

### **Strengthen Policy Action and Support System**

- A responsive grievance redressal system, including a dedicated hotline, is crucial for service-providing agencies to ensure their accountability in connection with services provided to persons with disabilities. The media should be actively engaged raising awareness and promoting collaboration for persons with disabilities.
- A dedicated disability budget is needed to implement the National Action Plan on Disability for allocation to relevant ministries.
- Disability allowances under social protection should be categorised in accordance with the severity of disabilities (severe, moderate, mild, and multiple).

## Conclusion

Disability has long existed in society, often paired with stigma. However, there is growing hope as the government is increasingly interested in addressing the vulnerabilities afflicting persons with disabilities. For inclusive development, it is essential that the government partners and collaborates with NGOs and the private sector to achieve the SDGs.

### Key message for policy action

The government must implement actions to strengthen technical skills that are capable of adapting to changing circumstances. NGOs which have expertise in this regard often face challenges, resulting in limited influence and funding opportunities. These will need to be addressed through collaborative efforts of all involved stakeholders, including government officials, NGOs, and advocacy groups. This is essential and integral to ensure progress in relevant areas.

Engagement of persons with disabilities, their representative organisations (OPDs), CSOs, international non-government organisation (INGOs), and advocacy platforms is vital and indispensable in affirming and upholding/ the rights and privileges of persons with disabilities as equal citizens of Bangladesh. Their active participation is crucial in ensuring that disability is a core aspect of mainstream development, both in society and the family.

Every child with a disability must have access to quality education which will open up opportunities for dignified employment for her/him. Disability-friendly employment opportunities, along with adequate skills training and entrepreneurship support, are crucial for their economic empowerment and for providing a decent standard of living.

The infrastructure, including service provider institutions, housing, WASH facilities, and transport systems, must be accessible for persons with disabilities. This is not merely a need but a fundamental right, ensuring that persons with disabilities have equal access to the legal system and public utilities, enabling lives of dignity and freedom.

Finally, active participation in the policy-making process, strengthening policy initiatives and support systems, including the active involvement of persons with disabilities, and a trustworthy and accessible data system, can move the country persuasively towards achieving the SDGs and usher in sustainable, positive changes for persons with disabilities.

## References

- Fred Hollows Foundation. (2023). *Mapping and Facility Assessment of Eye Health Facilities*.
- Habitat for Humanity International Bangladesh. (2023). *Project Completion Report*.
- BBS. (2022), National survey on persons with disabilities (NSPD) 2021.

## Annex

### Annex 1: OPDs and other organisations who took part in the consultations:

1. Coastal CPO Alliance (CDA), Chattogram
2. UTSA, Chattogram
3. Disabled Development and Research Center-DDRC, Chattogram
4. NOWZUWAN, Chattogram
5. AUDC, Chattogram
6. Jugantar Shamaj Unnayan Sangstha (JSUS), Chattogram
7. Songshoptaque, Chattogram
8. KRISHTY, Chattogram
9. N-RAS, Noakhali
10. HASI, Hatiya
11. Trinamul Unnayan Sangstha, Khagrachari
12. Zabarang Kallyan Samity, Khagrachari
13. Gram Unnayan Sangathon (GRAUS), Bandarban
14. Spondon Protibondhi Unnoyon Shongstha, Sirajganj
15. Poribarton, Sirajganj
16. Dighapatia Ekota Protibondhi Unnoyon Shongstha, Natore
17. Samata Protibondhi Unnoyon Shongstha, Natore
18. Jatiyo Trinomul Protibondhi Shongstha, Rajshahi
19. Jatiyo Trinomul Protibondhi Shongstha, Bogra
20. Bogra District Bandhon Protibondhi Shongstha, Bogra
21. Jatiyo Trinomul Protibondhi Shongstha, Joypurhat
22. Jatiyo Trinomul Protibondhi Shongstha, Pabna
23. Prokash Manobik Unnoyon Shongstha, Pabna
24. YES Group, Bogra
25. Anuvob, Panchagarh
26. GUK, Gaibandha
27. GBS, Bogura
28. NCDW
29. SSDP, Barguna
30. NSS, Barguna
31. PUS, Jhalakathi
32. Kanudashkathi Pratibondhi Unnayan Sangstha, Jhalakathi
33. Upakulia Protibondhi Unnoyon Sangsta(UPUS), Charfession, Bhola
34. BPUS, Barisal
35. Khulna Mohanagar Protibondhi Unnyoun Parishad (KMPUP), Khulna
36. Bandhab Protibandhi Songstha, Khulna
37. Khulna Disabled Development Organization, Khulna
38. Protibondhi Nari Unnayan Sangstha, Satkhira

## Implementing 2030 Agenda in Bangladesh

39. Ashraf Foundation, Jessore
40. Subah Samajik Unnayan Songstha, Meherpur
41. Prattasha Samazik Unnayan Sangstha (PSUS), Chuadanga
42. Welfare Efforts (WE), Jhenaidah
43. AISEDUP, Jhenaidah
44. AID Foundation, Jhenaidah

# Challenging Inequality and Marginalisation

*How Far the Dalit and Adivasi Communities Have Come Towards  
Achieving the SDGs*

## **Anchor organisation**

Nagorik Uddyog

## **Co-anchor organisation**

Kapaeeng Foundation

## **Associate organisations**

Association for Land Reform and Developments

Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust

Caritas

Habitat

HEKS

## **Penholder**

*Sayeeda Jahan*, Senior Lecturer, Department of Economics  
East West University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

## Key Messages

- Dalit and Adivasi communities have benefitted from various initiatives by NGOs and CSOs, such as targeted advocacy for anti-discrimination laws and community-led programmes, which have raised awareness about their rights and enhanced stakeholder participation in localised development efforts.
- Structural barriers, including caste-based and ethnic discrimination and land dispossession, continue to exclude Dalit and Adivasi populations from equitable development and targeted interventions under the SDGs. These problems are exacerbated because of the absence of disaggregated data about the real state of affairs concerning these communities.
- Dalit and Adivasi communities face systemic and societal discrimination in accessing education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and political representation, further perpetuating the cycles of poverty and marginalisation.
- To achieve inclusive development, the government must implement targeted policies to mitigate and address the challenges facing the Dalits and Adivasis. Keeping this in perspective, enforce anti-discrimination laws, promote gender equity, fully implement the CHT Accord, and improve disaggregated data collection, ensuring that Dalits and Adivasis receive equal treatment as citizens of the republic and that their voices are represented in decision-making processes in an informed and evidence-based manner.

## Context

The core principle of Agenda 2030 for SDGs is to ensure that no one is left behind (LNOB), guaranteeing equitable benefits from economic growth and development. While Bangladesh has made notable progress in implementing the SDGs, challenges such as poverty, inequality, and limited access to basic services continue to persist, particularly among marginalised groups. Dalit and Adivasi communities, in particular, face deep-rooted discrimination and socio-economic exclusion, further exacerbated by their lack of proper representation in national surveys and data. This exclusion from counting significantly hinders their ability to benefit from the country's SDG advancements.

As part of its commitment to the 2030 Agenda, Bangladesh will present its third VNR at the HLPF in July 2025. As is known, the review will focus on SDG 3 (Health), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and SDG 17 (Partnerships). To meet the principles of accountability, transparency, and inclusiveness, the VNR must address the realities of all communities through disaggregated data and focused analysis of the problems of the marginalised communities in an informed way.

Dalit and Adivasi populations in Bangladesh face systemic barriers, including caste-based discrimination, geographic isolation, and limited access to resources. Approximately 5.5 million Dalits (GED, 2020), often confined to urban slums or underdeveloped rural areas, and over 3 million Adivasis, concentrated in remote and conflict-prone regions such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), experience outcomes in terms of indicators of socio-economic development far below the national averages (Islam, 2023). These groups are largely invisible in national surveys, masking their inequalities. This analysis aims to highlight the structural challenges these communities face and amplify their voices in the VNR process to ensure that these left-behind groups are not left behind.

## Methodology

The report makes use of a mixed-methods approach to explore the socio-economic challenges faced by Dalit and Adivasi communities in Bangladesh. By combining quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, it provides a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of these issues. Data collection involved reviewing secondary sources and gathering primary data through community engagement, consultations, focus group discussions (FGDs), and household surveys.

Secondary data was sourced from government publications, academic studies, journal articles, and reports from NGOs and CSOs. The review exercise established a foundation for identifying key challenges and gaps, while stakeholder consultations and expert feedback validated and strengthened these findings.

Primary data collection method included consultations in Rajshahi, and Rangpur, and a virtual platform. The virtual consultation, organised by Nagorik Uddyog on December 1, 2024, focused on Dalit perspectives on the SDGs. HEKS conducted in-person consultations in Rajshahi on October 23, 2024, and in Rangpur on December 12, 2024, engaging stakeholders and community representatives.

A total of 14 FGDs were held in locations such as Satkhira, Madhupur, Tangail, and Mymensingh, involving 151 participants. These discussions provided qualitative narratives to complement quantitative data, highlighting barriers, SDG progress, and recommendations. Additionally, HEKS conducted two household surveys in Rangpur and Dinajpur between May and December 2024, engaging 535 families and 1,992 individuals. These surveys offered detailed socio-economic and demographic insights, which strengthened the study.

This integrated methodology ensures a balanced, evidence-based perspective by combining secondary data analysis, stakeholder engagement, qualitative narratives, and quantitative surveys. The participatory nature of the consultations and FGDs, coupled with the extensive household surveys, underscores the community-driven approach of this chapter, ensuring that the recommendations reflect the lived realities of Dalit and Adivasi populations in Bangladesh.

### **State of affairs**

In Bangladesh, national aggregate data often conceals the stark inequalities experienced by marginalised groups such as the Dalits, plainland Adivasis, and CHT Adivasi populations. While the country's population is approximately 169.4 million (World Bank, 2023), the Dalit population is estimated to be 4.5 to 5.5 million by the 8th Five-Year Plan (2020), with the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) suggesting a higher figure of 6.5 million (IDSN, 2021). However, disaggregated data on gender, age, and disability within this community is lacking, complicating targeted policy interventions.

Most Dalits in Bangladesh are Hindus and are subjected to entrenched social exclusion due to their designation as “out-castes” or “untouchables” within the Hindu caste system. While 78.8 per cent of Dalits identify themselves as Hindus, others include Muslims (19 per cent), Christians (1 per cent), and Buddhists (1 per cent) (Christian Aid et al., 2017). Despite comprising over 100 sub-groups,<sup>23</sup> systemic discrimination limits their access to resources and opportunities, impeding progress toward SDGs.

The Adivasi population, officially reported as 1.65 million (BBS, 2022), is estimated by advocacy groups like the Kapaeng Foundation to exceed 3 million, representing over 54 ethnic groups speaking at least 35 languages (Islam, 2023). Plainland Adivasis primarily reside in Rajshahi, Rangpur, Mymensingh, and Sylhet (International Republican Institute, 2020) and engage in agriculture, rickshaw pulling, and small-scale trading.

The CHT is one of Bangladesh’s most disadvantaged regions, with significant deficits in employment, healthcare, sanitation, education, and infrastructure (GED, 2015). CHT Adivasis face extreme poverty and limited access to basic services. Educational outcomes are alarmingly low, with primary and secondary school completion rates of 62.9 per cent and 15.4 per cent, compared to national rates of 98.5 per cent and 62.2 per cent. Poverty rates in the region exceed 53–63 per cent, more than double the national average (GED, 2020). These disparities highlight the urgent need for disaggregated data to assess and address SDG implementation progress effectively.

## **Review of the SDG Progress**

Historical exclusion and systemic discrimination make the Dalit and Adivasi groups a litmus test from the perspective of the inclusiveness of national progress. Despite improvements in national averages, structural factors such as lack of land rights, education disparities, and limited political representation continue to leave Dalit and Adivasi communities behind disproportionately. The lack of real-time disaggregated data prevents an accurate portrayal of the inequalities faced by these communities, obstructing targeted interventions and making the goal of “leaving no one behind” challenging to achieve. Addressing these gaps is essential to ensure inclusivity and equity in national development.

---

<sup>23</sup>According to the national platform of Dalits in Bangladesh named Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement (BDERM).

However, the investigation for purposes of this study was constrained by data limitations. Up-to-date and real-time data were not available for a large number of indicators, while others lacked any data. This complicated the process of evaluating the progress and implementation of the SDGs. In particular, if the objective of “leave no one behind” is to be achieved, data availability at the disaggregated level is essential for evaluating the progress of SDG implementation. Without detailed data, inequalities faced by Dalit and Adivasi communities remain invisible. This analysis is thus limited to assessing areas where adequate data were available while highlighting critical gaps.

### **SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being**

For SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), Dalit and Adivasi communities face significant disparities in healthcare access compared to national averages. While the maternal mortality rate stands at 173 per 100,000 live births and 74 per cent of births are attended by skilled personnel (DGHS, n.d.), these marginalised groups lag far behind. Dalits often encounter severe barriers to healthcare due to poverty, geographic exclusion, and systemic discrimination. A study by the Research and Development Collective and Manusher Jonno Foundation (2010) revealed that Dalits face stigma and financial challenges in accessing both government and private healthcare facilities. Urban slum dwellers and rural populations are particularly vulnerable due to minimal or non-existent health infrastructure. Poor sanitation and limited access to clean water exacerbate health risks, as highlighted by Nagorik Uddyog and BDERM (2015), which found that 89 per cent of rural Dalits used shared latrines, 43 per cent relied on hanging toilets, and 90 per cent lacked latrine roofs, rendering them unusable in rainy seasons. These factors lead to higher rates of communicable diseases and maternal and child health issues, perpetuating a cycle of ill health and poverty. Dalit women and children are especially vulnerable to malnutrition, maternal complications, and inadequate reproductive healthcare.

Similarly, Adivasi communities in the plains and the CHT face critical healthcare challenges. Although the National Health Policy (2011) emphasises equitable healthcare for ethnic minorities, it lacks specific strategies to address these disparities. Plainland Adivasis living in isolated areas are often far from health facilities like upazila health complexes or district hospitals, limiting their access to essential services. Socioeconomic disadvantages and low awareness further hinder their ability to seek preventive care. Many Adivasis also face challenges in accessing social security programmes due to outdated indigenous registries in union parishads.

Healthcare infrastructure in the CHT is particularly inadequate, with a shortage of community clinics and healthcare staff. Weak monitoring by Hill District Councils, along with corruption and absenteeism, exacerbates the situation. Remote Adivasi communities often lack access to immunisation and targeted child mortality reduction programmes, leading many to rely on unsafe home births and traditional healers. These systemic challenges highlight the urgent need for inclusive healthcare policies and targeted interventions to address the unique needs of Dalit and Adivasi populations.

### **SDG 5: Gender Equality**

According to national data, 51.4 per cent of girls in Bangladesh marry before age 18 (UNICEF, 2022), and women make up 36.3 per cent of the labour force (ILO, 2022). Gender disparities are particularly pronounced among Dalit and Adivasi women who face intersecting challenges rooted in caste, gender, and socio-economic status. Early marriage, limited educational opportunities, and restricted access to resources significantly hinder their progress. In both plainland and CHT Adivasi communities, gender-based violence, unequal inheritance rights, and exclusion from leadership roles are exacerbated by land disputes and entrenched patriarchal norms.

Dalit women are disproportionately confined to unpaid domestic labour or low-wage, high-risk jobs, such as manual scavenging. They face significant barriers to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, with minimal control over their earnings or personal decisions. Research by Siddequa and Sultana (2019) highlights the systemic inequalities they encounter, including limited access to justice, resources, and basic services, all compounded by pervasive patriarchal societal norms. Social ostracism further marginalises Dalit women, leaving them largely excluded from community and political decision-making, undermining efforts to achieve SDG 5's goals of eliminating discrimination and promoting women's empowerment.

Adivasi women, particularly in the CHT, face compounded issues such as domestic violence, unregistered marriages, and displacement from ancestral lands due to conflicts. Many plainland Adivasi women, predominantly Hindus or Christians, are subject to discriminatory religious family laws concerning marriage, inheritance, and property rights (Islam, 2023). It also indicate frequent cases of sexual harassment, restricted access to ancestral property, and minimal representation in traditional governance and political frameworks. These systemic barriers perpetuate cycles of marginalisation, limiting their access to education, healthcare, and leadership opportunities, which further entrench inequality.

## **SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth**

In view of SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), while the national unemployment rate is 5.2 per cent and 85 per cent of the workforce operates in the informal sector (ILO, 2022), in the case of Dalits and Adivasis, the indicators are even more discouraging, and they face heightened economic insecurity. Dalits are disproportionately confined to caste-defined, hazardous, and low-paying jobs that lack social protections. A study by Christian Aid et al. (2017) found that 77 per cent of Dalits are at risk of unemployment. Many are trapped in traditional occupations due to entrenched caste-based discrimination, stigma, and limited access to education and skills development, which restrict their participation in broader job markets. Child labour is also prevalent in Dalit communities as families struggle to survive.

Adivasis, primarily dependent on agriculture and forestry, face significant challenges due to land encroachment, wage discrimination, and restricted access to credit. Unclear land rights worsen economic insecurity. The National Land Use Policy (2001) fails to address the land rights of ethnic minorities and forest-dependent indigenous peoples (Islam, 2023). Similarly, the State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950 restricts land transfers among recognised ethnic groups but excludes provisions for formalising access to land ownership. While the Ethnic Minorities Cultural Institutions Act (2010) recognises more communities, the legal framework remains inconsistent and exclusionary.

In the CHT, indigenous peoples face structural barriers such as wage discrimination and poor infrastructure, particularly in transportation, which limits market access for entrepreneurs. The abolition of government job quotas has further reduced opportunities for Adivasis, confining them to low-paying, labour-intensive jobs. Additionally, systemic discrimination and cultural alienation discourage their participation in urban employment sectors. Addressing these challenges requires targeted policies to ensure fair wages, access to land, skills development, and inclusive infrastructure to support marginalised communities.

## **SDG 14: Life Below Water**

Fisheries contribute about 3.6 per cent to Bangladesh's GDP, but rising salinity, resource exclusion, and environmental degradation disproportionately impact Adivasi and Dalit fisherfolk, threatening their socio-economic stability. The *Jalmahal* (Water Bodies) Management

Policy, 2009, allows registered fisherfolk associations to manage aquifers and shore areas but excludes individual applicants and unregistered organisations. As a result, many Adivasi fisherfolk, particularly in areas like Chapainawabgonj, are unable to participate in leasing procedures due to the lack of registered organisations representing them (Islam, 2023). This lack of inclusivity marginalises Adivasi communities, restricting access to critical water resources and threatening their traditional livelihoods. Climate change and rising salinity further exacerbate their vulnerability by undermining ecosystem health.

Indigenous communities in the CHT, heavily reliant on aquatic resources, face similar barriers. Exclusion from resource management policies such as the *Jalmahal* Policy disrupts their traditional fishing practices and exacerbates poverty.

While primarily affected by adverse coastal and riverine factors, Dalit fisherfolk face heightened challenges. Overfishing, pollution, and climate change further threaten their livelihoods. Exclusion from decision-making processes and resource management compounds their economic vulnerability, leaving these communities at the margins of sustainable development. Addressing these disparities is essential for ensuring inclusivity under SDG 14.

### **SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals**

SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) emphasises the importance of inclusive collaboration to achieve equitable development. While Bangladesh has made progress in establishing partnerships for SDG implementation, Dalit and Adivasi communities remain primarily excluded from governance and national planning processes. This exclusion exacerbates existing inequalities and limits these groups' ability to influence decisions which directly affect their lives. Bridging this gap requires disaggregated data and targeted policies to promote inclusive progress and ensure that no one is left behind.

Dalit communities face significant barriers in advocating their cause as well as in policymaking due to underrepresentation in relevant bodies. While NGOs, CSOs, and international actors have supported Dalit rights through anti-discrimination advocacy, government-led efforts remain insufficient. Partnerships involving Dalit leaders, NGOs, and CSOs have demonstrated the potential for collaborative action, particularly in advocating anti-discrimination legislation. Expanding these partnerships and institutionalising their inclusion in decision-making processes is critical to achieving SDG 17 and advancing other SDGs.

Similarly, Adivasi communities, particularly those in the plainlands and CHT, face systemic exclusion from governance and development planning. Programmes such as Community WASH Committees have shown how the involvement of marginalised groups can lead to sustainable outcomes. However, the lack of formal mechanisms to include Adivasi leaders in decision-making processes limits their ability to advocate for resources and rights. Strengthened partnerships among government agencies, civil society, and Adivasi representatives are necessary to ensure inclusive governance, build capacity, and enhance representation at all levels.

For indigenous peoples in the CHT, limited engagement opportunities in governance remain a critical issue. To address this gap, collaboration between the government, indigenous leaders, and civil society is essential. Transparent institutional frameworks and adherence to principles such as free, prior, and informed consent are crucial to fostering inclusivity and promoting equity.

### **Contribution of NGOs and CSOs**

Active involvement of all stakeholders—government agencies, public representatives, private sector actors, CSOs, the knowledge community, and development partners—is crucial for implementing and reviewing progress traditionally toward the SDGs. In Bangladesh, NGOs and CSOs have played an important role in addressing implementation gaps and meeting the needs necessary to achieve the SDGs by 2030. Their efforts have been particularly effective in promoting inclusivity, transparency, and accountability within SDG processes.

The Government of Bangladesh has acknowledged the importance of NGOs and CSOs in advancing the SDG agenda. The General Economics Division (GED), in its report titled *Integration of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into the 7th Five-Year Plan*, highlights the need for effective coordination among stakeholders, including civil society, to ensure successful implementation of the SDGs. However, no formal institutional framework currently exists that could guarantee the systemic participation of the CSOs. The Citizen’s Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, addresses this gap by tracking SDG progress, advocating for resource efficiency, improving transparency through social accountability, and facilitating stakeholder collaboration.

Inclusion of indigenous peoples in SDG implementation is equally critical. Their active participation as contributors and beneficiaries ensures that development initiatives reflect their unique needs and priorities, promoting

sustainable outcomes. Without deliberate and inclusive engagement, achieving the SDGs risks excluding marginalised communities and undermining equitable development.

## Policy Challenges

The findings from consultations, FGDs, and surveys emphasise the urgent need to address the systemic exclusion of Dalit and Adivasi communities in Bangladesh's SDG framework. Integrating these insights into the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process is crucial to ensure accountability, transparency, and equitable development outcomes for marginalised groups.

Key challenges include:

### *Lack of Data and Representation*

- Absence of disaggregated data hinders accountability and targeted interventions.
- Dalits and Adivasis are underrepresented in governance and decision-making, limiting their advocacy power and resource access.

### *Education and Employment Barriers*

- Dalits face caste-based discrimination, restricting access to education and employment.
- Adivasi communities encounter geographic isolation, inadequate infrastructure, and limited opportunities for skill development.

### *Land Rights and Resource Access*

- Adivasis face land dispossession due to outdated laws, such as the State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of 1950.
- Dalit and Adivasi fisherfolk are excluded from resource management systems like the *Jalmahal* Policy, affecting livelihoods.

### *Gender Inequalities*

- Dalit and Adivasi women face systemic patriarchy, violence, and limited access to justice.
- Birth and Adivasi certificates, essential for being included in safety nets, remain inaccessible for marginalised women.

### *Health and Basic Services*

- Dalits and Adivasis lack equitable access to healthcare, housing, and sanitation, worsening socio-economic inequalities.
- Indigenous communities face barriers to accessing safety nets and social assistance.

### *Environmental and Livelihood Challenges*

- Coastal Dalit communities face severe livelihood threats from climate change, rising salinity, pollution, and overfishing.

### *Policy Implementation Gaps*

- Non-implementation of the CHT Accord and absence of affirmative action restrict education, public service, and legal representation opportunities.
- Top-down, imposed development models hinder inclusive progress for Dalit and Adivasi communities.

## **Way Forward**

Dalit and Adivasi communities in Bangladesh remain excluded from national development benefits due to persistent issues like caste-based discrimination, geographic isolation, land dispossession, and inadequate representation. The VNR process must address these disparities by prioritising inclusive policies, targeted interventions, and comprehensive data collection to ensure equitable development with a view to upholding the principle of “Leaving No One Behind.”.

## **Key Recommendations**

- *Policy Reforms:* Introduce inclusive policies focused on equitable access to education, healthcare, and land rights for marginalised communities. Revise outdated land laws to recognise indigenous rights and promote equitable resource management.
- *Data Collection:* Institutionalise disaggregated data collection to monitor inequalities and enable targeted interventions and proper monitoring of change and progress.
- *Gender Equity:* Enforce anti-discrimination laws, strengthen gender-

sensitive institutional frameworks, and promote inclusion of Dalit and Adivasi women in leadership and decision-making roles.

- *Affirmative Action*: Reintroduce quotas and expand skills development programmes for Dalits and Adivasis to enhance access to education and public service, and ensure employment opportunities.
- *Implementation of the CHT Accord*: Fully implement provisions of the CHT Accord to address governance and resource allocation issues for indigenous peoples.
- *Climate Resilience*: Invest in climate-resilient infrastructure and sustainable resource management to support vulnerable communities.
- *Anti-Discrimination Law*: Enact and implement the Anti-Discrimination Bill to criminalise caste-based discrimination, address untouchability practices, and strengthen legal protections for marginalised groups.
- *Political Representation*: Reserve seats in local, regional, and national government bodies for marginalised communities to ensure their voices are represented in decision-making.
- *Dedicated Budget*: Allocate targeted budgets for Dalit and Adivasi communities in the national budget and improve resource tracking for effective implementation.
- Collaborations between the government and NGOs are essential to address systemic barriers, enhance community participation, and ensure transparent accountability mechanisms. Addressing these challenges will help Bangladesh meet its SDG commitments and ensure that no one is left behind in the process of attaining the SDGs.

## References

- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). (2022). Census report 2022. Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.
- Christian Aid, Nagorik Uddyog, & Research Development Center. (2017). Dalits in Bangladesh: An action research for an evidence-base for the Dalit population in Bangladesh. <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1dBRvigorDOOWFKMEkUwcKBw8m1U434c1>
- Directorate General of Health Services. (n.d.). Maternal health indicators dashboard. Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Bangladesh. [http://203.112.218.101/storage/files/1/Publications/LFS/LFS\\_2023%20Full%20Book-Online%20Upload%20Copy.pdf](http://203.112.218.101/storage/files/1/Publications/LFS/LFS_2023%20Full%20Book-Online%20Upload%20Copy.pdf) (Page- 148)
- General Economics Division (GED). (2015). Integration of sustainable development goals (SDGs) into the 7th five-year plan. Planning Commission, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.
- General Economics Division (GED). (2020). 8th five-year plan FY 2020–2025: Accelerating growth, empowering citizens. Planning Commission, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.
- International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN). (n.d.). Statistics: Dalits in Bangladesh. <https://idsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Bangladesh-Dalit-statistics.pdf>
- International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN). (2021). Statistics on Dalits in Bangladesh. <https://idsn.org>
- International Labour Organization (ILO). (2022). Labour force statistics and gender equality data. <https://www.ilo.org>
- International Republican Institute. (2020). The challenges facing plainland ethnic groups in Bangladesh: Land, dignity, and inclusion. <https://www.iri.org>
- Islam, M. T. (2023). Laws and policies that discriminate against ethnic minorities in the Plainlands of Bangladesh. In M. Guhathakurta, S. Hossain, & B. D'costa (Eds.), *Towards equality and inclusion* (pp. 53–56). Christian Aid and Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST).
- Kapaeng Foundation. (2023). Advocacy for the rights of Adivasi communities in Bangladesh. <https://kapaeng.org>

- Nagorik Uddyog & BDERM. (2015). Equity watch 2015: Access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) for Dalits in Bangladesh: Challenges and way forward. <https://bderm-bd.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Equity-Watch-WASH.pdf>
- Our Voices, Our Futures. (2022). Annual report. BLAST.
- Our Voices, Our Futures. (2023). Mid-year progress report. BLAST.
- Research and Development Collective & Manusher Jonno Foundation. (2010). Dalits in Bangladesh: A study on deprivation. <https://www.manusherjonno.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/DALIT-REPORT-for-Publication-from-RDC.pdf>
- Siddequa, A. S., & Sultana, M. S. (2019). Casual analysis of the violence against Dalit women at Munshiganj district of Bangladesh. *Jagannath University Journal of Arts*, 9(1). [https://jnu.ac.bd/journal/assets/pdf/9\\_1\\_352.pdf](https://jnu.ac.bd/journal/assets/pdf/9_1_352.pdf)
- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). (2022). Child marriage data in Bangladesh. <https://www.unicef.org>
- World Bank. (2023). Bangladesh population statistics. <https://www.worldbank.org>

## **Annex**

### **Annex 1: Consultations**

- Virtual Consultation on SDG: Dalit Community of Bangladesh  
Organizer: Nagorik Uddyog
- Consultation with the Dalit Community  
Organizer: Habitat  
Venue: Babulia Rishi Para, Agardari Union, Satkhira Sadar, Satkhira  
Participants: 12 individuals (Male: 5, Female: 7)
- Consultation on Dalit and Adivasi Issues  
Organizer: HEKS  
Location: Rajshahi Division
- Consultation on Dalit and Adivasi Issues  
Organizer: HEKS  
Location: Rangpur Division

### **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**

- FGDs with Dalit and Adivasi Communities

- Organizer: HEKS  
Location: Rajshahi Division – total 3 FGDs  
Participants: 36 respondents
- FGDs with Dalit and Adivasi Communities  
Organizer: HEKS  
Location: Rangpur
- FGDs on Dalit and Adivasi Issues  
Organizer: HEKS  
Location: Rangpur Division – total 7 FGDs  
Participants: 102 respondents
- Plain Land Community FGDs for VNR 2025  
Organizer: Caritas Bangladesh  
Place: Jalchatra, Madhupur, Tangail  
Participants: 13 individuals (Male: 9, Female: 4)
- FGDs by Habitat  
Venue: Babulia Rishi Para, Agardari Union, Satkhira Sadar, Satkhira  
Participants: 5 Male, 7 Female (Total: 12 Dalit community members)
- Household Surveys  
Survey by HEKS  
Locations: Rangpur and Dinajpur  
Participants: 1,280 individuals from 320 families
- Survey by HEKS  
Location: Rangpur  
Participants: 712 individuals from 215 families across six villages

This list provides a comprehensive overview of consultations, FGDs, and surveys conducted to inform the findings and recommendations in this report.

# Dealing with Climate Vulnerabilities

*An Assessment of Risks and Resilience for SDG Realisation*

## **Anchor organisation**

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB)

## **Associate organisations**

ActionAid Bangladesh

BRAC

Centre for Disability in Development

Coast Foundation

Concern Worldwide Bangladesh

Dhrobotara Youth Development Foundation

Education and Development Foundation-Educo

Habitat for Humanity International Bangladesh

Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation Bangladesh

Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirchen Schweiz

JAAGO Foundation Trust

Jago Nari

Save the Children in Bangladesh

Shushilan

WaterAid Bangladesh

World Vision Bangladesh

## **Penholder**

*Md. Mahfuzul Haque, Md. Shahidul Islam, Mazharul Islam Hredoy and*

*Muhammad Badiuzzaman*

Transparency International Bangladesh

## Key Messages

- About 90 million people in Bangladesh (56 per cent of the population) live in climate-impacted areas. Many of them are women, girls, the elderly, youth, and persons with disabilities, who face diverse impacts of climate change in a disproportionate way.
- In Bangladesh, undeniably, some progress is discernible in school enrollment, child mortality, and access to water and sanitation, and in terms of building partnerships for climate goals. However, the lack of strong institutions and failure to access adequate climate finance to implement time-bound activities for climate-vulnerable groups and areas continue to remain major barriers. This needs to be addressed.
- In recent times, pollution and death from pollution have increased significantly. Waste management has emerged as a major challenge for public health. Uncollected waste in the rural areas and urban peripheries has emerged as an acute health hazard. Measures should be taken to address this.
- Climate-induced vector-borne diseases and deaths have increased. There should be a functional early warning system for climate-induced diseases and pollution in Bangladesh.
- Gender discrimination and child marriage in climate-vulnerable areas have increased with the increase in disasters. Inclusion of women in decision-making for addressing climate change impacts is almost non-existent. These need to be attended to.
- There is a lack of social protection programmes for climate-vulnerable groups. Programmes need to be put in place targeting the youth to cope with climate change challenges.
- Sustainable management of coastal resources, including ensuring the sustainability of ocean and aquatic ecosystems, needs to be prioritised in policymaking.

## Context

Bangladesh is the 7th most climate-vulnerable country in the world (Eckstein et al., 2021). Climate change is the single most acute threat to the existence of life, livelihood, and socio-economic development of the citizens of Bangladesh, and it is a barrier to achieving SDGs. About 90 million people of Bangladesh (56 per cent of the country's population) live in climate exposed areas in coastal districts, Barind Tract, haors, and char lands (Rojas, 2025), which are vulnerable to cyclones, salinity intrusion, floods, river bank erosion, drought, etc.

The most vulnerable groups to climate change are women, girls, older people, persons with disabilities, low-income families, and people living in informal settlements. These groups suffer disproportionately if multiple dimensions of their lives are taken into consideration. For example, 71 per cent of women in Bangladesh experience abuse during climate-induced floods (Aktar, 2024), while 60 per cent of women faced gender-based violence in areas affected by Cyclone Amphan (Talukdar & Hussain, 2024). Besides, approximately 0.1 million climate-induced migrants leave their homes each year, many of whom are youth (Khanom et al., 2022). More than 70 per cent of the migrants in Dhaka, impacted by climate-induced disasters, are from coastal areas (Illius, 2023). Women bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, which increases with climate-induced disasters. Women's low socio-economic status is further degraded by climate change; displaced women are often forced to work in the informal labour market and earn less than men (Pozzan et al., 2020).

Besides, about 19 million children are affected by climate change, including dropping out of school, many of whom are girls (UNICEF, 2019). Young and older people and those with health issues also suffer due to extreme heat and heatwaves. Air pollution causes more than 0.3 million premature deaths in Bangladesh each year (Lima et al., 2023), which increased from 0.10 million to 0.1 between 2019 and 2020 (Roy, 2023). Climate change is also affecting mental health, contributing to conditions such as anxiety and depression. Overall, the implementation of Bangladesh's SDGs is under challenge.

As part of preparing its VNR exercise, Bangladesh is at present reviewing the implementation progress of the targets related to climate-vulnerable groups within the selected five SDGs (3, 5, 8, 14, and 17). The present review covers the progress and policy challenges in implementing selected SDG goals and targets for the climate-vulnerable groups (youth, women, older people, and persons with disabilities) and outlines the way forward to overcome

the challenges. The review was carried out by engaging 22 CSO partners of the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, to collect data on SDGs implementation from July 2020 to June 2024. The review has gone through three phases: (i) developing and finalising concept notes and checklists through organising meetings alongside stocktaking climate-related activities of the organisations; (ii) collecting data using the checklist and extracting data from secondary literature; and finally, (iii) drafting and sharing the report with associate organisations by organising a validation workshop by engaging climate-vulnerable groups and the associated organisations.

## Review of SDGs Progress and Challenges

### SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being

**Progress:** Life expectancy rate and immunisations have increased in Bangladesh alongside the decrease in open defecation and deaths of children under 5 per 1,000 live births (Perry & Chowdhury, 2024). The number of deaths from unsafe WASH declined modestly (171/lac in 2020 to 161/lac in 2022) (SDG Tracker, 2024). Both state and non-state actors supported climate-vulnerable groups to prevent diseases associated with climate change by providing relief, WASH facilities, and health services; some research and advocacy activities were also carried out.

**Challenges:** The health and well-being of climate-vulnerable groups are under threat due to increased climate change, pollution, and environmental degradation. COVID-19 has exacerbated the crisis, affecting these groups severely. Cyclone Remal destroyed 20,000 water points (IFRC, 2024). During a flood in 2022 in Haor areas, about 82.6 per cent of people had skin problems, alongside diarrhoea, cholera, and fever (Nahar, Islam, & Mahiuddin, 2021). Cervical cancer and menstrual problems among women have increased among these groups due to increased salinity. Besides, health services in urban informal settlements are inadequate.

Overall, key challenges in implementing SDG 3 related targets are as follows:

**T3.9: Reduce death from cervical cancer and pollution:** Mortality rates due to air pollution increased from 231/lac in 2021 to 241/lac in 2022 (SDG Tracker, 2024). Only limited measures have been taken to work with public-private entities to green the economy and control pollution generated by businesses and industries.

**T3.3: Cervical cancer and fighting vector-borne diseases:** The spread of dengue and death is higher in climate-vulnerable districts. In 2023, 40,000 cases of dengue were recorded in the coastal districts, followed by 40,000 cases in other areas. The immunisation rate among children in Dhaka's slums, which hosts a large number of climate migrants, is only 67.5 per cent, compared to the national rate of 82.2 per cent (Hasan et al., 2024).

**T3.4: Promote mental health:** Suffering from depression and anxiety due to climate change has increased. In coastal areas, such as Satkhira, the prevalence of mental health related problems is very high, people tend to suffer from moderate to extremely severe anxiety (25.1 per cent), depression (22.5 per cent), stress (49.4 per cent), PTSD (20.0 per cent), and poor sleep quality (43.9 per cent).

**T3.9: Environmental safeguarding of health:** Bangladesh generates about 22.4 million tons of waste per year with an annual growth rate of 1.8 per cent; most of this is uncollected and is not managed and dumped in the rural areas (Rahman & Alam, 2020; Waste Concern, 2021). Besides, waste management is a neglected sector. The absence of authentic data, lack of technical capacity, training, and awareness regarding environmental risk and occupational hazards are major challenges in this arena. The burden of waste falls on the poor, often on under-aged groups and forced migrants living in informal (TIB, 2022a).

**T3.b: Support research and development in addressing health risks associated with cervical cancer:** There is a shortage of research on sustainable health systems that includes work on greening the health system and early warning for detecting climate-induced diseases. There are also data deficits on infectious diseases.

**T3.c: Build capacity of relevant actors:** There are inadequate healthcare facilities and infrastructures in climate-vulnerable areas. Emergency reliefs at the time of disasters often lack coordination among stakeholders, alongside fund and medical equipment shortages. The skills of community health workers are also poor, and there are deficits in view of initiatives to build their capacity.

**T3.d: Enhance systems of early warning and early action:** The current early warning system for detecting climate-induced vector-borne diseases is not functional in predicting the outbreak, and transmission. There is a lack of an integrated approach to address the intersections of gender, health, climate change, and environmental degradation. No mechanisms exist there to

disseminate early warning for persons with disabilities, especially for those who are hard of hearing.

### **SDG-5: Gender Equality**

**Progress:** Bangladesh made some progress in integrating gender perspectives into its climate change policies. The government prepared the Gender Action Plan, 2013 (updated in 2024) and included the gender-responsive budget in the budgeting system (International Monetary Fund, Asia and the Pacific Department, 2023).

**Challenges:** Despite some progress in areas of political empowerment, sizable gaps remain in multiple areas, including women's economic empowerment (De & Zinabou, 2024). Over 99 per cent of citizens hold at least one bias against women in Bangladesh (UNDP Bangladesh, 2023). On top of this, climate change is an extra threat to achieving gender equality.

**T5.1: End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls:** The rate of girls leaving school in char, haor, and coastal areas has gone up as they are having to manage the increased socio-economic burden of disasters (Khanam et al., 2023). Women prefer to stay home during cyclones and floods, as they feel unsafe in shelters (Ayeb-Karlsson, 2020). About 42 per cent of working-age women participate in the labour force, often earning less than men (UNDP Bangladesh, 2023). There is no authentic data on climate-vulnerable groups regarding the gender payment gap. However, the gap is higher compared to men in climate-vulnerable areas.

**T5.2: Eliminate violence and exploitation against women and girls:** Women and girls are at risk of violence and exploitation during and after disasters. About 71 per cent of women in climate-vulnerable areas experienced increased abuse during floods, compared to what they faced before, with 52.3 per cent of them enduring physical violence (Aktar, 2024). Gender-based violence surged by 65 per cent in Cyclone Amphan-affected areas (Aktar, 2024). About 80 per cent of people displaced by climate change are women (UNICEF, 2023).

**T5.3: Eliminate child, early and forced marriage:** Implementation of laws to prevent child marriage remains rather weak. About 44 per cent of girls get married before age 18 in coastal areas, this is 60 per cent (Jahan, 2024). Child marriage increased within climate-vulnerable groups, particularly in Bhola and Satkhira. About a 39 per cent increase in child marriage is recorded after a disaster (IRC, 2023). There was a 68 per cent increase in child marriages

during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 compared to 2019 (Nishat et al., 2023). The role of local administration in preventing child marriage is weak. Often, they facilitate child marriage.

**T5.4: Value unpaid care and promote shared responsibilities:** About 60 per cent of women are responsible for collecting drinking water and cooking fuel in disaster-prone areas of Bangladesh (Mitchell et al., 2014). Women also provide care and responsibility in the household, which is not considered “work.” Climate-induced disasters make caregiving tasks more time-consuming. Women climate migrants living in informal urban settlements and working in households as domestic aid are not included in the labour laws to get legitimate benefits.

**T5.5: Ensure full participation in leadership and decision-making:** Limited participation of women in leadership and decision-making on climate change is borne out by ground level evidence. About 90 per cent of projects of the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCTF) are formulated without consultation with women and girls, and their needs; only 2 per cent of more than a hundred projects are allocated to the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs. Only 20 per cent of members of local disaster management committees are women (UN Women, 2023). There is a lack of initiative to mainstream gender into policies and actions (UN Women & IUCN, 2022).

**T5.6: Access to reproductive health and rights:** Frequent climate-induced disasters destroy the healthcare infrastructure and services, water and sanitation facilities, limiting vulnerable communities’ access to sexual and reproductive health. The rate of child and early marriage among climate-vulnerable groups is high, contributing to a high child pregnancy rate. There are deficits in research and authentic data on reproductive health and the rights of vulnerable groups.

**T5.b: Empowerment of women:** Women earn less compared to men, with a gender wage gap of about 21 per cent. This scenario is worse within the vulnerable groups. A disproportionately higher number of women are involved in informal work in the agricultural sector, where social insurance is absent. It makes them more exposed to climate change, limiting their income (Eskander et al., 2022).

**T5.c: Adopt and strengthen policies and enforceable legislation for gender equality:** There are limited initiatives to expand digital literacy for women to

remove socio-economic barriers and enhance their access to digital financial services (Sinha, 2024).

### **SDG-8: Economic Growth and Decent Work**

**Progress:** Bangladesh reported higher economic growth that rose from 6.1 to 7.1 per cent during 2014-2022 (BBS, 2025). State and non-state actors have provided micro-finance and material assistance and supported their income-generating activities, and built capacity for farming and small business development. A number of research and advocacy initiatives have also been taken to formulate policies for decent work.

**Challenges:** Persistent unemployment, along with a high percentage of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), presents a major challenge. On top of that, the increased negative impact of climate change has been a persistent challenge in poverty eradication and building resilient infrastructure to accelerate economic growth.

**T8.1: Sustainable economic growth:** Income inequality has increased, which is higher in informal settlements (Roy, 2021). The purchasing power of young and climate-vulnerable groups in slums and rural areas has suffered erosion (Sato, 2024). Less effort is given to improving their socio-economic condition for creating green jobs, improving energy efficiency, and upgrading technologies for climate-friendly GDP growth.

**T8.2: Diversify, innovate, and upgrade to raise economic productivity:** Scarcely any initiative has been taken for economic diversification (e.g., moving away from climate-vulnerable products, markets, and jobs and moving toward low-emission and more climate-resilient sources of income) considering climate change and vulnerable groups. There is a lack of initiatives to shift away from single-source income to multiple sources and innovate business models in the adaptation sector.

**T8.3: Integrated policy approach for job creation and growing enterprises:** There are deficits in aligning employment and environmental policies to create and meet the demand for green jobs. There is a lack of support for green skills, including training and financial incentives in business and economy to promote green businesses. There is a dearth of initiatives to support green construction, including support for renewable energy infrastructure. Initiatives to build the capacities of national institutions to access climate funds from national and global sources are rather limited (TIB, 2024).

**T8.6: Youth employment, education, and training:** No significant job opportunities are being created for the youth. Unemployment increased to 4.7 per cent in 2023, from 4.3 per cent in 2016. The rate is even higher for the young (10.6 per cent in 2016) compared to the national average (Sato, 2024). Job creation targeting the climate vulnerable groups has not progressed much, resulting in many youth being unemployed or trapped in low-paying jobs in climate vulnerable areas.

Limited initiatives are taken to support local innovations, such as promoting micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, targeting the youth, women, and persons with disabilities in vulnerable areas. There is a lack of employment, education, and training support to protect the youth and their jobs in the sectors that are under pressure from climate change.

Extreme climate events in 2024 interrupted the education of 30.3 million students (UNICEF, 2024). Overall, 41 per cent of youth in Bangladesh fall into the NEET (category), of which 65.5 per cent are female (Karim, 2024). Budgetary support, including for training and equipment for trainers, is very limited as far as vulnerable groups are concerned.

**T8.7: Child labour:** The country is not on track to eradicate child labour by 2025 (Zohir et al., 2024). COVID-19, alongside climate change, forces children to work under extreme weather (BSS, 2024). Of these, 1.8 million are engaged in child labour. About 12 per cent of them work in drought-affected areas, followed by 18 per cent in flood-affected areas and 15 per cent in flash-flood-affected areas (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021). During the pandemic, the child labour rate increased by 33 per cent (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020). The rate is higher in disaster-prone areas, where few jobs are available (Zohir et al., 2024).

**T8.8: Work environment:** There are wage unpredictability and structural barriers in climate-vulnerable areas. The wage-setting system is often arbitrary and lacks transparency and fairness. Young workers are the most susceptible to unfair wages and work environments. Climate migrant workers, including women and marginalised groups, are most susceptible to the unpredictability of work opportunities and compromised wages.

### **SDG-14: Life below water**

**Progress:** To ensure safe ship recycling, to reduce ocean habitat loss, and to protect endangered biodiversity and coastal ecosystems, Bangladesh amended the Bangladesh Ship Recycling Act 2018 and set a target in view

of compliance with the Hong Kong Convention (Bangladesh reaffirms its commitment, 2022). Relevant actors have been working to reduce water and plastic pollution and for this, they are using digital technologies for plastic tracking and recycling and its management.

**Challenges:** Pollution and overfishing are major challenges alongside increased salinity and ocean acidification due to climate change. Some of the challenges are as follows:

**T14.1: Reduce marine pollution:** Bangladesh ranks as the sixth-most polluted country in the world for water pollution caused by plastic and polythene. Every year, two million tons of plastic enter the Bay of Bengal (Mim, Islam, & Abdullah, 2024). The shipbreaking industry, which employs climate-induced migrants, contributes 20 per cent of marine pollution by releasing heavy metals into the ocean (Bangladesh Shipbreakers Association, 2023). Few initiatives have been taken to comply with the Ship Recycling Act and the Hong Kong Convention.

**T14.2: Protect and restore ecosystems:** The mangrove forest in the Sundarbans has declined by 6 per cent in the last two decades due to shrimp farming and illegal deforestation (FAO, 2021). Heavy industries are constructed close to ecologically sensitive areas of the Reserve Forest (TIB, 2022b), being provided with faulty environmental clearance (UNB, 2019). A large number of climate-vulnerable communities are dependent on their ecosystem services. As ecosystem services of Sundarbans are declining, so are the livelihood opportunities of vulnerable groups. There is a lack of necessary steps to prevent industrialisation around the forest, alongside deficits of action against violations of environmental laws (TIB, 2022c).

**T14.4: Sustainable fishing:** The percentage of sustainable fisheries stocked in oceans and water bodies has reduced from 0.3 per cent in 2020 to 0.2 per cent in 2021 (SDG Tracker, 2024). Increased fishing by using illegal nets and toxins has damaged the fish ecosystem in coastal areas. Poverty and dependence on fishing among climate-vulnerable groups create conflict with conservation goals. There is a lack of initiatives to create alternative livelihoods in vulnerable areas.

**T14.7: Sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture, and tourism:** The impact of climate change on fisheries and marine tourism will reach USD 146 billion by 2050 (Barua & Barua, 2024). Due to bureaucratic delays and leaseholder conflicts, community-based small fishing communities are not able to access government-leased water bodies, which adversely affects their livelihood opportunities. Indiscriminate Rohingya settlements

in Chattogram—a hotspot of multiple climate-induced disasters—have damaged the hill and forest ecosystem and caused increased pollution (TIB, 2017). This also affected the potential of tourism in the areas that support climate-vulnerable groups.

### **SDG-17: Partnerships for goals**

**Progress:** Partnership for climate change has expanded significantly to facilitate and equip vulnerable people (United Nations, 2023). NGOs and CSOs have formed a large number of advocacy forums for advocacy and knowledge sharing. CSOs' initiatives and the government's collaboration with other LDCs and Small Island States have increased for enhanced climate finance to vulnerable countries such as Bangladesh.

**Challenges:** Despite some progress, a large gap remains in areas of partnership, coordination, and cooperation between NGOs and private stakeholders in view of working on climate issues, including those that concern vulnerable groups. Some of the key challenges are described below:

**T17.3: Mobilise financial resources for developing countries:** There is a lack of collaboration among the government, NGOs, civil society, and donors in terms of accessing climate finance. Developed countries promised to provide USD 100 billion/year to developing countries from 2020, which they never met. Bangladesh needed US\$13 billion/year, and only USD 0.7 billion has been delivered since 2010. The amount is insufficient and not time-bound (TIB, 2022b). There is a significant gap in terms of partnerships, collaboration, and engagement between the private sector and NGOs and CSOs to achieve climate-related SDGs.

**T17.9: Enhance SDG capacity in developing countries such as Bangladesh:** Relevant government agencies and NGOs in developing countries have deficits in technical capacity to implement SDGs. Only 18 per cent of government agencies possess such capacity (UNDP, 2020). There is no effective mechanism to build the capacity of the stakeholders from NGOs and CSOs to monitor the progress.

**T17.6: Knowledge sharing and cooperation for access to science, technology, and innovation:** Advancement in technology has been rather poor. Bangladesh ranked 106th out of 132 countries on the Global Innovation Index (GII) in 2024 (WIPO, 2021). There are a few initiatives taken by NGOs and CSOs to achieve the target at local, national, and international levels.

**T17.18: Enhance availability of reliable data:** A data gap exists to track the progress of SDGs. About 50 per cent of SDG indicators cannot be monitored. Challenges exist in measuring the progress due to the unavailability and inadequacy of authentic data (Rahman, 2021). Manipulation and fabrication of government data are also reported (Mustafa, 2024). The government does not acknowledge non-state actors' data. Timeliness of data on climate vulnerability and standard approaches for collecting data are not ensured. There are deficiencies in terms of timely data validation on climate vulnerability (Rahman, 2021).

## Policy Challenges

There are various action plans and policies for implementing climate change activities and mainstreaming gender into them. Some of these are the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP, 2009), the National Adaptation Plan (NAP), the Bangladesh Climate Change and Gender Action Plans, and others. However, there are inconsistencies in the policies and practices, some of which are:

- 1. Lack of adequate climate finance, budget, and allocation:** Less budget allocation in the local government for gender and climate-responsive action and for locally led adaptation. There are gaps in climate budgeting for promoting economic empowerment and the sustainable livelihood of vulnerable groups.
- 2. Lack of climate focus in the Social Safety Net Programme (SSNP):** Only 10 per cent of the SSNP allocation is allocated for climate-vulnerable groups. The services provided do not adequately address the needs and priorities of climate-vulnerable groups.
- 3. Gender discrimination in policy implementation:** Implementation of relevant policies falls short due to social norms and local power dynamics. Vulnerable groups are excluded from the project-related decision-making process and fail to access its benefits.
- 4. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds:** There is no effective mechanism to channel CSR funds for climate change adaptation and mitigation activities.

## Way Forward

The July 2024 uprising by the youth and the fall of the authoritarian regime have created an unprecedented opportunity to reform climate-related

policies. Youth is the driving force to bring transformative change in climate action. Therefore, reform agendas should integrate and use youth leadership to bring policy and practice changes in the post-uprising context.

*Introduce inclusive climate financing and budgeting:* Allocate sufficient budget to local government institutions to implement locally led adaptation actions. Engage youth leadership in climate change negotiations. Secure adequate grant-based climate finance. Create a separate budget line for climate and gender in the national budget and the budget of local governments. Allocate climate finance (e.g., BCCTF) through international NGOs to the local NGOs to implement innovative projects with technical support from international NGOs. Strengthen partnerships among NGOs and business entities. Introduce CSR funds to climate activities.

*Take initiatives towards gender mainstreaming:* Align and formulate plans and policies to ensure youth and women's access to climate finance, decision-making process and its implementation. Ensure proper needs assessment for gender-sensitive activities in climate change areas. Prioritise addressing gender-based violence in disaster-prone areas. Promote gender-sensitive designs in infrastructures. Focus on gender and climate vulnerability in SSNP.

*Promote inclusive governance and strengthen resilience:* Ensure data availability and data transparency related to vulnerable groups. Foster inclusive governance by involving them in planning and implementation. Enhance disaster preparedness, forecasting, and response systems. Ensure their timely and proper dissemination to vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities. Treat climate migrants according to their constitutional rights and provide them with safe and affordable housing.

*Develop sustainable livelihoods and economic opportunities:* Provide green job-oriented training to youth and vulnerable groups to move away from climate-vulnerable economic sectors. Align rural housing projects with decentralised industrialisation to reduce migration pressure and create employment opportunities. Promote urban greening, reduce water pollution, and foster sustainable marine and coastal management practices.

*Enhance health and social services:* Establish sustainable healthcare services targeting climate-vulnerable groups. Prioritise climate-induced health risks of vulnerable groups in primary healthcare systems. Develop one-stop service centres in urban areas to facilitate access to safety-net programmes for the low-income communities.

*Raise public awareness and global cooperation:* Mainstream climate-related literature in the textbooks. Raise awareness among citizens and strengthen advocacy works for policymakers as regards the disproportionately adverse impact of climate change that afflicts particularly the vulnerable groups.

## References

- Aktar, T. (2024, June 5). Climate change, disasters, and gender-based violence: An overview of Bangladesh's policies & status [Blog post]. BRAC Institute of Governance and Development, BRAC University. <https://bigd.bracu.ac.bd/climate-change-disasters-and-gender-based-violence-an-overview-of-bangladeshs-policies-status/>
- Ayeb-Karlsson, S. (2020). When the disaster strikes: Gendered (im)mobility in Bangladesh. *Climate Risk Management*, 29, 100237. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.crm.2020.100237>
- Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. (2025). Gross domestic product (GDP). Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. [https://bbs.gov.bd/site/page/dc2bc6ce-7080-48b3-9a04-73cec782d0df/Gross-Domestic-Product-\(GDP\)](https://bbs.gov.bd/site/page/dc2bc6ce-7080-48b3-9a04-73cec782d0df/Gross-Domestic-Product-(GDP))
- Bangladesh reaffirms its commitment to achieving SDG Goal 14. (2022, July 2). *The Financial Express*. <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/national/bangladesh-reaffirms-its-commitment-to-achieving-sdg-goal-14-1656677629>
- Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS). (2024, March 14). BBS: 1.78m children engage in child labour. *Dhaka Tribune*. <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/341837/bbs-1.78m-children-engage-in-child-labour>
- Bangladesh Shipbreakers Association. (2023). Report on environmental impacts of shipbreaking. BSA Publications.
- Barua, P., & Barua, C. (2024). Sustainable fisheries management approach of Bangladesh: A potential blue economy path. *Asian Journal of Research and Review in Agriculture*, 6(1), 109–125. <https://www.jagriculture.com/index.php/AJRRRA/article/view/85>
- De, J., & Zinabou, G. (2024, June 12). Bangladesh can boost growth and climate resilience by investing in women. *International Monetary Fund (IMF) News*. <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2024/06/12/na061224-bangladesh-can-boost-growth-and-climate-resilience-by-investing-in-women>
- Eckstein, D., Küsel, R., & Schäfer, L. (2021). Global climate risk index 2021: Who suffers most from extreme weather events? Weather-related loss events in 2019 and 2000–2019. *Germanwatch*. [https://www.germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Climate%20Risk%20Index%202021\\_2.pdf](https://www.germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Climate%20Risk%20Index%202021_2.pdf)

- Eskander, S., Steele, P., Rashid, M., Imam, N., & Munira, S. (2022). Still bearing the burden: how poor rural women in Bangladesh are paying most for climate risks. International Institute for Environment and Development, London. <http://pubs.iied.org/20851IIED>
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). (2021). The state of mangroves in the Sundarbans.
- Hasan, M. Z., Rabbani, M. G., Ahmed, M. W., Mehdi, G. G., Tisha, K. I., Reidpath, D. D., Hanifi, S. M. A., & Mahmood, S. S. (2024). Assessment of socioeconomic and health vulnerability among urban slum dwellers in Bangladesh: A cross-sectional study. *BMC Public Health*, 24, Article 2946. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-20425-9>
- Illius, S. (2023, January 25). Stability eludes climate refugees in Bangladesh's sinking cities. *Dialogue Earth Newsletter*. <https://dialogue.earth/en/justice/stability-eludes-climate-refugees-in-bangladeshs-sinking-cities/>
- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. (2024). Bangladesh: Cyclone Remal emergency appeal operational strategy (No. MDRBD035). ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/bangladesh/bangladesh-cyclone-remal-emergency-appeal-operational-strategy-no-mdrbd035>
- International Monetary Fund, Asia and the Pacific Department. (2023). Women's Empowerment, Gender Budgeting, and Intersection with Climate Change. <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/002/2023/410/article-A003-en.xml>
- International Monetary Fund. Asia and Pacific Department. (2023, December 14). Bangladesh: Selected issues (IMF Staff Country Report No. 23/410). International Monetary Fund. <https://doi.org/10.5089/9798400260728.002>
- International Rescue Committee (IRC). (2023, December 6). Bangladesh: IRC study reveals a staggering 39% surge in child marriage due to climate change [Press release]. <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/bangladesh-irc-study-reveals-staggering-39-surge-child-marriage-due-climate-change>
- Jahan, N. (2024, March 28). Alarming upswing in child marriage. *The Daily Star*. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/alarming-upswing-child-marriage-3576476>
- Karim, M. A. (2024, February 28). Empowering Bangladesh's youth for the next leap. *The Daily Star*. <https://www.thedailystar.net/anniversary-supplement-2024/readying-the-next-big-leap/news/empowering-bangladeshs-youth-the-next-leap-3553441>

- Khanam, D., Kabir, Z., Dina, S. A., & Islam, A. R. M. T. (2023). Experiencing the impacts of climate change-induced salinity by women in the coastal region of Bangladesh. *International Journal of Environmental Studies*, 80(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1142/S2972312424500012>
- Khanom, S., Tanjeela, M., & Rutherford, S. (2022). Climate-induced migrants' hopeful journey toward security: Pushing the boundaries of gendered vulnerability and adaptability in Bangladesh. *Frontiers in Climate*, 4, Article 922504. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fclim.2022.922504>
- Lima, A. L. G., Amann, M., Enriquez, S., Kumar, M., Larsen, B. K., Nishat, B., Nygard, J., Payares Montoya, D., Scandizzo, P. L., Tsydenova, N., & Yi, E. J. A. (2023). Building back a greener Bangladesh: Country environmental analysis 2023. World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099032624044525190/P1759081e3a5d909a18d>
- Mim, F. I., Islam, M. J., & Abdullah, M. S. (2024). Plastic tsunami: Bangladesh's maritime ecosystem under siege. *Environmental Forensics*, 25(6), 471–473. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15275922.2024.2330026>
- Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh. (2024). Climate financing for sustainable development: Budget report 2023-24. [https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/page/6e496a5b\\_f5c1\\_447b\\_bbb4\\_257a2d8a97a1/Climate%20English.pdf](https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/page/6e496a5b_f5c1_447b_bbb4_257a2d8a97a1/Climate%20English.pdf)
- Mitchell, S., Rabbani, M. G., Mainuddin, K., Seal, L., Emran, D. A., Tuhin, M. H., & Khan, Z. M. (2014). Assessment of women's livelihood needs in Bangladesh. UN Women. [https://wrw.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/74027\\_assessmentofwomenslivelihoodneedsin.pdf](https://wrw.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/74027_assessmentofwomenslivelihoodneedsin.pdf)
- Mustafa, K. (2024, September 2). Statistics given by Hasina regime need urgent correction. *The Daily Star*. <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/statistics-given-hasina-regime-need-urgent-correction-3691981>
- Nahar, N., Islam, S., & Mahiuddin, S. (2021). Flash flood impacts on the life and livelihood of women at haor areas in Bangladesh. *National Geographical Journal of India*, 67(3), 322–333. <https://doi.org/10.48008/ngji.1780>
- Nishat, J. F., Shovo, T.-E.-A., Ahammed, B., Islam, M. A., Rahman, M. M., & Hossain, M. T. (2023). Mental health status of early married girls during the COVID-19 pandemic: A study in the southwestern region of Bangladesh. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 13, Article 1074208. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2022.1074208>

- Perry, H. B., & Chowdhury, A. M. R. (2024). Bangladesh: 50 years of advances in health and challenges ahead. *Global Health Science and Practice*, 12(1), e2300419. <https://doi.org/10.9745/GHSP-D-23-00419>
- Pozzan, E., Bonnet, F., & Cattaneo, U. (2020, September). Freedom of association in practice: Lessons learned (Working Paper No. 4). International Labour Organization (ILO). [https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_protect/@protrav/@travail/documents/publication/wcms\\_755348.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_protect/@protrav/@travail/documents/publication/wcms_755348.pdf)
- Rahman, M. M. (2021). Achieving sustainable development goals of agenda 2030 in Bangladesh: The crossroad of the governance and performance. *Public Administration and Policy*, 24(2), 195–211. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/PAP-12-2020-0056>
- Rahman, M. S., & Alam, J. (2020). Solid waste management and incineration practice: A study of Bangladesh. *International Journal of Nonferrous Metallurgy*, 9(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ijnm.2020.91001>
- Rojas, D. (2025, January 1). How the climate crisis is impacting Bangladesh [Blog post]. The Climate Reality Project. <https://www.climaterealityproject.org/blog/how-climate-crisis-impacting-bangladesh>
- Roy, P. (2023, October 19). Heatwave in Bangladesh: Older people bear the brunt. *The Daily Star*. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/heatwave-bangladesh-older-people-bear-the-brunt-3447071?amp>
- Roy, S. (2021). Sustainable urbanisation in Bangladesh: Dhaka (ASEFSU23 Background Paper). Asia-Europe Foundation. [https://asef.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/ASEFSU23-Background-Paper\\_Sustainable-Urbanisation-in-Bangladesh-Dhaka.pdf](https://asef.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/ASEFSU23-Background-Paper_Sustainable-Urbanisation-in-Bangladesh-Dhaka.pdf)
- Sato, S. (2024, October 29). The impact of rapid urbanization on housing inequality and informal settlements in South Asia. *Authorea*. DOI: 10.22541/au.173016010.09382136/v1
- SDG Tracker. (2024). *SDG Tracker | Bangladesh Development Mirror*. <https://sdg.gov.bd/>
- Sinha, T. (2024, October 21). From crisis to connectivity: Empowering Bangladesh's women in the digital age [Blog post]. BRAC Institute of Governance and Development, BRAC University. <https://bigd.bracu.ac.bd/from-crisis-to-connectivity-empowering-bangladeshs-women-in-the-digital-age/>

- Talukdar, S. H., & Hussain, S. (2023). The impact of climate change on urban women in Bangladesh. *The Business Standard*. <https://www.tbsnews.net/thoughts/impact-climate-change-urban-women-bangladesh-665170>
- Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB). (2017). Problems related to refugee provided in Bangladesh to forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals (Rohingya): An assessment of governance challenges. [https://www.tibangladesh.org/images/2017/rohingya/Executive\\_Summary\(English\)\\_%20Rohingya\\_TIB.pdf](https://www.tibangladesh.org/images/2017/rohingya/Executive_Summary(English)_%20Rohingya_TIB.pdf)
- Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB). (2022a). Executive summary: Medical waste management. [https://www.tibangladesh.org/images/2022/report/Medical\\_Waste\\_Management\\_Executive\\_Summary\\_English.pdf](https://www.tibangladesh.org/images/2022/report/Medical_Waste_Management_Executive_Summary_English.pdf)
- Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB). (2022b). COP27 Position Paper. [https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/images/2022/position\\_paper/COP27-Position-Paper.pdf](https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/images/2022/position_paper/COP27-Position-Paper.pdf)
- Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB). (2022c). Governance challenges of the Department of Environment and way forward. [https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/images/2021/report/DoE\\_ES\\_English.pdf](https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/images/2021/report/DoE_ES_English.pdf)
- Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB). (2024). Accessing green climate fund (GCF) for vulnerable countries like Bangladesh: Governance challenges and way forward. <https://www.ti-bangladesh.org/images/2024/report/gcf/Executive-Summary-Green-Climate-Fund-En.pdf?v=2>
- U.S. Department of Labor. (2020). 2020 findings on the worst forms of child labor: Bangladesh. Bureau of International Labor Affairs. [https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child\\_labor\\_reports/tda2020/bangladesh.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child_labor_reports/tda2020/bangladesh.pdf)
- U.S. Department of Labor. (2021). 2021 findings on the worst forms of child labour: Bangladesh. [https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child\\_labor\\_reports/tda2021/bangladesh.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ILAB/child_labor_reports/tda2021/bangladesh.pdf)
- UN Women and IUCN. (2022). State of Gender Equality and Climate Change in Bangladesh. [https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/FINAL-Bangladesh-State-of-Gender-Equality-and-Climate-Change-Report\\_10-08-22.pdf](https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/FINAL-Bangladesh-State-of-Gender-Equality-and-Climate-Change-Report_10-08-22.pdf)
- UN Women. (2023). CCGAP Rapid Appraisal: A review of progress and challenges. [https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/final\\_ccgap\\_rapid%20appraisal\\_bco\\_9-dec-clean-copy.pdf](https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/final_ccgap_rapid%20appraisal_bco_9-dec-clean-copy.pdf)

- UNB. (2019, June 29). 5 cement factories near Sundarbans get environmental clearance. *The Business Standard*. <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/5-cement-factories-near-sundarbans-get-environmental-clearance>
- UNDP Bangladesh. (2023, September 19). Over 99 percent of Bangladeshis hold at least one bias against women [Blog post]. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). <https://www.undp.org/bangladesh/blog/over-99-percent-bangladeshis-hold-least-one-bias-against-women>
- UNICEF. (2019, April 8). Climate change threatens the lives and futures of over 19 million children in Bangladesh [Press release]. <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/climate-change-threatens-lives-and-futures-over-19-million-children-bangladesh>
- UNICEF. (2023). Climate change's greatest victims are women and girls. <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/blog/climate-changes-greatest-victims-are-women-and-girls>
- UNICEF. (2024). Learning Interrupted: Global Snapshot of climate-related school disruptions in 2024. <https://www.unicef.org/guatemala/media/7656/file/Global-snapshot-climate-related-school-disruptions-2024.pdf>
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2020). Bangladesh: SDG Implementation Report. [https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/BGD/SDGs-Bangladesh\\_Progress\\_Report%202020.pdf](https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/BGD/SDGs-Bangladesh_Progress_Report%202020.pdf)
- United Nations. (2023). United Nations Country Results Report Bangladesh. [https://bangladesh.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/UN%20Country%20Report%202023%20Bangladesh\\_0.pdf](https://bangladesh.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/UN%20Country%20Report%202023%20Bangladesh_0.pdf)
- Waste Concern. (2021). Bangladesh waste database 2021. [https://wasteconcern.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/22-Bangladesh-Waste-Database\\_2.pdf](https://wasteconcern.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/22-Bangladesh-Waste-Database_2.pdf)
- World Bank. (2024, December 17). Bangladesh: Country profile. <https://data.worldbank.org/country/bangladesh?view=chart>
- World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). (2021). Global Innovation Index 2021: Tracking the COVID-19 response and innovation. [https://www.wipo.int/edocs/pubdocs/en/wipo\\_pub\\_gii\\_2021/bd.pdf](https://www.wipo.int/edocs/pubdocs/en/wipo_pub_gii_2021/bd.pdf)
- Zohir, S., Dutta, S., Rahman, S., & Khan, W. A. (2024, July). Child labour and schooling in Bangladesh: Insights from data and evidence. Economic Research Group & UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight. <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/media/9341/file/UNICEF-Innocenti-Child-labour-schooling-report-2024.pdf>

## **Annex**

### **Annex 1: Climate Vulnerability Group Planning Meeting**

Location: Online

Participants: 6 representatives from 6 civil society organisations (CSOs)

### **Annex 2: Consultation Meeting with Partners**

Location: Dialogue Room, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

Participants: 57 representatives from 44 CSOs

### **Annex 3: Concept Note and Checklist Sharing Meeting (Online)**

Participants: 18 representatives from 13 CSOs

### **Annex 4: Findings Validation Workshop**

Location: Udaypadma Conference Room, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB)

Participants: A total of 25 participants attended the workshop, including eight vulnerable community representatives (Two youths from Sunamganj and Satkhira District, two women and one person with disability from Bagerhat district, and three representatives from informal settlements of Dhaka).

## Annex 5: Data Collection Checklist

Questions/Particulars	Description	Link of the activities (Internal publications, documents, and photos can be uploaded here)
<p>Q 1. Describe the context of your organization’s involvement with climate-vulnerable groups focusing on the below aspects: Context of the climate vulnerable groups Their demographic area, size, status, and perspectives The level of vulnerability of the left-behind groups</p> <p>Note: Focus on disaggregated data, if available (official/non-official), beyond gender and location. You may use national-level statistics as well.</p>	(Max 500 words)	

<p>Q 2. Describe the goal-wise (SDG 3: Health and Well-being;<sup>24</sup> SDG 5: Gender equality;<sup>25</sup> SDG 8: Economic Growth and Decent Work;<sup>26</sup> SDG 14: Life below water;<sup>27</sup> SDG 17: Partnership for Goals<sup>28</sup>) status of the climate vulnerable groups based on your organisational assessment/work.</p> <p>Progress and limitations in the attainment of the target of SDGs</p>		
<p>Highlight your organisation's contribution in these areas</p> <p>Document existing knowledge, the changes over time and forward perspectives</p> <p>Note: All the goals and targets that are listed here may not apply to your organisation. Describe only the relevant one</p>		

---

24 T3.9: Reduce deaths caused by climate change and pollution; T3.3: Address climate change and combat vector-borne diseases; T3.4: Promote mental health and well-being; T3.9: Ensure environmental safeguards for health, including medical waste management, etc.

25 T5.1: End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls; T5.2: Eliminate violence and exploitation against women and girls; T5.3: Eliminate child, early and forced marriage; T5.4: Value unpaid care and promote shared responsibilities; T5.5: Ensure full participation in leadership and decision making; T5.6: Access to productive health and rights; T5.b: Empowerment of women through technology; T5.c: Adopt and strengthen policies and enforceable legislation for gender equality, etc.

26 T8.3: Integrated policy approach/policies for job creation, growing enterprises; T8.1: Sustainable economic growth; T8.2: Diversify, innovate and upgrade for economic productivity; T8.4: Improve resource efficiency; T8.5: Employment and equal pay; T8.6: Youth employment education and training; T8.7: Child labour; T8.8: Work environment- migrant workers, women migrants, etc.

27 T14.1: Reduce marine pollution; T14.2: Protect and restore ecosystems; T14.4: Sustainable fishing; T14.5: Conserve coastal and marine areas; T14.7: Sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism; T14.a Increase scientific knowledge, research and technology for ocean health; T14.b: Support small-scale fishers; T14.c: Implement and enforce International. sea law, etc.

28 T17.3: Mobilise financial resources for developing countries; T17.6: Knowledge sharing and co-operation for access to science, technology, and innovation; T17.7: Promote sustainable technologies to developing countries; T17.9: Enhance SDG capacity in developing countries; T17.14: Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development; T17.16: Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development; T17.17: Encourage effective partnership; T17.18: Enhance availability of reliable data, etc.

## Implementing 2030 Agenda in Bangladesh

<p>Q 4. Are there any supportive policies towards the climate-vulnerable groups? (e.g., legislation, fiscal policy, credit scheme, SSNP, special project, quota, etc.). What worked (success) and what did not work (challenges)? - Why? What policy gaps still exist?</p>	(Max 500 words)	
<p>Q 5. Provide five/six recommendations Focus on SDG areas Keep an eye on the ongoing (post-uprising) reform agenda (e.g., economic, institutional, legal, etc.)</p>	(Max 500 words)	





This volume embodies the contribution of the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh, to the preparation of the country's Voluntary National Review (VNR) process in 2025. The VNRs provide a unique opportunity to showcase the progress made by countries in attaining the SDGs and to highlight the challenges in view of this. The 2025 VNR was the third in which Bangladesh had participated.

As is known, a central overarching objective of the SDGs is to "leave no one behind". From this perspective, the Citizen's Platform prepared the present volume in collaboration with its partners, and with support from eminent experts, recording the state of SDG delivery in the country. The purpose was to examine whether the relevant Goals and Targets were attained by addressing the concerns and interests of the marginalised citizens and communities in Bangladesh. The volume draws attention to the gaps that persist, highlights the unfinished tasks, and puts forward a set of recommendations to mainstream and advance the interests of each of the six focused vulnerable groups. It is hoped that the volume will help amplify the visibility and voice of the country's marginalised groups, and will serve as a powerful resource to keep the cause of these people at the heart of implementing the SDGs in Bangladesh.



### **Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh**

Secretariat: **Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)**

House 40/C, Road 11 (new), Dhanmondi

Dhaka-1209, Bangladesh

E-mail: [coordinator@bdplatform4sdgs.net](mailto:coordinator@bdplatform4sdgs.net)

Website: [www.bdplatform4sdgs.net](http://www.bdplatform4sdgs.net)

Phone: (+88 02) 41021780-2



978-984-37-0623-2