

Bangladesh

- **Population Sex & Age Disaggregation:**
 - Female: <15yrs 33.8%; 15-49yrs 49.8%; >50yrs 12.8%
 - Male: <15yrs 35.5%; 15-49yrs 49.8%; >50yrs 14.7%¹
- Average household size: 4.4¹
- Female headed households: 15.6%²
- Disability Crude Rate: Female 13 per 1000; Male 15.2 per 1000¹
- Youth Literacy Rates 15-24 yrs: female 80.4%; male 77%³
- Infant Mortality rates: 43 per 1000 live births³
- Rate of Domestic Violence: 50% of women experience physical violence in the home⁴

Gender in Brief

Bangladesh is one of the most populous and densely populated countries in the world with a diversity of religions and ethnicities. While Bangladesh has taken significant steps to further its development agenda, is ranked relatively low on the 2010 Gender Inequality Index (116 out of 169 countries) and significant challenges remain with respect to women's access to social, economic, political and legal institutions. Other vulnerable groups such as ethnic and religious minorities, people living with HIV/AIDS and the disabled face similar constraints. Natural disasters, political violence and rapid rural-urban migration continue to harm livelihoods, cause displacement of people and threaten safety in certain regions; all factors that worsen women's vulnerability to poverty and the pre-existing inequalities they face, particularly in relation to livelihood opportunities, land ownership and inheritance, access to credit, wages and workplace benefits and violence.

Gender roles and responsibilities: Traditional gender roles in Bangladesh still exist; women hold the role of "wife", and are expected to undertake the majority of household, childcare and overall caring work. Wives are commonly thought of as new workers whose labour, sexuality and fertility belong to their husband and his family. The practice of "purdah" (female exclusion) is also common and requires the physical segregation of sexes and often restricts females personal, social and economic activities and mobility. Polygamy remains legal however it has become less common, particularly in the cities.⁵ Men, on the other hand, are expected to provide and be the decision-makers as head of the family and while women can make decisions about small household matters they are not usually involved in larger or final decisions, which are usually made by their husbands or other male relatives. This includes decisions about family assets and land that are usually decided along religious /community family laws. The existence of separate laws for each community means that justice is determined by the religious community that individuals belong to. Most of these laws are antiquated, discriminate against women and girls, and do little to provide equal status for women.

Education and Economic Empowerment: Bangladesh has made significant progress to close the gender gap in school enrolments at both primary and secondary levels and girls currently outnumber boys' enrolments. However, dropout rates are higher for girls than boys and secondary school level female-enrolment only constitutes 40% of the male total. Literacy remains relatively low throughout Bangladesh, particularly for women.¹ Most women in Bangladesh work but only 59% of women participate in the formal labour force, compared to 83% of male and only 20% of women work for cash income, where they are usually paid less than men for the same work.⁶ Women who are divorced, separated, widowed or have children are more likely to be employed than those currently married. Among those who earn an income only 48% have sole control over it. Agriculture is the most dominant sector of the economy of Bangladesh. Amongst working women most are engaged in raising poultry or cattle, followed by semi-skilled labour and home-based manufacturing. The rapid growth of the garment industry has provided a large number of formal sector jobs for women, who comprise more than 90% of its labour force. The recent industrial disasters in the garment sector highlight the serious concerns about unsafe and insecure working environments for women. Women are also disproportionately affected by unemployment, underemployment and vulnerable employment; all factors that place women at a higher risk of being engaged in risky and less secure work without legal and social protections.

Participation and Policy: Bangladesh has signed and ratified the the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and continues to strengthen legal framework to prevent and protect women

against violence and penalise perpetrators of rape and other forms of violence against women, such as domestic violence, dowry-related violence and trafficking. However, the penal code continues to preclude legal prosecution for marital rape. In addition, positive steps are often undermined at a local level by inconsistencies between general law and personal law and limited enforcement. For instance, Muslim Personal Law contains rules on clothing, morality and religion and often limits women and girls' ability to exercise their rights, which, for example, prohibit Muslim woman from marrying a non-Muslim man or hindering her from leaving their houses after dark without being accompanied by a spouse or male representative.⁷ Women's presence in the political sphere has continued to both improve and challenge traditional views that position women as less valuable than men. The ILO also references independence of women as one of the major reasons the "missing women" phenomenon (gender based infanticide) is declining in Bangladesh.⁸

Gender Based Violence and Protection: Women and girls face serious protection and gender based violence issues in Bangladesh; sexual violence, domestic and family violence, dowry related violence, acid attacks, trafficking, kidnapping, and illegal fatwas remain a major concern. In the 2011 Violence Against Women Survey 65% of married women reported experiencing physical violence committed by their current husband in their lifetime and more than 50% of women received medical treatment as a consequence this violence. The survey also found that many women did not seek medical attention as they feared or were not permitted to do so by their husbands. In the case of sexual violence, 36.5% of women experienced sexual violence by their current husbands in their lifetime and unmarried women are perceived as the top victim, cited by 54% of rural women and 62% of urban women. The report states that the prevalence of violence is higher in rural area as compared to urban areas. More than 40% of women on average and 50% of urban respondents indicated that they had first forced sex while they were at the age of 14 and below. Three quarter of the respondent women (77.8%) indicated that they had first forced sex at age 19 and below.⁹ The Ministry of Health reports 14% of pregnant women's deaths are associated with injury and violence. There are also reports that Bangladeshi women (including underage girls) are being trafficked for the purposes of forced prostitution, especially to Pakistan, India and the Arab countries. For female staffs working in remote areas, security and transportation are a big challenge. Limited transportation options pose problem and hinder mobility. Availability of safe and suitable accommodation is still limited especially for women working in Haor area (e.g. Sunamganj). Female staff working in conservative locations may face threats. In addition, the current trend of political violence poses additional threat and is often unpredictable.⁹

Gender in Emergencies: Gender roles are socially and historically constructed but are also being continually reformulated.¹⁰ Men and women are differently impacted by emergencies causing changes in household and community dynamics. Women are often disproportionately affected by natural disasters and experience specific challenges. In Bangladesh, women are more vulnerable than men to natural disasters because of the gendered characteristics of self-protection, social protection, and livelihood resilience.¹⁰ Research has found that the death rate following the 1991 Sidr and Cyclone was 71 per 1000 among women aged 20-44, compared to 15 per 1000 for men.¹¹ Low literacy rates, limited mobility, restricted access to the public sphere and woman's primary role as caregiver etc. were the identified reasons behind women's higher mortality. Experiences from the past suggest that due to disasters a kind of functional disorder is created where women had to face challenges different from men. Women in Bangladesh generally confront loss of livelihood opportunities, deprivation from relief materials, sexual harassment and little scope of participation during any response or management activities.¹²

¹ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. 2011. *Report on Population Census*, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

² Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey. 2011: www.dghs.gov.bd/licts_file/images/BDHS/BDHS_2011.pdf

³ UNICEF. 2008-2012. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/bangladesh_bangladesh_statistics.html

⁴ Farouk, S.A. 2005. *Violence against women: A statistical overview, challenges in and gaps in data collection and methodology and approaches for overcoming them*. Expert Group Meeting as cited in <http://www.care.org/sites/default/files/documents/2013%20COVAW%20Case%20Study.pdf>

⁵ Human Rights Watch. 2012. "Will I Get My Dues ... Before I Die?" Harms to Women from Bangladesh's Discriminator Laws on Marriage, Separation, and Divorce. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/09/17/will-i-get-my-dues-i-die/harm-women-bangladeshs-discriminatory-laws-marriage>

⁶ ILO. 2013. Female labour force participation in Bangladesh: trends, drivers and barriers. http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sronew_delhi/documents/publication/wcms_250112.pdf

⁷ Partners for Prevention. 2013. Masculinity and Gender-based Violence in Bangladesh: http://www.partners4prevention.org/sites/default/files/resources/bangladesh_qualitative_working_paper_final.pdf

⁸ ILO. 2014. A quiet revolution: Women in Bangladesh: http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_234670/lang--en/index.htm

⁹ BBS. 2013. Violence Against Women Survey 2011. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS)

¹⁰ T. Cannon, Gender and climate hazards in Bangladesh, *Gender and Development*, 10. 2002.

¹¹ BRIDGE Report no. 26: *Background Paper on Gender Issues in Bangladesh*, by S. Baden, A.M. Goetz, C. Green and M. Guhathakurta, commissioned by ODA, August 1994

¹² World Bank Group. 2013. *Improving Women's Odds in Disasters*: www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/12/12/improving-women-disasters