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## Abbreviations

ACC	Anti-Corruption Commission
ANC	Ante-Natal Care
AICC	Agricultural Information and Communication Council
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ART	Anti-Retroviral Therapy
ARV	Anti-retro Viral (drug)
ASPR	Annual Sector Performance Report
ASA	Association for Social Advancement
BB	Bangladesh Bank
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BANBEIS	Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics
BCCSAP	Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy & Action Plan
BDHS	Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey
BGB	Border Guard Bangladesh
BKSP	Bangladesh Krira Shikhhkha Protisthan
BMET	Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training
BMI	Body Mass Index
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BPFA	Beijing Platform for Action
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BRDB	Bangladesh Rural Development Board
BSA	Bangladesh Shishu Academy
BSCIC	Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation
BURO	Basic Unit for Resources and Opportunities
CCGAP	Climate Change and Gender Action Plan
CDMP	Comprehensive Disaster Management Plan
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CFIS	Child Friendly Investigation Skills
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CPF	Community Policing Forum
CRC	Convention on the Rights of Child

CSBA	Community Skilled Birth Attendants
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAE	Department of Agriculture Extension
DGHS	Directorate General of Health Services
DLAC	District Legal Aid Committees
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid
DRR	Disaster Relief and Rehabilitation
DV	Domestic Violence
DWA	Department of Women Affairs
EC	Election Commission
EPI	Expanded Program on Immunization
EPICES	EPI Coverage Evaluation Survey
EPZ	Export Processing Zone
FFW	Food for Work
FFE	Food for Education
FPU	Female Police Unit
FTI	Forensic Training Institute
FWV	Family Welfare Visitor
FY	Fiscal Year
GB	Grameen Bank
GDP	Gross Domestic product
GEI	Gender Equity Index
GPS	Government Primary Schools
GRB	Gender Responsive Budget
GRP	Gender Responsive Planning
GS	Grameen Shakti
HB	Health Bulletin
HDI	Human Development Index
HFWC	Health and family Welfare Centre
HIES	House Income Expenditure Survey
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HPN	Health, Population and Nutrition
HNPSDP	Health, Nutrition and Population Sector Development Program

HNPSP	Health, Nutrition and Population Sector Program
IC	Information Commission
ICS	Improved Cook Stoves
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ICTD	Information and Communication Technology Division
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
LC	Law Commission
LFP	Labour Force Participation
JATI	Judicial Administration Training Institute
JMS	Jatiyo Mahila Sangastha
LDC	Least Developed Countries
LGED	Local Government Engineering Department
LFS	Labour Force Survey
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MFI	Micro Finance Institution
MFLO	Muslim Family Law Ordinance
MHVS	Maternal Health Voucher Scheme
MIDAS	Micro Industries Development Assistance and Services
MOEWOE	Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MOHFW	Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
MOI	Ministry of Information
MOLJPA	Ministry of Law Justice and Parliamentary Affairs
MOP	Ministry of Planning
MOPME	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
MOSW	Ministry of Social Welfare
MOWCA	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs
MOYS	Ministry of Youth and Sports
MP	Member of the Parliament
MSP-VAW	Multi-Sectoral Programme on Violence against Women
NAP	National Action Plan

NAP VAW	National Action Plan on Violence against Women
NCCD	National Council for Children Development
NCTB	National Curriculum and Text Book Board
NCWCD	National Council for Women and Children Development
NEP	National Education Policy
NGO	Non-governmental Organizations
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
NILG	National Institute of Local Government
NPA	National Plan of Action
NSDC	National Skills Development Council
NSDP	National Skills Development Policy
NWM	National Women Machinery
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
NIPORT	National Institute of Population Research and Training
NLASO	National Legal Aid Services Organization
NNS	National Nutrition Services
NPWA	National Policy for Women Advancement
OCC	One Stop Crisis Centre
OMS	Open market sale
PC	Planning Commission
PEDP	Primary Education Development Program
PKSF	Pally Karma Shahayak Foundation
PNC	Post Natal Care
PSC	Parliamentary Standing Committee
PSHTA	Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act
PWD	Person with Disability
RAB	Rapid Action Battalion
RDRS	Rangpur Dinanjpur Rural Services
RDA	Rural Development Academy
RMG	Ready-Made Garments
RPO	Representation of People's Ordinance
RRRI	Rescue, Recovery, Repatriation and Integration

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RTI	Right to Information
RIA	Right to Information Act
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAIEVAC	South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children
SC	The Supreme Court
SFYP	Sixth Five Year Plan
SHS	Solar Home System
SMC	School Management Committee
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SSC	Secondary School Certificate
SSNP	Social Safety Net Program
STD	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
SVRS	Sample Vital Registration System
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
TMSS	Thengamara Mohila Shobuj Shangha
TT	Tetanus Toxoid
TTC	Teachers' Training College
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UP	Union Parishad
UZP	Upazilla Parishad
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
UNCRPD	UN Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities
VAW	Violence against Women
VGD	Vulnerable Group Development
VGf	Vulnerable Group Feeding
VSC	Victim Support Centre
VTE	Vocational and Technical Education
WATSAN	Water and Sanitation
WWD	Women with Disability

WDP	Women Development Policy
WID	Women in Development
WMCA	Water Management Cooperative Association
WIDFP	Women in Development Focal Point
WIDFPIEC	Women in Development Focal Point Implementation and Evaluation Committee
WIDFPCC	Women in Development Focal Point Coordination Committee
WIDFPNC	Women in Development Focal Point Network Committee



## **I. General Information**

### **A. Demographic, Economic, Social and Cultural Characteristics**

#### **1. Geography and Area**

1. Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation on 16 December 1971 preceded by a nine-month long Liberation War under the leadership of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It is located in Southern Asia, bordering the Bay of Bengal, between Myanmar and India. The People's Republic of Bangladesh is in the northern tropical zone between 23-27 degree North latitude and 88-92 degree East longitude and has a territory of about 147,570 square kilometers. It is the largest deltaic plain of the world with a 400-mile long coast line of which a part contains the Bangladesh Part of Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest of the world. Bangladesh is predominantly an agrarian economy and a victim of climate change suffering from increase in extreme climatic events like flood, cyclone, drought, tidal waves, etc.

2. The country consists of low, flat and fertile land, except the hilly regions in the Northeast and the Southeast, some areas of highland in the North and North Eastern part. Bangladesh is a country of rivers and around 93% of catchment area of the main rivers is outside Bangladesh. The major rivers are Padma, Meghna, Jamuna, Teesta, Brahmaputra, Surma and Karnaphuli and the rivers flow down to the Bay of Bengal covering the country with heavy silts deposited by rivers during the rainy season and thus continuously enriching the soil.

#### **2. Demography**

3. The total population of Bangladesh stood at 150.2 million at the time of population census in 2011 with a population density of 1,015 per square kilometer. The total child population in 2012 stood at around 510 million of which 31 million are boys and 28 million are girls (BBS-2012). There are approximately 33.03 million households in the country and average household size is 4.4. Of the total population, 74.98 millions are male and 74.79 million are female, which yields a sex ratio of 100.3 indicating almost equal numbers of men and women in the country. The average annual population growth rate is 1.37%. Approximately 83 per cent of the population is Muslim, 16 per cent is Hindu and 1 per cent is Buddhist, Christian or other (BBS Population Census, 2011). Close to 10% population have different types of physical challenge. The rate of average life-expectancy has been increased to 69 years in 2011. Life expectancy for males rose from 64.4 to 67.9 and for females it rose from 65.8 to 70.3 years during the same period (SVRS 2011). Population aged 12-19 constitutes about 20.9% of the population. As per the existing law, the minimum age of marriage is 18 for girls and 21 for boys.

#### **3. Economy**

4. The economy of Bangladesh is predominantly agrarian. Bangladesh has made significant economic progress over the last ten years. The economy of Bangladesh is a market-based and the Country is classified as a Next Eleven emerging market. Between 2004 and 2014, Bangladesh averaged a GDP growth rate of 5-6%. Despite widespread political demonstrations before the national elections in January 2014, gross domestic product (GDP) growth in Fiscal Year 2014 (ended 30 June 2014) was estimated at 6.2%, half a percentage point higher than projected in the Asian Development Outlook, 2014 in April. Strong expansion in exports outweighed a more moderate rise in imports to narrow the trade deficit in FY2014. The economy is increasingly led by export-oriented

industrialization. The Bangladesh readymade and textile industry is the second-largest in the world and the largest sector employing women. Currently more than 3 million women are working in the RMG sector alone. Bangladesh has enhanced its women labor force from 24% in 2010 to 36% in 2013. Other key sectors include pharmaceuticals, shipbuilding, ceramics, leather goods and electronics. The Bangladesh telecom industry has grown rapidly over the years and is dominated by foreign investors. The government has emphasized the development of software services and hi-tech industries under the *Digital Bangladesh* programme. Remittance from the Bangladeshis working abroad is a major contributor of foreign exchange to the economy. Remittance inflows have more than doubled in the last five years.

5. Real per capita income has increased by more than 130 per cent, poverty rate has declined by more than half and the country is well set to achieve most of the MDGs. The estimated poverty headcount ratio for 2013 was 26.2 per cent and the Planning Commission estimated the figure for 2014 as 25%. Bangladesh has already met one of the indicators of target 1 by bringing down the poverty gap ratio to 6.5 against 2015 target of 8.0. The estimated figures suggest that the MDG target of halving the population living below the poverty line (from 56.7 per cent to 29.0 per cent) has already been achieved by 2012. Poverty rate has declined by 10% during the reporting period.

6. Bangladesh's development experience is particularly remarkable in a sense that it stands out as a positive example of a resilient young nation that has fought many natural disasters as well as internal political conflicts and yet stayed firm on the development path. Per capita income has been raised continuously and steady progress has been made in reducing poverty. Despite the progress in economic growth, poverty is the single most important socio-economic policy challenge for Bangladesh. The agriculture sector is a major component of the Bangladesh economy. The sector contributes 20% of GDP and employs around half of the working population. Remittance plays a major role in reducing poverty and increasing economic growth by driving consumer spending.

#### **4. Social and Cultural Structure**

7. Bangladesh is a democratic, secular and socialist state. Bangladesh has a rich history and culture. The identity of Bangladesh is rooted in a Bengali culture that transcends international borders. The land, the rivers, and the lives of the Bengali people form a rich heritage. It has evolved over the centuries and encompasses the cultural diversity of several social groups of Bangladesh. The Bengali Renaissance of the 19th and 20th centuries noted the contribution from Bengali writers, authors, scientists, researchers, thinkers, music composers, painters and film makers, who have played a significant role in the development of Bengali culture.

8. Though about 90% of the population is Muslim, Bangladesh is a firm believer of peaceful coexistence of people from all ethnic groups including minority groups and protecting and upholding their cultures. The Constitution in Article 23 provides, "The State shall adopt measures to conserve the cultural traditions and heritage of the people, and so to foster and improve the national language, literature and the arts that all sections of the people are afforded the opportunity to contribute towards and to participate in the enrichment of the national culture". The Article further states, "The State shall take steps to protect and develop the unique local culture and tradition of the tribes, minor races, ethnic sects and communities".

9. Though the majority of the population is Muslim and Bengali, but is not homogenous. There are heterogeneous groups of people in the society with different identities and vulnerabilities. These groups face different realities, obstacles, and opportunities and have different needs and priorities. There is a need to take such differences into consideration to remove obstacles, address needs and expand opportunities

for the people. The excluded, disempowered, and vulnerable members of society, in many cases are women, elderly, children, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, geographically vulnerable, and other disadvantaged groups. In accordance with the principles of quality and inclusion the Vision 2021 also incorporates provision for development of all groups to uphold the Constitutional provisions, which are consistent with the principles of CEDAW.

## **B. Development Perspectives**

10. The Government envisaged its development perspectives through the Vision 21 and planned to operationalize it through the Perspective Plan and the Five Year Plans.

### **1. Vision 2021**

11. The implementation of Vision 2021 will be done through two medium term (five year) development plans. The first one spans over FY11-15. Along with higher per capita income, Vision 2021 lays down a development scenario where citizens will have a higher standard of living, will be better educated, will face better social justice, will have a more equitable socio-economic environment, and the sustainability of development will be ensured through better protection from climate change and natural disasters. The associated political environment will be based on democratic principles with emphasis on human rights, freedom of expression, rule of law, equality of citizens irrespective of race, religion and creed, and equality of opportunities. The Bangladesh economy will be managed within the framework of a market economy with appropriate government interventions to correct market distortions, to ensure equality of opportunities, and to ensure equity and social justice for all.

12. The Government recognizes that in a market economy like Bangladesh where the bulk of the economy is privately owned and managed, the role of planning is essentially indicative and strategic in nature. A key focus of the plans are therefore are on strategies, policies and institutions to help guide the private sector in helping Bangladesh achieve the goals set in Vision 2021. The experiences of Bangladesh and elsewhere show that without proper government regulations and public spending in core areas, the social and economic results can be devastating and unsustainable. The experience of the global financial crisis is a good example of this. So, ensuring a proper balance between providing incentives to private sector and instituting regulatory policies for safeguarding public interests is a major guiding principle of the policy and institutional framework of the Sixth and the upcoming Seventh plans. Similarly, the balance between private and public spending, especially in regard to the investment programs in the plans, will receive major attention. The Plans are also to uphold the women's rights as incorporated in Vision 2021.

### **2. The Perspective Plan**

13. The Perspective Plan, 2010-2021 gave the broad directions of the development perspective in light of the Vision 2021. The development perspective envisaged to achieving a prosperous progressive nation with food and energy security, reduction of poverty and a low level of unemployment. It also included great strides in human development including health and nutrition, effective population control, progress in all levels of education, primary, secondary and tertiary in addition to commendable improvement in science and technology, along with great achievement in ICT. Infrastructure development including transport and connectivity and simultaneous fulfilment of economic, social, civil and political rights of women was also envisaged. Strong links between economic growth, expansion of employment opportunities, reduction

of poverty, expansion of democracy and empowerment, consolidation of cultural identity and protection of environment for the next generation.

14. The Perspective Plan envisaged achieving the development goals through a set of structural, social, human and physical action, which are:

- Building a secular tolerant liberal progressive democratic state;
- Promoting good governance and curbing corruption;
- Promoting sustainable human development;
- Instituting a prudent macroeconomic policy mix;
- Promoting a favourable industrializations and trade policy regime;
- Addressing globalization and regional cooperation challenges;
- Ensuring adequate supply of electricity and fuel;
- Achieving food security;
- Making available adequate infrastructure;
- Pursuing environmental friendly development; and
- Building a digital Bangladesh.

15. Some of the objectives in specific terms are:

- Eliminate illiteracy by 2014;
- Attain hundred per cent enrolment in the 12th class by 2021 with gender parity addressing the dropout problem at the primary and secondary levels;
- Reduce unemployment rate to 15 per cent by 2021;
- Reduce poverty to about 14 per cent and bring down the number of poor people to about 25 million in 2021;
- Emphasise energy availability to provide per capita energy consumption of about 600 kwh;
- Raise per capita income to about \$2000 by 2021;
- All the historical monuments/mass graves of martyred war veterans will be preserved;
- Conserved and restored by 2021; and
- Strengthen information technology to establish a digital Bangladesh.

16. The Plan envisaged women's advancement through promoting education of women; direct election for women members of parliament and other local government bodies; combating abuses against women and children, especially those in domestic work; expanding the safety net programmes for the female-headed households along with appropriate skill training; making drudgery saving technology available; providing micro credit for sustainable self-reliance; and supporting coping strategies against climate change and in disaster.

### **3. Sixth Five Year Plan and Gender Mainstreaming:**

17. The current Five Year Plan is the sixth in the series of development plans in Bangladesh starting in 1973. Women's needs and interest have been considered in various development plans of Bangladesh in order to ensure gender equality. The SFYP formulated

by the Government in the light of the Vision 2021 and MDGs puts forward the gender agenda with more emphasis in gender mainstreaming through integration into planning and budgeting. This has been reflected through the Medium-Term Budget Framework (MTBF) that considers gender concerns in budget preparation process to minimize the gaps through Gender Responsive Planning (GRP) and Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB). The SFYP focuses on establishing the overall rights of women, achieve gender equality and empower women, and include women in the mainstream of development activities. The vision for women's advancement and rights of the Sixth Five Year Plan is to create a society where men and women will have equal opportunities and will enjoy all fundamental rights on an equal basis. To achieve this vision, the mission is to ensure women's advancement and rights in activities of all sectors of the economy.

18. Accordingly, establishing equal opportunities for women in all sections of the society with an objective of integrating them into social and economic sphere is a major strategic element underlying the SFYP. The SFYP strategy embeds the critical role of women in nation building and thus ensures that their needs, rights, entitlements and contributions are appropriately reflected in the SFYP document. The human development and social protection strategies underlying the SFYP will place particular emphasis on gender aspects of development. It is also recognized that women are a heterogeneous groups such that their situations, deprivations, and needs vary according to their locations within various communities, religions, and regions. Women frequently experience poverty differently, have different poverty reduction priorities and are affected differently by development interventions. Thus, along with promoting rights and entitlements of women, the SFYP envisages to cater to all these differential and specific requirements.

19. The vision for women's advancement and rights of the SFYP is to create a society where men and women will have equal opportunities and will enjoy all fundamental rights on an equal basis. To achieve this vision, the mission is to ensure women's advancement and rights in activities of all sectors of the economy. The SFYP recognized the different priorities of women and needs for addressing them while planning development interventions. In addressing gender based discrimination, the SFYP follows a two-pronged approach. Firstly, integrating gender into all sectoral interventions and secondly, removing all policy and social biases against women with a view to ensuring gender equality as enshrined in the National Constitution.

20. **SFYP strategy to address gender issues:** The main strategy and policy initiatives to improve the economic political and social inclusion and empowerment of women in SFYP include:

- Policy and legal framework;
- Productive employment;
- Enabling environment;
- Eliminating female health and education disparities;
- Priority to women in social protection programs;
- Political empowerment and participation;
- Addressing violence against women (VAW);
- Gender mainstreaming;
- Institutional strengthening;
- Integrating gender issues in planning and budgetary processes;
- Strengthening female participation in economic decision making;

- Addressing ethnic dimension of women;
- Promoting public image of women;
- Disability and gender issues.

#### **21. National Policies and Strategies for Gender Mainstreaming and Upholding Women's Rights**

National Policy for Women's Advancement (NPWA) was adopted in 1997 through a wide consultative process with stakeholders, women rights groups, human rights activists, and in the light of the CEDAW, BPFA, and the Constitution of Bangladesh. It may be noted that after signing Beijing PFA in 1995, Bangladesh was one of the first countries adopting NPWA in 1997 and the National Action Plan (NPA) in 1998, reflecting its staunch commitment as a State-party to the regional and international agreements. While activities and programs were underway in conformity with NPWA 1997, the said Policy was subsequently revised in 2004 and 2008. As per the election commitment, the Government formulated the Women's Development Policy (WDP) in 2011 and the National Action Plan (NAP) 2013 has been approved for the implementation of the WDP 2011. The WDP 2011 provides for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and ensures their rights and equal partnership in development.

**22. Objectives of the Women Development Policy, 2011:** The WDP 2011 aims at eliminating all forms of discrimination against women by empowering them to become equal partners in development. The development objectives for women's empowerment are to:

- Establish equal rights of men and women in areas of state and public life in the light of the constitution of Bangladesh;
- Ensure security and safety of women in all areas of state, social and family life;
- Ensure the socio-economic, political, administrative and legal empowerment;
- Establish human rights of women;
- Ensure full and equal participation of women in the mainstream socioeconomic development;
- Bring up women as educated and skilled human resources;
- Free the women from the curse of poverty;
- Remove existing male-female disparities;
- Give appropriate recognition to women's contribution in socio-economic areas;
- Eliminate all forms of abuse of women and girl child;
- Eliminate discrimination to women and female children;
- Establish gender equality in politics, administration, other areas of activity, socio-economic activity, education, culture, sports and in all areas of family life;
- Innovate and import technology favoring the interest of women and prohibit anti-women technologies;
- Ensure taking appropriate steps to ensure sound health and nutrition of the women;
- Ensure priority of women in provision for proper shelter and housing;
- Arrange rehabilitation of the women affected in natural calamities and armed conflicts;

- Extend overall assistance to ensure rights of the disabled women and women belonging to the smaller ethnic groups;
- Arrange safety of the widow, aged, guardianless, husband abandoned, unmarried and childless women;
- Reflect gender perspective in the mass media including positive image of the women and female children;
- Assist in flowering of Talented, genius women of their creative potentials;
- Provide necessary support services for development of women; and
- Provide overall assistance in ensuring the growth of women entrepreneurs.

#### 23. Strategies of the Government on Women Empowerment:

The government has taken different strategies under WDP 2011 for women empowerment as follows:

- Ensuring human rights and fundamental freedom of women;
- Development of girl child;
- Elimination of all forms of abuse against women;
- Addressing situation of women in armed conflict;
- Education and training;
- Sports and culture;
- Ensuring active role of women and their equal rights in all the national economic activity;
- Poverty elimination of women;
- Economic empowerment of women;
- Employment of women; and
- Making gender responsive budget and gender disaggregated database.

#### 24. Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting

The present Government in the light of its Election Manifesto and MDGs puts forward the gender agenda with more emphasis in gender mainstreaming through integration into planning and budgeting. This has been reflected through the Medium-Term Budget Framework (MTBF) that considers gender concerns in budget preparation process to minimize the gaps through Gender Responsive Planning (GRP) and Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB). For the first time in 2009-2010 fiscal year for ensuring the participation of women in various programmes, the gender responsive budget was formulated. The Ministry of Finance has put in place a practice of gender budget reporting at the Parliament during the budget session. Currently 40 ministries/divisions are included in gender responsive budgeting. Gender specific information about the beneficiaries is presented in the budget of these ministries/divisions. The process helped to create awareness about the gender and prevent discrimination against women.

## C. Constitutional, Political and Legal Structure

### 1. Constitutional Structure

25. Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972 is the solemn expression of the will of the people and the supreme law of the land. Article 7 is the Pole Star of the Constitution stating that all powers in the Republic belong to the people. Part-II of the Constitution contains the Fundamental Principles of State Policy, fundamental to the governance of Bangladesh to be applied by the State in the making of laws and serve as guide to interpretation of the Constitution and of other laws. Part-III contains Fundamental Rights i.e. right to equality before law, right to life, right to equal protection of law etc.

26. The Article 19 (1) (2) of the Constitution states: "Equality of opportunity as follows- (1) The State shall endeavour to ensure equality of opportunity to all citizens. (2) The State shall adopt effective measures to remove social and economic inequality between man and woman and to ensure the equitable distribution of wealth among citizens, and of opportunities in order to attain a uniform level of economic development throughout the Republic."

### 2. Political Structure

27. The President is the Head of State and the Prime Minister is the Head of the Government. The Cabinet Ministers are selected by the Prime Minister. The President acts in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister. The executive power is exercised by the Prime Minister.

28. **The Parliament:** The Parliament is a single house one and is led by the Speaker. It has 350 seats of which 50 are reserved for women selected by the political parties proportionate to their seats. Women are eligible to compete for the 300 general seats. In the 10th Parliament there is a total of 50 Standing Committees responsible to monitor activities of the ministries.

29. **The cabinet:** The newly elected Government in January 2014 led by a woman Prime Minister has appointed three women to the cabinet (one as full ministers and two as state ministers) responsible for key portfolios such as Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Public Administration and Ministry of Women and Children Affairs.

30. **Local Government:** The country is administratively divided into 7 divisions consisting of 64 districts, 489 Upazilas (sub-districts), 636 Police Stations and 4,562 Union Parishads (Councils). The lowest unit of local government is the Union Parishad (UP) run by elected representatives. Additionally, for urban development, there are 11 City Corporations and 324 municipalities.

31. **Union Parishad (UP):** The Union Parishad Act (Second Amendment) 1997 allows for direct election of one chairperson and twelve members to the UPs. Each member represents a single ward (constituted by several villages). In addition, three seats are reserved for women to be elected by direct vote. In addition to the three reserved seats, women can take part in direct elections for general seats. The Act is considered a milestone towards increasing women's participation in the political empowerment process and promoting their political skills through direct elections.

32. **Upazila Parishad (UZP):** The Upazilla Parishad Act, 2009 reserved one seat for women among the two elected vice chairpersons. Women are elected in reserved seats the number of which is equal to one third of the regular seats. The provision of reserved seats for women would not limit rights of women's direct election to compete for the general seats (The Upazilla Parishad Act, 2009).



33. **City Corporations and Pourashavas:** Ten city corporations and 517 municipal bodies known as *pourashavas* (small townships) provide elected governance in cities and townships. Three to five seats of pourashavas for women depending on the size of the 'pourashavas. As per the Local Government (City Corporation) Act 2009, one third of the counselors' seats (and ten to thirty depending on the size of the city corporations) are reserved for women candidates and women can also contest for direct election for the general seats. In the landmark election of Narayanganj City Corporation a woman was elected as Mayor with a sweeping majority.

34. The administrative units consist of 7 divisions, 64 districts and 489 upazillas and the civil servants carry out the executive responsibilities of these administrative units.

#### **Representation of People's Ordinance**

35. Representation of People's Ordinance (RPO) 2013 (Third Amendment) specifies that a registered political party must meet up some criteria in order to qualify to participate the national election. The political party must have incorporated some specific provisions in their constitution namely a) to elect the members of the committees at all levels including members of the central committee and b) to fix the goal of reserving at least 33% of all committee positions for women including the central committee and progressively achieving this goal by the year 2020. Article 90(c) mentioned that a political party will not qualify for registration if the party constitution has any discriminatory clause regarding religion, race, caste, language or sex. To be nominated by a party, the candidate is required to have been a member of that party for at least three years. The recent RPO is significant for its initiatives to promote parties to adopt practices of internal democracy, such as election of party leadership and more grassroots power over candidate nomination; mandated parties to hold certain basic principles such as non-discrimination; tough financial controls to increase transparency in party operations; inclusion of women inside the party leadership role.

#### **Legal Structure**

36. The Supreme Court (SC) of Bangladesh is the highest judicial authority and its decisions are binding on all sub-ordinate courts, executives and judicial authorities in the country. The Supreme Court consists of the Chief Justice and the Judges of the Appellate Division and the High Court Division. Judicial review is the most important power of the SC for the purpose of enforcement of fundamental rights. The SC has recognised human rights which have not been expressly incorporated in the constitution as fundamental rights in some cases and has enforced international treaty provisions into national legal regime.

37. In addition to the Supreme Court, there are subordinate courts as envisaged under the Constitution. District level Judiciary is responsible for both criminal and civil cases. At the sub-district level, the judicial magistracy operates.

## **II. General Framework for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights**

### **A. Acceptance of International Human Rights Norms**

38. Bangladesh is party to a number of international human rights treaties that make it obligatory to ensure the rights to equality before law and to equal protection of the law, as well as the right to personal liberty and security, freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention, freedom from torture and cruelty, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, and to an effective remedy in case of violation of any of these rights. These

rights are enshrined in Part III of the Constitution of Bangladesh as Fundamental Human Rights.

39. Fundamental Principles of State Policy contained in Part II of the Constitution provides in Article 10, Participation of Women in National Life to the following effect- “Steps shall be taken to ensure participation of women in all spheres of national life”. According to Article 27 of the Constitution, “All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law”; Article 28 (1), “The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only for religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth”; and Article 28 (2), “Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and of public life”. Article 31 provides right to be treated in accordance with law. Furthermore, Part III of the Constitution contains right to life and personal liberty (Article 32), right to freedom of thought, conscience and speech (Article 39) that are equally applicable for women. While guaranteeing non-discrimination and equal protection of law for all citizens, the Constitution allows affirmative action for the development of the underprivileged sections of the population like women, children and the other deprived sections of the citizens. The Constitution also provides the Fundamental Principles of State Policy requiring the government to ensure democratic, economic, social, and cultural progress of the citizens.

40. Bangladesh has continued to demonstrate its commitment regarding the issue of human rights promotion and protection. Ratification of the several Conventions reflects the commitment of Bangladesh in fulfilling its international obligations as State Party. Since the last report on CEDAW in 2009, the Parliament passed much legislation which addressed the political, socio-economic and cultural rights of the people, especially women, children, ethnic minorities, workers, socially marginalised people etc. These national legislations have been enacted with a view to better realisation of international human rights obligations. The most significant new laws that relate to women’s rights are:

- Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010;
- Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Rules, 2013;
- National Identity Registration Act, 2010;
- Hindu Marriage Registration Act, 2012;
- Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012;
- Overseas Employment Act, 2013;
- Bangladesh Labour (Amendment) Act 2013;
- Control of Pornography Act, 2012;
- Climate Change Trust Act, 2010;
- Disaster Management Act, 2011;
- Vagrant and Homeless People (Rehabilitation) Act, 2011;
- National Human Rights Commission Act, 2009;
- Anti-Terrorism Act, 2009;
- Right to Information Act, 2009;
- Small Ethnic Group Cultural Institutions Act, 2010;
- Prime Minister’s Education Assistance Trust Fund Act, 2012.

### Policy measures

41. Since UPR 2009, the Government demonstrated its human rights commitment by adopting a number of new policies for promotion and protection of human rights. The major ones are:

- National Women Development Policy, 2011;
- National Children Policy, 2011;
- National Child Labour Elimination Policy, 2010;
- National Education Policy, 2010;
- National Child Rights Policy, 2010;
- Domestic Workers Protection and Welfare Policy 2010;
- National Labour Policy, 2011;
- National Skill Development Policy, 2011.

## B. Legal Framework for the Protection of Human Rights at the National Level

42. The Constitution is the source of the legal framework and it contains fundamental human rights in Part-III. All existing laws inconsistent with provisions of this Part shall to the extent of such inconsistency become void. The State shall not make any law inconsistent with any provisions of this Part, and any law so made, shall to the extent of such inconsistency, be void.

43. Article 1.2 (1) provides that High Court Division on the application of any person aggrieved, may give such direction and or order as may be appropriate for enforcement of any of the fundamental rights conferred by Part III of the Constitution.

44. In addition, there are specific legislations for protection to women and ensuring non-discriminatory treatment towards them and upholding their rights such as Prevention of Cruelty to Women and Children Act, Acid Control Act and Dowry Prohibition Act.

## C. Framework for Promotion of Human Rights at the National Level

45. **National Human Rights Commission (NHRC):** National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Act, 2009 authorizes the setting up of a Human Rights Commission, constituted by seven members, of whom at least one will be a woman and one will be from a minority community. The Government prioritised transforming the NHRC into the primary institution that oversees human rights implementation in Bangladesh. The Government appointed a chairperson, undertook comprehensive reorganisation, secured 'B'-status rating by the International Coordinating Committee of NHRI, and ensured NHRC's functional independence. The Government is actively considering further enhancement of its budgetary and human resources. The NHRC has set up an online Complaints Management System. The NHRC Act, 2009 empowers the NHRC to exercise its investigative power *suo moto* to probe into any alleged violation of human rights. Its mandate extends, inter alia, to summon explanation from the law enforcing agencies and other public authorities, visit jails, prisons or correctional centres, lodge writ petitions to the High Court Division on behalf of an aggrieved person and exercise the powers of a civil court while conducting any inquiry.

46. **Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC):** The ACC acts as an independent institution to investigate and prosecute offences related to corruption. The Government has undertaken reforms to ensure independence of ACC. The Anti-Corruption Commission (Amendment) Act, 2013 gives ACC stronger institutional powers and capacity to combat corruption. The ACC has formed Corruption Prevention Committees in metropolitan areas districts and upazillas (sub-districts) with a view to raising awareness and promoting anti-corruption movement among citizens.

47. **Law Commission of Bangladesh:** The Law Commission is a statutory body empowered to recommend enactment, amendment or repealing of laws relating to fundamental rights and values of society. It codifies laws and advises reforms of the judicial system. Before finalising draft laws, the Commission consults, solicits and considers submissions from various stakeholders. Since 2009, the Commission has prepared a number of reports on reform of laws for the promotion of human rights, including abolition of corporal punishment, prevention of sexual harassment in educational institutions and workplaces, prevention of violence against women, protection of victims and witnesses to grave offences, ensuring speedy disposal of civil and criminal cases, reform of Hindu family laws and the withdrawal of reservation on the two Articles of CEDAW. The Law Commission is currently working on reports on the Protection of the Rights of the Marginalized and Disadvantaged Sections, the enactment of new laws on medical negligence, prevention of torture and death in police custody.

48. **Information Commission (IC):** The IC has been established as per Right to Information Act, 2009 (RIA) with a view to ensuring citizens' *access to information* under public and private domain. IC retains the power to impose legal sanctions for breach of RIA, including failure of any public or private organization to provide information to anyone who may apply.

49. **National Legal Aid Services Organization (NLASO):** The GOB, through the Legal Aid Act, 2010, has set up the country's first legal aid institution NLASO in order to facilitate poor citizens' access to justice and enforcement of their rights. The NLASO provides service through District Legal Aid Committees (DLAC) operating in all districts. Each DLAC reserves a legal aid fund financed by the Government. The NLASO has put in place hotline numbers which are accessible by the people.

50. **Non-governmental and civil society organizations (NGO/CSOs):** The vibrant and internationally acclaimed NGOs and CSOs complement the government's efforts for promoting human rights, economic and human development and good governance. Consultation and active collaboration between the Government and non-governmental organizations is a continued process that have been contributing actively in human rights law and policy making process, in follow-up of UPR and implementation of international treaties. The Government has developed strong linkages with the broader civil society through a process of continuous consultation. Representatives of women's organizations and eminent women activists, writers, and researchers are part of the national machinery such as the NCWCD.

51. The NGOs are actively engaged as partner in a wide range of activities such as micro-financing; poverty alleviation; disaster management; protection of environment; education and training; health services; development of vulnerable groups such as children, women and persons with physical and mental disabilities; and advocacy on protection and promotion of civil and political rights and good governance. The government welcomes the efforts of the NGOs and CSOs in strengthening the national human rights regime.

52. **The media:** A vibrant and vigilant media are key to an integral democratic institution to ensure promotion and protection of human rights and strengthen democracy. The Government is vigilant that media can always perform its role in full freedom. There

are about 41 private television channels, 32 community radio channels (all are approved and only 1 channel is working) and 28 new private FM radio channels (working-12, rest are approved and awaiting for broadcasting).

53. **Citizens:** Article 102 of the Constitution empowers citizens to enforce their fundamental rights through the intervention of SC. The SC, by way of interpretation, recognised the right of individuals to institute public interest litigations. In case of violation of fundamental human rights, an aggrieved person may seek shelter of law by invoking writ jurisdiction under Article 102 of the Constitution before the High Court Division of Supreme Court of Bangladesh. There is specific legislation for protection of women and there is scope to file cases under that legislation that the Police can file complaint case before a Magistrate.

### **III. Information on Non-Discrimination and Equality and Effective Remedies**

54. As mentioned earlier that all citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law under Article 27 of the Constitution. The Article 28 ensures non-discrimination and Article 29 ensures equality in employment.

55. To ensure equality of women, the WDP, 2011 incorporates provisions for promoting equality and non-discrimination in all spheres of life. The NAP, 2013 to implement National Women Development Policy 2011 provides guidelines for the implementation of the Policy. Ministry of Women and Children Affairs has been formulated National Action Plan to prevent Violence Against Women and Children 2013-2025 to protect and ensure women's human rights.

56. As mentioned earlier, the Government has taken a positive step in directing that the mother's name be included in all official documents. In 2009, the High Court ruled that the mother's name be inserted in school admission forms, either alone or with that of the father. The specific steps taken to promote equality have been discussed in the Section II of this report.

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