



ADVOCACY MESSAGES

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS

By Development Partners and UN Agencies of the Local Consultative Group on Women's Advancement and Gender Equality (LCG WAGE)

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CONTEXT:

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is one of the most systematic, widespread human rights violations worldwide. In Bangladesh, VAWG rates remain high despite progress on normative and policy frameworks. Bangladesh has adopted several laws, policies, and plans to address VAWG, including a National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children (2018-2030) and a National Action Plan to End Child Marriage (2018-2030). However, challenges remain in the implementation of these frameworks, including limited human and financial resources. VAWG stems from persistent deeply rooted gender inequalities and discriminatory social norms and practices. Limited access to affordable, essential, and adequate multi-sectoral services, coupled with social stigma attached to survivors of violence, hinders survivors from receiving the required response services. An increase in gender-based violence and sexual harassment was observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, both offline and online. The government's 8th Five Year Plan calls for multi-pronged action to combat VAWG, including through prevention, education, and response, at all levels.

Linkages: 8th Five Year Plan National Priority: Gender and Inequality and National Priority: Governance, Women Development Policy (2011), National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children (2018-2030), National Action Plan to End Child Marriage (2018-2030), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5 - Gender Equality).

50% of women between the ages of 20-24 were married before their 18th birthday.

Demographic and Health Survey (2022)

72% of ever-married women have experienced some form of violence at least once in their lifetime.

VAWG Survey (2015)

2% of women took legal action for partner physical or sexual violence.

VAWG Survey (2015)

25% of women agree that a husband is justified in hitting/beatings his wife in at least one of the following circumstances: she goes out without telling him, she neglects the children, she argues with him, she refuses sex with him, and she burns the food.

Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2019)

62% of women think physical harm, abuse, and harassment has gotten worse since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Violence Against Women During COVID-19 (2022)

KEY ADVOCACY MESSAGES:

Legislation

Robust legal frameworks provide a foundation for safeguarding the rights of all individuals, regardless of their gender, and constitute the legal basis for addressing issues such as discrimination, violence, harassment, and unequal treatment. Over the past decade, Bangladesh has demonstrated its commitment to gender equality by formulating and amending discriminatory provisions in legislation. Despite this, some laws and policies are not yet in full conformity with CEDAW. **Call for the removal of all discriminatory provisions in laws and policies, and their alignment with relevant international conventions ratified, including withdrawing the reservation on CEDAW Article 2 and 16(1c),¹ enacting the draft sexual harassment prevention and protection act (2022) for workplaces and educational institutions, redefining the concept of 'family**

relationship' in the Domestic Violence Act (2010),² and amending the definition of rape in laws addressing gender-based violence,³ among others.

Progress has been made in reducing the percentage of women aged 20-24 who are married before age 18, as observed in the decline from 65 per cent in 2011 to 50 per cent in 2022.⁴ Despite institutional efforts, such as the Child Marriage Restraint Act (2017), Child Marriage Restraint Rule (2018), and the National Action Plan to End Child Marriage (2018-2030), the prevalence of child marriage in Bangladesh remains unacceptable. **Reiterate the importance of strong and rigorous ownership and enforcement of the laws related to child marriage and the allocation of adequate resources for the full implementation of the national strategies and plans to achieve the target of ending**

child marriage by 2041 as set out in the National Action Plan to End Child Marriage (2018-2030).

Bangladesh has strong and comprehensive national plans, complemented by legislation, to address the challenge of violence against women and girls, including the National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children (2018-2030) and the National Action Plan to Prevent Child Marriage (2018-2030).

Call for strong monitoring mechanisms to ensure accountability to the existing national action plans and legislation, with an allocation of the required human and financial resources for periodic data collection, management, analyses, and reporting.

Monitoring the implementation of the national action plans is a strategic tool for achieving goals, maintaining accountability, adapting to changing circumstances, and promoting transparent and effective governance. It contributes to evidence-based decision-making and supports the realization of the 8th Five Year Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Prevention

The 8th Five Year Plan acknowledges that discriminatory practices such as child marriage and gender-based violence persist due to practices, rooted in the traditional social norms that favour boys over girls. In Bangladesh, almost 72.6 per cent of ever-married women experience one or more forms of violence by their husbands at least once in their lifetime.⁵ **Reinforce the need to accelerate evidence-based prevention of violence against women and girls with dedicated interventions to address patriarchal behaviour, gender stereotypes, and harmful social norms, across all aspects of life.** Everyone, including local elected representatives, religious leaders, government departments, teachers, and community members, across all levels, family, community, institutions, and society, play an important role in promoting equitable gender and social norms that recognize and respect human rights.

Biases, gender stereotypes, and discriminatory social norms are held by both women and men. **Note the importance of constructive engagement with men and boys as partners and agents of change in addressing discriminatory social norms and systems that perpetuate gender inequality and unequal power structures.** It is crucial for the general development of Bangladesh to address these persistent social norms to remain on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and 8th Five Year Plan.

Response

A comprehensive gender-responsive and survivor-centered response is critical to ensure that all survivors, including individuals from marginalized groups, have access to the required essential services. The provision, coordination, and governance of essential health, police, justice, and social services can significantly mitigate the consequences that violence has on well-being, health, and safety; assist in recovery; and stop violence from reoccurring.⁶ **Reaffirm the need to invest in the provision of accessible, quality, comprehensive, inclusive, and**

multi-sectoral coordinated response services, including health sector response to gender-based violence, legal aid, livelihood, and mental health and psychosocial support and services, at national and sub-national levels. Any response needs to be age- and ability-appropriate, taking into consideration the needs and best interests of the survivor, in line with the 'do no harm' principle.

In a ministerial conference on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI)⁷ in 2022, Bangladesh was one of the 54 countries that endorsed the new global Political Declaration that sets out how states will work together to strengthen the global prevention of and response to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). **Acknowledge the government's endorsement of the PSVI Political Declaration and emphasize the importance of implementing the actions⁸ committed to in the declaration to carry forward this agenda.**

Financing

Bangladesh has demonstrated its commitment to gender-responsive budgeting, increasing the total gender budget allocation from 24.65 per cent for FY 2009-10 to 34.37 per cent for FY 2023-24.⁹ Gender-responsive budgeting continues to be an important tool and strategy to address gender disparities in resource allocation, policy formulation, and service delivery. Civil society organizations provide crucial support and services for gender-based violence prevention and response, complementary to that of the state. **Encourage the application of gender-responsive budgeting, and its monitoring, to establish a fund accessible to survivors of gender-based violence, including for those living in climate-vulnerable areas, persons with disabilities, and survivors from other marginalized groups.** Gender-responsive budgeting is essential both for gender equality and for fiscal justice as it ensures gender-equitable distribution of resources contributes to equal opportunities for all.

Data

Bangladesh has demonstrated its commitment to gender equality by initiating efforts to collect and analyse sex-disaggregated data, such as the Time-Use Survey (2021). More recently, Bangladesh has initiated the violence against women prevalence survey (data expected in 2024). However, a key challenge hindering the implementation and monitoring of SDG 5, and the relevant strategies and plans, remains a lack of adequate gender-sensitive reliable and comparable data, including data that is disaggregated by sex, age, disability, and other socioeconomic characteristics.¹⁰ **Encourage the regular collection, analysis, and use of services and administrative data, and periodic collection, analysis, and use of prevalence data (quantitative and qualitative), on violence against women and girls to inform policy formulation and programming, and guide resource allocations.** In the 2022 SDG Progress Report, the Government of Bangladesh has emphasized the need for data generation, noting that without credible and quality data, illustrating progress on SDGs implementation is challenging.¹¹

⁵Status of Ratification Interactive Dashboard (2023), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

⁶Currently the definition of domestic violence (DV), does not take into account divorced women, nor women who are in a live-in relationship, as it defines DV as "physical abuse, psychological abuse, sexual abuse or economic abuse against a woman or a child of a family by any other person of that family with whom the aggrieved person is in a family relationship." (Section 3 of the Act), where the term 'family relationship' is defined as a relationship established through consanguinity, marriage, and adoption or by being a member of a joint family.

⁷Because the definition falls short of illustrating the meaning of 'penetration' the traditional meaning of 'sexual intercourse' is used to define rape, which leaves out several other ways of sexual penetration, which are generally considered as rape in many jurisdictions. The definition also fails to elaborate on the meaning of the term 'consent'.

⁸Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey, Key Indicator Report (2022), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

⁹Violence Against Women Survey (2015), Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

¹⁰Essential Service Package (2015), UN Women, UNFPA, WHO, UNDP and UNODC.

⁷The State Minister for the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWCA) led Bangladesh in the ministerial global conference on PSVI that was hosted by the United Kingdom in London between 28-29 November 2022.

⁸The key actions Bangladesh committed to include: strengthening the global response, including by working with the UN to build global multilateral consensus in combatting CRSV and to mitigate the suffering of CRSV victims worldwide; reforming policy and investing in programmes that tackle the harmful gender norms that drive sexual violence; deliver training to the military and law enforcement agencies to tackle CRSV; strengthen access to justice by enhancing the capacity of the criminal justice system to conduct survivor-centers investigations and prosecutions of CRV cases; and enhance investments in programmes supporting survivors of gender-based violence, including CRSV; among other (Source: International Ministerial Conference on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiatives 2022: national commitments, June 2023).

⁹Gender Budget Report 2023-24 (2023), Ministry of Finance.

¹⁰Sustainable Development Goals, Bangladesh Progress Report (2022), General Economics Division, Government of Bangladesh.

¹¹Sustainable Development Goals, Bangladesh Progress Report (2022), General Economics Division, Government of Bangladesh.