



# Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Bangladesh



Implemented by

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সেন্টার ফর পলিসি ডায়ালগ (সিপিডি)  
Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

# BUDGET HELPDESK 2022

Technical Assistance to Support the Implementation of the PFM Reform Strategic Plan in Bangladesh

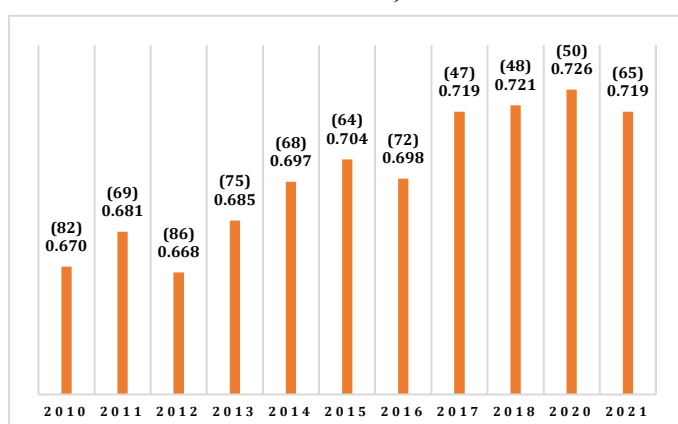
## 1. Introduction

‘Gender equality and women empowerment’ is one of the major priority areas of development of the Awami League government led by the Hon’ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's development ideas cover a large part of women's emancipation and women's empowerment in the country. The government’s key development policies put special focus on gender mainstreaming through different initiatives and activities. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 has specific gender-related targets to be achieved by 2030. Bangladesh has already achieved some of the SDG targets on gender equality and women empowerment. The country has a ‘women development policy’, the current version has been updated in 2011. In order to implement it, a National Action Plan has been developed in 2013 which is now being implemented in line with the SDGs. The 8th Five Year Plan (8FYP) 2020-2025 specifically mentioned about improving and enhancing women’s economic participation and benefits, women’s freedom of speech, and programmes for the welfare of mother and child. Overall, the need for further improvements in gender equality and women empowerment is rightly emphasised in the policy documents, and the government has undertaken a number of initiatives through different ministries to achieve the relevant targets.

## 2. Bangladesh's Performance in the Global Context

Bangladesh is in a better position in terms of gender parity. This is evinced through the increasing empowerment of women across political, economic, and social spheres. Also, Bangladesh has secured better score in gender equality according to the Global Gender Gap Index prepared by World Economic Forum (WEF). Bangladesh has been significantly improving in terms of reducing gender gap over the years. It ranked 65<sup>th</sup> among 156 Countries in 2021 which was 82<sup>nd</sup> in 2010 (Figure 1). Bangladesh scored highest among the seven South Asian countries—a reflection of positive advancement from the vantage point of gender equality (Table 1).

**Figure 1: Gender Gap Index for Bangladesh (2010–2021)**



Source: World Economic Forum Gender Gap Reports (2010-2021).

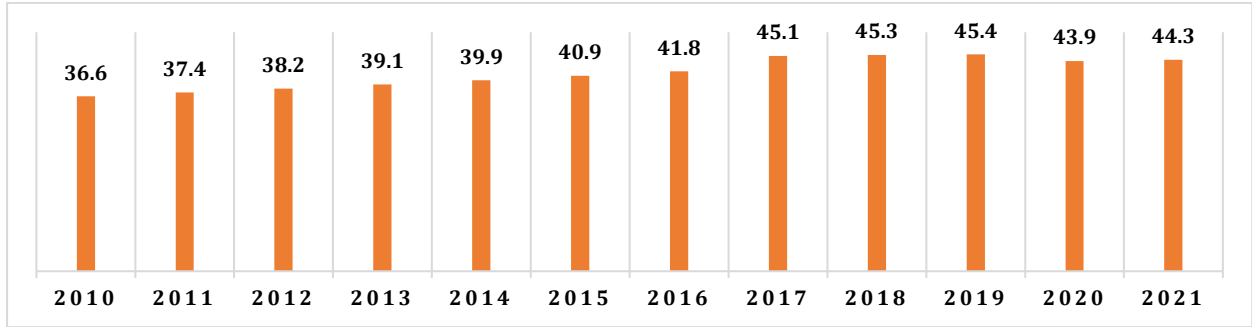
Note: Figures in parantheses indicate country ranking.

**Table 1: Gender Gap Index 2020 and 2021**  
Source: World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report 2021.

Country	2021	
	Rank	Score
<b>Bangladesh</b>	65	0.719
<b>Maldives</b>	128	0.642
<b>India</b>	140	0.625
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	116	0.670
<b>Nepal</b>	106	0.683
<b>Bhutan</b>	130	0.639
<b>Pakistan</b>	153	0.556

In addition, female-to-male labour force participation rate—an indicator of gender parity—has improved over the years (Figure 2). This is a reflection of the improvement in the status of women in terms of participation in economic activities and entitlement to benefits. This also demonstrates the progress of the government's effectiveness in promoting women's development and reducing gender inequality.

**Figure 2: Ratio of Female to Male Labour Force Participation Rate (%) (2010-2021)**

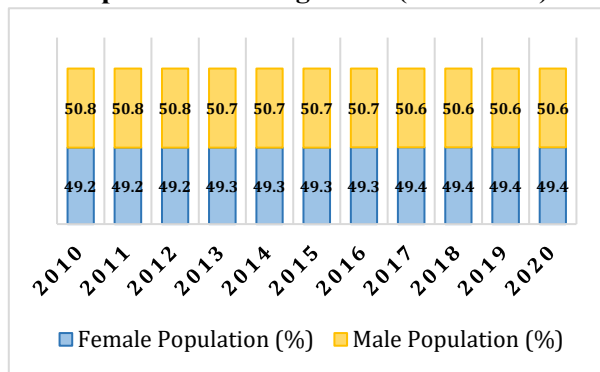


Source: World Development Indicator, World Bank.

### 3. Women in National Economy

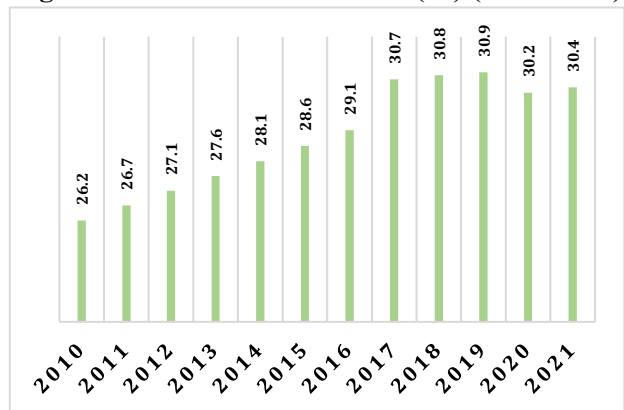
Bangladesh is densely populated where women represent nearly half of the population (Figure 3). It is evident that female labour participation is rising progressively and they are being empowered. There has been a rise in female labour participation in the job market over the last decade—from 26.2 per cent in 2010 to 30.4 per cent in 2021 (Figure 4). It indicates educational, social, political and economic progress for women in the country.

**Figure 3: Male to Female Ratio in Total Population of Bangladesh (2010–2020)**



Source: World Development Indicator, World Bank.

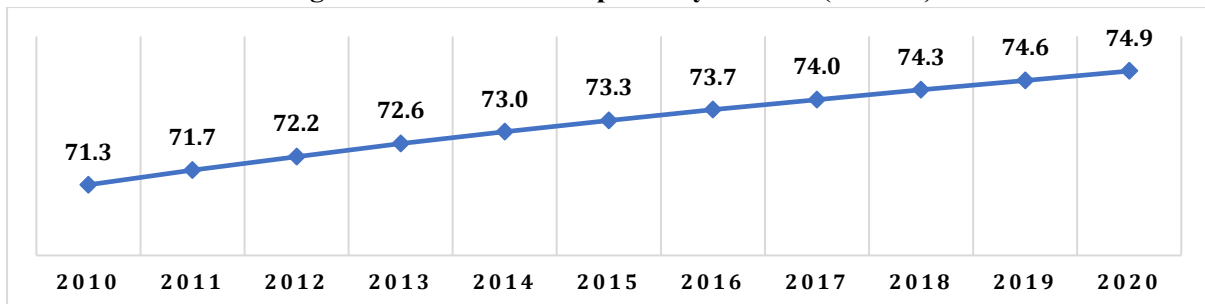
**Figure 4: Female Labour Force (%) (2010–2021)**



Source: World Development Indicator, World Bank.

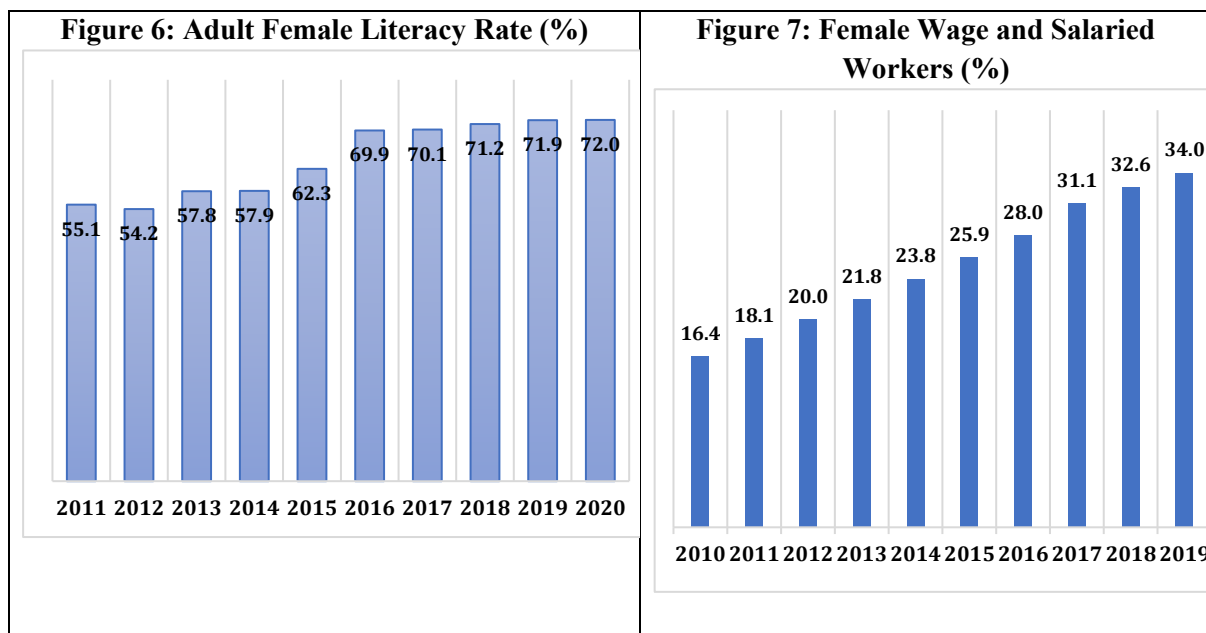
Female life expectancy at birth has gradually increased over the last decade. Currently, female life expectancy at birth has risen to 74.9 years in 2020 (71.3 years in 2010). In other words, since 2010, life expectancy has increased by 3.6 years (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Female Life Expectancy at Birth (in Year)**



Source: World Development Indicator, World Bank.

Over the years, the country experienced tremendous improvement in women’s education and formal job market participation. To be more precise, a rise in adult female literacy rate from 2010 to 2021 is observed. Bangladesh's adult female literacy rate was 55.1 per cent in 2010, which rose to 72 per cent in 2020. In connection with the rise in female literacy, the proportion of female wage and salaried workers has been rising gradually over the past decade. In 2010, about 16.4 per cent of the female in employment in Bangladesh were wage and salaried workers which increased to 34 per cent in 2019 (Figure 7). Hence, the continuous increase in adult-female literacy rate is a recognised indicator of the improved status of women empowerment in the country (Figure 6).



Source: World Development Indicator, World Bank.

Source: World Development Indicator, World Bank.

#### 4. National Policies, Laws and International Accord

Constitution of Bangladesh [Article 28(2)] specifically states that ‘women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and of public life’. The Prevention of Women and Children Repression Act of 2000 (amended in 2020) is the key Act, and National Women Development Policy (NWDP) 2011 is the vital policy document with regard to gender equality and women empowerment. The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) is working for mainstreaming women in the overall development through establishment of rights of women and children and women empowerment.

The Women and Children Repression Prevention Act (WCRPA) is the cardinal legislation that criminalises and introduces strict punishments for various forms of violence against women in Bangladesh. The Government of Bangladesh has placed special emphasis on the programmes to promote women’s development in the 8FYP, SDGs, and National Women’s Policy 2011. The government formulated Prevention of Domestic Violence (Protection and Preservation) Rules 2013 under Domestic Violence (Protection and Preservation) Act 2010 to ensure equal rights and to prevent all forms of discrimination in all spheres of public life and the state. In order to ensure overall development of women and children, the government has formulated National Children Policy 2011; Early Childhood Care and Development Policy 2013; Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) Act 2014, and Early Marriage Protection Act 2017. There is an initiative to formulate 'Sexual Harassment Prevention and Protection Law'. With a view to attracting skilled professionals, the fees of panel lawyers working for free legal aid were increased by amending the “Legal Aid Services Regulation 2001”. As a result,

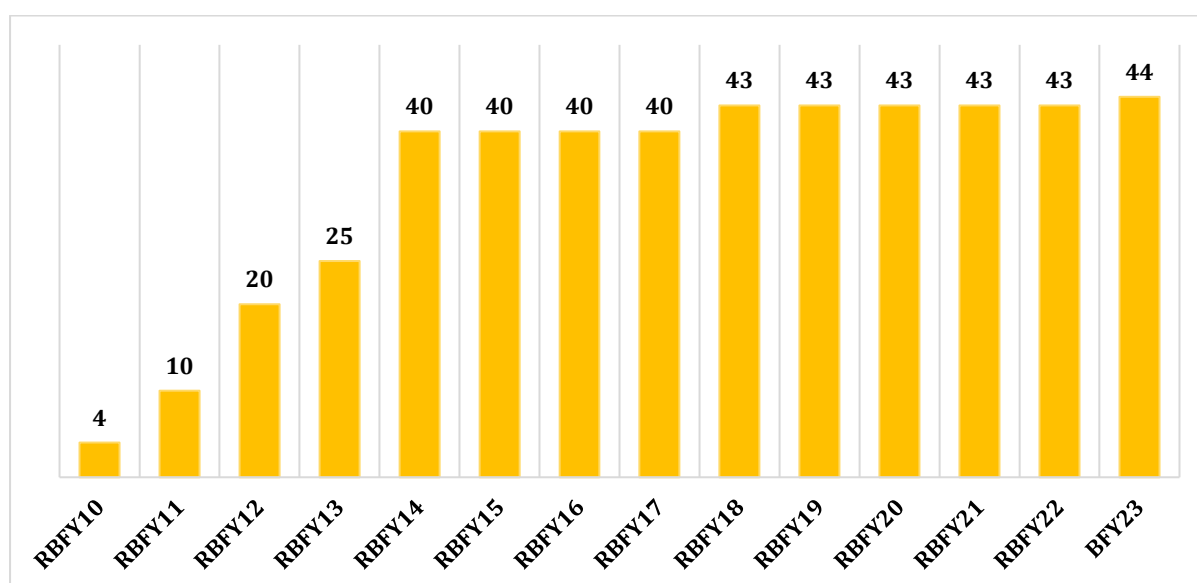
women are getting more improved services. The current law in Bangladesh that addresses child marriage is the Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017 (CMRA). The Act sets the minimum age of marriage for a male as 21 years and for a female as 18 years. Also, the National Plan of Action (NPA) to End Child Marriage has been launched to eliminate child marriage. The goal of the NPA is to end the marriage of girls below the age of 15 years and to reduce by one third the rate of marriage for girls aged 18 years in 2021, and to completely eliminate child marriage by 2041.

Bangladesh ratified several key conventions and agreements on women's and girls' rights including the Human Rights Convention, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), The Child Rights Convention (CRC), the Vienna Convention and several International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. To implement the NWDP of 2011, a National Action Plan was developed in 2013, which is now being updated as National Plan of Action on Violence against Women, effective during 2018–2030. In 2011, Bangladesh ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, 1990.

## 5. Gender Budget for Gender Equality and Empowerment

Gender budget is one of the unique initiatives which has been undertaken by the government since 2010. Initially, only four ministries have prepared gender-related budgetary activities that increased over time and reached 44 ministries and divisions in FY2022–23 (Figure 8). Each ministry analyses its projects and assesses the gender sensitivity, then prepares the gender budget and submits it to the Ministry of Finance before the annual national budget.

**Figure 8: Number of Ministries and Division Involved in Preparing Gender Budget (FY10–FY23)**



Source: Gender Budget Report FY2022–23, Ministry of Finance.

Gender Budget formulation is based on three thematic areas:

- (a) Empowering women and enhancing their social dignity;
- (b) Improving women's productivity and participation in labour market; and
- (c) Increase women's access to government services.

Under the three thematic categories, around 44 ministries and divisions may be grouped considering the functional areas or activities (Table 2). Table 2 presents the thematic distribution of ministry/division wise activities.

**Table 2: Thematic Distribution According to the Activities of Various Ministries or Divisions**

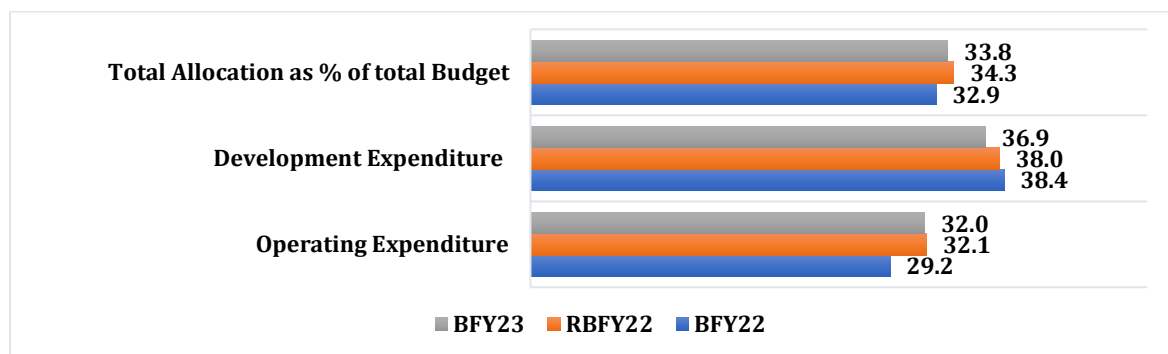
Empowering women and enhancing their social dignity (Ministry/division)	Improving women's productivity and participation in labour market (Ministry/division)	Increase women's access to government services (Ministry/division)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary and Mass Education</li> <li>• Secondary and Higher Education</li> <li>• Technical and Madrasah Education</li> <li>• Health Services Division</li> <li>• Medical Education and Family Welfare</li> <li>• Women and Children Affairs</li> <li>• Food</li> <li>• Agriculture</li> <li>• Fisheries and Livestock</li> <li>• Social Welfare</li> <li>• Local Government</li> <li>• Information and Communication Technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Administration</li> <li>• Financial Institution</li> <li>• Labour and Employment</li> <li>• Youth and Sports</li> <li>• Textiles and Jute</li> <li>• Water Resources</li> <li>• Disaster Management and Relief</li> <li>• Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment</li> <li>• Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs</li> <li>• Commerce</li> <li>• Rural Development and Co-operatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prime Minister's Office</li> <li>• Election Commission</li> <li>• Law and Justice</li> <li>• Public Safety</li> <li>• Security Services</li> <li>• Science and Technology</li> <li>• Housing &amp; Public Works</li> <li>• Information</li> <li>• Cultural Affairs</li> <li>• Religious Affairs</li> <li>• Industries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy and Mineral Resources</li> <li>• Environment, Forest and Climate Change</li> <li>• Land</li> <li>• Road Transport and Highways</li> <li>• Railways</li> <li>• Shipping</li> <li>• Civil Aviation and Tourism</li> <li>• Posts and Telecommunications</li> <li>• Power</li> <li>• Liberation War Affairs</li> </ul>

Source: Gender Budget Report FY2022-23, Ministry of Finance.

## 6. Measures for Women's Development in the National Budget

The allocation for women's development is nearly one-third of the national budget. Over the years, there has been a gradual rise in the allocations. Allocation for gender budget has increased by 12.7 per cent in the national budget for the FY2022-23 to BDT 229, 677 crore against that of the revised budget for the FY2021-22. Gender budget as a percentage of total budget has also increased to 33.8 per cent in FY2022-23 (Figure 9). Operating expenditure has increased by 25 per cent (BDT 133,708 crore) in FY2022-23.

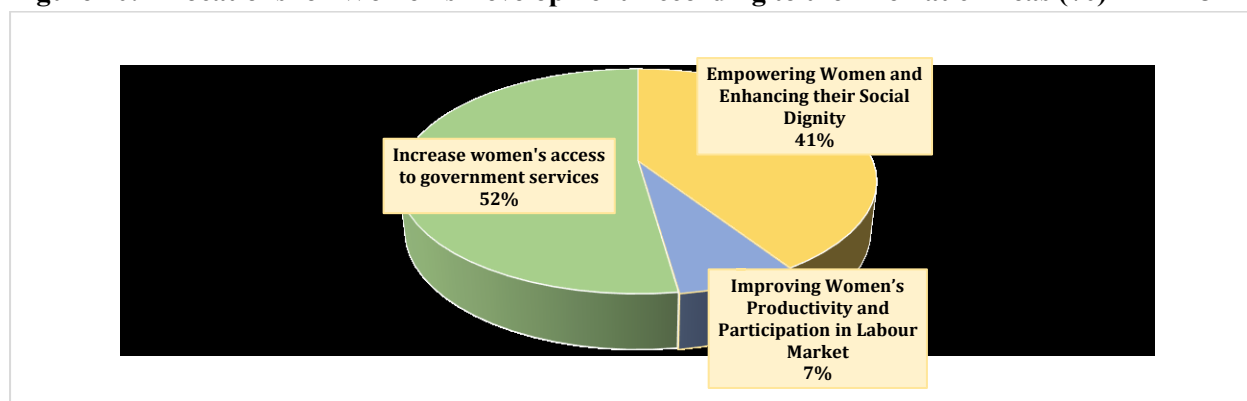
**Figure 9: Budget Allocations for Women's Development in the National Budget (%) (FY22–FY23)**



Source: Gender Budget Report FY2022-23, Ministry of Finance.

Of the three thematic areas, the allocation for "Increasing Women's Access to Government Services" is at the top with 52 per cent; 41 per cent allocation has been given to "Empowering Women and Enhancing their Social Dignity"; and "Improving Women's Productivity and Participation in Labour Market" has the share of 7 per cent (Figure 10)

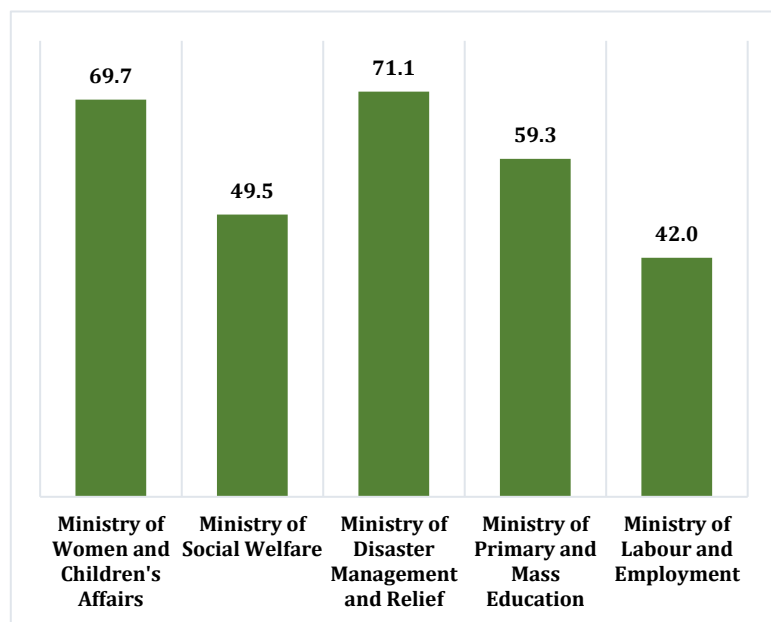
**Figure 10: Allocations for Women's Development According to the Thematic Areas (%) in FY23**



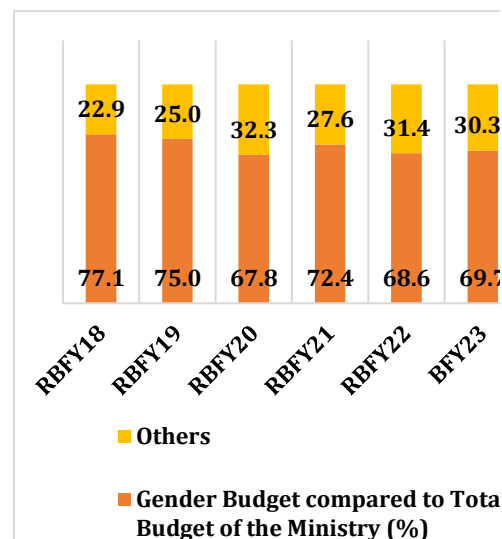
Source: Gender Budget Report FY2022-23, Ministry of Finance.

Among the 44 ministries and divisions, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR) has the highest allocation for women's development with 71.11 per cent in FY2022–23 followed by the MoWCA with 69.7 per cent (Figure 11).

**Figure 11: Allocations in the Five Major Ministries for Women's Development (%) in FY23**



**Figure 12: Allocations for Women's Development under the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs (%) in FY23**



Source: Gender Budget Report FY2022-23, Ministry of Finance.

Allocation for women's development in MoWCA has been around 70 per cent on average over the past decade (Figure 12).

## 7. Major Initiatives to Attain Gender Equality and Women Empowerment

A number of initiatives undertaken by different ministries have received public attention because of their specific focus on women empowerment and gender equality.

**Female in Leadership Role in Different Sectors:** Significant improvement in social and political empowerment is displayed over the last decade particularly in female leadership in different sectors. Female representation in the National Parliament has improved over the years—during 2020, the female representation in the National Parliament comprised 20.9 per cent of the available seats which was 18.6 per cent in 2010. Noticeable progress is observed in the number of female Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) administration officers. In 2019, the share of women in the civil service at Class-I position was around 21 per cent which increased to 26.6 per cent in 2021. So far, 701 female peacekeepers from Bangladesh Armed Forces have participated in UN peace operation. Also, the Government of Bangladesh has launched National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (NAP WPS), for the period 2019-2022, in November 2019. Besides that, at present, 371 female members of Bangladesh Armed Forces are deployed in different peacekeeping missions. Female are increasingly taking position in the top management and boards of the corporate sector. Female leadership is observed in different private sector business associations including Bangladesh Employers Federation, Metropolitan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) and Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

**Her Power Project – Women Empowerment using ICT:** The project aims to raise nationwide awareness about the importance of women's empowerment through information and communication



technology (ICT), women's participation in the ICT ecosystem, employment of women through capacity building and creating women entrepreneurs through ICT. The project designed in two phases where time frame for phase 1 was from July 2017 to December 2019 and phase 2 is from January 2022 to December 2024. The first phase of the project targets to empower 10,500 women in 21 major districts through ICT by providing training and internships. The second phase is to be implemented by December 2024 at 130 upazilas of 44 districts under eight divisions at the cost of BDT 250 crore.

**TotthoApa:** The initiative targets to empower women through Information and Communication Technology within the broad national goal of 'Digital Bangladesh'. The project is funded by the MoWCA to provide easy access to information technology by the underprivileged women in rural areas and to empower them through IT-enabled services.

**Prevention of Violence against Women:** The government has been implementing activities under the Multi-Sectoral Programme on Violence against Women. The specific objectives are to improve public services such as health, police assistance, criminal justice and social services (counselling, rehabilitation) utilised by women victims of violence and to increase public awareness of all forms of violence against women. One-stop crisis centres for women and children victims of violence have been set up in divisional districts and medical college hospitals in six districts. Moreover, a total of 67 one-stop crisis cells, including 47 in district Sadar hospitals and 20 in upazila health complexes, have been established. Instant support is being provided through the mobile app 'Joy'.

**Adolescent Club Establishment Project:** A project, initiated in 2018, for setting up adolescent clubs across the country under the Department of Women Affairs (DWA). The project targets to set up 4883 clubs across the country aiming at making aware the adolescents about their personal safety and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) to prevent eve-teasing, child marriage, and gender-based violence. The marginalised adolescents gain awareness about their rights and acquire life skills to negotiate and exercise their rights and expand their life choices.

**Income Generation Training Project for Women at Upazila Level:** Implemented by the DWA, the project offers free of cost capacity development training on income-generating activities to the underprivileged women (age 16–45) in the 431 upazillas of the 64 districts of 8 divisions of the country.

**Micro-credit Activities:** Micro-credit activities are being carried out to improve the socio-economic condition of rural poor and helpless women for poverty alleviation and creating opportunities for self-employment. Loan disbursement is going on in 488 Upazilas of 64 districts on a revolving basis with the allotted funds.

**Joyeeta Tower Construction Project:** The project aims to create a perfect platform for the rural women working unrecognised to find their destination under the umbrella of Joyeeta foundation.

## 8. Conclusion

Present government's policy initiatives regarding gender equality and women empowerment and the progress under different initiatives and activities reflect distinct positive changes. The budget allocations under different thematic area-based ministries/departments are in line with the policy goals undertaken by the government for women's development and to eliminate gender inequality. The

government's relentless efforts in a targeted manner would help achieve gender mainstreaming in the country in near future.

However, there are some challenges which include—removing wage disparity, increasing inclusion of women in managerial roles in the private sector, ensuring stronger implementation of CEDAW and other gender-related laws to prevent child marriage and social violence, and eliminating all forms of discrimination against women. The government is cautious about these challenges and has already undertaken efforts to address them.