

# Gender Equality and Women Empowerment – National Commitments

**Gender Justice and Diversity Programme, BRAC**

# What the Constitution says ...

<b>Article 10</b> - Steps shall be taken to ensure <b>participation of women in all spheres of national life</b>	Participation of Women in National Life
<b>Article 19</b> -The state shall endeavour to ensure <b>equality of opportunity to all citizens</b>	Equal Opportunity
<b>Article 27</b> - All citizens are <b>equal before law and entitled</b> to equal protection of law	Equality Before Law
<b>Article 28 (1)</b> - The state shall not discriminate against any citizen <b>on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth</b>	Non-discrimination
<b>Article 28 (2)</b> - Women shall have equal rights with men in <b>all spheres of the state and of public life</b>	
<b>Article 28 (4)</b> - Nothing in this article shall prevent State from making Special provision in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of the citizens	
<b>Article 29 (1)</b> - There shall be <b>equality of opportunity for all citizens in respect to employment</b> or office in the service of the Republic	
<b>Article 29 (2)</b> - No citizen shall, on grounds only of religious, race, caste, sex or place of birth, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect to, any employment or in the service of the Republic	Equality in Public Employment

- So, the **constitutional foundation ensures** -
  - Women have equal rights.
  - Discrimination is prohibited
  - Equal opportunity is guaranteed in life and public employment.
  - The State can introduce affirmative action to support disadvantaged groups.

# UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

- CEDAW was adopted by UN on December 18, 1979.
  - Bangladesh is a signatory of CEDAW – since **November 6, 1984**
  - CEDAW is referred as the ‘**International Bill of Rights**’ for women and is considered as an international instrument giving ethical and legal basis to the protection and promotion of women’s rights.
- The Convention defines discrimination against women as “....*any distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil, or any other field.*”

# Bangladesh's reservation

- Bangladesh ratified CEDAW **with reservations on Articles 2, 13.1(a), 16.1(c), and 16.1(f).**
- Article 2 - **“States Parties condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women.”**
- Article 13(a)- “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in areas of economic and social life in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women”; ‘the right to family benefits.’”
- Article 16.1- “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular, shall ensure on a basis of equality of men and women;
  - **(c) the same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution (equal rights to family benefits)**
  - (f) the same rights and responsibilities with regard to guardianship, ward ship, trusteeship, and adoption of children, or similar institutions where these concepts exist in national legislation; in all cases the interest of the children shall be paramount (“equal rights to guardianship”)

- Bangladesh withdrew its reservation 13(a) (“equal rights to family benefits”) and 16.1(f) (“equal rights to guardianship”) in 1997
- The reservation on **Articles 2 and 16.1(c)**, however, still remains and the argument behind reservation is that these Articles contradict the country's Personal Laws, which the country intends to maintain for guiding the citizen's personal life.

# National Action Plan for Women's Advancement (NAP) in 1998.

- To make women's development as an integral part of the national development program.
- To establish women as equal partners in development with equal roles in policy and decision making in the family, community and nation at large.
- To remove legal, economic, political or cultural barriers that prevent the exercise of equal rights by undertaking policy reforms and strong affirmative action.
- To raise public awareness about women's differential needs, interests and priorities and increase commitment to bring improvements of women's position and condition.

# National Women Development Policy (NWDP-2011)

Government declared 49-point National Women Development Policy in 2011- specific to human rights, employment, economic activity and administrative and political empowerment, NWDP includes the following objectives for ending women's inequality:

- To ensure gender equal rate of wages, increase participation of women in the labor market, equal opportunity at the workplace, ensured security and removal of disparities in employment.
- To make all our efforts to motivate political parties including the mass media to ensure increased and active political participation of the women.
- To ensure **33% representation** in phases inside the political parties.
- To raise number of women's seat in the **Parliament to 33% and to take initiative to direct election in the extended seats for women**
- To arrange **direct poll in the extended seats at all levels of local governments.**
- To appoint substantial number of women in the higher levels of decision making.
- To appoint women at increased rate in the administrative, policy making and constitutional posts.
- **To increase quota for women at all level and gazetted or non-gazetted positions at entry points aimed at empowerment of women.**

# Climate Change and Gender Action Plan (CCGAP)

- The first Climate Change and Gender Action Plan (CCGAP) in 2013 it had set out a strategic framework to integrate gender considerations
- Revised in 2024

- Women face **higher vulnerability** to climate shocks (cyclones, floods, droughts).
- Increased workload due to climate-induced scarcity of water, food, and fuel.
- Greater exposure to **health risks**, including water-borne diseases and heat stress.
- Higher risk of **gender-based violence (GBV)** during displacement and disasters.
- Limited access to **land ownership**, credit, technology, and productive resources.
- Disproportionate job loss and reduced income in climate-affected sectors (agriculture, fisheries).
- Barriers to participating in **green economy** and climate-resilient livelihoods.
- Restricted mobility during emergencies due to social norms.
- Women's voices underrepresented in **climate governance**, planning, and policy design.
- Limited participation in local decision-making bodies that manage climate resources.
- Increased reproductive health risks during climate disasters.
- Lack of safe shelters, sanitation, and menstrual hygiene support in emergencies.
- Higher risk of trafficking during displacement and migration.
- Women migrants face livelihood insecurity, exploitation, and loss of support networks.
- Female-headed households experience greater economic strain when male members migrate.



# Women's Affairs Reform Commission- 2025

- Out of 11 commissions formed by the interim gov – one is Women's Affairs Reform Commission.
- The commission made 433 recommendations grouped under 15 thematic areas to eliminate existing discrimination against women.
- Commission recommended three phases
  - a) Immediate actionable steps under the interim government
  - b) Activities to be completed in the first five years of the elected government
  - c) Strategic dreams and proposals for building a future women-friendly state.

- Electing an equal number of female representatives in parliament through direct elections
- formulating policies to prevent sexual harassment in all workplaces and forming complaint committees
- Setting the minimum age for marriage at 18 years
- Amending laws to ensure equal inheritance rights for women
- Six-month paid maternity leave in all institutions, including government agencies, offering paid paternity leave, and establishing childcare centres in workplaces
- Recognizing marital rape as a crime; recognizing sex workers as workers
- Ensuring 50% female participation in media; establishing a permanent women's commission, in accordance with the National Broadcast Policy 2014
- To increase women's representation through direct elections, the commission also recommended expanding the number of parliamentary seats to 600 and reserving 300 of those for women, to be filled through direct elections.
- Commission also recommended negative representation of women across all types of media. The report strongly recommends that women should not be used as sexual objects in media participation, and urges a stop to misogynistic statements that unnecessarily mention or target women.

# Presenting gender-sensitive news

- Fairness and respect
- Ensuring that all genders are represented accurately, equally, and without bias or harm

- **Avoid stereotypes-Do** not reinforce traditional or negative gender roles (e.g., portraying women only as victims or men only as decision-makers).
- **Use gender-neutral and respectful language-** Avoid sexist, derogatory, or objectifying terms. Use correct titles and names.
- **Ensure balanced representation-** Include voices of women, men, and gender-diverse people as sources, experts, and decision-makers—not only as victims.
- **Focus on the issue, not the gender-** Gender should be mentioned only when it is relevant to the story, not to sensationalize or blame.
- **Protect privacy and safety-** Especially in cases of sexual violence, avoid revealing identities or details that may cause further harm or stigma.
- **Challenge discrimination and inequality-** Highlight structural causes of gender inequality rather than individual blame.
- **Be accurate and contextual-** Present facts with proper social and cultural context, avoiding misleading narratives.