



PHASE 1

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**IN BRIEF:**

# MAKING EVERY WOMAN AND GIRL COUNT IN BANGLADESH

**THE ISSUE**

A national assessment on gender statistics, conducted in 2018, revealed three interrelated challenges:

- The availability of gender data and statistics were uneven – across sectors and topics, as well as in regularity and timeliness. While there were numerous laws, policies and plans to address gender equality and women’s empowerment, the gender data and statistics needed for monitoring and reporting were not available for many areas, and those statistics that were available were not updated.
- Surveys and censuses were not conducted regularly. Moreover, the national statistical system (NSS) did not have designated statistics capacities – meaning there was no assurance that data collection would be resourced and done regularly.
- Systems to facilitate efficient access and dissemination were virtually non-existent. The Bangladesh

Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and the statistical system in general, did not have a dissemination policy or advance-release calendar. Access to statistics was complicated for non-governmental users.

**WOMEN COUNT RESPONSE:**

- **Creating an enabling environment:** Coordination mechanisms were established and have resulted in strengthened coordination of gender statistics activities in the NSS.
- **Increasing data production:** The technical capacities of the NSS have been strengthened to collect data on unpaid care work and to improve the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- **Improving data accessibility and use:** User-producer dialogues have been organized to improve the analysis and use of gender statistics in planning, budgeting, policymaking and decision-making.

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*“We now have more people trained on gender statistics with support from UN Women’s Women Count project, so in the future we can generate more gender-specific data more efficiently.”*

## **Mashud Alam, Director of the Demography and Health Wing, BBS**

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### **KEY RESULTS**

Since 2018, progress has been relatively slow, due to challenges in formalizing partnerships with the BBS, and as a result the Bangladesh project was phased out and concluded in April 2021. Nonetheless, UN Women has made efforts to improve the availability of data, successfully advocated for gender data to be included in national gender strategies and plans, and there is increased gender data analysis to inform key policies and advocacy in the country. Even after the project closed, the technical committees established have continued to function and there have been calls from Parliament and the Government to collect data on women’s economic empowerment and violence against women. Increased government buy-in and ownership signals a positive future for gender data in Bangladesh. Key results include:

#### **1. Creating an enabling environment**

- **Gender data are increasingly recognized as a priority in national plans and gender strategies.** The country’s Five-Year Plan (FYP) now includes its first-ever chapter on gender after UN Women supported the Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs (MoWCA) and the BBS in the preparation of a Gender Strategy that is now incorporated within the gender chapter of the 8th FYP (2021–2026). The Gender Strategy explicitly calls for the regular collection of sex-disaggregated data as an important factor to contribute to its strategic objective on creating an enabling environment for women’s advancement. This signals that the Government will prioritize collecting gender data as part of its national efforts to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment over the next five years. To implement the Strategy, it specifically calls on the BBS to generate sex-disaggregated data to report on national progress on gender equality commitments for the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the SDGs.

- **Improved coordination within the NSS has resulted in more and better gender data being produced.**

Composed of a Steering Committee, a Monitoring Committee and a Technical Committee, the Inter-ministerial Coordination Mechanism has contributed to improving the governance, production and use of gender statistics in Bangladesh’s NSS. The Technical Committee, which includes MoWCA and the Ministries of Health, Education and Planning, was central to the implementation of Bangladesh’s first-ever Time-Use Survey (TUS) in 2021. Even after the closure of the Women Count project, the Technical Committee is still functioning and will be instrumental in taking forward the development of a satellite account on unpaid care and domestic work and a survey on the prevalence of violence against women (VAW). UN Women remains engaged in the Committee, through collaboration with MoWCA, and is discussing a joint programme on unpaid care work.

- **Gender is now mainstreamed in the statistical operations of BBS.** The Gender Cell, established as part of Women Count activities, was supported to study how the BBS can generate data for gender-related SDG indicators by processing and reprocessing existing data. Recently, the Gender Statistics Cell has started contributing to other BBS departments to include a gender perspective or gender modules in other surveys. For example, the BBS units on ‘hygiene statistics’ and disability statistics approached the Gender Cell to ask for guidance in collecting data for these sectors. The Gender Statistics Cell has also been collaborating on developing a satellite account with the National Accounts wing.

#### **2. Increasing data production**

- **Bangladesh has blazed trails on measuring women’s unpaid care work.** TUS data collection was completed in April 2021, with the final report to be released in June 2022. The BBS is also in the process

of developing a satellite account, at the request of Parliament, based on TUS data to measure women's unpaid care and domestic work to estimate its contribution to national GDP. The satellite account will be used as a reference for the Government to take policy and programmatic action to gradually reduce women's unpaid care work burden. Additionally, with support from UN Women, MoWCA is updating the national action plan of the 2011 National Women's Development Policy to include women's unpaid care and domestic work issues, in line with the initial findings of the TUS.

- **More data are now available to monitor gender-related SDGs in Bangladesh.** Gender-related data from existing surveys can now be used to generate around 60% of gender-related SDG indicators, including on time use, based on UN Women's support. This is a notable increase from the 37% of gender indicators for which data were readily available at the project's inception. The TUS served as a crucial reference for SDG 5.4.1 to set the 2021 baseline of the SDG Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and its targets for the next nine years. These data have also been used to report on national commitments to achieve gender equality for the country's Voluntary National Review.
- **More data are now available to assess the gender-specific impacts of COVID-19.** Bangladesh was one of the first countries to produce a rapid gender assessment (RGA) on the impacts of COVID-19 in April 2020. Then, Bangladesh was one of 13 countries selected by UN Women for a separate RGA on violence against women (VAW) and how this increased during COVID-19, which helped BBS determine the tools, methodology and even some questions related to COVID-19 in the country's official VAW survey in 2022.
- **There is now Government commitment to collect data on the prevalence of violence against women for the first time.** BBS is in the process of planning a VAW prevalence survey, investing USD 100,000 of its own funding to begin preparatory work. It will draw on experiences from the 2015 survey and will also include a dedicated section on VAW in the context of COVID-19, drawing on UN Women's VAW RGA. VAW data will be used to monitor existing

programmatic and policy provisions of the Women's Development Policy and the National Action Plan on Ending Violence against Women. The data will also provide information that will be used for financing through the existing gender-responsive budgeting mechanism and to monitor progress against two specific SDG indicators (5.2.1 and 5.2.2). MoWCA has already formally asked BBS to conduct the VAW prevalence survey as soon as possible. The VAW data are also expected to help build pressure on the Government to adopt a stand-alone law on VAW prevention: The High Court has already instructed the Government to do so and the CEDAW Committee's 65th Concluding Observations equally recommend that Bangladesh adopt a national VAW prevention law.

### 3. Improving data accessibility and use

- **Gender microdata are now available to researchers for further analysis.** Data accessibility is poised to increase with a BBS commitment to upload all survey findings on their webpage at the earliest possible time and to make microdata available to researchers. This institutional commitment was made by the Secretary of the Statistics and Informatics Division. Microdata are also being made available to researchers through a clearance process.
- **Gender data analysis is expected to fuel evidence-based decision-making.** The production of two policy briefs was supported by UN Women: the first, on gender-based education, found that girls' enrolment is high in primary education but drop-out rates rise in secondary school and there is low participation in tertiary education – the main factors cited being high rates of child marriage and violence against women. The brief, published on the BBS website, is expected to inform future decisions of the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) to improve female participation in tertiary education. The second policy brief, on Gender-Based Employment and Wages, will be published in 2021 and will raise awareness about the gender gap in the employment sector in Bangladesh.

## FUTURE PLANS<sup>1</sup>

UN Women will continue to support activities in Bangladesh to provide gender-related data for informed decision-making, with the support of the Asia-Pacific Regional Office, including:

- Integrating gender statistics in the next NSDS and in the updated National Statistical Act.
- Developing a minimum set of gender indicators for Bangladesh; mainstreaming gender indicators in key surveys (i.e. the Labour Force Survey, Household Integrated Economic Survey, Agriculture Census, etc.); and developing modules on gender indicators with clear instructions for their inclusion for all departments of BBS.
- Continued processing and reprocessing work, strengthening the capacity of the Gender Statistics Cell to play key role to mainstreaming gender statistics in the NSO.
- Continued technical support to BBS to include gender statistics in new and emerging areas, such as migration, environmental, disability and women's participation in the informal sector.

FIGURE 1

### Measuring Progress during Phase I



Progress in Bangladesh was driven by the increased coordination and more and better gender data being produced, such as on time use. In 2021, 100% of targets were met by the project.

- Disseminating TUS data and supporting the development of a national satellite account to calculate the contribution of women's unpaid work to GDP using TUS data, while developing a national programme on the care economy, based on TUS data with the Ministry of Women and BBS.
- Supporting BBS with conducting the national VAW prevalence survey and to generate gender statistics using big data and other technological tools.

<sup>1</sup> Plans for 2022 are contingent on available funding.