



IN BRIEF

# WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

October 2025

*Photo: UN Women/Fahad Kaizer*

## THE ISSUE

Women make vital contributions to Bangladesh's economy—as entrepreneurs, agricultural workers, business owners, employees and unpaid care and domestic workers. The Government of Bangladesh recognizes women's economic empowerment as one of the key drivers to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Despite strong policy commitments, women remain deeply undervalued in social and economic life. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2025, Bangladesh scores low on economic participation and opportunities (ranks 141 with a score of 0.775)<sup>1</sup>, as compared to political empowerment.

Gender discrimination leaves women concentrated in insecure, low-wage jobs and underrepresented in leadership positions. Persisting barriers, including poverty, discrimination and exploitation curtail-

women's access to productive assets, such as land and capital, and limits their participation in shaping economic and social policies. The burden of unpaid domestic work further reduces their time and ability to pursue economic opportunities. This marginalization results in wage disparity, limited participation in the formal economy and economic resilience and autonomy, while exposing them to higher risks of gender-based exploitation, such as workplace harassment and abuse. Additionally, shifts in the global economy, changing demographics, technological advances and environmental crises are transforming the world of work, with specific impacts on women's economic security. This brief outlines UN Women Bangladesh's efforts to create sustainable pathways for women to access decent work, build resilience and claim their rights in the economy.

<sup>1</sup> World Economic Forum. [Global Gender Gap Report 2025](#).

## APPROACH

Drawing on feminist scholarship, UN Women Bangladesh defines economic empowerment as a transformative, collective process through which economic systems become just, equitable and prosperous, and through which all women enjoy their economic and social rights, exercise agency and power in ways that challenge inequalities and level the playing field. UN Women Bangladesh's WEE programming aims to expand women's ability to participate equally in existing markets, access decent work and productive resources, and meaningfully participate in economic decision-making at all levels—from households to state institutions. The care economy forms a critical area of UN Women Bangladesh's work, with a focus on strengthening evidence-based care policies, improving access to care services and social infrastructure, and transforming social norms to recognize, reduce, and redistribute women's unpaid care burden.

In line with the principle of *leave no one behind*, UN Women Bangladesh prioritizes working with the country's most marginalized groups—including women migrant workers, tea garden workers, disaster-vulnerable communities, women with disabilities, and gender-diverse individuals—to strengthen their voice, leadership and economic empowerment.

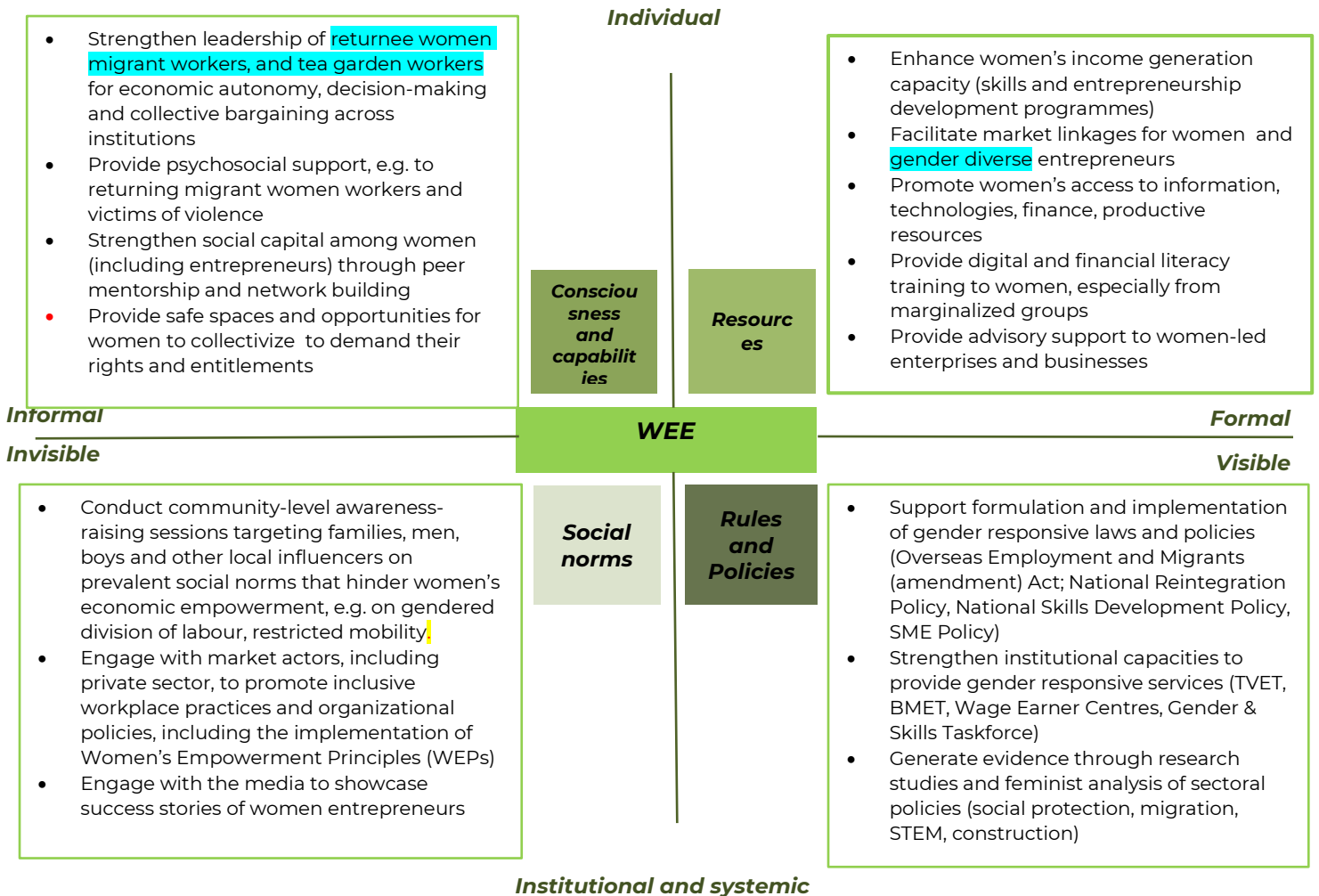
Leveraging its coordination mandate, UN Women Bangladesh promotes gender-responsive procurement (GRP)—the sustainable selection of services, goods or civil works that takes into account the impact on gender equality and women's empowerment—within the operations of the UN in Bangladesh.

UN Women Bangladesh aligns its efforts on women's economic empowerment with the [UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework \(UNSDCF\) 2022-2026](#), the Government of Bangladesh's 8<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, and [UN Women's global Strategic Plan \(2022–2025\)](#).

With support from the Governments of Canada, Switzerland, the Multi-Partner Trust Fund, and in collaboration with sister UN agencies (ILO, IOM, UNCDF, UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA), UN Women Bangladesh engages diverse stakeholders (government, civil society, the private sector, women's organizations, youth, development partners) through transformative solutions that improve the lives of women and girls by **addressing structural discrimination**, social norms and unequal power relations. To achieve this, UN Women Bangladesh prioritizes the following:

1. Mainstreaming gender across institutions, policies and economic systems.
2. Enhancing women's access to decent work, productive resources, social protection and care infrastructure.
3. Transforming social norms that hinder women's economic security and rights, including those related to unpaid care and domestic work.

UN Women in Bangladesh uses the gender@work framework as the conceptual model to inform its programming:



[The Gender at Work](#) Framework highlights the **interrelationship between gender equality, organizational change** and **institutions** or 'rules of the game' held in place by power dynamics within communities.

## RESULTS (2022-2025)

UN Women Bangladesh's WEE initiatives have contributed to tangible changes across policy, institutional and community levels:

### Enabling Legal and Policy Frameworks

- With technical support from UN Women, the Government of Bangladesh integrated gender equality as a key principle in the [National Reintegration Policy](#) for Migrants and retained directives on providing women returnee migrants with psychosocial support, local employment opportunities and low-interest loans to start small businesses.



Mobile van food cart by returnee women migrant worker. UN Women/Fahad Kaiser.

- UN Women Bangladesh, along with sister UN agencies and women's rights organizations, successfully advocated for the regularization of sub-agents in the Overseas Employment and Migrants (amendment) Act. It is a key step towards fair recruitment and better working conditions for migrant women and men.

- Through UN Women Bangladesh's capacity building efforts, government officials including labour attaches are now more equipped to negotiate safer migration pathways and improved pre-departure training systems, supporting more gender-responsive recruitment processes.
- As a result of joint advocacy by UN agencies including UN Women under the Regional GOALS Programme, the Government of Bangladesh proposed a recommendation in the Workplan of the Colombo Process's Thematic Area Working Group on Fair and Ethical Recruitment Practices to include gender-sensitive terms and conditions employment contracts to protect the rights violation of migrant workers, especially women
- UN Women Bangladesh in collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, developed and piloted a Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting (GRPB) monitoring tool in five districts under the joint programme on Women's Empowerment for Inclusive Growth (WING).

*The Government of Bangladesh received the Care Champion Award at the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Meeting on Beijing+30 in November 2024, recognizing its collaborative efforts with UN Women to strengthen the care economy.*

## Capacity and Skills Development

- Over 15,308 women—including returnee women migrant workers, garment workers and tea garden workers—have developed stronger leadership and negotiation skills through trainings on communication, gender equality concepts and financial literacy. Many reports increased confidence in voicing their rights at home, at work and in their communities.
- In Sylhet, women tea garden workers were empowered to address harmful social norms and unfavorable work environments. The 'gender talks' implemented as part of the UN SDG Joint Programme "Enhancing Social Protection for Female Tea Garden Workers and Their Families", were recognized as one of the most effective interventions in the project evaluation. Approximately 80 per cent of those engaged in these dialogues demonstrated improved understanding of gender issues.
- Capacities of 150 local and national level government officials, civil society organizations (CSOs), tea gardens' managers, local government officials, and Cha Sramik Union leaders were strengthened on GRPB.
- Through UN Women Bangladesh supported interventions under the WING joint programme, 1,217 people (1,175 women and 42 men) accessed information, resources, and services. This included 975 people benefiting from stronger policies in women-led businesses, 100 Anondomela
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entrepreneurs improving leadership skills, and 122 women learning about the WEPs.

- Under the WING joint programme, 44 enterprises, including women-led or women-oriented received capacity development and advisory support on the WEPs. The programme was implemented in five districts - Manikganj, Thakurgaon, Jashore, Cox's Bazar and Kurigram. A 2024 UN Women Bangladesh assessment reflected that 10 of them made major investments in gender-responsive measures, such as day care, targeted training, and transport, to improve workplace culture and increase women's participation.
- Under the WING joint programme, 1,025 representatives (632 women, 393 men) from local government institutions and Women Development Forums (WDFs) across five districts—enhanced their capacity to implement gender-responsive public budgeting (GRPB) and engage in decision-making.
- In 2023, gender focal points, procurement personnel, and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) results group members received dedicated training on gender analysis, gender-responsive procurement with technical support from UN Women Bangladesh.

## Private Sector Engagement and Workplace Transformation

- 46 companies received capacity-building support to implement the WEPs in their operations. Among them, 16 women-led enterprises became WEPs signatories, benefiting 1,396 female employees.

- In five districts,<sup>2</sup> 975 employees (933 women and 42 men) benefited from improved workplace practices, equal pay, and anti-harassment policies introduced in 10 women-led small and medium enterprises under the WING joint programme.

In 2024, 12 new women-led enterprises adopted gender-responsive policies in the workplace, while another 22 expanded their networks through WING programme-supported business association events.

### Evidence building



Archana Biswas, an entrepreneur from Jashore with her team. Photo: UN Women/Monon Muntaka.

- In 2024, UN Women Bangladesh, in collaboration with Data-Pop Alliance, released a report entitled [Towards Caring Cities: A Geospatial Analysis in Dhaka City](#) that maps the supply and demand of care

services across Dhaka, demonstrating critical gaps in access, particularly in areas vulnerable to climate-induced disasters, using innovative geospatial methods. The report emphasises the importance of integrating care infrastructure into urban governance to facilitate women's full economic participation.

- UN Women Bangladesh in collaboration with the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM) published a study entitled [“Analyzing the Challenges and the Opportunities for Women’s Participation in the Construction Sector and STEM-based Career in Bangladesh”](#) focuses on accessing women’s situation within construction sector and understating women’s potential and barriers in STEM based carrier in Bangladesh.
- A policy brief on GRPB was developed with recommendations to enhance the social protection of female tea garden workers and their families in Bangladesh. The policy brief offers a critical analysis of gender-related issues among tea garden workers and their family members in Bangladesh.

<sup>2</sup> Manikganj, Thakurgaon, Jashore, Cox’s Bazar and Kurigram.

## FEATURE STORY: WHEN YOU KNOW YOUR BUSINESS, NO ONE CAN HOLD YOU BACK



*Priyanka Rani Su, Entrepreneur, Jashore, Bangladesh. Photo: UN Women/Shararat Islam.*

My husband and I initiated our tech start-up [BornolT](#) in 2016 to develop business software and websites for small businesses across a range of sectors. Today we have 11 employees, six of whom are women. In my experience, women often feel they need a little longer to understand the work, but once they do, they accomplish it with greater efficiency, on time, and with fewer errors. It's different with men. Men will say that they catch on quickly, but they tend to make more mistakes. So, I have to apply different strategies to manage them. The training from UN Women on the [Women's Empowerment Principles \(WEPs\)](#) has been immensely helpful in promoting women in leadership roles and creating an enabling environment for them. Being a woman in the tech field has been challenging. People tend to assume I don't know anything about business or information

technology and often do not listen to me. This is due to their social conditioning. We have been taught that business and tech are men's domains. So, I put myself in clients' shoes, respond to their queries and explain our solutions. When you know your business, no one can hold you back.

This principle has contributed to us building a loyal customer base. Since college, I have wanted to walk down my own entrepreneurial path. But entrepreneurs can work independently and not be boxed in. We founded our new venture [Deshi Feriwala](#), meaning "country hawker", in 2020 during the COVID-19 lockdown. I thought of this website to help local artisans who lost their jobs due to the pandemic. We started selling Jashore's famous Nakshikatha, quilts embroidered in a centuries-old tradition, created by local

artisans, as well as jaggery from local hawkers.

The small venture has become another business wing of BornoIT, with 72 local women artisans working for us as contractors. It is always difficult for women to access the market or find accurate information. This is another significant aspect of our commitment as a WEP signatory.

There is no shortage of ideas, but we need more investment and a bigger market. I want to create a business that treats women and men equally and ensures larger participation of women from the community. Then, the sky is the limit!

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*We have been taught that business and tech are men's domains. So, I put myself in clients' shoes, respond to their queries, and explain our solutions. When you know your business, no one can hold you back.*

*— Priyanka Rani Sur, BornoIT, Bangladesh.*

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UN Women exists to advance women's rights, gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. As the lead UN entity on gender equality, we shift laws, institutions, social behaviors and services to close the gender gap and build an equal world for all women and girls. We keep the rights of women and girls at the centre of global progress – always, everywhere.

Because gender equality is not just what we do. It is who we are.

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