

IN BRIEF

# GENDER RESPONSIVE GOVERNANCE AND WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

October 2025

Photo: UN Women/Monon Muntaka

## THE ISSUE

National plans, policies, institutions and budgets enable governments to translate commitments to women's empowerment into practical progress towards gender equality. Bangladesh has been implementing commitments to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). This is reflected in national development frameworks and policies. For instance, the 8th Five-Year Plan seeks to ensure the opportunity for all rights holders to have the space and voice to claim their rights and contribute to local or national development priorities, while the National Women's Development Policy (2011) [NWDP] commits to increasing women's seats in Parliament to 33 per cent and advancing

initiatives for direct elections in Bangladesh has published gender budget reports, with

gender-focused analysis on expenditures and utilization.<sup>1</sup> In 2024, Bangladesh underwent a historic political transition following the civil unrest. An Interim Government (IG) was established, tasked with stabilizing the country and overseeing critical institutional and economic reforms. This transition came amidst heightened political engagement and a resurgent youth movement demanding systemic change, accountability, transparency, and equitable governance. Despite significant progress, gaps remain in the ability of citizens to meaningfully participate and effectively claim their rights in governance systems, and access gender-responsive, equitable and non-discriminatory institutions and public services. Women hold less than 20 per cent of first-class government jobs, less than 23 per cent of leadership roles in local government institutions, and only 20 per cent of seats in the last (12th) National Parliament. In the interim government, too, only 4 of 22 advisors are women. Of the eleven reform commissions only one (the Women's Affairs Reform Commission) was led by

<sup>1</sup> [Bangladesh: Comprehensive National Review Report for Beijing+30](#)

a woman. The National Consensus Commission tasked to create a roadmap for the future of Bangladesh, with the mandate of forging a broad-based political agreement under the interim government, has no women members. Although young women were at the forefront of the 2024 anti-discrimination protests, their role in leadership and decision-making remains marginal.

Socio-political challenges in Bangladesh have historically affected women, youth, and socially excluded groups disproportionately, deepening existing inequalities. Discriminatory norms and structural barriers, restrict women's political participation and leadership. Limited education, resources, and networks further constrain women and gender-diverse people, while harassment, misogyny, and violence—both online and offline—inhibit engagement. Political parties remain overwhelmingly male-led, with few opportunities for women to secure nominations in winnable constituencies, especially those from marginalized communities. Gender parity in representation and leadership remains a critical, unmet issue. Furthermore, gaps remain in the annual monitoring of laws and policies as well as the systematic tracking of budgetary allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE).

In its 2016 Concluding Observations, the CEDAW Committee highlighted persistent discrimination in personal status laws across religious communities and urged reform in marriage, divorce, inheritance and custodial rights. The Committee also recommended strengthening the national women's machinery to have the necessary human, technical and financial resources to effectively promote women's rights and gender equality and ensure effective gender mainstreaming

across all government departments. It encouraged the government to collect

disaggregated data and increase women's representation in the parliament, judiciary, administration and private sector.

In its report, the Women's Affairs Reform Commission has proposed wide ranging legal and institutional reforms, including withdrawal of reservations to the CEDAW Convention and ratification of ILO Conventions 189 and 190 to uphold international standards on domestic worker rights and the prevention of workplace violence and harassment. Furthermore, the Commission calls for the establishment of a permanent, autonomous National Women's Commission.

This brief outlines UN Women Bangladesh's efforts to support the government in addressing these challenges and promoting gender responsive governance and women's leadership.

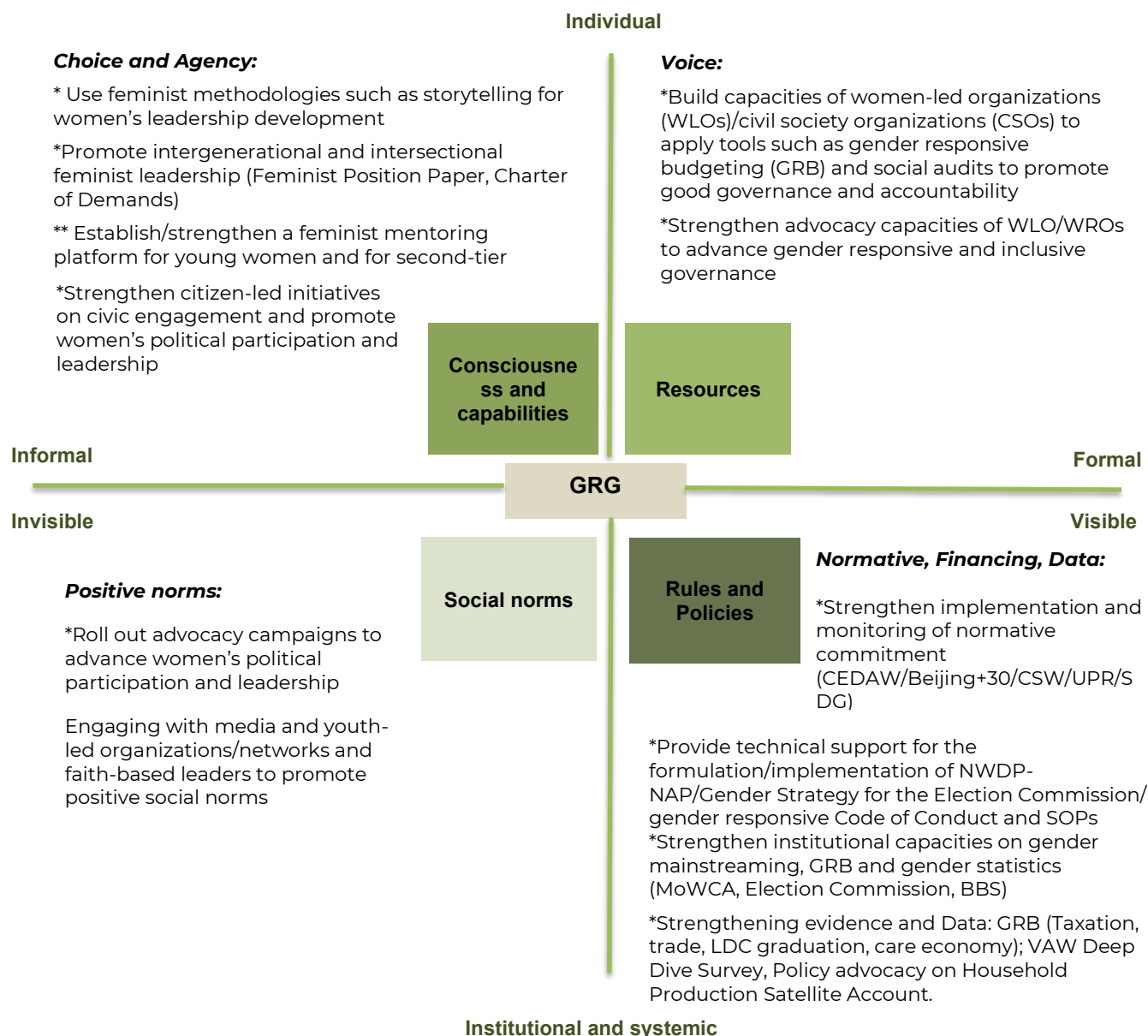


*Photo: UN Women/Joyantee Reza*

## STRATEGY

UN Women Bangladesh aligns its work to advance gender responsive governance and women's leadership with [Bangladesh's 8th Five-Year Plan](#), the [United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework \(UNSDCF\) 2022-2026](#) and the country office's Strategic Note, which contributes to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. UN Women aims to strengthen the capacity of the government to formulate gender-responsive policies, programmes and financing strategies

that are consistent with global norms and standards and advance women's political participation, representation and leadership. 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.



With support from the Governments of Switzerland, Korea, Norway, SDG Fund, and in close collaboration with sister agencies (UNDP, UNESCO, UNOPS), UN Women works closely with the Government of Bangladesh to strengthen institutional accountability for gender equality, support inclusive governance and ensure women's full participation in public life. In addition to engagement at the national level, UN Women works across seven divisions namely Barishal, Khulna, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Mymensingh, Chattogram and Dhaka.

UN Women responds to current challenges by prioritizing integrated solutions that tackle the root causes of gender inequalities and trigger systemic changes by:

- Protecting and advancing normative frameworks, laws and policies that uphold the rights of all women and girls
- Strengthening institutions to drive accountability through financing and data that advance gender responsive governance.
- Promoting women's meaningful participation, representation and leadership

### ***I. Advancing Normative Frameworks***

UN Women advocates for stronger accountability mechanisms for gender equality, in line with normative frameworks. These include overarching frameworks such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs, the Beijing Platform for Action, global human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the CEDAW, and gender equality-focused intergovernmental agreements such as the

Agreed Conclusions of the CSW. Key national normative frameworks include the Constitution of Bangladesh, the 8th Five-Year Plan, and the NWDP 2011. To operationalize these commitments, UN Women provides technical and capacity development support to government ministries and departments (at the national and local levels) to develop, implement and monitor gender responsive laws, policies and programmes. Policy advisory support is provided, primarily to the nodal ministry for gender equality, i.e. the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA), to strengthen monitoring of international commitments, especially CEDAW Concluding Observations, BPfA Review and Voluntary National Review for the SDGs.



*Unpaid Care Work. Photo: UN Women/Monon Muntaka.*

## II. *Driving Accountability*

### **Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting:**

A key component of UN Women's programming on governance is gender responsive planning and budgeting (GRPB). Recognizing public financing as a critical enabler for transformative change, UN Women provides policy and programme support to government and other stakeholders on the application of GRPB. This includes strengthening GRPB to enable gender mainstreaming across all sectoral ministries and departments and strengthening gender-responsive policy formulation and implementation. In alignment with the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF), UN Women advocates for the development and financing of national strategies to advance gender equality and women's empowerment. Through gender responsive macroeconomic policy analysis, UN Women also contributes to ongoing UN efforts to support Bangladesh's graduation from the Least Developed Country status in 2026.

**Gender Statistics:** UN Women supports the government on the availability, accessibility and usage of gender statistics in Bangladesh. In collaboration with the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), UN Women supports the government's monitoring of the implementation of the SDGs by strengthening the collection, analysis and dissemination of gender statistics. As part of the global Women Count

programme, UN Women ensures the availability of high-quality, comparable and regular gender statistics to address national data gaps and meet policy and reporting commitments under the SDGs, CEDAW and the BPfA.



### iii. ***Women's Meaningful Participation, Representation and Leadership:***

UN Women adopts a comprehensive approach to women's meaningful participation, representation and leadership across governance institutions and democratic processes, in line with normative commitments, especially CEDAW General Recommendation 40, aimed at achieving gender balance in political decision-making and institutions. Emphasis is placed on partnerships with women's rights groups – with a focus on

movement building - to empower and build the capacities of these groups to participate in and shape public and building feminist consciousness and leadership, enabling them to articulate their needs and interests, and demand accountability for protection and fulfilment of their rights. In collaboration with other stakeholders, particularly women's organizations, the use of social accountability tools such as gender audits is also promoted. Further dialogue platforms among feminist collectives and other social movements and networks are strengthened. Other strategies include evidence-based advocacy to address critical barriers and challenges to women's effective participation in political and public life, such as violence against women in politics, as well as access barriers to governance institutions and democratic processes.

In an evolving national context, UN Women, in collaboration with sister UN agencies, provides technical support to the Election Commission on gender-responsive electoral processes. This entails the development of a gender strategy, gender responsive monitoring tools and Standard Operating Procedures, as well as wide-scale capacity development of officials engaged in the election management processes, in the lead-up to the next national election. Through the use of innovative tools such as storytelling and feminist mentorship, UN Women seeks to enhance the leadership of women—particularly youth and excluded

political life. Capacity development of women and members of excluded groups, as rights holders, focuses on groups—from an intergenerational and intersectional perspective.

## RESULTS (2022-2025)

### Normative Frameworks:



The National Action Plan for the implementation of the NWDP 2011 was updated in 2024 to include specific actions for 52 ministries and divisions.

- The Government of Bangladesh submitted the State Party Report to the CEDAW Committee, with support from UN Women. National commitments to accelerate implementation of the BPfA were shared by MoWCA at the 69<sup>th</sup> Session of the CSW - prioritizing five actionable areas: ending GBV, economic participation, climate resilience, digital

inclusion and legal reform. This was informed by a wide multi-stakeholder review process led by MoWCA with support from UN Women, reflecting enhanced accountability and stakeholder engagement. A multi-stakeholder Beijing+30 Technical Working Group was established and coordinated by MoWCA to enable inclusive and consultative processes across government entities. In parallel, alternative reporting/shadow reporting by civil society organizations, including for CEDAW's ninth and tenth review cycles, was facilitated by UN Women.

- With technical and financial support from UN agencies, including UN Women, the Government of Bangladesh officially submitted the 2025 VNR report in June 2025, reaffirming its commitment, following the political transition in 2024, to realise the SDGs. Leveraging its coordination mandate and comparative advantage in gender statistics, UN Women adopted an inclusive and collaborative multi-pronged approach that informed a gender-responsive and evidence-based VNR reporting process.

### **Policy Advocacy and Capacity Development :**

- With UN Women's assistance, MoWCA conducted training for the government ministries on GRPB to strengthen the capacity of gender and budget focal points and CSO representatives.



«A collaborative approach where CSOs are part of the process, must be ensured to make gender data more reliable.»



SM Shaikat

Executive Director, SERAC Bangladesh



- UN Women developed a GRPB guideline and monitoring tool under MoWCA's leadership. In 2024, the guidelines and tools were piloted and validated in five districts: Thakurgaon, Kurigram, Cox's Bazar, Manikganj and Jessore. UN Women built the capacity of government officials, including the MoWCA, the National Institute of Local Government (NILG), the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), and the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS), to mainstream the GRPB guideline and monitoring tool.
- Capacities of key officials from BBS and gender and data focal points from seven-line ministries on generating and analysing gender statistics were enhanced with support from UN Women. Investing in their capacities is expected to contribute to improved quality of SDG monitoring and reporting

and enhance the evidence base for gender-responsive policy formulation and sectoral planning.

- A total of 304 (71 women, 233 men) users (CSOs, academia, media and local government institutions) and producers (national, divisional and district level BBS officials) were engaged in User-Producer Dialogues (UPDs) across seven divisions<sup>2</sup> of Bangladesh. Led by BBS with support from UN Women, these interactive and structured dialogues aimed at strengthening national capacities to produce and apply gender statistics, with a particular focus on time use statistics. The UPDs spurred commitment by users and producers alike to enhance awareness of the value of care work and greater use of time statistics to shape programmatic

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- The Government of Bangladesh mainstreamed gender equality priorities in the Development Result Framework (DFA) and the INFF for SDG financing. These frameworks forecast the financing required to meet the SDG targets. Through UN Women's technical support, targets related to gender equality are reflected in the frameworks. UN Women also assisted in developing a financing strategy for the SDGs and a financing roadmap for Goal 5, with a projection of



<sup>2</sup> These include: Barishal, Khulna, Chittagong, Sylhet, Mymensingh, Rajshahi and Rangpur

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USD 54 billion for implementation by 2030.

- Strengthened application of GRPB, financing modalities and the gender and macroeconomic nexus were highlighted in the [White Paper on State of the Bangladesh Economy](#), developed by the [White Paper Committee](#)<sup>4</sup> in 2024. UN Women provided recommendations to the Committee, drawing on its past work on GRPB. In December, the Committee [submitted the draft Paper](#) to the Chief Adviser, with UN Women's contributions reflected in the gender chapter.

### **Feminist Movement Building**

- In 2025, the intergenerational and inclusive feminist movement was strengthened through divisional workshops involving around 100 CSOs, enhancing their capacity for strategic advocacy and collective action. The workshops, led by BMP and Bonhishika with UN Women's support, built solidarity with grassroots women's rights organizations in Bangladesh.
- A total of 116 CSOs across four divisions (Sylhet, Rajshahi, Khulna, Chittagong) and Dhaka engaged in the development of a [Charter of Demands](#) (CoD) led by Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP) and Bonhishikha, with UN Women's support.

Several recommendations from the CoD were reflected in the report of the Women's Affairs Reform Commission constituted by the Interim Government.

### **Evidence and Data:**

- In 2025, the Government of Bangladesh launched the first national [Household Production Satellite Account \(HPSA\)](#) Report to measure the economic value of women's unpaid domestic and care work. Led by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, with support from UN Women and with technical assistance from the Asian Development Bank, the HPSA provides critical evidence for policymakers to design and strengthen gender-responsive policies, programmes and budgets and inform policy priorities in the forthcoming national development plan.
- In 2022, the first-ever comprehensive [Time-Use Survey \(TUS\)](#) to increase the visibility of unpaid care and domestic work in Bangladesh was published by BBS. UN Women supported BBS in conducting the TUS, including specialized data training for over 100 enumerators, supervisors, data editors, coders and other BBS staff.
- UN Women in partnership with the International Monetary Fund developed a Selected Issues Paper, under Article IV of the Fund's Articles of Agreement. The

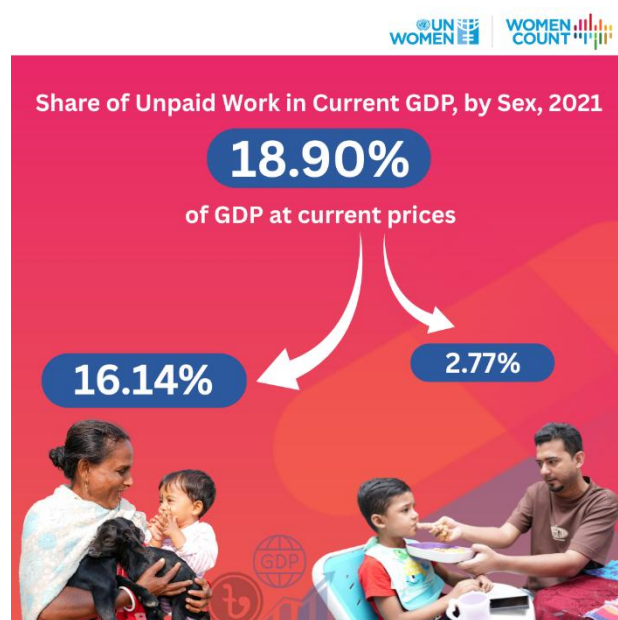
<sup>4</sup> The White Paper Committee, established in August 2024 by Bangladesh's interim government led by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, is a 12-member task force chaired by economist Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya. The Committee undertook a rapid but in-depth review of Bangladesh's economy (2010–2024),

identifying structural challenges in governance, debt, data transparency and corruption. Its December 2024 report and subsequent symposium are informing national reform efforts and budget planning for sustainable and gender-responsive development.

[analytical paper](#) highlights the need for a more strategic, transparent, and impact-oriented GRB system, covering all phases of the budget cycle.

- In collaboration with Centre for Policy Dialogue, UN Women conducted a study entitled, '[Opportunities and Challenges for Gender Equality Financing in the Context of Post-COVID-19 Recovery and LDC Graduation](#)'. The study proposes several innovative financing models and calls for stronger complementarity between fiscal and monetary policy instruments, including tax reforms and collaboration between relevant stakeholders for financing SD G-5.
- A forward-looking assessment of 'Gender Responsive Budgeting in Bangladesh' was commissioned by UN Women, under the leadership of MoWCA.
- An advocacy brief on Women's Political Participation, Representation and Leadership was developed by UN Women on behalf of the Local Consultative Group on Women's Advancement and Gender Equality (LCG WAGE).<sup>5</sup>
- Under UNSDCF Strategic Priority Group 5, UN Women and UNFPA co-led the development of the [Gender Analysis Bangladesh 2024](#), documenting the gendered impacts of civil unrest in 24 districts. The report highlights rights

violations, economic precarity, service disruptions, gendered violence and political exclusion affecting women, girls, gender.



### ***For All Women and Girls: Samina Yasmin on Challenging Patriarchy and Championing Inclusive Leadership***

**#ForAllWomenandGirls** is a global call to action marking the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Samina Yasmin from Bangladesh reflects on gender norms, intersectional activism, and the power of collective feminist leadership.

Samina is a feminist activist and storyteller working with Bonhishikha, a Dhaka-based organization that promotes gender equality through dialogue, leadership, and community mobilization. Bonhishikha and

<sup>5</sup> The Local Consultative Group or LCG functions as the main forum for development coordination and policy dialogue between the Government and

Development Partners in Bangladesh. The LCG WAGE is chaired by MoWCA and co-chaired by UN Women.

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad with support from UN Women, is implementing the project

“Strengthening Intergenerational and Inclusive Women’s Movement in Bangladesh.” The movement has drafted a [Charter of Demands](#)—a collective call for gender equality and the empowerment of all

women and girls in their diversity. Samina, who has worked across the corporate and development sectors, represented Bangladesh at the Beijing+30 Review Session during the 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69) in New York in March 2025.

Growing up in an urban, educated family, Samina was aware of her relative privilege—yet her voice was often undervalued in both family and workplace settings. “I was seen as too young, too inexperienced, or simply not the ‘right’ person to speak up,” she recalls. “As a working mother, my ambition was questioned—something that would have been celebrated in a man.” Her motivation for change came from within her own family.

Through her work, Samina has witnessed how deeply gender bias is embedded in systems that may appear progressive on paper. She notes that for women with less access to education, resources, or social capital, barriers multiply. “Child marriage, lack of social

protection, and insecurity amplify women’s vulnerability. For women from minority communities, climate-vulnerable regions, or those living with disabilities, the challenges are even more severe.”

At Bonhishikha, Samina focuses on building leadership among women and girls, particularly those from structurally excluded groups, creating safer, more inclusive spaces for collaboration and advocacy. “Patriarchy affects everyone—it limits potential across all genders. The first step to dismantling it is acknowledging its existence and unlearning the biases that sustain it.”

The *Strengthening Intergenerational and Inclusive Women’s Movement in Bangladesh* project has been instrumental in advancing gender equality by connecting feminist activists across generations. It builds on their collective knowledge and experience to foster solidarity and strengthen advocacy, linking grassroots efforts to national-level movements. “Given the rise of anti-rights groups, shrinking civic space, and funding crises, strengthening Bangladesh’s women’s movement is more crucial than ever,”

Samina emphasizes. “This project is shifting advocacy from isolated actions to a collaborative, intersectional, and intergenerational movement that elevates diverse voices and ensures that

gender equality remains a shared, evolving agenda.” Samina remains hopeful. Working in coalition with women’s rights and human rights groups across Bangladesh continues to strengthen her belief in the power of collective action. “Reclaiming space and

resisting regression is essential,” she says. “The feminist movement has taught me that progress is never linear. Rights must be constantly defended.”



*Bonhishikha and BMP members at the dissemination event of the Charter of Demands. Photo: Bonhishikha*

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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