

Bangladesh Country Statement
UN CEDAW Meeting
Geneva
January 25, 2011

Presented by:
Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, MP.
State Minister, Ministry of Women and
Children Affairs, Government of the
People's Republic of Bangladesh.

Introduction:

Bangladesh, having ratified the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and signatory to Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) and Millennium Development Goals is committed in attaining the objectives of ensuring gender equality and empowerment of women.

Government of Bangladesh firmly believes that gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance. Therefore, women's concerns must be expressed in and integrated into development policies to bring about meaningful changes in securing empowerment of women. Women are important agents of social transformation. Ensuring women empowerment has invaluable socioeconomic gain. Promoting women empowerment is therefore, "*smart economics*" as stated by the World Bank President Mr. Robert Zoellick.

The journey to ensure empowerment of women began since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. Policies and institutional measures were undertaken for women development under the leadership of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees women equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and public life as a fundamental right (Article 28 (2)) and prohibits discrimination and inequality on the basis of sex. Article 28(1) lays down that State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of sex and nothing in this Article shall prevent the state from making special provision in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of

citizens. (Article 28(4)) Principles of equality and non-discrimination, the fundamental theme of CEDAW are well reflected in the Constitution of Bangladesh.

Constitution aims to realize through a democratic process, a society free from exploitation wherein rule of law, fundamental human rights and freedom, equality and justice - political, social and economic will be secured for all. Article 27 states that all citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law.

A new era of democracy ushered in Bangladesh with the Parliamentary Elections in December 2008. The newly elected Government declared "Vision 2021". Bangladesh Government is committed in mainstreaming gender issues in order to incorporate them within the framework of macroeconomics and to formulate policies to effectuate effective, substantial and visible changes to the lives of women at all levels and in all spheres. Under the visionary leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Bangladesh Government has been actively engaged in formulating proactive policies and taking affirmative actions for accelerating the implementation process in achieving the goal of gender equality and holistic empowerment of women.

Initiatives to ensure equal rights of women and non-discrimination have gained momentum in Bangladesh. It has been successful in mobilizing and coordinating women to stand up for their rights. Women's mobility and visibility in public domain, both in rural areas (increase in women economic participation in rural non-farm activity) and in urban areas (women's participation in garments industries, construction sites and other income generating activities) have significantly improved. However, relentless endeavour is underway on the part of the Government by way of adoption of appropriate policies, legislation, strategies, national plan of action and program for realization of empowerment of women.

The pro-women policies, strategies and measures of the Government undertaken in the last decades have positively influenced the reduction of poverty of women. Progress of women can be traced from their increasing economic participation through employment in various sectors including garments, shoes and cosmetics industries in formal sector and also self-

employment in non-formal activities. Women also work in agricultural sector; women are employed in crop production, in livestock, in forestry, in fishery. There is a growing trend of women working in construction sites.

Positive indicators of women's advancement in the country are reflected in continuing gender parity in school enrolment, gradually lowered infant mortality and decrease in maternal mortality rates. Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina received the UN Millennium Award 2010 for remarkable achievement of Bangladesh in reducing infant mortality. There has been significant progress in health and education areas. The improved health services through implementation of health, nutrition and population related programs have contributed to improved health, especially of women. Nutrition situation has also improved. The proportion of non-pregnant mothers in the chronic energy deficiency situation declined from 44.2 percent in 2000 (BDHS 2000) to 32.2 percent in 2005 (CMNS 2005). Maternal mortality ratio (MMR) declined significantly from 574 in 1990 to 348 per 100,000 live births in 2008.

In carrying forward CEDAW commitments, Government of Bangladesh formulated the National Policy for Advancement of Women in 1997 in the light of the Constitution of Bangladesh, CEDAW Convention, BPFA and broad based consultation with the stakeholders including human rights organizations, women's rights activists, non Governmental organizations and the civil society. The said Policy is under review and will be implemented in an updated manner shortly. National Action Plan for Women's Advancement was adopted in 1998 projecting the strategy of mainstreaming gender in all Governmental policies by the sectoral Ministries.

Concluding Comments of UN CEDAW Committee on the Fifth Periodic Report of Bangladesh

The UN CEDAW Committee in its Concluding Comments on the Fifth Periodic Report of Bangladesh congratulated the Government for achieving gender parity and dramatic increase in the enrolment of girls in primary and secondary level in schools. This was possible by the innovative steps taken by the Government of making substantial investments in both primary and secondary education of girls by giving scholarships, stipends and introducing free education.

The Committee praised the initiative of the Government in reaching out to rural poor women in providing maternal health care and services through community and mobile clinics which resulted in decrease of maternal mortality rate. The Committee further observed that while the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Bangladesh remained low, the Government continued to take urgent measures to prevent any possible epidemic through various awareness raising programs.

The Committee concluded by observing that Bangladesh was marching ahead with the correct mindset and progress on all socioeconomic fronts including women's empowerment was palpable.

Very recently, on 18th January, 2011 the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon while paying a courtesy call upon the Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in UAE expressed satisfaction for Bangladesh's progress towards achieving of the MDGs. He praised the Government's efforts at facing the adverse impacts of climate change and the contribution of Bangladeshi contingents in UN peacekeeping missions across the Globe.

Measures of Government to comply with recommendations of UN CEDAW Committee on Fifth Periodic Report

UN CEDAW Committee also identified certain principal areas of concern and gave recommendations. Bangladesh Government, in conformity with UN CEDAW Committee recommendations have taken measures to effectuate changes in the concerned areas.

- Priority attention has been given in adopting comprehensive approach to address violence against women. One Stop Crisis Centres are operating in seven Divisions of the country, providing medical treatment, legal support, police assistance and rehabilitation to women victims of violence. National Trauma Counseling Centre has been established by MOWCA providing psycho-social counseling to women victims of violence and there is help line support. Steps are being taken to strengthen legal aid to better ensure justice for poor women seeking legal recourse. Legislative framework is in place. Dowry Prohibition Act, 1980; Prevention of Repression against Women and Children Act,

2000 (revised 2003); Acid Crime Control Act; Child Marriage Restraint Act; 1929 etc. Shelter Homes are in seven Divisions of the country. Initiatives are underway to prepare a National Plan of Action to Prevent Violence Against Women. VAW Cells are operating under MOWCA, JMS and women Directorate.

- Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010 has been passed by the Parliament.
- Extensive awareness raising programs are conducted throughout the country at the grass root level. Courtyard meetings are organized wherein mothers and daughters take part and are made aware of their legal rights, given information about their rights under relevant laws and how to seek redress. Community leaders, imams are also given awareness raising training to bring about positive change in traditional, are-old mindset and patriarchal attitudes. Advocacy to prevent child marriage, culture of dowry, sexual harassment etc. are also part of the program. Emphasis is being given to engage men and boys in preventing violence against women. Concerts are organized to spread the message through young generation "*to say no to violence against women.*" Continuous seminars, workshops, rallies and human chains are organized with GO-NGO collaboration throughout the country.
- The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2009 has been enacted by the Parliament eliminating discrimination and entitling a Bangladeshi woman to transmit citizenship to her children.
- Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 contains provisions for equal pay for equal work. Maternity leave has been expanded from four months to six months for all women employees in the government service, effective from January 09, 2011. The number of Day Care Centres operated by MOWCA was 19 and in this FY 10 more have been established making total number 29.
- While provisions of Convention cannot be directly implemented, Courts can, in interpreting legal provisions, in the event where domestic law is silent, apply CEDAW or any other international Convention. This has been done by the Courts in Bangladesh. Courts

often rely on CEDAW provisions in interpreting laws. Many provisions of CEDAW have been incorporated into domestic law by way of judicial interpretation. Discriminatory provisions have been eliminated in conformity with the fundamental tenets of equality and non-discrimination of CEDAW Convention. Women's right to independent choice in marriage has been recognized by High Court Division in Writ Petition No. 7977/2008 Dr. Shipra Chowdhury & ASKVs. Md. Joynal Abedin and others.

In cases where the obligations have not yet been fully met, the Government is making sincere efforts to fully comply with its obligations under CEDAW, particularly in the light of the recommendations made by the Committee after the Fifth Periodic Report. For instance it may be pointed out that in line with the recommendation of the Committee initiatives have been further strengthened by Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development under various Projects to ensure safe drinking water for rural women. MOWCA as a pilot initiative has undertaken a Project from Climate Trust Fund to provide safe drinking water and sanitation facilities to women and children in disaster affected area, Char Borhanuddin and Char Fashion in Bhola District.

Overview of Implementation of CEDAW

A brief overview of the state of implementation of CEDAW and its Optional Protocol in Bangladesh till December 2010 reveals a success story in relation to gender equality and empowerment of women. Bangladesh has been globally acclaimed as a country promoting secular, progressive values, countering extremism and a 'rising star' in women empowerment by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and other global leaders in the 65th UNGA High Level Segment on MDGs.

Government of Bangladesh has initiated various programmes and projects for the development of women and children which are contributing in the achievement of targets set out in "Vision 2021". In Bangladesh women and children constitute a large segment of the population. Women development, therefore, is an essential prerequisite for national development. The Government has been implementing different programme and projects to empower and establish rights of the women and children by mainstreaming

them in the overall development process of the country.

The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs has undertaken various programmes for alleviating poverty of women in line with the election manifesto of the present government. The prime objective of these efforts is to ensure women's overall development by ensuring their equal and active participation in the mainstream socio-economic activities. Comprehensive initiatives are being undertaken to ensure women's economic empowerment through skill development by providing extensive training, creating job opportunities, ensuring participation in the labour market and providing support to the small and medium women entrepreneurs.

Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment of women is a high priority agenda of the Government. Eradication of poverty being the focal point, Government strongly emphasizes that features of women's poverty require a gender perspective in the pro-poor growth strategy.

Women being important agents of economic and social transformation and proportion of ultra poor being higher in female headed households in comparison to that of male headed ones emphasis is being given on reducing feminization of poverty. Taking account of this fact, "Steps Towards Change: National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction-II (NSAPR-II)" has been formulated reflecting the commitment of the Government in its Election Manifesto and also in the light of the Millennium Development Goals, with particular emphasis in reducing feminised poverty. NSAPR- II stresses the need for reducing feminised poverty by ensuring social safety net protection to extreme poor women, creating employment opportunities, providing support for small and medium enterprise (SME) initiative of women by resource mobilization; providing credit facilities to women on easy terms and without collaterals; creating market linkages for women to market their products through cooperatives; providing skill development training for facilitating employment opportunities. It further envisages facilitating increased participation of women in labour force and ensuring equal wages for them. It purports to foster Rural Non-Farm Activities (RNFA) as an effective poverty reduction activity for women. In order to make this sector more vibrant, certain interventions have been identified as necessary, for

example - improving marketing capacity by providing sales centres in Growth Centre markets (GCM) and peri-urban markets; providing training on food processing activities; providing basic skills about business management and steps linking them to markets; setting up vocational training institutes in rural and peri-urban areas etc.

Keeping in view the special aspects of women's poverty, it has been recognized that women frequently experience poverty differently and therefore different poverty reduction priorities need to be identified and different development interventions are required. In empowering women to become equal partners of development, "Vision 2021" reflected in NSAPR-II aims to enhance women's participation in mainstream economic activities; creating opportunities for education and marketable skills training enabling them to participate; incorporating women's needs and concerns in all sectoral plans; promoting enabling environment at the work place. Investment in women's education and training has proven to deliver large social and economic returns.

Examining the bench marks of MDGs also indicates notable progress made in education and health sector. Gender parity has been attained in primary education. Special emphasis given to girl child's education, stipend for girls, free education have resulted in increased enrolment of girls and decreasing dropout rates. Positive results have been achieved in reducing maternal mortality and infant mortality through effective institutional measures.

Social Safety-net Program for Ultra Poor Women

- **Widow and Destitute Women Allowance:** Destitute and Widow Women are provided a monthly allowance Tk. 300 throughout the country. During 2009-10 fiscal year the amount of allowance and number of beneficiaries have been increased. Number of beneficiaries has been increased by 20 thousand. Presently, 9,20,000 women are covered under the programme. The allocation for this programme was Tk. 331.20 crore.
- **Maternity Allowance:** Tk. 350/ is paid per month to the poor pregnant women for a period of twenty four months. During 2009-2010 fiscal years 80 thousand women of 4,495 unions (at least 17 from each union)

have been brought under this programme. An amount of Taka 33.60 crores were allocated for this program. The number of beneficiaries at present is 88 thousand. Number of beneficiaries has been increased from 60 thousand to 80 thousand and amount of allowance from Tk. 300 to Tk.350.

- **Lactating Mother Allowance for Working Women in Urban Areas:** In fiscal year 2010-11 Tk. 30 crore has been allocated to provide allowance to lactating mothers who are working women in urban areas at the rate of Tk.350 per person. Garments workers are majority beneficiaries from this program.
- **Vulnerable Group Development Program (VGD) ensuring food security for the ultra poor women:** This is the largest programme for providing food security to the ultra poor women of the rural areas. Under this program 30kg rice is distributed to 7,50,000 poor women every month. Awareness raising trainings on reproductive health, self employment and income generation activities are being provided as a part of the food assistance development package for women living under the poverty line.
- **VGDUPP Program:** About 7 Lac 50 thousand poor and destitute women in remote areas are given monthly subsistence allowance of Tk.400 and training on income generating skill. At the end of training an amount of Tk. 7,500 is given to each of them for purchasing a productive asset, i.e. sewing machine, cattle etc.
- **Credit programme for poverty reduction:** In order to make rural destitute women self reliant, credits are provided for self employment. Maximum amount of credit given to a woman is Taka Fifteen Thousand which is to be repaid in twelve instalments within a two year term. 5% service charge is fixed on the total credit amount. The poor women can utilize the credit for various income generating activities that include small trading, rearing cattle, etc. Along with the provision of credits, the beneficiaries are made aware of the use of sanitary latrines, sending their children to schools, birth registration, primary health care, immunization, use of safe water, dowry and prevention of child marriage, etc.

Extensive Training Programs

- Extensive training is conducted throughout the country on agriculture, computer, handicrafts, block-batik, sewing, beautification, repair of electronic gadgets etc.
- Small and Medium Women Entrepreneurs (SME) Policy, Industrial Policy and separate window at banks under Refinancing Scheme for access to finance by way of collateral free loan and credit facilities in support of women entrepreneurs. An amount of Taka One Hundred and Twenty Crore has been allocated for funding Women entrepreneurs. Taka One hundred and Eleven Crore has already been disbursed as loan till December 31, 2010.

Human Development:

Education: Gender parity has been achieved in primary education. Since 1990 primary school enrolment has increased 1.4 times from 11.9 million in 1990 to 16.7 million in 2008. Secondary education enrolment for female students has increased significantly with girls' enrolment surpassing boys in 2000 (52% for girls and 48% for boys). Special emphasis has been given to girl child's education. Primary and secondary education is free for girls. Provision's for stipends for girls and waiver of tuition fees have resulted in increased enrolment for girls decreasing dropout rates and early marriages. One of the eligibility criteria for availing female stipend is being unmarried. In order to increase women participation in technical and vocational education, three women Polytechnic Institutes has been established at three Divisional Headquarters. 23 crore books have been distributed free of cost throughout the country both at primary and secondary level. An International University, named Asian University for Women has been established in Chittagong to offer higher studies opportunity to women who prefer studying at Women University.

Health: Noticeable gains have been achieved in the area of women's health. Initiatives have been undertaken to deliver primary health medical care services to rural poor women through community clinics. Special attention is being given to facilitate maternal health care resulting in decreased maternal mortality rate. Ten Women Friendly Model District Hospitals and three Upazilla (Sub-district) Health Complexes has been established to treat women and children. Maternal Health Voucher scheme provides poor women in 35 sub-districts voucher package that includes Tk. 2,000/-, three anti natal check-ups and a safe delivery under the guidance of skilled child birth attendant, one post natal check up and transport cost. In addition maternity allowance is given to 88 thousand extreme poor pregnant women for 24 months at the rate of TK. 350/- per month. Maternal mortality ratio (MMR) declined significantly from 574 in 1990 to 348 per 100,000 live births in 2008.

Employment of Women in Different Sectors

There is a growing trend of increased women participation in labour force.

- Women's participation in the labour force has increased significantly from 23.9% in 1999-2000 to 29.2% in 2005-2006.
- Agricultural Sector - Rural women's role as agricultural workers has expanded gradually from 25% to 34% between 2002-03 to 2005-06. This indicates an increase in female labour force in agricultural sector from 7.6% in 2002-03 to 10.11% in 2005-06. A micro level study conducted in 2008 reveals that 88% women are engaged in agriculture related works.
- Formal Sector - Garments Sector - 28 Lac women are employed.
- Non-formal Sector

Social Empowerment

Increased number of women engaged in various professions.

- Civil Service and Administration,

- Judiciary (Six Women Judges in the High Court Division of the Supreme Court),
- Armed Forces, Navy and Air Force.
- Police. Recently Women Officer in Charge of police station has also been appointed.
- In UN Peace Keeping Mission women are employed in the armed Forces and also All Female Formed Police Unit (FPU) reached Haiti evidencing the support that women participate in conflict resolution, crisis management and post conflict rehabilitation as mandated in Security Council Resolution 1325.
- Maternity leave for all women employed in government service has been extended to six months.
- Increase in number of Day Care Centers. MOWCA runs 29 Day Care Centers to support working mothers.

Legal Empowerment

Legislative framework is in place to combat violence against women. Bangladesh has a number of special laws, specifically prohibiting certain forms of violence against women including the Penal Code, 1860; Anti-Dowry Act, 1980; Prevention of Repression against Women and Children Act, 2000 (revised 2003), Acid Crime Control Act etc.

- The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2009 has been enacted by the Parliament eliminating discrimination and entitling a Bangladeshi woman to transmit citizenship to her children.
- Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010 has been enacted by the Parliament in October, 2010 and it came to effect as law on 30th of December, 2010.
- Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution effectuates an increase in women reserved seats from 30 to 45.

- The Representation of People's (Amendment) Ordinance, 2008 makes provision for a woman to be elected to one out of two posts of Vice Chairpersons in each Sub-district.
- National Human Rights Commission Act, 2009 enacted and Human Right Commission established having at least one woman as a Member.
- Right to Information Act, 2009 enacted and Information Commission established having one woman as Commissioner.
- Representation of People's (Amendment) Ordinance, 2008 makes provision for political parties to reserve at least 33% of all committee positions for women.
- Recognition of mother's identity has been ensured through a Gazette Notification in year 2000 which requires that the name of mother be included in all official documents relating to a child. In 2009 the High Court Division directed the Education Boards to ensure that mother's name be inserted in the school admission form either alone or with that of the father. Mother's name must also be inserted in the Passport.
- The Legal Aid Fund Act, 2000 (amended in 2006).
- Village Courts Act, 2006.
- Birth and Death Registration Act, 2004.
- Labour Act, 2006 ensures equal pay for equal work and increased maternity benefits.
- Witness and Victim Protection Act is being drafted.

Policy Initiatives

Bangladesh adopted the following Policies for advancement of women between years 2004 to 2010:

- National Plan of Action against Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children including Trafficking for the period of 2002-2007.
- National Plan of Action to combat Trafficking in Women and Children, 2008.
- National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction I & II (2008 & 2009).
- National Education Policy.

Political Empowerment

Progress of women in political arena is significant. Women occupy top positions in political leadership in Bangladesh. At the highest decision making level there are six women ministers in the Cabinet including the Hon'ble Prime Minister, holding non traditional, important portfolios. Political empowerment of women has gained momentum in local government. The local Government (Union Parishad) Second Amendment Act of 1997 providing for direct election to reserved seats for women is a milestone in ensuring equal access of women in political power structure. As a unique strategy of affirmative action, providing the structural framework for women's participation in political decision making, it paved the way for women to come to the centre stage of local development and in developing new grass root leadership. Subsequently, at the Upazilla (Sub-district) level Vice Chairman's position has been earmarked for women to be elected directly.

- Hon'ble Prime Minister is a woman, Opposition Leader, Deputy Leader of House, six Members in the Cabinet are women holding important and non-traditional portfolios - Ministry of Home, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Labour and Employment and Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, which demonstrates strong political will to place women in leadership position.
- Whip, Chairman and members of Standing Committees in Parliament are women.

- Number of reserved seats for women in National Parliament increased from 30 to 45. 19 women directly elected members of Parliament, total number of women members of Parliament 64 which is 19%.
- At the local government level, under the Local Government Act, 1997 three seats have been reserved for direct election of women as members of Union Parishad.
- The Representation of People's (Amendment) Ordinance 2008 provides for two elected Vice-Chairman, one of which must be a woman.
- The Representation of People's (Amendment) Ordinance, 2008 provides that political parties reserve at least 33% of all committee positions for women.

Measures to Combat Violence against Women

In preventing violence against women legislative framework is in place - Dowry Prohibition Act, 1980; Prevention of Repression against Women and Children Act, 2000 (revised 2003); Acid Crime Control Act; Child Marriage Restraint Act; 1929 etc.

- Prevention of Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010 has been enacted by the Parliament in October, 2010 and it came into effect as law on 30th of December, 2010.
- Commendable judicial initiatives by pronouncement of judgments have highlighted the spirit and fundamental tenets of CEDAW of ensuring gender equality and non-discrimination.
- High Court Ruling on Fatwas: The Hon'ble High Court Division declared all extra-judicial punishments, including those made in the name of fatwas (religious edicts), to be illegal.
- Number of significant Judgment have been given on sexual harassment, forced marriage, guardianship, post divorce maintenance, discrimination on the basis of marital status in selection of public

employees, discrimination in allocation of responsibilities to elected members.

- The Hon'ble High Court Division of Supreme Court of Bangladesh has recently given Directives detailing a set of guidelines for action in cases of sexual harassment of women in academic institutions, workplaces and organizations. Steps are being taken to implement the Directives of the Hon'ble Court. Committees have already been formed in all the departments of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in compliance with the Directives of the Hon'ble Court for entertaining complaints of sexual harassment. Other Ministries are also taking steps in compliance of the Judgment.
- One-Stop Crisis Centres are operating in seven Divisions of the country, providing medical treatment, legal support, police assistance and rehabilitation to women victims of violence. National Trauma Counseling Centre has been established by MOWCA providing psycho-social counseling to women victims of violence and there is help line support. Steps are being taken to strengthen legal aid to better ensure justice for poor women seeking legal recourse.
- Legal assistance is provided by "Cell for Prevention of Violence against Women" in the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs and Department of Women Affairs and Jatiyo Mohila Sangstha.
- Gender Responsive Community Policing Program is being administered as a pilot initiative in certain districts to ensure security for women and girls and facilitating access to justice.
- Women Support Centers are operated for women victims of violence in six Divisions of the country providing shelter and rehabilitation facilities including food, health and training for six months with two children below the age of 12 years.
- Insertion of section 509 of the Penal Code in the schedule of Mobile Court Act empowering the Mobile Courts to take immediate action against eve teasers and offenders of sexual harassment.

- Awareness raising programs and advocacy are conducted with specific focus on engaging men and boys in prevention of violence against women and changing stereotype mind set. Policy Dialogues are held in different districts throughout the country at the grass root level in courtyard meetings emphasizing the role of men and boys in preventing violence against women. There are teenagers clubs wherein boys and girls take part in many learning activities, sports and cultural activities in a friendly environment and are informed about reproductive health issues of adolescents and the negative impact of dowry in marriage, child marriage, sexual harassment and exploitation etc. Mothers of teenagers also take part in these awareness raising programs.
- Human chains, Seminars are conducted throughout the country to raise awareness at the community level in preventing violence against women, including sexual harassment and eve teasing.

Framework for Implementation of Gender Equality Policies

- National Council for Women and Children (NCWCD) has been reconstituted in February, 2009 as the highest forum for monitoring and ensuring gender equality, non-discrimination and empowerment of woman, chaired by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, other ministers, members of Parliament, secretaries, representatives of women organizations.
- Women in Development (WID) Focal Point Mechanism comprises of representatives from 47 Ministries and Associate and Sub-WID Focal Points to report on WID activities of their respective Ministries on a quarterly basis to MOWCA, the lead Ministry for gender mainstreaming.
- Gender Responsive Budget: In 2009-10 FY four Ministries (Education, Health and Family Welfare, Social Welfare and Food and Disaster Management) were brought under Gender Responsive Budgeting and in 2010-11 FY it has been introduced in total ten Ministries.

- In order to monitor and ensure that resource allocated for women is best utilized for their welfare, 'engendering budgets' has been recognized as vital. Medium Term Budgetary Framework (MTBF) has been introduced to ensure that a government budget is to be prepared within a medium term context and should include estimated projections of revenues, financing and expenditures for the next fiscal year and two subsequent years. Under the MTBF approach a strategic phase to budget planning is to be undertaken before preparing the annual budget. 33 Ministries have been brought under MTBF.

Gender Mainstreaming through Ministries

Integration of gender concerns into mainstream of development and poverty reduction with the goal of attaining gender equality is a priority agenda of the Government. GOB assigns responsibility to all its agencies for achieving the said end by ensuring that the policies and programs adopted respond to the needs and interests of both women and men and distribute benefits equitably between them. The aim is to implement consistent and systematic efforts in all sectoral plans, programs and projects to ensure gender equality. Certain priority areas have been identified in implementation of gender equality policy. The most widely shared programmatic priorities are –

- Ensuring increased women's economic participation; Government programmes in this sector target women agricultural workers, labourers, entrepreneurs, factory workers, and Government employees.
- Gender equality mainstreaming.
- Gender responsive budgeting.
- Human Development through education, health and social welfare of women and girls.

Measures are being adopted by the ministries and departments targeting women as specific beneficiaries in programs or ensuring women's participation in activities, deriving benefits from the same. Women are being engaged in projects that increase their opportunities for economic advancement such as employment, self-employment, income generation and other means of enhancing livelihoods. These initiatives target entrepreneurs, factory workers, handloom weavers, sericulture workers, labourers in infrastructure projects, government employees (e.g. police, nurses), and

women in farming, fishing and rural communities. Projects focus on a mix of providing employment or self-employment opportunities, skill training, access to technology and other resources and services for working women.

As part of gender mainstreaming in all sectors, ministries are promoting and strengthening women's role at local-level decision-making as members of user and community committees involved in natural resources (water, forests) and disaster management. A number of ministries are working to help women enforce legal rights by providing access to legal aid. There is a growing recognition across government agencies about the nexus between poverty reduction and women's advancement and programs are being designed keeping in view how these combined objectives can be achieved.

Twenty-eight ministries and departments are working with an intense focus on –

- promoting economic engagement of women in employment and self-employment, including fisheries, agriculture and natural resource management;
- education and training;
- improved health, reduced violence against women, strengthened social welfare and protection from food shortages and disaster;
- access to utilities, infrastructure and services; and
- awareness raising programs through public education and training to effectuate change in mind set, patriarchal attitude regarding gender relations and women's rights.

At individual ministry level emphasis is given on adhering to government quotas, giving women equal training opportunities and creating a more woman supportive work environment. Acknowledging the generally disadvantaged status of women in the country, a 10% quota was introduced in 1972. Subsequently, mandatory reservations for women were introduced – 10% in gazetted posts and 15% in non-gazetted posts in addition to merit and 60% of primary school teacher posts. Quotas for women's recruitment and employment are being strictly followed.

Women officers are given opportunities to participate in training programmes and go for higher education. Women officers are given priority in training programmes designed for the Senior Assistant Secretary to Additional Secretary levels under the Top-2 (MATT-2) Bangladesh Public Service

Capacity Building Programme. Issues relating to women's empowerment and the development of disadvantaged women are key considerations in the Performance Improvement Project and Super Performance Improvement Project. Gender and Development training course has been introduced in the Public Service Training Academy to raise the awareness of government officers about gender concepts. Provisions for separate toilets, common room, day care centres are being enhanced for providing support.

CONCLUSION

Amartya Sen states -

“Women are not passive recipients of welfare-enhancing help brought about by society, but are active promoters and facilitators of social transformations. Such transformations influence not only the lives and well being of women, but also those of men and children.”

Women are autonomous agents of economic and social development, capable of making their own decisions, claiming their own rights, identifying their priority needs and finding best ways of responding to them. All that is required is providing them with the right opportunities and develop their capabilities so that they can empower themselves by availing such opportunities.

Government of Bangladesh in its endeavour to achieve gender equality and justice in conformity with the fundamental tenets of CEDAW is working to –

- Promote equality between women and men in power relation and decision making process.
- Increase women participation in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life and in governance and administration.
- Bring about change in attitude and old age mind-set inbuilt within patriarchal structure and practices to ensure human dignity and equality in all spheres of life.
- Create positive impact on employment and income of women.
- Mainstream gender and women concerns in all sectors of development.
- Ensuring women's and girl's physical and social security against vulnerability in family, society and state.

- Eliminating all forms of violence and discrimination against women.

However, there are areas where the Government needs to further strengthen its efforts and overcome the prevailing difficulties. There are emerging challenges of climate change and global recession. Women are more vulnerable to effects of natural disaster and climate change. Specific gender attributes contribute to increased women vulnerability, which calls for special attention. Government is conscious of the fact that these emerging challenges have differential impact on women, constituting the most vulnerable segment and therefore takes account of these factors in stepping up of policies and program measures. Poverty alleviation is critical. Resource constraint is a major issue. In addition there is a need for more logistic support for the Ministries to reach out to the people throughout the country. Resource mobilization is a key factor in achieving the desired targets.

It is only through coordinated efforts of all that we can achieve the desired goal. It is therefore essential to create a synergy in attaining the objectives of CEDAW, BPFA+15, MDGs. The common vision of attaining gender equality is all about working together, to revisit our commitments, to reaffirm once again our call for action and declare that *we will keep moving forward* in our pursuit of gender equality and justice -

“As we have promises to keep and miles to go before we sleep.”

Joy Bangla.
Joy Bangabandhu.
May Bangladesh Live Forever.