



People's Republic of Bangladesh

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(This country profile is available online at www.unisa.edu.au/genderbudgets)

1 Background

Socio-economic indicators	
Population in 2008	147.3 million
Projected population change 2008–50	46%
GDP per capita (PPP \$US) 2005	\$2,053
Proportion (percent) of population below the Poverty Line (\$1 PPP a day) 2005	36.3%
Gender equality indicators	
Seats in parliament held by women (% of total) 2007	15.1%
Maternal Mortality Ratio (per 100,000 live births) 2005	570
Adult literacy rate, females (aged 15 and older) 2005	40.8%
Adult literacy rate, males (aged 15 and older) 2005	53.9%
Gross secondary enrolment: Ratio of female rate to male rate, 2005	1.03
Gross secondary enrolment: Female ratio (% of the female secondary school aged population), 2005	48%
Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector (% of total employment in the sector) 2000	22.9%
Budgetary indicators	
General Government public expenditure on education (% of GDP) 2002–05	2.5%
General Government public expenditure on education (% of total expenditure) 2002-05	14.2%
General Government public expenditure on health (% of GDP) 2004	0.9%
General Government public expenditure on health (% of total government expenditure) 2005	5.5%
Central Government military expenditure (% of GDP) 2005	1%
Central Government public expenditure on defence (% of total outlays) 2007	10.93%
Open Budget Index: Overall Score	42% - Government provides the public with some information on the central government's budget and financial activities during the course of the budget year government's budget and financial activities during the course of the budget year

Sources: UNDP (2007) *Human Development Report 2007/08*; Population Reference Bureau, (2008) *World Population Data Sheet*; World Economic Forum (2007) *The Global Gender Gap Report*; UN Statistics Division (2008) *Millennium Development Goal Indicators*; United Nations Population Division(2008) *World Population Prospects*; UNESCAP (2008) *Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific*; IMF (2008) *Government Finance Statistics*; Open Budget Initiative (2008) (See Explanatory Notes for details).

The People's Republic of Bangladesh is bordered by India on three sides, Myanmar (Burma) in the southeast and the Bay of Bengal in the south. Predominantly Muslim, Bengali is the country's official language.

Prior to 1947, Bangladesh was part of the Indian province of Bengal and ruled by the British. When India was partitioned in 1947, the province of Bengal was split and West Bengal remained with India. The predominantly Muslim East Bengal was made part of Pakistan and renamed East Pakistan. In 1952 relations between Pakistan and East Pakistan became strained when East

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Pakistan launched the Bengali Language Movement, a political campaign advocating the recognition of Bengali as an official language of Pakistan. This movement was a forerunner to Bengali nationalist struggles, including the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 which resulted in the secession of East Pakistan to become the independent nation of Bangladesh. After independence, Bangladesh became a parliamentary democracy with elections held every five years for a unicameral parliament. The Prime Minister is the head of government and the President, a nominal appointment, is the head of state.

The 2007-2008 *Human Development Report* ranks Bangladesh ranked 140th among 177 countries with an HDI score of 0.514. According to the UNDP this places it among countries considered to have achieved medium human development. This achievement has been attributed to the adoption and implementation of policies and strategies which have enabled the country to sustain a large measure of economic stability and macroeconomic growth. Throughout the 1990s, the economy grew by an average of 4.75% per year (UNDP 2005). The Gross Domestic Product per capita (PPP \$US) has grown steadily from US\$273 in 1990-91 to \$2,053 in 2005. Although poverty rates are declining, Bangladesh remains one of the poorest and most densely populated countries in the world, with 36.3% of the country's population of 147.2 million living on less than \$1 per day.

Bangladesh has slipped in its Gender Development Index (GDI) rank to 120th among 157 countries in 2005. Its Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) ranking of 81th of 93 countries shows continued low levels of female representation in government with only 15.1% seats in lower house or single house being held by women in 2007. There has been a narrowing of the gender gap in the education sector, with the gross secondary enrolment rate for women (ie as a percentage of the total female secondary school aged population) standing at 48%. However, a significant gender disparity persists in the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector, which stood at 22.9% in 2000.

2 Gender-responsive budgeting

The origins of GRB work in Bangladesh can be traced to 2001, with an initiative led by Bangladesh academic, Kaniz Siddique, and supported by the Royal Netherlands Embassy and the Royal Norwegian Embassy (Budlender 2002; email communication with international consultant 17/03/09). Prior to this initiative, the Ministry of Health had piloted a gender disaggregated beneficiary assessment of the community health services, focussing on key aspects of the Essential Services Package but linked to donor appraisal, rather than an government processes (Budlender 2002: 151; email communication with international consultant 17/02/09).

The GRB initiative involved a baseline study of the government expenditure using a beneficiary assessment and an expenditure incidence analysis, published in *Who Gets What: A Gender Analysis of Public Expenditure of Bangladesh* (Evers and Siddique 2006). This study revealed how men and women benefited differently from public expenditures in the education, health, agriculture and other sectors. The findings were presented in 2005 to the Ministry of Finance in a workshop during which the government confirmed their interest in incorporating poverty and gender concerns into the budget (email communication with international consultant 17/03/09).

The central government engaged with gender responsive budgeting in 2005, following the introduction in 2003 of the Medium Term Budgetary Framework (MTBF) under the donor assisted Financial Management Reform Programme (email communication with international consultant 17/03/09). In his 2007/08 budget speech the Minister for Finance reported:

(The) MTBF allows an opportunity to test poverty and gender sensitivity inherent in each of the objectives of medium-term strategic plan. Thus there would be increased visibility of the activities relating to gender parity and poverty sensitivity as a guide to budgetary allocation. (Bangladesh Minister for Finance 2007: 14)

Another important development in 2005 for GRB was the government's publication of its first poverty reduction strategy, *Unlocking the Potential: National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction* (NSAPR). The poverty reduction strategy identified pro-poor and gender responsive budgetary processes for implementing women's empowerment and gender equality into national development (Planning Commission 2005: xxi; email communication with international consultant 16/03/09). Budlender (2007: 4) reports that the poverty reduction strategy outlined a series of gender impact criteria to be reflected in the Medium Term Budgetary Framework and has emerged as the basis for the government's resource allocation.

In 2006 the Ministry of Finance produced amendments to the Budget Circular 1 which integrated guidelines on poverty and gender and aligned them with the objectives outlined in the NSAPR (Budlender 2007: 18; Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs 2007: 12). Budlender (2007: 18) argues that these changes to the Budget Circular enable the ministries to evaluate their performance against the poverty and gender objectives outlined in the poverty reduction strategy and contribute to emphasising the relationship between policies, strategies and the budget cycle. Specifically, Section 3 of the Budget Circular requires ministries to outline the impact of their strategies against gender and poverty objectives and Section 4 requires them to assess the impact of their activities on the outlined gender and poverty goals.

Furthermore, the government has developed a framework to calculate the share of the total expenditure that benefits both the poor communities and women. Individual ministries provide quantitative assessments of firstly the number of people under poverty conditions and women affected by the strategy, and secondly the impact of activities related to the strategy, using a scale of 1 to 5 (Budlender 2007; Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs 2007; email communication with international consultant 17/03/09). The Minister of Finance (Government of Bangladesh 2009: 14) reports in his 2008/09 budget speech that 'gender expenditure accounted for 23.5 percent of the total budget. We propose to raise it to 26.3 percent in this budget'.

Several donor agencies have assisted the Government of Bangladesh to progress GRB. Two donor-funded projects have provided significant assistance: the Financial Management Reform Program (FMRP) funded by the UK Department For International Development (DFID) and Royal Netherlands Embassy; and the Policy Leadership and Advocacy for Gender Equality - Phase II (PLAGE II) funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The FMRP project involved gender budget training of all Ministries engaged in the Medium Term Budgetary Framework (communication with international consultant 17/03/09; Budlender 2007: 4). The PLAGE II complements the work undertaken by the Ministry of Finance and the FMRP by strengthening partner ministries' gender analysis capacity to mainstream gender across their programs, and the capacity and position of the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs' to lead gender mainstreaming (PLAGE II date unspecified; email communication with donor 19/02/09).

A baseline study undertaken by PLAGE II in October-December 2008 highlighted improvements in the capacity of the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs to implement GRB (email communication with donor 19/02/09). Nonetheless what the study showed was that the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs tends to focus on women specific expenditure, is under-spending its budget and has a modest impact on gender equality. It also demonstrated that budget prioritisation was not evidence-based. Recommendations from this study included strengthening the information management system and the planning process (email communication with donor 19/02/09).

Bangladesh NGOs have become increasingly involved in GRB work. In 2006-2007 Steps Towards Development (Steps), hosted a series of sector-specific dialogues on GRB (email communication with international consultant 16/03/09). In June 2008 a group of NGOs, Steps and ActionAid Bangladesh, with assistance from the local organization Unnayan Shamannay and UNIFEM Bangladesh, held a national workshop to assess the impact of expenditure on men and women and the challenges to progressing GRB work in key development sectors namely education, health, local government, agriculture, and law and justice (email communication with international consultant 17/02/09). NGOs also have been visible in the media in commenting on the government's progress on GRB work (Bangladesh News 2008). For example, in response to the Minister of Finance's claims that gender expenditure will be raised to 26.3% in the 2008/09 budget, the media reported critical commentary from the national NGO workshop about the magnitude of the gender impact of these proposed allocations and argued that greater emphasis on development related expenditure was demanded in order to make budgets more gender responsive (Bangladesh News 2008).

The diversity of stakeholders engaged in GRB has resulted in the use of different approaches and concepts in GRB work (email communication with international consultant 17/02/09). In an effort to build a common understanding across government and NGOs on GRB and strengthen comprehension on the government's current effort to progress GRB, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, with the support of PLAGE II, in February 2008 organised a consultation meeting. This meeting highlighted the need to build a network of stakeholders on GRB, to make the concept of GRB appropriate to the context, to explore its implementation and impact at both local and institutional levels and, finally, to develop user-friendly materials. Further, this meeting discussed the role for NGOs in the preparation and monitoring the implementation of the budget (email communication with donor 19/02/09). On the other hand, it has been noted that political parties are poorly committed to gender equality and women's representation in parties and in parliament is low (email communication with international consultant 16/03/09).

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