

Draft Summary

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**POLICY BRIEF ON “*INEQUALITY BETWEEN  
WOMEN AND MEN AND WOMEN’S  
EMPOWERMENT*”  
CPD TASK FORCE REPORT**



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# **Inequality Between Women and Men and Women's Empowerment: Priority Concerns for the Election Agenda**

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1. **Introduction:** The dawn of a new millennium calls for renewed enthusiasm to deal with a time old problem – the problem of inequalities between men and women. Over the years, various women's organizations, NGO's, civil society, and human rights activists have contributed significantly towards achieving positive changes in reducing discrimination against women. A major portion of the political constituency keenly observes the commitments made by political parties to eliminate discriminations against women. There are two main objectives of this policy brief. The *first* objective is to pinpoint the link between discrimination against women, women's empowerment and national development. And the *second* objective is to obtain from political parties a clear mandate for remedying existing inequalities between women and men. This brief highlights that discrimination against women hits not only the fundamental human rights of women but is also detrimental to economic growth and prosperity of the country.

2. **Why eliminate discrimination against women and empower them?: Link with National Development:** Women are more than 90% of the workers in the garment industry, which is the most important foreign exchange earner of the country. Women also contribute to 50% production in agriculture sector. They are in the construction sector and small trade and business. A large number of women also works in informal sectors and in domestic service. Women are also participating in various professions. They are overcoming various obstacles and becoming doctors, engineers, educators, accountant and bankers and also joining governmental and non-governmental services. Thus women are actively contributing to the progress of the nation.

3. Beyond their significant economic contribution women also work 10 to 18 hours a day in the household sector preparing food, caring for children, fetching water and sources of cooking energy etc, which are financially non-remunerative. They also perform the duty of providing care for the sick and elderly in the house and also in the community. Women provide pre-school and regular education and also spend time with the children and help to develop their social skill and value system. These are essential activities, which help the social and economic system to function smoothly. Women perform these roles and responsibilities under most difficult situations and face adversity in all possible manners. Women are willing and able to extend their roles and contributions to the society if a favorable environment can be created. Therefore, women and human right partners demand equal rights and equitable treatment and opportunities for women. The straightforward computation is that

- (a) if political parties want votes, they must understand the needs of the women and respond to those needs.
  - (b) They must recognize where the inequalities between women and men are and what the political, economic and social consequences of those inequalities are.
- And

- (c) the election manifestoes put forward by each political party must clearly state its position on women's needs and lay down specific pledges for fulfilling those needs within a specified time.

4. **Equality Mandates of Bangladesh:** Women's organizations have been for a long time demanding actions to be taken to reduce and eventually eliminate all kinds of discriminations against women so that women and men have equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities in all spheres of life. As a result, government and other development partners have started to pay more attention towards achieving equality between women and men. In this respect, during recent years, the government has taken a number of actions. For example, such as the Bangladesh became a signatory to the Beijing Declaration and endorsed its Platform for Action (PFA). Formulated a national policy for the advancement of women. Established the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs to act as a facilitator and catalyst in implementing, coordinating, and monitoring of WID programs. It established a 44 member National Council for Women's Development (NCWD) chaired by the Prime Minister, in 1997. Adopted of a National Action Plan (NAP). It withdrew some reservations to the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) and undertook affirmative actions for selection of women in the public sector and elected bodies.

5. **Inequality between women and men: A Profile for Bangladesh:** Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world. With a per capita GNP of US\$ 350, Bangladesh ranks 175 among 206 countries in the World Development Report (WDR) 1999, of the World Bank. In the WDR Bangladesh ranks 147 among 174 countries in Human Development Index and ranks 140 among 160 countries according to the Gender Development Index (GDI) (UNDP 1998). These facts are no coincidences and they indicate the linkage between poverty and discrimination against women. The objective of attaining growth and reducing poverty is consistent with the objective of attaining equality between women and men.

6. Various micro studies indicate that firstly, the 'hard-core' poor are largely women. Secondly, women are more susceptible to becoming poor when they lose the male earning member of the family due to abandonment, divorce, or death. Thirdly, because they face social barriers in accessing economic assets (skill, property, credit etc.) it is much harder for women to overcome poverty. The reduction of poverty is impossible without addressing the issue of discrimination against women.

7. Various indicators show that women are discriminated against. In health, indicators of child mortality, high maternal mortality, life expectancy and household expenditure distribution manifest systemic discrimination against women. In education also the women are behind men. In the income generating activities, discrimination against women is rampant as indicated in national data on labor force participation, wage rate, working condition etc. The worst kind of discrimination takes place in terms of violence against women. Dowry demand, dowry related violence and death in the households have become endemic. Bangladesh ranks as one of the countries with the highest number of trafficking in women and children. Women are also subject to

discrimination due to inconsistent application of laws. In matters related to citizenship the current statutory laws do not allow a Bangladeshi woman to transmit her citizenship to her children or spouse. In politics also women have no voice in decision making.

8. **Diversity of Women:** Like the nation itself, women of Bangladesh also consist of diverse groups. There are inequalities among them. However, discriminations against women exist in all spheres of life and among women in different regions of the country, religions, ethnic, social, cultural, religious, regional, and economic groups. These discriminations manifest themselves in different degrees and forms among women with different background. However, the common concern against discrimination arises from the fact that discrimination against women leads to their disempowerment, which in turn leads to further discriminations against them. These discriminations are eventually translated into the fact that women are not part of decision making at home and other spheres of lives and have very little control over their own lives. *Therefore, empowering women is essential for eliminating discrimination against them in all social strata.*

9. **Issues to be addressed by Political Parties in Election Campaigns:** Women's demands can be divided in six broad categories. These are (a) Political rights; (b) Legal rights; (c) Security and Safety; (d) Economic opportunities; (e) Social rights; and (f) Institutional arrangements

10. (a) **Political rights: Women's demands to the political parties are:**

- Give at least 10 percent nomination to women candidates for the general seats
  - Conduct violence free election campaign
  - Include women's issue into the party platform
- Do not give nomination to candidates who have expressed discriminatory attitude towards women

**Women's demand with respect to the current caretaker government is:**

**Ensure safety to all voters, particularly women voters so that they are able to vote freely**

**Women's demand to the next elected government is:**

**Ensure women's participation in the political decision making process at all levels**

<b>Actions to be taken</b>	
<b>In the Short term</b>	<b>In the medium term</b>
Immediately make quota provision on reserved seats for women representatives in the national parliament through direct election. Recommendations for quota are 64, 100 and 150 seats in the parliament. Upon consultation	Provide comprehensive sensitization program for all members of parliament and elected members of local government on issues regarding discrimination against women and elected members' roles in

make a quick decision on this issue and arrange for election within two-three months after the new government comes to power.	removing these discriminations
	Take actions to make women's participation in local government and parliament meaningful.
	Ensure that all parliamentary standing committees hold public hearings on women's issues.
	Include women members of parliament in all standing committees.
	Allow local women leaders to undertake responsible positions in the decision-making.
	Ensure that local government consults with local women's organizations and women leaders in making decisions on important issues.

11. (b) **Legal Rights:** The demand in this area is

***Treat women and men equally under law***

<b>Actions to be taken</b>	
<b>In the Short term</b>	<b>In the medium term</b>
Immediately withdraw reservations from CEDAW	Identify areas of gender discrimination in major laws such as the Criminal Procedure Code, the Civil Procedure Code and Evidence Act, particularly the requirement of corroboration of women's testimony regarding rape.
Amend Section 5 of the Bangladesh Citizenship Act of 1951, and the Bangladesh Citizenship (Temporary Provisions) Order, 1972 to allow women equal rights as men to transmit their citizenship to their children and spouses.	Introduce and enforce sexual harassment laws or codes of conduct, to protect women from harassment at the work place, and introduce workplace safety standard to protect women from hazardous work..
Strongly implement existing laws on sexual harassment and sexual assault.	Introduce equal opportunity employment laws. Ensure equal wage for similar work for male and female workers.
Include domestic violence against women as a punishable offence within the Nari o Shishu Nirjaton Daman Ain 2000.	Reform the family and inheritance laws to ensure women's equal access to property, particularly in relation to property rights of Hindu and Buddhist women.
Amend Section 31 of the Nari o Shishu Nirjaton Daman Ain 2000, to allow women the right to	Introduce amendments to the Guardians and Wards Act 1890 to facilitate adoption of

express their consent in matters of safe custody.	children.
Amend the Nari o Shishu Nirjaton Daman Ain 2000 to allow <i>in camera</i> trials in cases of rape or where women seek such a provision.	Reform the family and inheritance laws to ensure women's equal access to property, particularly in relation to property rights of Hindu and Buddhist women.
Widen the scope and extent of the Family Courts Ordinance 1985, to allow the jurisdiction of family courts to extend to all of Bangladesh, and to specify its application to members of all religious groups in Bangladesh	

12. (c) **Security and safety:** The demand in this area is

**Improve safety for women particularly in public space and stop violence against women**

<b>Actions to be taken</b>	
<b>In the Short run</b>	<b>In the medium run</b>
Ensure fast track trial procedures particularly for victims of VAW.	Allocate sufficient amount of money, human and other resources for restoration of security particularly for women
Allocate sufficient funds for the carrying out court case of VAW. Enough funds must be allocated for carrying out forensic test and to preserve evidence, gather information, protect witnesses etc.	Allocate sufficient money for hiring women crime-prevention officers and women doctors (particularly for examining rape victims).
Abolish current practice of so called 'safe custody'. Practices of "safe custody" in jails and vagrant homes have totally failed and should be completely abandoned.	Introduce effective one stop help centers for victims of violence with sufficient human resources and funds. These one stop centers should be introduced at the Thana level.
Allocate funds for providing protection to victims of VAW in case of such demand	Provide security for witnesses. Often witness of VAW cases are threatened by the perpetrators not to submit their testimony. Introduce effective long-term witness protection program
	Provide special transportation system for women workers in garments industries who work night shifts.

13. (d) **Economic opportunities:** The demand in this area is

**Create opportunities for women to participate in income-generating activities**

<b>Actions to be taken</b>	
<b>In the Short term</b>	<b>In the medium term</b>
Improve women's employment opportunities and wages outside households' activities.	Increase women's income earning ability by providing training in undertaking small and medium-scale business.
Undertake affirmative measures through sufficient budgetary allocation to ensure women's access to and safety in the public space.	Increase availability of funds for giving medium size credits to women and encourage women entrepreneurs both in small and medium-scale production and business activities.
Improve women's participation in all kinds of activities in the agricultural sector. Ensure agriculture extension services for women and women's participation in market places (installation of stalls) and women's access to local water resources for fishery production.	Introduce vocational skill-training facilities for women particularly in high-tech industry and in information technology through effective budgetary allocation
	Distribute <i>Khas</i> land in the name of the female heads of households. Provide protection of women sharecroppers, and ensure the proper use of <i>Khas</i> land allocated to women.
	Make provision for garment workers to participate in equity ownership in the garment industry and provide financial support for this purpose.
	Provide home banking facilities to support women's savings habits.
	Formulate economic policies to reduce discrimination against women and allocate funds in the national budget. The formulation of the national budget should reflect how women and men are going to benefit from budget allocations.
	Support household activities through the national budget. For example, by ensuring supplied of inexpensive energy source such as gas to the households. This will reduce cooking time and will assist women to undertake income-generating activities.
	Introduce home delivery system of information through mobile library etc. Introduce E-business facilities in the rural areas for marketing of local products.
	Recognize, include and highlight women's contribution in carrying both household and income generating activities in the National Income Accounting.

14. (e) **Social Rights:** The demand in this area is

**Remove all social and cultural practices, which are biased**

<b>Actions to be taken</b>	
<b>In the Short term</b>	<b>In the medium term</b>
Undertake initiative to start a social movement towards removing discrimination against women.	Immediately take actions towards changing current education curriculum to eliminate biases against women, and include legal, human and women right issues at all levels of education starting from very early stage.
Take actions to eliminate illegal application of 'Fatwa' in resolving conflicts of any kinds	Increase women's access to education at secondary and higher levels. This would require school bus for girls, toilet facilities, and hostel facilities in addition to monetary facilities such as free education and scholarships for girls.
Declare 30th September as the "girl child day".	Increase access to health care facilities, primary health care and nutrition training.
	Design transport facilities by incorporating special needs of women and ensuring safety of women while using transport facilities.
	Set up more effective parent-teacher associations, and pinpoint links with community as deterrents to violence.
	Increase sports facilities for women particularly in the rural areas in the schools.

15. (f) **Institutional Arrangements:** The demand in this area is

**Remove institutional biases against women**

<b>Actions to be taken</b>	
<b>In the Short term</b>	<b>In the medium term</b>
Recruit women in high positions in the government administration through lateral entry.	Recruit women in the government at all levels with the objective of attaining 50 % participation of woman.
Provide VAW training to police personnel and medical corps; establish links between women's groups and police; appoint more women judges; set up more legal aid mechanisms for women; use family health visitors to identify domestic violence cases, and link up with legal aid.	Recruit more women in the armed force.
Make 'Women in Development (WID)' focal	Take initiative to make the visual media more

points more effective by defining their roles and responsibilities.	sensitive about negative images of women and introduce gender focal points in Bangladesh Television and Film Development Corporations.
Build formal contacts with women's organizations and consult women's organizations in taking major policy decisions and project designs.	Introduce more women police, and special cells for women's complaints.
Stop giving public money to any institution that promotes or tolerates discrimination against women.	Undertake effective sensitization and education programs on discrimination against women for the police and judges, and the civil services and other cadres' training program.
Include in official forms and documents provision for mother's name in addition to father's name	Incorporate women's representation on land distribution committees.
	Create a safe and supportive work environment for women to work and introduce daycare facilities in the government offices and also in the large private organizations.