



# Evaluation of the implementation of the UNICEF Gender Policy and Gender Action Plans (GAP 2 and GAP 3):

## Bangladesh Country Case Study

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

<b>8 FYP</b>	Eighth Five-Year Plan	<b>HPV</b>	Human Papilloma Virus
<b>ALP</b>	Alternative Learning Programme	<b>HQ</b>	Headquarters
<b>BCO</b>	Bangladesh Country Office	<b>HR</b>	Human Resources
<b>CCC</b>	Core Commitments for Children	<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women	<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interview
<b>CO</b>	Country Office	<b>LGBTIQ+</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/Questioning, Asexual and more
<b>COAR</b>	Country Office Annual Report	<b>LMIC</b>	Low- and Middle-Income Country
<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus Disease	<b>MICS</b>	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
<b>CPD</b>	Country Programme Document	<b>MoWCA</b>	Ministry of Women and Children Affairs
<b>CRPD</b>	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>CRC</b>	Convention on the Rights of the Child	<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>CSI</b>	Core Standard Indicator	<b>OR</b>	Other Resources
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization	<b>ORE</b>	Other Resources Emergency
<b>DAPM</b>	Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring	<b>PG</b>	Programme Group
<b>DGHS</b>	Director General Health Services	<b>PSEA</b>	Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
<b>ECM</b>	End Child Marriage	<b>RAM</b>	Results Assessment Module
<b>EO</b>	Evaluation Office	<b>RO</b>	Regional Office
<b>EQ</b>	Evaluation Question	<b>ROSA</b>	Regional Office for South Asia
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion	<b>RR</b>	Regular Resources
<b>GAP</b>	Gender Action Plan	<b>SDDirect</b>	Social Development Direct
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-Based Violence	<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>GBViE</b>	Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies	<b>SRH</b>	Sexual and Reproductive Health
<b>GEM</b>	Gender Equality Marker	<b>SRHR</b>	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
<b>GEWE</b>	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment	<b>STEM</b>	Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics
<b>GII</b>	Gender Inequality Index	<b>TLM</b>	Teaching Learning Materials
<b>GPECM</b>	Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage	<b>ToC</b>	Theory of Change

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<b>ToR</b>	Terms of Reference
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCT</b>	United Nations Country Team
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UN-SWAP</b>	United Nations System-wide Action Plan
<b>UNSDCF</b>	UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
<b>WASH</b>	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
<b>WFHI</b>	Women-Friendly Hospital Initiative
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

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## Executive summary

### Introduction

This evaluation case study forms part of the evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Policy and Gender Action Plans (GAPs). Its purpose was to explore the implementation of GAP 2 and GAP 3 and the Gender Policy in Bangladesh between 2018 and 2023, including its contribution to evolutions in workplace culture and accountability, as well as to assess gender-related programmatic results for women and girls in the course of 2024. Conceived as a learning exercise, it is intended to be useful to the country office (CO) in improving its work on gender. In parallel, the findings from this case study will be compared with those from other countries, as well as analyses triangulated with additional data sources to help formulate and write the overarching evaluation report.

Bangladesh, with a population of 169 million people, is the eighth most populous country in the world. It is one of the fastest-growing economies in the region and is set to graduate from the United Nation's (UN) least-developed country list in 2026. Despite economic growth, over 20 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line. The country has made significant strides in gender equality, but challenges remain. Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child marriage globally, and gender inequality is still a complex issue.

There are more than 100 staff working in the UNICEF Bangladesh Country Office (BCO) and eight field offices in the country, with a budget of US\$86 million (regular resources or RR) and US\$220 million (other resources or OR). The country programme document (CPD) 2022-2026 aligns with the country's eighth five-year plan (8 FYP) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). It focuses on five key sectors: health and nutrition, education, child protection, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), and social protection. The programme also emphasizes gender equality, with a specific country-level Gender Equality Strategy developed in 2021. The BCO aims to capitalize on the country's demographic shift, which is fast moving towards an 'ageing' population, and prioritize investments in children and adolescents for sustainable development, and is pushing for gender parity among staff and strong gender analysis in all programme evaluations to inform programme design and implementation. The Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage (GPECM) is in its third phase (2024-2030) and is jointly implemented with the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) in Bangladesh. The BCO is close to meeting the threshold of 15 per cent for gender equality expenditure as per GAP guidelines.

## Evaluation purpose, objectives and scope

The case study aimed to assess UNICEF's performance and results in implementing GAP 2 and GAP 3 between 2018 and 2023, as well as the Gender Policy, in Bangladesh, including progress made in 2024.. Conceived as a learning and accountability exercise, it is part of the evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Policy and Gender Action Plans. The global evaluation report<sup>1</sup> will be presented to the UNICEF Executive Board in 2025.

The specific objectives of the evaluation were:

- ▶ To assess the relevance and coherence of the current Gender Policy and GAP 3 in supporting gender equality and adolescent girls' empowerment from the point of view of UNICEF's mandate (i.e., Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), Core Commitments to Children (CCCs)) and the organization's commitments to the UN system-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP), as captured in the Strategic Plan in development and humanitarian settings.
- ▶ To assess the coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of implementing gender-related organizational changes and performance enablers of the GAPs across UNICEF policies, practices, systems, programming processes, organizational commitments, and accountability mechanisms.
- ▶ To determine the extent to which UNICEF meets the programmatic results set for all children, adolescents and women on gender equality across the five Goal Areas of the Strategic Plan and in both development and humanitarian settings.

The case study covered three main components: the Gender Policy and the GAP conceptual framework; institutional enablers and their implementation in Bangladesh; and programmatic results and integration of gender equality across programmes.

As per the Terms of Reference (ToR), the primary users of this evaluation are UNICEF employees at all levels, government and partners working with UNICEF to advance the rights of women and girls, women and the BCO – in particular, the senior leadership and the gender team – to strengthen gender integration in policies and programmes.

## Methodology

The evaluation used an analytical framework described in the Theory of Change (ToC) model developed during the inception phase. The country case study in Bangladesh offers an opportunity to test whether the logic and assumptions of this model are verified in practice.

The case study took a mixed methods approach, drawing on both primary and secondary data sources, including a desk review of over 18 documents; monitoring and financial data from the BCO; eight responses to the evaluation staff survey from the BCO; 18 individual key informant interviews (KIIs) with UNICEF staff, government stakeholders, UN and other development partners, donors and implementing partners from civil society, of which 10 (55 per cent) were female and eight (45 per cent) were male; two gender-segregated workshops with UNICEF staff (nine female; 13 male) on organizational culture and gender equality; and four gender-segregated adolescent workshops (20 adolescent girls; 19 adolescent boys) to discuss the contribution of the programmes to transformative results for gender equality. Data collection involved a field visit to Bangladesh (May-June 2024), including Dhaka and one decentralized location, Sylhet. The evaluation was informed by ethical and safety considerations for research and by the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) and UNICEF evaluation and ethical guidance. Additionally, external ethical clearance was obtained from an independent review board for the overall evaluation. Limitations included the limited participation of UNICEF staff in face-to-face interviews due to unexpected events – cyclone and viral fever contagion; however, remote interviews were conducted, and the data collection period was extended to ensure staff had ample opportunity to participate.

## Key findings

The main evaluation findings are presented along the three overarching objectives and questions that frame the evaluation.

### 1. Gender Policy and GAP conceptual frameworks

**The CPD 2022-2026 references the Gender Policy and GAP along with the UNICEF Strategic Plan. The BCO Gender Equality Strategy also references these global frameworks and identifies critical areas to focus on for each sector.** The BCO works on gender, although more than two-thirds of UNICEF staff were unaware of the contents of the GAP, Gender Policy and Gender Equality Strategy. About one-quarter of UNICEF staff said that it was complex and difficult to understand. Sectoral strategies that included gender were used to address gender issues. Gender was included in project proposals, but neither the Country Gender Equality Strategy, GAP nor Gender Policy were consulted. Less than a quarter of staff who were aware of the GAP and the Gender Policy felt that it provided overall guidance on gender equality, was useful to advocate to external stakeholders, and articulated UNICEF's interest in gender equality. More than two-thirds felt that it was the responsibility of the gender specialist to know and use these documents. Less than a quarter of staff who knew about the Gender Policy and GAP were those directly working on gender issues. They felt that it was too generic, did not address sectoral strategies and action plans and provided little guidance to countries where gender equality is a challenge. They felt that an action plan detailing how sectors could use these gender frameworks would accelerate use. About a third said that they appreciated that gender was cross-sectoral but would like to learn more about how to integrate it.

### 2. Organizational changes and performance enablers of the GAPs

**Bangladesh is rich in sex-disaggregated data and captures gender data that is required for each sector. The BCO also uses data from the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) and other sources for policy and programming and commissions research when needed to inform programming. Strong monitoring data is available** for several programmes on adolescent girls' empowerment in multiple sectors, such as adolescent health, skills-based programmes, adolescent clubs (child protection community hubs), and the Ending Child Marriage programme. Data from the GAPs indicate that the quality of gender results meets the criterion for reporting on gender issues in policies, programmes and at-scale programmes. The only indicator that has not met the criterion is on reporting of gender equality results, highlighting the possibility that the system does not capture these results. Bangladesh has achieved 14 per cent gender equality expenditure, which is only 1 per cent short of the 15 per cent gender equality expenditure benchmark. New leadership for emergencies made it mandatory to conduct a gender analysis; however, this is not consistently or systematically done by other sections in the design of programmes. The GAP Standard Index was not known to staff. Gender equality expenditure indicates a lack of alignment between the gender equality marker (GEM) and gender tags across sectors. The gender architecture includes one international specialist, the gender-based violence (GBV) focal point in child protection who manages the GPECM programme and one national gender specialist for the other sectors. There are many gender focal points, but over two-thirds of staff did not know who they were. For a large office, the gender architecture of the BCO needs to be reviewed and optimized as needed. The emphasis on gender in different sectors is dependent on individual leadership. About two-thirds staff said that to understand and implement gender-transformative programmes, capacities require strengthening. UNICEF has excellent partnerships with the government and other UN organizations and is generally seen as valuable, trustworthy and equitable when it partners with civil society organizations (CSOs), and women's or feminist organizations. UNICEF has been able to work on various gender equality issues with the government despite the gender-discriminatory socio-cultural context. UNICEF coordinates with other UN organizations on many projects and working groups. The

accountability to integrate gender into programmes is dependent primarily on the sectoral strategy and individual leadership. Gender parity in the BCO has been met consistently and UNICEF is the only UN organization in Bangladesh to have achieved this. The organizational culture is generally gender friendly. However, there are a few concerns about inadvertent micro-aggressions related to sexism and ageism, which may stem from the broader patriarchal societal context prevailing in Bangladesh. Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) is strongly entrenched in the organization, which includes capacity building on PSEA guidelines, communication materials and monitoring systems.

### 3. Programmatic results for gender equality

UNICEF programme sections are challenged by the context in which they operate, where discussions on gender are likely to be gender-sensitive and, at best, gender-responsive. This may be attributed to a pervasive patriarchal culture. All sections work on gender, mainly by developing integrated interventions that are targeted for girls and women. These have shown good results, such as the successful rollout of the human papillomavirus (HPV+) vaccine (with 7 per cent set aside funds), women-friendly hospital initiative (WFHI), advocating for a gender-responsive curriculum and Alternative Learning Programmes (ALPs) for girls and boys. For Goal Area 1, the UNICEF-led Mothers@Work programme has successfully worked with the Garment Manufacturers Association to provide breastfeeding spaces and breaks, childcare facilities, paid maternity leave, cash benefits, health care, employment protection and a safe work environment for working mothers and pregnant women. This programme has been expanded substantially. WFHI resulted in more women accessing health services and with UNICEF support, the government developed a National Adolescent Health Strategy 2017-2030. About 88 per cent of girls were reached with the HPV+ vaccine. For Goal Area 2, the BCO successfully supported the government to review textbooks and roll out a gender-transformative curricula for primary and secondary schools. The ALP includes hands-on centre-based occupational training along with entrepreneurship training and other relevant soft skills for out-of-school adolescent boys and girls, with the latter being offered non-gender stereotypical skill training (electrician courses, driving, auto-repair). For Goal Area 3, UNICEF, with UNFPA, implements the GPECM, which is now in its third phase. For Goal Area

4, UNICEF supported the National Menstrual Hygiene Management Strategy (and costed action plan), which is an important buy-in from the government. For Goal Area 5, the Cash Plus programme is offered to pregnant mothers and children aged 0-4 years. However, there is little gender analysis and the specific needs of boys and girls in different contexts and with different vulnerabilities cannot be determined. Lack of gender analysis hinders the systematic integration of gender equality in the intervention or programme.

The Adolescent Girl programme and its various interventions have seen significant results: a) UNICEF supported the government to strengthen the monitoring of ongoing public investments at the sub-national level to combat child marriage; b) the ALP is a market-driven project that provides skill training and job placement for out-of-school children, focusing on the most marginalized boys and girls. These programmes ensure that at least 50 per cent of enrollers are girls; c) adolescent clubs for boys and girls, known as child protection community hubs, are popular in communities and are supported by the government. Girls have reportedly benefited from these clubs in terms of improved knowledge of child rights, social norms and agency. However, they are not involved in programme design, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), which is a missed opportunity to promote girls' agency; d) UNICEF works with adolescent sex workers and others who are extremely vulnerable. Adolescent-friendly health services have improved access. These results are particularly significant in a conservative country context. More than two-thirds of staff expressed the need to better understand how to change norms to enable them to address the drivers of harmful norms and power asymmetries. Greater engagement with boys and men, families, communities, local institutional structures, including religious institutions, and with implementing partners are likely to support norm change.

The evaluation outlined several enabling and hindering factors internally and externally for the implementation of the GAP and the Gender Policy. Internal enabling factors include the BCO's strong commitment to gender parity and presence of women in leadership positions, appointing a national officer as a gender specialist who understands the context, and the understanding of a majority of staff that social norm change is important for gender-transformative work. External enabling factors include UNICEF's excellent reputation with government and implementing partners. Hindering factors include rigid programme implementation partnership guidelines

that disadvantage national women's rights organizations, limited staff understanding about what constitutes gender equality practices, the difficulty in understanding the GAP and the Gender Policy, emphasis on personal commitment for gender by the leadership rather than being system driven and having only one gender specialist at the national level for overall gender and adolescent girl related programming.

## Conclusions and lessons learned

The Gender Policy and GAPs appear complex and dense to non-gender staff, and there is no incentive to drive sectoral programmes towards gender-transformative results. The articulation of GAP 3 for gender equality and especially gender-transformative programming is considered the responsibility of gender specialists rather than that of all UNICEF staff. Political will and senior leadership commitment are critical if the goal is to make everyone responsible for gender outcomes, along with management systems to support them.

The BCO has very good monitoring systems to track data. Sex-disaggregated data and gender output level data are available for sectors, but there is little information regarding gender outcomes that can be linked to how gender-responsive or gender equality the programmes are. Sectors generally do not use detailed gender analysis to design programmes. Bangladesh is just 1 per cent away from reaching the UN-SWAP benchmark of 15 per cent. Although UNICEF has been able to forge excellent partnerships with government, civil society and other UN agencies, without user-friendly programme implementation partnership guidelines and procedures, especially those that involve women-led or feminist organizations, it would be difficult to engage in collaborative programmes with these organizations.

Within a challenging context, sectoral commitment to gender equality approaches and programming for transformative results must be multi-sectoral. Social and gender norm change is addressed mostly by empowering the agency of adolescent girls. Yet, adolescent boys and the wider family, community, peers and religious and state institutions hold the power to influence gender norms, so there is a need to target them as well to address the deeply entrenched cultural beliefs rooted in patriarchy.

The BCO's work on gender equality has generated many lessons that could inform other country programmes, including:





- ▶ UNICEF's unique position as a child rights organization can be leveraged to champion the rights of adolescent girls in challenging socio-cultural contexts.
- ▶ Across sectors, it is essential to shift from gender-sensitive to gender-responsive and -transformative programmes. This requires addressing the multi-dimensional and intersectional factors that shape gender inequalities.
- ▶ The effective implementation of the Gender Policy, and GAP requires an understanding of gender equality approaches and programming, as well as how to address the specific challenges and the socio-cultural realities of countries.
- ▶ Strong commitment and leadership for achieving gender results is needed along with a robust integrated M&E system to measure outcomes is essential.
- ▶ Gender-related policies, strategies, and action plans are necessary but are not sufficient conditions to embed gender-transformative approaches at the country level. These must be accompanied by capacity building at all levels of the CO, government, implementing partners and community.

## Recommendations

These recommendations are presented in order of priority and were derived from the evaluation’s findings and conclusions. They were validated with the BCO during a workshop in October 2024.





**Recommendation 1: The BCO should strengthen capacity to increase the understanding of gender equality approaches and programming for transformative results, and operationalize it across sectors and externally.**

A profound understanding of gender equality approaches and programming and its connection to gender norms is essential. A tiered, contextualized capacity building programme should link work experience, the application of gender concepts, and engage staff in critical examination of their own gender norms and biases. Such reflective spaces should not be a once-off but should happen over time. This is necessary as more than two-thirds of staff have a limited understanding of the concept of gender equality programming and what it entails. A more holistic approach to capacity building, including experiential learning, in-depth exploration of gender equality concepts, and their application to workplans, along with cultural understanding, is likely to enable progress towards transformative results. Identifying gender champions should be included in the holistic capacity building.

 <b>Priority:</b> Very high
 <b>Timeframe:</b> Immediate to long-term
 <b>Responsible units:</b> BCO management, gender specialists, with support of the regional office (RO) and headquarters (HQ)
 <b>Cost implications:</b> Budget for external facilitation will be needed although there are many technical resources that are available, which can be reviewed for experiential learning





**Recommendation 2: The BCO should elevate the meaningful involvement of adolescents, especially girls for the design and monitoring of programmes and create an enabling environment through allies such as adolescent boys, parents, family and institutions in the wider community ensuring that no one is left behind.**

As stereotypical gender values in education and skill development for girls reinforce traditional gender norms, there is a need for bottom-up, community-led solutions, informed by gender analysis and programmes designed with the active involvement of adolescents with feedback loops. Girls often lack decision-making power within families and communities, and it is important to engage both boys and girls in understanding gender stereotypes, in an enabling environment. A costed multi-sectoral action plan for adolescents, especially girls would be useful.

 <b>Priority:</b> Very high
 <b>Timeframe:</b> Immediate to long-term
 <b>Responsible units:</b> BCO management, gender specialists, programme staff
 <b>Cost implications:</b> Moderate to plan and implement participatory programmes





**Recommendation 3: The BCO should generate and document evidence by integrating outcome and intermediate level gender indicators into staff reviews and country M&E systems.**

Gender outcomes (not just outputs) from various sectors, including sex-disaggregated data if integrated into the country’s reporting system and strategic indicators will strengthen the monitoring of gender-related indicators. Both programme and monitoring staff need to understand and align the GEM and GAP monitoring systems and utilize these for decision-making with clear roles and responsibilities of all staff members in the process. Including gender indicators in performance evaluation reviews of staff and making sectors accountable for gender-responsive or transformative indicators will ensure that gender equality is embedded in their work. The accountability of senior leadership for gender-responsive and -transformative evidence generation is critical.

 <b>Priority:</b> High
 <b>Timeframe:</b> Immediate to medium-term
 <b>Responsible units:</b> BCO management, gender specialists, programme staff, chief social policy, monitoring and evaluation
 <b>Cost implications:</b> Minimal





**Recommendation 4: The BCO should strengthen the gender architecture and develop systems for cross-sectoral integration of gender.**

To achieve the ambitions of the Gender Policy and GAP, it is key that gender specialists and gender focal points participate in regular sectoral meetings for planning, reviewing and monitoring programmes so that gender issues are addressed systematically and intentionally. A robust functioning gender architecture, both specialist and sectoral (focal points), is essential along with capacity, accountability, resources and relevant projects. The gender specialist should be present for all management meetings.

 <b>Priority:</b> High
 <b>Timeframe:</b> Medium- to long-term
 <b>Responsible units:</b> BCO management, gender specialists, programme staff, in collaboration with the RO
 <b>Cost implications:</b> No cost implication - only efficient use of existing resources





**Recommendation 5: The BCO should strengthen coordination between UN agencies working on gender with different government ministries and departments.**

Establish a gender-focused task force among UN agencies to share gender-related policy and other technical support with government departments and ministries to synergize efforts and avoid duplication. Plan joint support where the same government departments are being targeted for gender-related technical support.

 <b>Priority:</b> High
 <b>Timeframe:</b> Immediate to medium-term
 <b>Responsible units:</b> BCO management, gender specialists, sector leads with UN partners
 <b>Cost implications:</b> No cost implication - only efficient use of existing resources

In addition to specific recommendations for the BCO, there are broader recommendations that are particularly relevant to this country case study but require attention at UNICEF HQ and RO levels. These relate to elements that are part of the recommendations set out in the main global evaluation and will be addressed in the corresponding management response.

**Recommendation 6: UNICEF should develop simplified versions of the Gender Policy and the GAP for wide dissemination across all levels of staff and partners including how to use it with sectoral strategies.**

 <b>Priority:</b> Very High
 <b>Timeframe:</b> Immediate to medium-term
 <b>Responsible units:</b> Gender team in the Programme Group (PG) and RO gender team
 <b>Cost implications:</b> Minimal; this can be done in-house

**Recommendation 7: UNICEF should address concerns of contextualizing the Gender Policy and GAP for different political landscapes. Guidance should be provided to the CO to overcome barriers and challenges in promoting gender equality in such contexts.**

**Priority:** Very high

**Timeframe:** Immediate to medium-term

**Responsible units:** Gender team in PG and RO gender team

**Cost implications:** Minimal; this can be done in-house

**Recommendation 8: UNICEF should address challenges in the M&E framework and strengthen outcome-based M&E to capture gender-transformative change.**

**Priority:** High

**Timeframe:** Immediate to long-term

**Responsible units:** Gender team in PG, Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring (DAPM), with RO gender, planning, monitoring and evaluation teams

**Cost implications:** This will require a review of the way indicators are captured and how to improve it



# 1

## Introduction

This evaluation case study forms part of the evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Policy and Gender Action Plans (GAP). The purpose of the case study was to explore the implementation of the GAP 2 and GAP 3 and Gender Policy in Bangladesh, its contribution to shifts in workplace culture and accountability, as well as interrogate gender-related programmatic results for women and girls. Conceived as a learning exercise, it will be useful to the BCO to improve its work on gender. In parallel, the findings from this case study have been compared with those from other countries, and analyses triangulated with other data sources (review of global secondary and primary data sources and follow-up global interviews) to write the global evaluation report.

An appreciative enquiry approach was adopted to select the countries benefiting from an in-depth case study. The selection of countries was made during the inception phase. COs that had effectively brought about institutional shifts in gender work, or countries that have reported transformative gender equality results, were identified according to the UNICEF reporting mechanisms (GAP Standard Indicators). ROs were consulted, and the final selection took into consideration the necessity to have a sample of COs representative of a range of UNICEF-specific and broader contextual factors (regional balance, humanitarian and development portfolio, country budget and size, broad gender context in the country, amongst others).<sup>2</sup>

The rationale for selecting Bangladesh for the case study was as follows: Bangladesh represents a development context, has a gender flagship programme, reports gender equality results that are transformative, and does not score more than 70 per cent on GAP Standard Score. At this moment, Bangladesh is a low- and middle-income country (LMIC) with mid-range gender inequality index (GII) score<sup>3</sup>, has a large office size with large CO budget and high gender spend.

The case study report presents the findings of the evaluation of UNICEF's performance and results in implementing GAP 2, GAP 3 and the Gender Policy in the BCO. The report is organized into six sections. Following this introduction, Section 2 provides the background, as well as the purpose, objectives and scope. Section 3 presents the evaluation case study methodology. Section 4 presents the findings for each evaluation question (EQ), and Section 5 presents the conclusions derived from the findings. Section 6 contains the recommendations. The report is also supplemented by nine annexes which are included in a separate document.



## 2

## Background

### Context of the evaluation

#### Overview of the country context

Bangladesh achieved independence in 1971 and is the eighth most populous country in the world, with a population of about 169 million, according to the 2022 Population and Housing Census<sup>4</sup> report, with a sex ratio of 96.741 males per 100 females. Of this population, 36.9 per cent are children. Most of the population lives in rural areas (68.3 per cent). The country's dependency ratio, which measures the number of economically dependent people (under 15 years of age and over 64 years of age) per 100 economically productive people, is 52.6. Although this ratio is advantageous to the country's development, it is expected to decrease in the coming decade since Bangladesh is experiencing a rapid increase in its ageing population, leading to a higher senior dependency ratio. The urban population, currently at 37 per cent, is projected to grow rapidly, making urban slums a new focus for poverty reduction efforts.<sup>5</sup>



Bangladesh<sup>6</sup> is one of the fastest growing economies in the region and is poised to move from the least developed country category in 2026<sup>7</sup>. This transition brings both challenges such as losing benefits from critical global health and education initiatives through international support for least developed countries and benefits like attracting more foreign direct investment<sup>8</sup>. Despite the progress made, over 20 per cent of the population live below the poverty line, and the richest 10 per cent of the population owns over 40 per cent of the wealth.<sup>9</sup> In 2023, Bangladesh faced economic risks driven by declining foreign currency reserves, a depreciating local currency, and rising inflation. A decline in remittances, export earnings,

and foreign direct investment coupled with increasing debt obligations is likely to risk investing in children. Budget allocations for health, education, and social protection all declined as a percentage of gross domestic product according to UNICEF analysis based on Ministry of Finance data<sup>10</sup>.

Bangladesh has made significant strides in terms of gender equality. UN Women's Gender Equality Brief: Bangladesh 2024<sup>11</sup> provides a comprehensive situation analysis of gender equality in the country. It highlights the nation's advancements in key areas such as governance, women, peace, and security; ending violence against women; economic empowerment, climate change, disaster risk reduction, and humanitarian response. Bangladesh has a notable record for women in politics and is ranked seventh in the world for having a woman as the head of state for the longest duration in the last 50 years. This is a significant achievement that demonstrates the country's commitment to promoting women's participation in leadership roles. However, there is still room for improvement. As of February 2021, only 20.9 per cent of seats in parliament were held by women.<sup>12</sup>

The labour force participation rate among females was 37 per cent, compared to 80.2 per cent among males in 2023<sup>13</sup>. While there is a recovery in women's economic participation post-pandemic, the gender wage gap and the high percentage of women in informal employment need further attention and improvement.<sup>14</sup>

While Bangladesh ratified CEDAW in 1984, it maintains reservations on Article 2 and 16.1c which are considered the core of the convention related to modification of practices that place one gender as inferior and equal rights in marriage and divorce.<sup>15</sup> Bangladesh ratified the CRC in 1990 as well as the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 182 to combat harmful practices against children.

Gender inequality in Bangladesh is multifaceted and complex, rooted in prevailing patriarchal social norms and power dynamics that place women and girls in a subordinate status, discriminating against them in many aspects of their lives. Bangladesh ranks 133 out of 160 countries on the GII for 2020<sup>16</sup>, the lowest in South Asia after Afghanistan. There are rising concerns that the socio-economic impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic could slow or reverse the gains made towards gender equality.<sup>17</sup>

Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world, with more than half of girls married before their 18th birthday. The Child Marriage

Restraint Act (1929) sets the legal age of marriage in Bangladesh at 18 years of age for women and 21 years of age for men. Despite this, factors such as poverty, lack of government action, and local administration consent often contribute to the continued prevalence of child marriage, especially in rural areas. Bangladesh is a signatory to the UN Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages, which requires consent from both parties establishing a legal minimum age for marriage. According to UNICEF, 51 per cent of young women in Bangladesh were married before 18 years of age, and 22 per cent were married before 15 years of age.<sup>18</sup> There is virtually no difference from the 52 per cent rate of girls married before 18 years of age in 2012-2013<sup>19</sup>. MICS 2019 data shows that neonatal mortality rates are 1.4 times higher (31 per 1,000 live births) among young pregnant women (under 20 years of age) compared to those who are older than 35 years of age (22 per 1,000 live births). The adolescent birth rate was 74 per 1,000 women aged 15-19 years in 2019.<sup>20</sup> Notably, the rate of adolescent fertility has decreased since 2010, and the maternal mortality ratio in Bangladesh has improved from 441 in 2000 to 123 in 2020<sup>21</sup>.

In 2018, 23.2 per cent of women aged 15-49 years reported that they had been subject to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months. This was higher among married adolescents than older married women<sup>22</sup>. GBV increases due to conflict and natural disasters, which are common in Bangladesh and spiked during the pandemic. Many adolescents in the Rohingya refugee camps, especially girls, have experienced GBV, and there is an increased risk in these camps and elsewhere of rape, sex for survival, trafficking and early and forced marriage.

The adult female literacy rate in Bangladesh is higher than in South Asia<sup>23</sup>. Bangladesh has achieved a high primary net enrolment rate of 98 per cent with gender parity.<sup>24</sup> However, the net attendance rate in higher secondary education at 48.1 per cent (girls 53.4 per cent; boys 43.1 per cent) and the completion rate at 29.4 per cent indicate high drop-out rates, especially among boys.

Bangladesh is ranked seventh among countries most-affected by extreme weather events, particularly tropical cyclones.<sup>25</sup> Importantly, UN Women's Gender Equality Brief: Bangladesh 2024 emphasizes the need for women's participation in decision-making processes related to climate change and disaster risk reduction.

## Overview of UNICEF work in Bangladesh

### UNICEF country programme

The BCO CPD 2022-2026 aims to capitalize on the country's significant socio-economic progress. It aligns with the country's 8 FYP for 2020-2025, which focuses on various areas, including COVID-19 recovery, inclusive growth, poverty reduction, social equity improvement, sustainable development, disaster and climate change resilience, urbanization management, institutional development, and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The programme also supports the goals of the UNSDCF.<sup>26</sup>

The BCO has identified six key sectors: health, nutrition, education, child protection, WASH, and social protection. The CPD is in line with the UNICEF Strategic Plan, the Gender Policy and GAP, the Bangladesh COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan, and the UNSCDF, especially Pillar 2, which focuses on basic services and social protection.

In terms of gender, the BCO aligns with SDG 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. This includes a focus on ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls (target 5.1) and ending all forms of violence against and exploitation of women and girls (target 5.2). However, gender work in Bangladesh faces significant challenges, including politicization of gender equality. The government's efforts need to move beyond those that are preliminary towards gender equality and changing harmful gender norms. Other challenges are a lack of resources, limited technical capacity in the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA), and weak inter-ministerial collaboration.<sup>27</sup>

To guide its work on gender across all sectors, the BCO developed a Gender Equality Strategy (2021). This strategy follows the principles of gender equality, such as applying a twin-track approach (gender integration along with a few targeted priorities), intersectional programming, a multi-sectoral approach, an inclusive work environment with greater gender parity and transformative<sup>28</sup> programming to tackle the root causes of poverty.

A Strategic Note on Ending Child Marriage in Bangladesh outlined the BCO's major priorities for gender-responsive programming and its work on the UNFPA-UNICEF GPECM over the CPD period. Bangladesh is one of the 12 country programmes of the GPECM.

UNICEF used the GPECM programme to lead technical and advocacy efforts with the Government of Bangladesh and donors on the National Plan of Action to End Child Marriage launched in 2018. The BCO was one of the few offices where child marriage was categorized under gender, as per the GPECM global vision, due to its need for a preventative, multi-sectoral, and integrated approach. By prioritizing adolescents and ending child marriage as a gender-targeted outcome and a headline result within outcome three, a drive was created to focus on adolescent girls, particularly in the health, education (including secondary education and skills), and WASH sectors<sup>29</sup>. GPECM was moved to the child protection sector during a recent re-organization exercise. In 2017, with the onset of the Rohingya crisis, GBV in emergencies (GBViE) emerged as a key targeted gender priority for the CO.

**Table 1.** CO overview

<b>Size of the office (staff)</b>	305 (137 women; 168 men)
<b>CPD years and budget</b>	CPD 2022-2026 (US\$86 million from RR and US\$220 million from OR)
<b>Field offices</b>	Field offices are present in Dhaka, Chattagram, Khulna, Mymensingh, Rangpur, Barisal and Sylhet. Cox's Bazar is a separate humanitarian mission.

**Source:** UNICEF Bangladesh Country Office

The country programme aims to take maximum advantage of the demographic shift,<sup>30</sup> necessitating the prioritization of investments in today's children to ensure sustainable development. The country programme addresses key barriers to development, such as strengthening linkages with government priorities, piloting evaluable models, advocating for

universal coverage for relevant services, emphasizing community and system resilience to address child rights issues, partnering with children, adolescents, parents and communities to encourage behaviour and social norm change, and addressing structural barriers to gender equity through the life-cycle approach.

Along with a strong push for gender parity among staff, the CPD discusses investment in dedicated gender expertise with a P4-level gender specialist, a national officer<sup>31</sup> for gender and proposed to have sectoral gender specialists as well. In 2019, the BCO's gender capacity was mapped, revealing weaknesses in gender analysis and sectoral programming. All programmes (WASH, ECM, health, education) in the BCO are requested to have a strong gender analysis. The evaluation and research studies commissioned in 2019 specifically included gender as a component especially in WASH and ECM driven by the social policy, monitoring and evaluation section.<sup>32</sup>

### Programmes: Using a gender lens

The GPECM is in Phase III (2024-2030) and is managed jointly with UNFPA. This phase aims to implement scalable, evidence-based programming to empower adolescent girls, strengthen systems and mobilize communities to ECM. Social norms and beliefs will be targeted, and men, boys, and community leaders will be engaged as allies. The BCO partners with MoWCA to integrate monitoring tools for the National Plan of Action to End Child Marriage through enhanced coordination among 23 relevant ministries. This is the only targeted priority which has a long-term resource commitment from the global level. Resources, leadership and accountability are critical components of a well-oiled joint programme, leading to results like the first National Action Plan on ECM and an award-winning campaign<sup>33</sup>. Other gender initiatives include Mothers@Work, ALP and adolescent clubs (child protection community hubs).

The BCO's Gender Equality Strategy outlines specific gender priorities and outputs across sectors, according to five key areas that UNICEF will focus on to achieve transformative results for gender programming for women and children in Bangladesh:

1. Addressing gender equality across the life course
2. Promoting positive gender socialization in early childhood
3. Advancing adolescent girls' well-being and empowerment
4. Preventing, mitigating and responding to GBV
5. Institutional strengthening for gender equality

The health component supports the achievement of the 8 FYP to ensure equitable access to and the use of high-quality health services and adoption of healthy life practices for all children, adolescents and women. Gender-related initiatives include scaling up Women Friendly Hospital Initiative (WFHI), improving maternal and neonatal child health services, and continued support for the National Adolescent Health Strategy 2027-2030 with its emphasis on sexual and reproductive health (SRH), violence response and mental health. This strategy also considers negative social norms.

The nutrition component ensures that children under five, adolescents and women of reproductive age access and utilize nutritional services and adopt appropriate practices. Gender initiatives include the Mothers@Work programme to address breastfeeding by working mothers in the workplace and the Community-Based Nutrition programme to address the power dynamics of nutrition for women and girls.

The education component aims to ensure that all girls and boys (aged 4-18 years) access and learn from quality and inclusive education. Gender initiatives include a gender-responsive curriculum free of stereotypes, adolescent priorities to promote gender-responsive 21st century transferable skills in adolescent girls and other alternative education and skills programme. This will include skills for life and livelihood through strengthened education-to-work programmes. Strategies are in place to reach out-of-school children and a competency-based curriculum to address learning deficits.

The child protection approach for the programme integrates child protection-responsive frameworks in education and health systems and promotes a shift from harmful practices by engaging children, adolescents, families and communities. Gender priorities address discriminatory social norms through early childhood and adolescent-focused interventions and during adolescence to address toxic masculinity. Child marriage prevention will continue to be strengthened using evidence and an emphasis on shifting harmful social and gender norms. Working with parents and communities will be critical to shift norms.

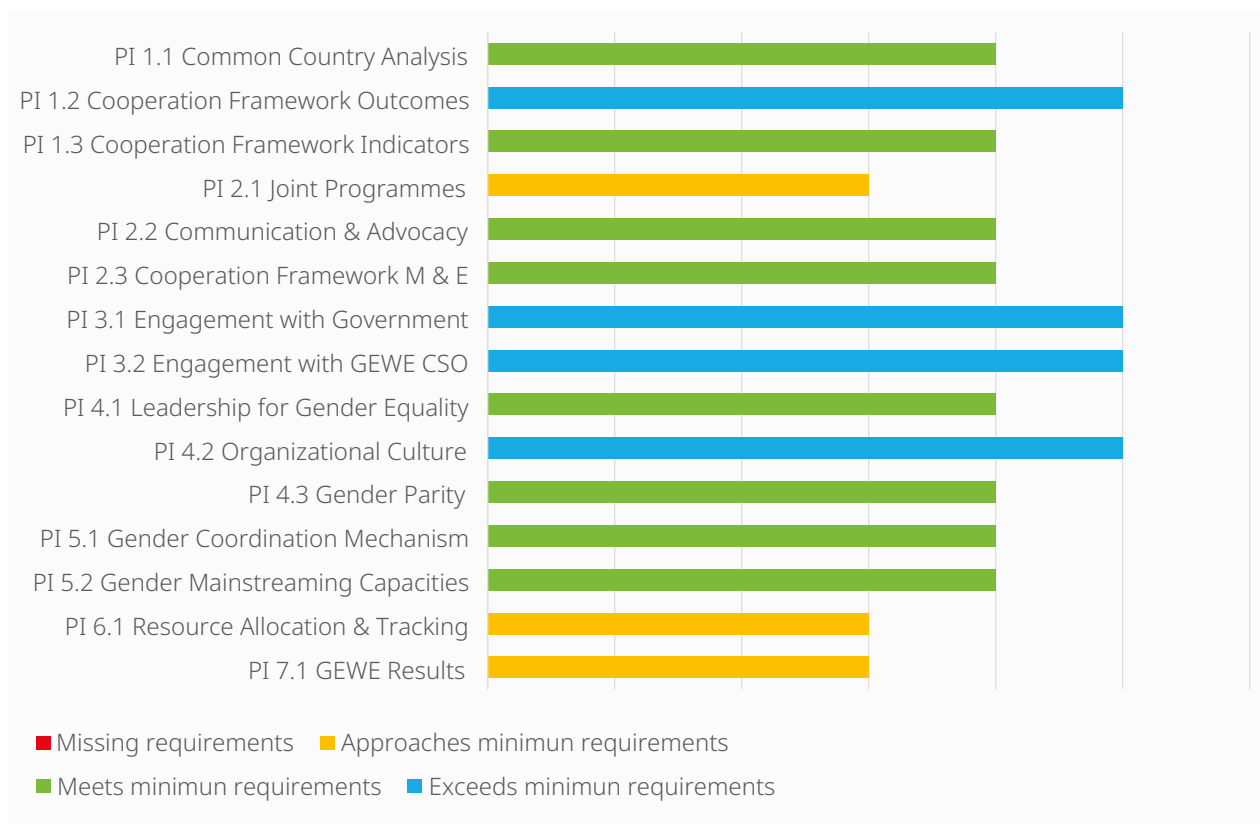
WASH targets have been established in alignment with the 8 FYP and will ensure that climate change and gender barriers are addressed. The 2019 Sanitation Industry Study and the success of sanitation marketing will guide the development of improved sanitation and menstrual hygiene facilities and services.

### UN-SWAP gender equality indicators

The BCO, like all other UN agencies, is committed to UN-SWAP gender equality indicators<sup>34</sup>. The UN country team (UNCT)-SWAP is structured around seven dimensions and 15 performance indicators that address key components of gender equality, and the empowerment of women and girls as agreed upon by the UN Sustainable Development Group. It uses a four-point scale ranging from missing requirements, approaching minimum requirements, meeting minimum requirements to exceeding minimum

requirements. The scale is self-administered and represents the joint performance of the UN system at the country level.<sup>35</sup> According to the SWAP, the UN response in Bangladesh for gender is approaching requirements for joint programming, resource allocation and tracking, and gender equality and women’s empowerment (GEWE) results. Areas, where it exceeds minimum requirements, include achieving cooperation framework outcomes, engagement with government and GEWE CSOs, and fostering an organizational culture that supports these goals.

**Figure 1.** UN-SWAP Indicators for Bangladesh 2023



**Source:** UNCT-SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard, Annual Progress Assessment Report and Action Plan, UNCT Country team in Bangladesh, 2023

### GAP Standard Index

UNICEF uses the GAP Standard Index as a benchmark to monitor and measure the organization’s performance on key institutional elements for gender-responsive planning and programming. The GAP Standard includes nine key institutional elements/benchmarks (from now onwards, “criteria”) that the country is required to have in place to ensure effective gender integration. A CO is considered to have met the GAP Standard when it achieves 70 per cent or more of all criteria. COs are attributed a 1 or a 0 for most indicators within each criterion depending

on whether they meet the indicator or not – few indicators can take any number between 0 and 1. A criteria average is then calculated for each of the nine criteria. The final score is an average of the nine criteria averages. Some indicators do not apply to certain countries (COs not in humanitarian context for example), in which case the indicator is muted and has no impact on the criteria average, nor on the final score.<sup>36</sup> The shift between the GAP 2 and GAP 3 Standard Indices has methodological implications. Based on a GAP Standard Indicator correspondence matrix between GAP 2 and GAP 3, developed as part

of this analysis and validated by the UNICEF gender equality team (presented in Annex 4 in the interim report), trends have been calculated across GAP 2 and GAP 3 Standard Indicators. Where no corresponding indicators existed prior to GAP 3, trends are limited to GAP 3 data.

In terms of the gender equality expenditure, the BCO does not make the threshold of 15 per cent but is very close to doing so. It missed achieving the benchmark by 1 per cent but since GAP scoring is a yes (1) or no (2), it is captured as 0 per cent (no) or 100 per cent (yes).

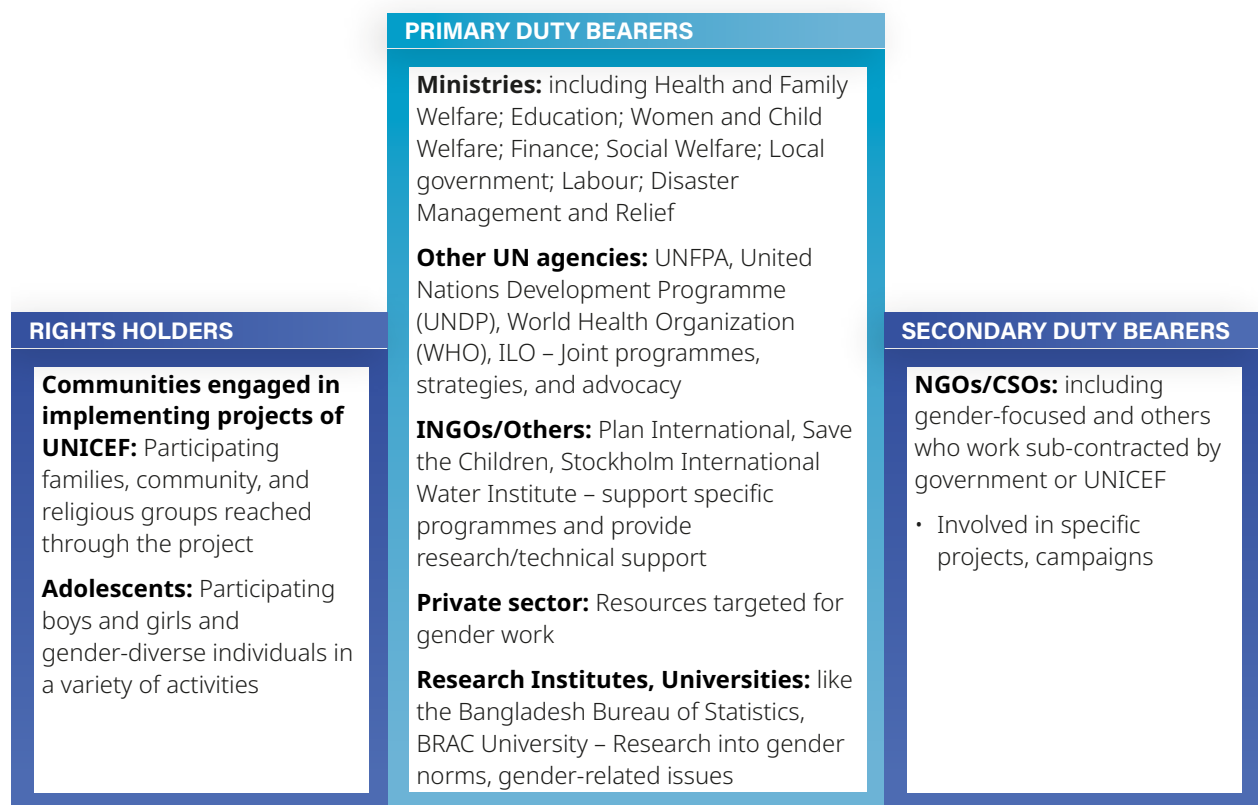
**Table 2.** GAP 2 and GAP 3 total expenditure

GAP	GAP 2			GAP 3	
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
% expenditures	100%	100%	100%	0%	0%

Source: UNICEF internal system Insight

### Stakeholders – Duty bearers and rights holders

The major stakeholders of the BCO for gender, their roles and any specific contributions are presented below (see Table 3).



**Table 3.** Stakeholder list

Actor/stakeholder	Role in programme implementation (gender related)	Specific contribution if any
Ministries including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Health and Family Welfare</li> <li>▶ Education</li> <li>▶ Women and Child Welfare</li> <li>▶ Finance</li> <li>▶ Social welfare</li> <li>▶ Local government</li> <li>▶ Labour</li> <li>▶ Disaster management and relief</li> </ul>	Primary duty bearers	
Other UN agencies: UNFPA, UNDP, WHO, ILO	Primary duty bearers	Joint programmes, strategies and advocacy
Donors	Primary duty bearers	Resources targeted for gender-responsive and -transformative work
International non-governmental organizations (INGOs)/others – Plan International, Save the Children, Stockholm International Water Institute	Primary duty bearers	Support specific programmes or provide research or technical support on specialized topics
Private sector	Primary duty bearers	Resources targeted for gender work
Research Institutes, universities like the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, BRAC University	Primary duty bearers	Research into gender norms, gender related issues
Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)/CSOs including gender focused and others who work sub-contracted by government or UNICEF	Secondary duty bearers	Involved in specific projects, campaigns
Communities engaged in implementing projects of UNICEF	Rights holders	Participating families, community and religious groups reached through the project
Adolescent	Rights holders	Participating boys and girls and gender diverse in a variety of activities

**Source:** Evaluation team in consultation with Bangladesh Country Office team

## Purpose, objectives and scope

### Purpose and objectives

This evaluation case study aimed to assess UNICEF's performance and results in implementing GAP 2 and GAP 3 between 2018 and 2023, as well as the Gender Policy, in Bangladesh from 2018-2023. It was a learning and accountability exercise, as part of the evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Policy and Gender Action Plans. The global evaluation report<sup>37</sup> will be presented to the UNICEF Executive Board in 2025.

The specific objectives of the evaluation case study were:

- ▶ To assess the relevance and coherence of the current Gender Policy and GAP 3 in supporting gender equality and adolescent girls' empowerment from the point of view of UNICEF's mandate (i.e., CRC, CEDAW, CRPD, CCCs) and the organization's commitments to the UN-SWAP, as captured in the Strategic Plan in development and humanitarian settings.
- ▶ To assess the coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of implementing gender-related organizational changes and performance enablers of the GAPs across UNICEF policies, practices, systems, programming processes, organizational commitments, and accountability mechanisms.
- ▶ To determine the extent to which UNICEF meets the programmatic results set for all children, adolescents and women on gender equality across the five Goal Areas of the Strategic Plan and in both development and humanitarian settings.

### Scope

The main evaluation was global in scope, with in-depth case studies in a sample of countries, including Bangladesh and spans from 2018 to 2023, covering the implementation of GAP 2 and half of GAP 3.

The evaluation covered three main components:

- ▶ The Gender Policy and GAP conceptual framework: The evaluation reviewed the strategic positioning of gender in the UNICEF Strategic Plan, analysing the Gender Policy, GAP conceptual framework and ToC.
- ▶ Institutional enablers and their implementation: The evaluation assessed how the GAP is implemented, including programming processes, monitoring systems, financial resources, leadership and accountability at HQ, RO and CO level.
- ▶ Programmatic results and integration of gender equality across programmes: The evaluation examined overall programmatic results based on available indicators and implemented activities and assessed the outputs and the contribution to outcomes as defined in the GAPs in the selected case studies. In particular, the evaluation assessed to what extent UNICEF has mainstreamed gender equality across its five Goal Areas in the Strategic Plan.

### Audience and use

As per the ToR, the primary users of this evaluation are UNICEF employees at all levels, government and partners working with UNICEF to advance the rights of women and girls, and BCO – in particular, senior leadership and the gender team – to strengthen gender integration in policies and programmes. It aimed to provide strategic guidance for the next country programme and the gender equality strategy, both ending in 2026. The case study country report provided an opportunity to share learnings on how to integrate gender equality in programmes and organizations, and on building a culture of accountability, with government, other UN organizations, and implementing partners – including women- and girl-led organizations.



## 3 Evaluation case study methodology

### Evaluation design and approach

The evaluation methodology used a mixed methods approach, including qualitative methods such as key informant interview (KII), document review, participatory workshops and focus group discussions (FDGs). Quantitative data included an analysis of programme and expenditure quantitative data, survey data (conducted for this evaluation), and the GAP Standard Index.

The approach was theory-based,<sup>38</sup> and an analytical framework described in the ToC, developed during the inception phase, was used,<sup>39</sup> which helped to refine the change pathways that were implicit in the existing GAP ToC; to define explicit causal assumptions linking GAP support to identifiable results at the output, outcome and goal levels; and to refine the EQs to be investigated, against which findings and conclusions were reported. The ToC and assumptions informed the development of the evaluation matrix, including sources of information and data collection tools. It reflects a shared understanding among key UNICEF stakeholders and the evaluation team of the intended causal chains underpinning the Gender Policy and GAPS and provides the theoretical framework for applying contribution analysis to assess causal linkages and infer the contribution UNICEF has made to the observed outputs and outcomes. Appreciative inquiry is an approach to organizational culture change that focuses primarily on strengths.

This approach was adapted to evaluate the GAP 2, GAP 3 and Gender Policy, identifying lessons on what is working well to inform recommendations to accelerate organizational change.

Mixed methods included collecting data qualitatively from individuals either through interviews, group discussions or workshops (see sampling below). For the participatory workshop with adolescents, youth-friendly tools were used. For the workshop with UNICEF staff, participatory tools were used to elicit information. Quantitative data included the review of more than 18 documents and analysis of country-specific expenditure data, GAP survey, GAP Standard Indicators and programmatic indicators. A survey was also conducted at the global level, and data from Bangladesh was available from this survey. For qualitative tools used, please see annexes.

For the financial and expenditure data analysis, data was extracted from UNICEF's Cube database for 2018 to 2023 and analysed to draw trends in gender expenditure and in gender-transformative expenditure from 2022 (the start of GAP 2) also looking at expenditure by Goal Areas and GEM scores.

## Evaluation criteria and questions

The criteria applied to the Gender Policy and GAPs evaluation, drawing on Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee criteria as well as UNICEF's

definition of impact are described below (*see Table 4*). The EQs and sub-questions (and corresponding criteria) are outlined in the evaluation matrix in the annexes document of this report.

**Table 4.** Evaluation criteria applied to the evaluation

<b>Relevance</b>	The extent to which the GAP is responsive to the various contexts in which UNICEF operates (development or humanitarian, LMICs or middle-income countries (MICs) and various continents), and to the diverse gender realities and needs; the extent to which it is grounded in evidence of what works.
<b>Coherence</b>	Internal coherence focuses on the alignment, synergies and interlinkages between the GAP and other UNICEF normative frameworks, including the coherence between the GAP and the Gender Policy. External coherence examines the alignment of the GAP with broader UN commitments and to governments.
<b>Effectiveness</b>	The extent to which the results intended by GAP 2 and GAP 3 have been realized (as far as feasible to discern at this stage) and whether contribution has been demonstrated towards results which could have been reasonably expected. Analysis of the varying importance of the results and differential results across groups and sectors and understanding the enabling and hampering factors that influence results.
<b>Impact</b>	The evaluation adopted UNICEF's definition of impact and sought to identify the plausible contribution to impact results. <sup>40</sup>
<b>Sustainability</b>	The robustness of institutional enablers gives an indication of the sustainability of the changes observed, as well as the strength of UNICEF partnerships with governments and the civil society sector.

**Source :** OECD/DAC criteria as adapted to the evaluation by evaluation team

## Data collection, stakeholders and sampling

The sampling was purposeful to ensure representation from all stakeholders relevant to the evaluation. Recommendations from the BCO were considered, and a final list was developed based on relevance and availability.

## Key stakeholder types included in the evaluation

Key stakeholder types included in the evaluation for interviews and FGDs are listed below:

**Table 5.** List of stakeholders for KII

Stakeholder type	Method (KII/ FGD/Workshop)	# of women/men/ non-binary/unknown	Details
<b>UNICEF staff</b>	KII	7 women, 2 men	CO and district
<b>UNICEF staff</b>	Workshop 1	13 men	On site participatory workshops Dhaka
	Workshop 2	9 women	On site participatory workshops Dhaka
<b>UN agencies (UN Women, UNFPA)</b>	KII	2 women	On site interviews Dhaka
<b>Government partners (MoWCA, Ministry of Health)</b>	KII	2 men	Remote interviews
<b>CSO including gender-focused organizations (Naripokkho, ESDO, Sushilan, Jagorin)</b>	KII	1 woman, 3 men	Includes feminist organizations; remote and onsite interviews; rural and urban settings
<b>Adolescents</b>	FGD (4)	20 women, 19 men	Urban and rural workshops in Sylhet and Dhaka
<b>Donor (Global Affairs Canada)</b>	KII	1 man, 1 woman	On-site interviews

**Note:** Except for adolescents FGD who were rights holders, all the other KII were with duty bearers

**Source:** Evaluation team

Overall, the sampling was as follows:

- ▶ 18 KIIs and group interviews with UNICEF staff (8); two UN agencies (UN Women, UNFPA); two government partners (MoWCA, Ministry of Health); and four CSOs (Naripokkho, ESDO, Sushilan, Jagorin), donor (Global Affairs Canada);
- ▶ Two UNICEF single sex workshops with 22 participants (9 women; 13 men); and
- ▶ Four adolescent single sex FGDs with 39 participants (20 girls; 19 boys).

Adolescent FGDs were held in two locations, Sunamganj (rural area) and Dhaka (urban area), to understand the perspectives of youth in different geographical locations. Field visit locations included in Sunamganji: Sultanput and Shantiganj, and in Dhaka: Korail slum, Banani, and Bouniabandh slum, Mirpur (Under Dhaka North City Corporation).

## Survey

The evaluation team developed an all-staff survey disseminated by the EO to HQ and all ROs and COs as part of this evaluation. The survey was anonymous and piloted for accessibility (including for screen reader use) and in all five UN languages (English, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, and French) by several UNICEF staff. It was open between 13 March and 8 April 2024. The survey was circulated to all staff (UNICEF currently employs a total of 17,656 staff), and a self-selection sampling approach was taken given the size and scale of the population.

For the survey, there were eight responses from the BCO, of which one was a UN volunteer, two were international staff, four were national staff and one did not mention. Most respondents were from programmes and policies, with one from emergency. Respondents were aged 46-55 years (38 per cent), about 25 per cent were above 55 years and 12 per cent were aged 26-35 years. In terms of gender, three were male, three were female and two preferred not to say. None had a disability.

## Data analysis

The evaluation team used a thematic analysis approach<sup>41</sup> to analyse qualitative data from KIIs, FGDs and workshop outcomes to identify key trends and patterns. Both inductive and deductive coding were used against a base coding framework aligned to the evaluation matrix, including new thematic codes as trends are identified during analysis. Qualitative data from KIIs, FGDs and workshops were assessed using Dedoose, a qualitative and mixed methods data software. Documents provided by the BCO and other stakeholders involved in the case study were coded using Excel. Triangulation across quantitative and qualitative findings took place following the coding of the qualitative data. Where possible, sub-group analysis took place to ensure that an intersectional lens was applied. All data collected during the case study was disaggregated at a minimum by gender, age and disability, to ensure representation of a diverse range of voices and allow for sub-group analysis.

As a first step, the draft report was circulated to the BCO and RO and comments were received and addressed by the evaluation team. Next, the draft report was presented at a virtual workshop with the BCO and RO where the findings, conclusions and draft recommendations were discussed and validated.

## Ethical considerations

The case study was guided by a set of ethical principles to minimize the risk of doing harm, while seeking to maximize the benefits of the evaluation. The principles were translated into practical measures to ensure confidentiality, informed consent, data protection, reduction of direct and indirect risks to interviewees, and safe and meaningful participation. This ensures that core principles such as do no harm and leave no one behind were adhered to and assure human rights, gender equality and equity considerations are built into the evaluation approach.

All research is informed by ethical and safety considerations for research and informed by the UNEG Ethical Guidelines, the World Health Organization's Ethical Research Guidance<sup>42</sup>, UNICEF Procedure on Ethical Standards in Research and Evaluation, UNICEF's Ethical Research Involving Children, UNICEF Guidance on Gender Integration in Evaluation, as well as SDDirect's Ethical Policy and Child Protection and Vulnerable Adults (Safeguarding) Policy, which sets out values and principles and describes how commitments are met to create a positive and safe environment for children and vulnerable adults who may be connected to the work. All staff received an induction on these policies. The national consultant involved in data collection activities attended an online workshop covering all the evaluation's ethical principles and procedures. The training included SDDirect's safeguarding policies and code of conduct, such as how to report suspected safeguarding concerns and how to act if a participant discloses situations of violence and/or abuse. Oversight from SDDirect management ensured that the evaluation team had no conflict of interest and worked independently and credibly.

Additionally, ethical clearance was obtained for the overall evaluation through the Health Media Lab<sup>43</sup> Ethics Review Board (ID 863MULT24). Bangladesh's ethical clearance was also obtained from the designated UNICEF Evaluation Office Independent Review Board (IRB), Institute of Health Economics, and all necessary procedures were followed to receive clearance.

## Limitations and mitigation measures

The evaluation faced several limitations both by design and in practice, with appropriate mitigations implemented where possible. The main limitations and mitigation measures are summarized below (see Table 6).

**Table 6.** Limitations and mitigation measures

Limitations	Mitigation measures
Unavailability of UNICEF staff for face-to-face interviews due to unexpected events – cyclone and viral fever contagion	Remote interviews were held, and the data collection window was kept open for two weeks after return
Government officials' unavailability for interview or last-minute cancellation	Remote interviews were scheduled after the country visit
Local language expertise of international consultant	The international consultant is from the region and superficially understands Bangla but to mitigate the lack of knowing the local language, an interpreter was included as part of the data collection team where required
Weather conditions – unexpected cyclonic storm, lack of electricity and flight cancellations	Delays were anticipated and adjustment for the site visit in the rural areas were made
Limited survey responses	Triangulation of data with qualitative data from interviews and group discussions as well as quantitative data, as relevant
Delays in country level ethical clearance	The country visit was rescheduled to accommodate the delay and CO support was requested to expedite the clearance

**Source:** Evaluation team



# 4

## Evaluation findings

### EQ1 – Gender conceptual and policy frameworks

**To what extent are the current Gender Policy and the GAP 3 conceptual framework well-designed, relevant, and coherent to respond to the various needs of all children, adolescents and women, national government priorities, UNICEF normative framework (i.e., CRC, CEDAW, CRPD, CCC) and the organization’s commitments to the UN-SWAP on gender equality?**

#### In summary

The CPD 2022-2026 references the Gender Policy and GAP along with the UNICEF Strategic Plan. A Gender Equality Strategy also references these global frameworks and identifies critical areas to focus on in each sector. The BCO works on gender although about two-thirds of UNICEF staff were unaware of the contents of the GAP, Gender Policy and Country Gender Equality Strategy. About a third of staff said that it was complex and difficult to understand. Sectoral strategies that included gender were used to address gender issues. Gender was included in project proposals but neither the Country Gender Equality Strategy, GAP or Gender Policy were consulted. Less than a quarter staff who were aware of the GAP and the Gender Policy felt that it provided overall guidance on gender equality, was useful to advocate to external stakeholders, and articulated UNICEF’s interest in gender equality. About two-thirds of staff felt that it was the responsibility of the gender specialist to know and use these documents. Staff who knew the Gender Policy and GAP (less than a quarter) were those directly working on gender issues. They felt that it was too generic, did not address sectoral strategies and action plans and provided little guidance to countries where gender equality is a challenge. They felt that an action plan detailing how sectors could use these gender frameworks would accelerate use. About a third said that they appreciated that gender was cross-sectoral but would like to learn more about how to integrate it.

## Knowledge of the GAP and Gender Policy, relevance in the context, use and references in key CO frameworks

The Bangladesh CPD 2022-2026 references both the Gender Policy 2021-2030 and GAP 3 2022-2025 along with the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022-2025. The BCO also has a Gender Equality Strategy 2021 which references the GAP and the Gender Policy and other normative gender instruments such as CEDAW, CRC, the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. Reference to these gender-related documents indicates that the Gender Policy and GAP are relevant in Bangladesh.

Regarding awareness and use of the GAP and the Gender Policy, about two-thirds of CO staff interviewed, workshop participants, and all the survey informants (N=8) reported that they had 'heard' of it. About two-thirds of interviewees and workshop participants did not know its contents and did not use it. However, despite the limited awareness of both documents, the BCO works on gender issues.

Qualitative responses from the survey indicated many ways in which the Gender Policy and GAP 3 were used, such as to influence workplans, ensure implementing partners (IPs) include gender inclusiveness in intervention design and collect sex-disaggregated data, advocate upstream work with government, ensure inclusion and parity in a work environment and lastly, for gender-fair recruitment policies. Since only eight people from a staff strength of more than 100 in the BCO responded to the survey, it could be assumed that those who did respond were interested in gender issues and, therefore, chose to answer the global survey. However, the small survey sample constrains the analysis and interpretation of the findings.

About a third of BCO staff who were interviewed, and 50 per cent of survey participants were aware of and use the Gender Equality Strategy.

"The gender equality strategy is just that, a strategy. It needs an action plan to go with it", noted an interview informant.

## EQ2 – Gender-related organizational changes and performance enablers

**How well are the gender-related organizational changes and performance enablers of the GAPs implemented across UNICEF policies, practices, systems, organizational commitments and accountability mechanisms at all levels?**

### In summary

Bangladesh is rich in sex-disaggregated data and captures gender data that are required for each programme section. The BCO also uses data from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), MICS and other sources for policy and programming and commissions research when needed to inform programming. Strong monitoring data are available for several programmes on adolescent girls' empowerment, in multiple sectors such as adolescent health, skills-based programme, adolescent clubs (child protection community hubs), and the ECM programme. Data from the GAPs in Bangladesh indicate that the quality of gender results meets the criterion for reporting on gender issues in policies, programmes and at-scale programmes. The only indicator that has not met the criterion is reporting on gender-transformative results but it is possible that the system does not capture transformative results. Bangladesh is only 1 per cent short of the 15 per cent gender-transformative expenditure benchmark. New leadership for emergencies has made it mandatory to conduct a gender analysis, but this is not consistently or systematically used to design other programmes. The GAP Standard Index was not known to staff. Gender-transformative expenditure indicates a lack of alignment between GEM and gender tags across sectors. The gender architecture is in need of strengthening for the extensive needs of the BCO, which currently has one international specialist who manages the GPECM programme (with an assistant NOB officer), and one national gender specialist for the remaining sectors. There are many gender focal points, but about two-thirds of staff did not know who they were. The emphasis on gender in different sectors is dependent on individual leadership. About two-thirds of staff said that capacities to understand and implement gender equality programmes require strengthening. UNICEF has excellent partnerships with government, civil society, other UN agencies and feminist organizations. UNICEF is generally considered a valuable, trustworthy and equitable partner by CSOs and women's organizations. Government stakeholders indicated that UNICEF is a reliable and technically sound UN partner to work with. UNICEF has been able to work on various gender equality issues with the government despite the gender discriminatory socio-cultural context in Bangladesh. UNICEF coordinates with other UN agencies on many projects and working groups. The accountability to integrate gender into programmes is dependent primarily on the sectoral strategy and individual leadership. Gender parity in the BCO has been met consistently and UNICEF is the only UN agency in Bangladesh to have achieved it. The organizational culture is generally gender friendly. However, there are a few concerns about inadvertent micro-aggressions related to sexism and ageism. These issues may stem from the broader patriarchal societal context prevailing in Bangladesh. PSEA is strongly entrenched in the organization with staff aware of its contents, and who to go to for reporting.

### Enablers for gender-responsive work

#### Staff capacity and gender architecture

Interviews with UNICEF staff and workshop participants suggested that there is inadequate capacity to address gender, both at CO and field level. Out of six survey responses, only four agreed that they had the opportunity to build capacity on gender, and five out of eight felt that their capacity enabled them to integrate gender in their work.

GAP 2 and GAP 3 indicators demonstrate a gap for gender capacity over both years. These findings triangulate with those from the KIIs.

**Table 7.** GAP capacity indicator

Capacity	GAP 2			GAP 3	
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
At least one staff GenderPro credentialed				0.00	0.00
At least 50 per cent of staff took the mandatory foundational gender (pro) training				0.00	0.00
Overall				0%	0%

**Source:** UNICEF Insight internal gender dashboard

Although several resource materials for gender are available on SharePoint, about two-thirds of BCO staff mentioned that it was impossible to self-learn because of work pressure. Also, they requested refreshers and sector-specific gender training relevant to their work so that gender issues could be easily implemented. KIIs and staff workshops revealed that the understanding of gender is rudimentary for many staff members, especially at the field office level. For example, about a third of staff considered that gender parity in programmes is gender-responsive. There appears to be a limited understanding among about two-thirds of staff of the concept of transformative programming for gender equality and what it entails.

About two-thirds of the staff expressed a desire to learn and understand gender issues, especially those that are gender-transformative. Suggestions included mandatory gender-related orientation for all staff, and where possible face-to-face or at a staff retreat so that gender issues could be discussed in detail.



“For the first time in six years, we have discussed anything related to gender in a group.” – *Key informant*

“We do gender related work but no training.” – *Key informant*

“Do not know enough about gender equality and cannot monitor implementing partner.” – *Key informant*



“There are many resources on SharePoint but we have no time because there is too much work.” – *Key informant*

“We need simple language, translated – there is too much jargon.” – *Key informant*

The gender architecture in the BCO is as follows: There is currently one national staff (NOD level) responsible for facilitating gender mainstreaming in all sectors and focal points designated within the respective programme sections. The international consultant is focused on GBV in child protection (primarily the joint programme on ECM and is supported by a national programme officer (NOB level) in child protection). However, the gender focal points, although numerous, were not active in their role, and the exact number of focal points was not available. Interviews indicated that the gender architecture can be strengthened and aligned with the needs of the BCO.

Most staff regretted the absence of gender mainstreaming capacities embedded within sectors; instead, the onus is placed on the gender specialist, who needs to “advocate to be invited” by the various sectoral teams. The fact that they do not manage funds directly and that gender mainstreaming is not mandatory also limits their power to influence colleagues. The gender specialist is supported by the deputy representative, but respondents suggested that to effectively mainstream gender in a CO as large as Bangladesh, it would be useful to place one staff who had gender expertise in each team.

While understanding the gender architecture in the BCO, the evaluation team found that there were many gender focal points, however about two-thirds of informants were unaware of these and what they did. The two or three gender focal points that were interviewed felt that they needed more capacity and/or were unclear about their roles and responsibilities as well as about the time to be allocated to integrate gender along with other work responsibilities. Senior UNICEF management pointed out the need to work with the human resources (HR) available, to streamline the number of focal points, clearly articulate their roles and responsibilities, and ensure that they work closely with the gender specialist.

### Gender analysis, use of data research and evaluation to inform policies and programmes

This section compiled data from the available evaluations for desk review. The evaluation team was not able to access sector level gender data except what was available in the Country Office Annual Reports (COARs). The GAP Standard Index and expenditure

data were shared during the country visit and later by email and the BCO concurred with the interpretation.

Interviews with senior BCO staff indicated that Bangladesh is one of the countries with good, sex-disaggregated data across sectors. The BCO also uses data from DGHS, MICS and other sources for policy and programming. Such data are useful for strategic planning. In other instances, studies are commissioned to inform programming such as for the ALP for out-of-school adolescents.

Aside from the gender data generated by sectors, there are two tools to track gender – GEM and gender tagging. GEM is added at the planning stage and indicates gender outputs. Gender tagging happens when expenditure is tracked and is in the financial system VISION under results and activities. There are codes for all outputs.

GAP 2 and GAP 3 data for 2022 and 2023 indicate that Bangladesh has good availability of sex-disaggregated data which is reflected in the core standard indicators (CSIs).

**Table 8.** GAP gender data and M&E

Gender data and M&E	GAP 2			GAP 3	
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Gender RAM standard indicators used in programming platform	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.63
Level of sex-disaggregation on RAM standard indicators				NA	NA
Level of sex-disaggregation on CSIs				NA	0.95
Overall	100%	100%	100%	100%	79%

**Source:** UNICEF Insight internal gender dashboard

Although GAP indicators show no improvement in gender analysis, except in the emergency preparedness platform, recent progress has been made. During Cyclone Remal in May 2024, the BCO conducted a rapid gender analysis<sup>44</sup>. This initiative was spearheaded by the new leadership, who made it mandatory to conduct gender analysis<sup>45</sup> (which is optional in emergencies) for all planning, design, monitoring and learning.

**Table 9.** GAP gender analysis and planning

Gender analysis and planning	GAP 2			GAP 3	
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Gender programmatic reviews: Systematic analysis of gender power dynamics and gender relations	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00
Clear gender results identified clear in key documents - CPD, annual workplan, regional office management plan/office management plan	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00
Integrating UNICEF's minimum standards for gender in the CCCs' in emergencies				1.00	1.00
If operating in a humanitarian context, has the CO conducted a rapid gender analysis?				0.00	0.00
Core package GBV risk mitigation activities conducted during the reporting year?				1.00	1.00
Completion of gender analysis in the emergency preparedness platform				0.00	1.00
Overall	100%	100%	100%	50%	50%

**Source:** UNICEF Insight internal gender dashboard

The evaluation team reviewed evaluations<sup>46</sup> that have informed decision-making and were used to improve and expand the programme. Research related to social norms, long overdue and possible now because of available resources, is underway by the social and behaviour change team with Bangladesh University. Its findings will be useful to all sectors for programming on social and gender norms and enable more gender-responsive work.

In addition, strong monitoring data is available in Bangladesh for several programmes on adolescent girls' empowerment, in multiple sectors such as adolescent health, the skills-based programme, adolescent clubs (child protection community hubs), and the ECM programme. The latter is part of the global programme (evaluated separately and rigorously), which is successfully implementing a convergence approach in coordination with the government, donors and other implementers.

Data from the GAPs indicate that the quality of gender results meets the criterion for reporting on gender issues in policies, programmes and at-scale programmes. The only indicator that has not met the criterion is reporting on gender-transformative results. This area requires further exploration as it cannot be assumed that the BCO is doing less, and it is possible that the system does not accurately capture the results.<sup>47</sup>

**Table 10.** GAP quality of gender results

Quality of gender results	GAP 2			GAP 3	
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Reporting gender equality results that are transformative				1.00	0.20
At-scale programmes addressing gender discriminatory roles and practices are implemented				1.00	1.00
Gender-transformative child rights policies and programmes identified and financed				1.00	1.00
GBV risk mitigation results reported against by sectors				1.00	1.00
Overall				100%	80%

**Source:** UNICEF Insight internal gender dashboard

The gender dashboard and GAP indicators were unknown to almost all BCO staff interviewed. It is widely known within UNICEF that the way the information is entered is dependent on who does the coding and the extent to which the purpose of tagging is understood.



“It is very difficult to do quality assurance for codes on gender as it is quite subjective.” – *Key informant*

“If the gender data, such as that captured in GEM is not linked to the country strategic indicators, it will not be captured in the data system. There are too many indicators to track.” – *Key informant*

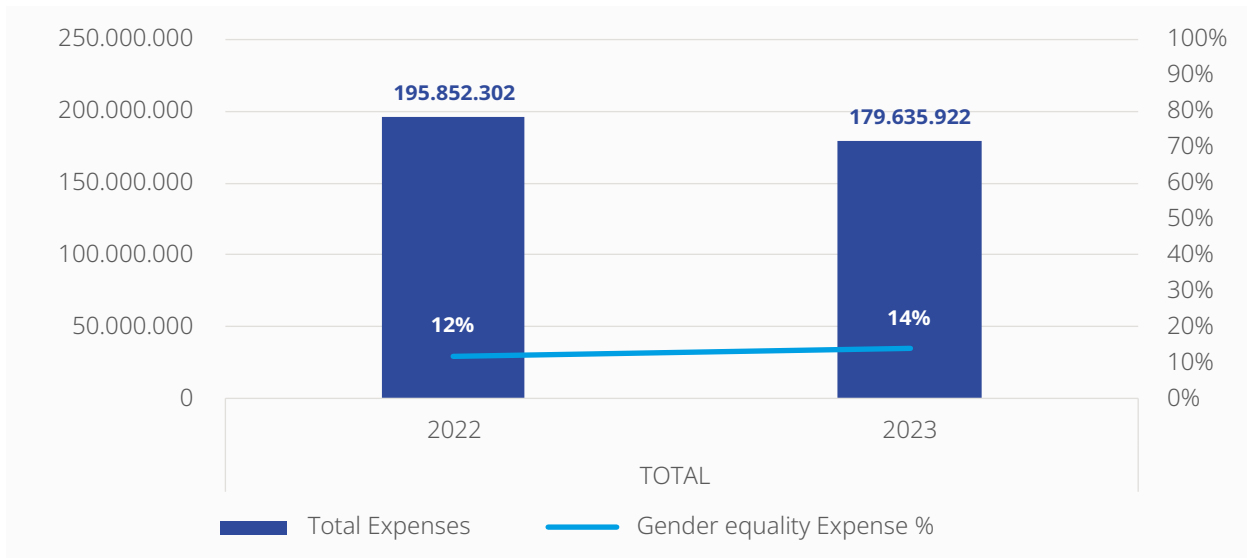
It was reported that gender was often considered “as a tick box exercise required by the system” and was not systematically included in programme design, partly because the quick turnaround expected when drafting proposals did not enable staff to conduct in-depth analysis. They reported “only ticking boxes to receive funds”. The general opinion was that gender analysis is mostly not available for programmes and needs to be strengthened and that there was a need to go beyond sex-disaggregated data.

### Resource mobilization

Bangladesh has mobilized resources and is very close to achieving the UN-SWAP benchmark of 15 per cent (also see background section on overview of UNICEF responses in Bangladesh for 2023 UNCT SWAP indicators). However, a detailed explanation of the resources received and expenditure on gender-transformative provides a mixed picture.

The UN-SWAP requires 15 per cent spending on gender-transformative activities. In 2023, Bangladesh was close to achieving this target. The percentage of total expenditure from all resources for gender-transformative activities are described below (see Figure 4). The financial data shows an overall increase in the level of expenditure<sup>48</sup> from 12 per cent of the total budget in 2022 (US\$195,852,302) to 14 per cent of the total budget in 2023 (US\$179,635,922).

**Figure 2.** Overall gender equality expenditure by year

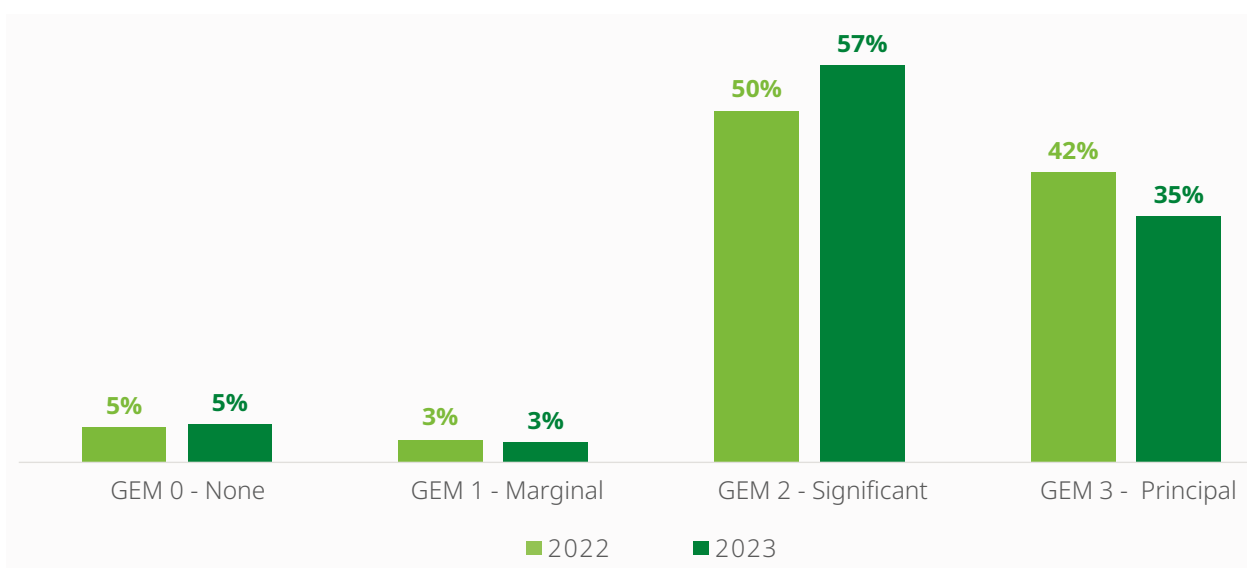


**Source:** UNICEF Strategic Plan expenditure cube 2022-2025

Outputs are tagged on a four-point scale through GEM at the planning stage and indicate to what extent the outputs are gender-transformative. Overall, investment in gender principal programming (equivalent to GEM 3, for outputs that have advancing gender equality as the principal objective) has decreased between 2022 and 2023, from 42 to 35 per cent. In 2022 and 2023, the expenditure tagged as

GEM 0 (outputs that are gender blind or discriminatory) remained low at 5 per cent. In Bangladesh, there is high expenditure for GEM 2 (significant) and GEM 3 (principal), which corresponds to gender-responsive and gender-transformative on the gender continuum. When considering GEM 2 and GEM 3 combined, the proportion is above 84 per cent for all Goal Areas for both 2022 and 2023.

**Figure 3.** GEM allocation, 2022 and 2023

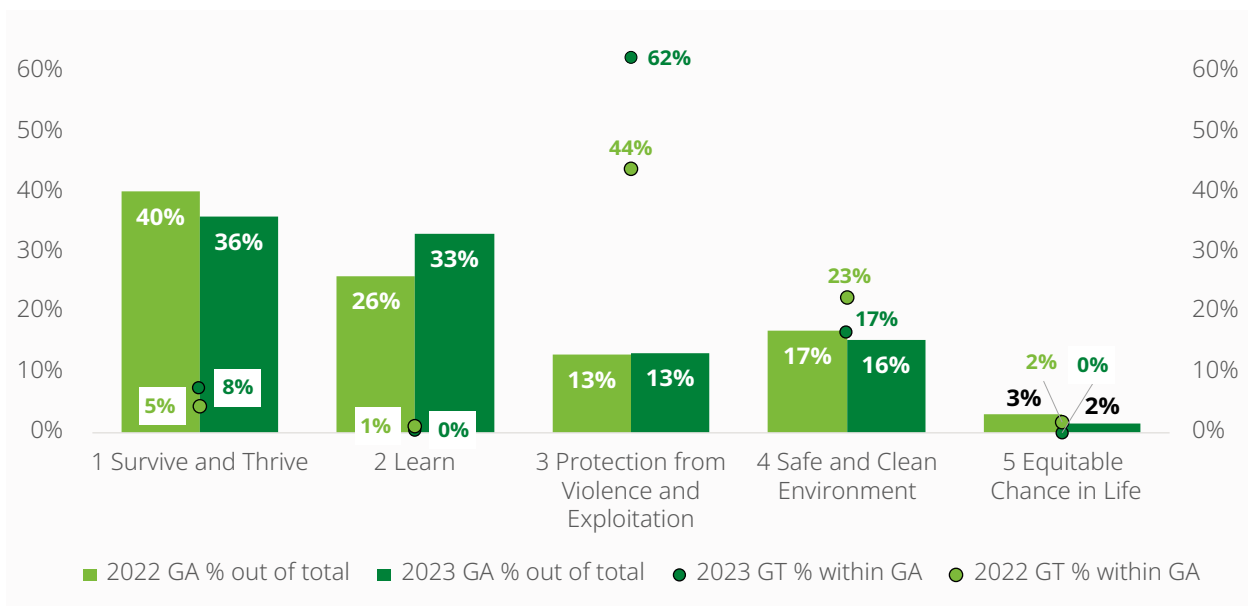


**Source:** UNICEF Strategic Plan expenditure cube 2022-2025

The percentage of expenditure per Goal Area out of the total expenditure of the BCO and the percentage of gender-transformative expenditure within each Goal Area for 2022 and 2023 are presented below (see Figure 4). In 2023, the Goal Area with the highest proportion of gender-transformative expenditure was Goal Area 3 (child protection) at 62 per cent. However, the total expenditure of this Goal Area only accounted for 13 per cent of the total expenditure across all Goal Areas. While Goal Area 1 (health and nutrition) represents the highest proportion of expenditure in 2023, amounting to over a third of the total budget, it only spent 20 per cent of the total gender-transformative resources, and only 8 per cent within the area was gender-transformative, possibly because health has universal coverage. This is followed by Goal Area 2 (education), representing a third of total

expenses, but has virtually no gender-transformative spending (down from 1 per cent in 2022). Goal Area 5 (social protection), which represents a minimal area of expenditure for the BCO (2 per cent), also had no gender-transformative expenditure in 2023. The percentage of gender-transformative expenditure increased between 2022 and 2023 only for Goal Area 2 (education) and decreased for Goal Area 1 by four percentage points. Some analysis of the reasons for low gender-transformative expenditure (especially in Goal Area 1, Goal Area 2, and Goal Area 5) and a decrease in WASH (Goal Area 4) was requested during the interviews, with follow-up by email, however an explanation for such low/decrease gender-transformative expenditure was unavailable.

**Figure 4.** BCO Goal Area expenditure and gender expenses out of total expenditure, by Goal Area, 2022 and 2023

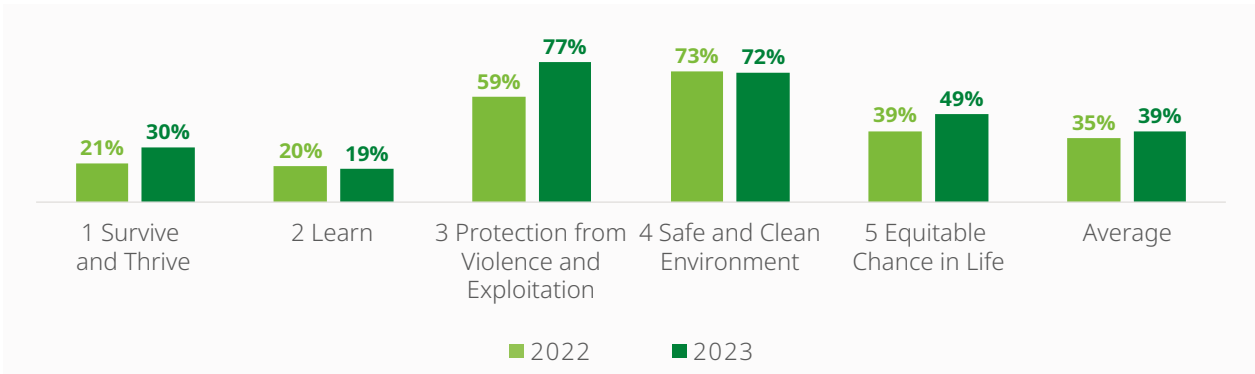


**Source:** UNICEF Strategic Plan expenditure cube 2022-2025

In terms of expenditure, recorded at reporting phase, the proportion of expenditure for activities tagged as gender activities, out of the total expenditure for 2022 and 2023 by Goal Area are outlined below (see Figure 5). On average, the proportion of expenditure with the gender tag increased from 35 per cent in 2022 to 39 per cent in 2023.

There is a discrepancy between gender tagged expenditure and the results presented above about GEM 3 activities-related expenditure decreasing between 2022 and 2023 (see Figure 3). However, it is worth noting that GEMs are assigned at planning stage, while gender tags are assigned at the reporting stage.

**Figure 5.** BCO proportion of gender tagged expenditures out of total expenditure by Goal Area 2022 and 2023

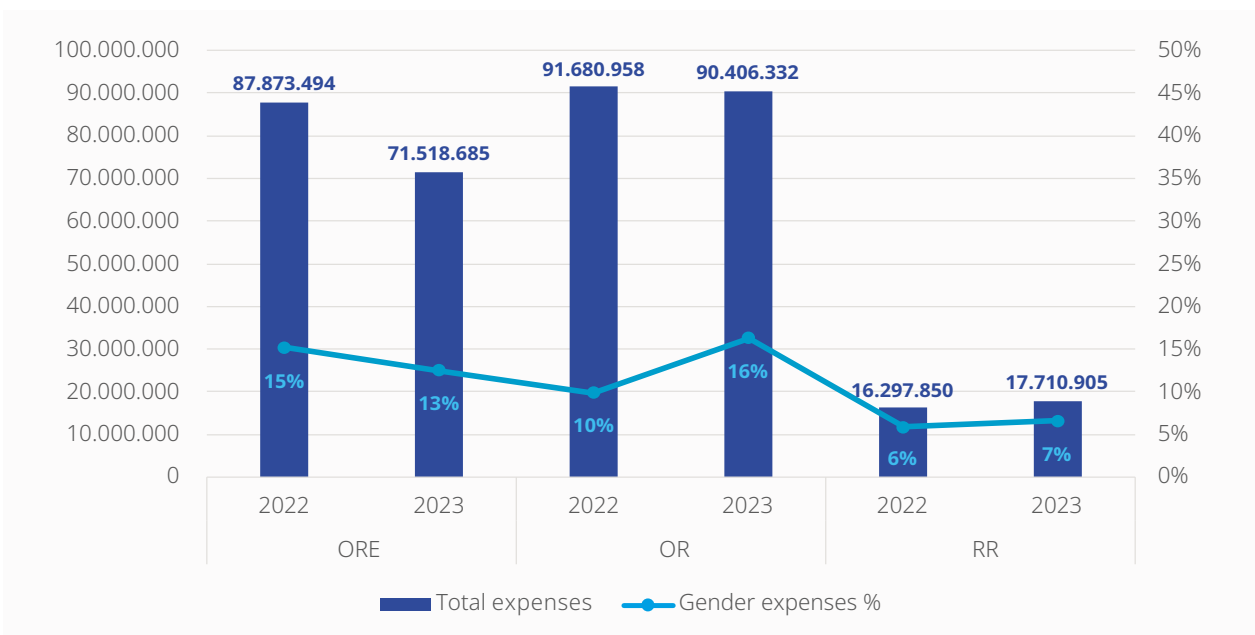


Source: UNICEF Strategic Plan expenditure cube 2022-2025

UNICEF receives financial support from three sources: RR, also known as core funding, OR, and other resources emergency (ORE). The share of total expenditure and proportion of gender-transformative spending for 2022 and 2023 by sector are shown below (see Figure 6). OR represents the source which has the highest total spending, but also the highest

proportion of gender-transformative expenditure – 16 per cent for 2023 (above the UN-SWAP requirement), up from 10 per cent in 2022. OR is followed by ORE and RR both in terms of total expenditure and in terms of the gender-transformative proportion – 13 per cent and 7 per cent respectively in 2023.

**Figure 6.** BCO total expenditure and gender expenses out of total expenditure, by type of resources, 2022 and 2023



Source: UNICEF Strategic Plan expenditure cube 2022-2025

## Partnerships

One GAP 3 indicator improved in 2024 which is partnership with grassroots girls’ and women’s rights

groups. The BCO has a history of working with these organizations, so it is unclear why the criterion was not met in 2023.

**Table 11.** GAP indicator partnerships

GAP 3 Partnerships	GAP 2			GAP 3	
	2019	2020	2021	2023	2023
Partnership with women and youth groups in programme design and monitoring				1.00	1.00
Partnerships with grassroots girls’ and women’s rights groups				0.00	1.00
Integration of gender issues in key partnership documents (proposals, request for proposals, programme cooperation agreements, etc.)				1.00	1.00
CO has a joint programme on gender equality with other UN entities				1.00	1.00
Overall				75%	100%

**Source:** UNICEF Insight internal gender dashboard

### With girl-, youth- and women-led organizations

UNICEF has good relationships with CSOs, and women-led organizations in a constrained but improving civic space in Bangladesh. Prioritization of partnerships is shaped by the wider political environment in which UNICEF functions. In the prevailing patriarchal context, UNICEF has been able to work with transgender and sex worker networks, demonstrating a strong gender equality focus.

The evaluation found that youth groups rather than youth-led organizations are present in communities and include both boys and girl clubs, with the latter being far more popular. These adolescent clubs (child protection community hubs) are common and are expanding across the country, supported by the government, through the MoWCA. UNICEF provides support to the government for these hubs. The hubs use interactive tools and resources which encourage active participation in the sessions. The evaluators noted that adolescents were aware of child rights, child labour, child marriage, gender norm and other gender topics. All the hubs use a standardized curriculum. However, evaluators, in their interaction with youth during adolescent-friendly workshops, noted that there is little involvement of youth in programme design, monitoring or evaluation and are mainly receivers of services.

Interviews with staff from the BCO and feminist organizations noted that the latter have a tenuous relationship with the present government because of their strong advocacy on patriarchal and traditional power systems, mostly in the context of women’s rights and GBV. Small short-term projects and/or campaigns initiated by women-led feminist organizations have been supported by UNICEF, primarily in the areas of health, rollout of the HPV+ vaccine, and GBV. CSOs implement several initiatives such as the skills programme for out-of-school adolescents’ programme, ending ECM and the rollout of the HPV+ vaccine. However, UNICEF internal programme implementation partnerships guidelines and systems constrain the expansion of work especially with civil society which is often limited to events or campaigns. Both UNICEF and CSOs, including women-led and women’s rights organizations felt that much more could be accomplished with coordinated efforts.

Respondents from CSOs indicated that UNICEF builds the capacity of CSO partners on gender issues as well as PSEA, if there is a gap.

The BCO is generally considered a valuable, trustworthy and equitable partner of CSOs. Interviews with CSOs who are contracted by the BCO stated that they are required to have a PSEA policy in place to partner with the UN agency. UNICEF provides

relevant training, including on PSEA (mandatory) and gender (on a case-by-case basis), the intensity of which is dependent on the duration of the programme. CSOs are expected to roll out this training at the community level. With women's or feminist organizations, it works well as they have a culture of training at the community level. In some cases, such as with CSOs who implement ALP, adolescents who enrolled received limited gender and PSEA related training because of time constraints for completing the skills syllabus. UNICEF encourages innovation, and one IP mentioned that girls were offered non-stereotypical vocational training such as driving, electrical related, mobile phone repair and auto repairs. Some IPs have been more successful than others in suggesting such non-stereotypical training to girls, while others offer training in the traditional occupations for women, such as tailoring. Some IPs stated that gender parity in the skills programmes could be defined as gender equality. It is not clear how the BCO monitors the extent to which IPs are gender-transformative in their approach.

In a politically tense environment, with a strong patriarchal culture and a conservative government, discussion on gender equity and transformation by UNICEF is carefully calibrated when working with civil society.

### With government

Interviews with government stakeholders indicated that UNICEF is a reliable and technically sound (in relation to sectors such as health, education, WASH, etc.) UN partner to work with. Government informants recognized UNICEF's emphasis on girls and the technical support given to MoWCA for GBV, adolescents and gender equality. They mentioned UNICEF support (with UNFPA) for the Women's Empowerment Policy and Adolescent Health Strategy with Ministry of Health.

UNICEF's partnership with its host ministry, MoWCA, is well established, and has enabled many positive results. Together they have supported the integration of monitoring tools for the National Plan of Action to End Child Marriage through better coordination among 23 ministries. UNICEF's collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Education and Health contributed to their perception that there is a reduction in child marriage. These are important achievements. UNICEF also supports school health and a 1,700+ national government-led expanding network of adolescent clubs for boys and girls (renamed as child protection community hubs). However, the ministry has constrained capacity and resources to implement activities.

The achievement of gender parity among students in education; progress in ECM, and the presence of a long-term female prime minister have influenced the perception and narrative within the government that the country is gender-responsive. However, gender parity among teachers has not yet been achieved. Government officials claim that moving to gender-transformative actions (including changing harmful practices and norms) is a long-term undertaking and by saying so, compromises the urgency to act for social norm change now. However, gender-sensitive and transformative ambitions are still limited.

UNICEF is supporting a major Ministry of Education initiative to reform textbooks to be more gender-sensitive, but it has so far been a complicated process, particularly in addressing gender stereotypes and gender diversity. Government officials, who are predominantly male, agree on the issues but implementation is slow. Discussion on representation of gender diversity and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual and more (LGBTIQ+) in textbooks is considered 'external' to the culture in Bangladesh. Representation of women in textbooks in non-gender stereotypical roles is being continuously negotiated. BCO staff have explained that disability inclusion is an easier agenda to advocate for with the various ministries than gender and social norms change. The fact that leadership positions in ministries are still dominated by men may act as a barrier. Finally, another challenge is the insufficient coordination between UN agencies working on gender strategies with various ministries and the tendency to work in silos.

### With other UN agencies

Respondents from BCO staff and UN agencies (UN Women and UNFPA) indicated good coordination among UN agencies in working groups and on specific projects such as ECM, distribution of dignity kits to women and girls, campaigns and health-related interventions for adolescents. Each agency is aware of its mandate. UNFPA and UN Women acknowledged their gender technical expertise, whereas UNICEF had by far a larger outreach and multiple entry points through various sectors to integrate gender. UNICEF and other UN agencies felt that more could be done in terms of joint programming and coordinated efforts. Colleagues from other UN agencies think that UNICEF could utilize better opportunities to mainstream gender in various sectors and through the life cycle approach.

## Leadership and accountability

### GAP M&E system utilization

It was evident from staff discussions that they were unfamiliar with the GAP M&E system (described in the section on overview of the CO), so full utilization of this system is not yet possible. Interest in gender issues beyond sectoral requirements is dependent on the interest of BCO senior management, including chiefs of section. The Gender Evaluation Report UNICEF Bangladesh Country Programme of Cooperation 2017-2020 commissioned by the RO came to the same conclusion<sup>49</sup>. The evaluation also indicated that the results assessment module (RAM) is not optimized to address cross-cutting issues like gender.

### Accountability mechanisms

GAP 2 and GAP 3 indicators show that accountability measures are in place, such as the CO GAP and leadership commitment to promote gender equality at programmatic level. Since gender is a cross-cutting issue, accountability is dependent on system-wide processes that monitor and evaluate the extent of gender mainstreaming and emphasis on gender equality interventions across sectors. There are no regular meetings or a programme management plan to support such implementation. These findings are similar to those that emerged from the KIIs.

**Table 12.** GAP leadership and accountability

GAP 3 Leadership and accountability	GAP 2			GAP 3	
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
CO has a GAP	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
CO has the leadership, oversight and accountability at an appropriate management level (deputy representative)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
CO programme management plan defines accountabilities to achieve gender results across sectors				0.00	0.00
CO organizes regular meetings on the implementation of the gender priorities				1.00	0.00
Overall	100%	100%	100%	75%	50%

**Source:** UNICEF Insight internal gender dashboard

BCO staff indicated that although gender is discussed in management and staff meetings, there is no specific accountability assigned to the programme sections or in job descriptions for ensuring gender integration. The way data is captured and reported to HQ is inadequate to report gender related changes, especially those that are responsive and transformative.

The CPD and the Gender Equality Strategy reference the Gender Policy and GAP for strategic direction, and each programme section addresses gender equality in sectoral strategies. However, the extent to which efforts are gender-responsive or gender-transformative depends on UNICEF staff members' own understanding of gender. In principle, everyone is

accountable for gender integration, but in practice accountability measures need to be strengthened to hold staff responsible. Where the gap is in relation to gender-transformative results may need to be investigated as gender is an agenda item of both Country Management Team and Programme Management Team meetings. The BCO is currently reorganizing horizontal working groups including a Gender Equality Task Team.

## Senior leadership commitments to gender equality

Respondents interviewed individually or during the staff workshop felt that more could be done to strengthen the visibility of gender within the BCO, taking advantage of the fact that senior positions are largely occupied by women. Making gender reporting mandatory for all programme sections would help overcome the perception that working on gender is optional and is left to individual staff motivation. In addition, better recognition and support to gender champions would also send a strong signal to all staff about the importance of gender integration.

## Staffing and culture

The BCO does well in promoting an equitable culture at the workplace, and the decrease from 82 to 73 per cent in the GAP Standard Index on culture is attributed to the number of senior staff engaging in formal gender training scored as “not applicable”. Therefore, on this indicator the CO remained stable across 2022 and 2023 (see Table 13). Notably, less than half of BCO staff agree with the following statement asked in the global staff survey “I believe all colleagues are given the same opportunities for career advancement in this organization.” Comparatively, 53 per cent of all CO staff globally agree with the same statement. This finding reflects the discussions during the workshop held with UNICEF staff.

**Table 13.** GAP culture and staffing

Dimension and indicators	Year				
	GAP 2			GAP 3	
Culture	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Have a system in place to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse.				1.00	1.00
Percentage of staff who agree with the gender equality statement.				0.46	0.46
At least one senior staff trained on in gender equality.				1.00	NA
Overall				82%	73%
Staffing	GAP 2			GAP 3	
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Meeting the GAP staffing guidance	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Virtual parity at all international professionals/national officers/general service levels	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	1.00
Overall	100%	100%	100%	50%	100%

The CO has achieved gender parity in its staffing and meeting guidance.

**Source:** UNICEF Insight internal gender dashboard

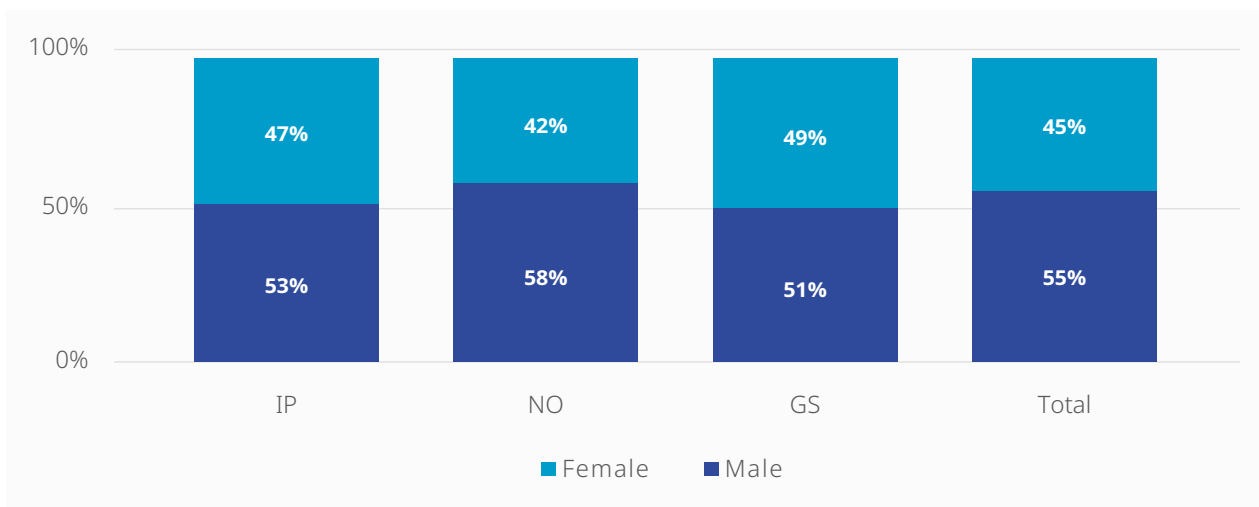
## Ownership of the gender mandate at all levels

As indicated earlier, in principle, gender equality is accepted as the responsibility of everyone at the BCO, although understanding the definitions of gender equality and gender-transformative may vary. According to interviews with UNICEF, donors and CSOs (including feminist organizations) there is insufficient understanding of gender especially gender-transformative and that UNICEF has missed opportunities of its comparative advantage to mainstream gender in all sectors (more details in section 3.1).

## Gender equality in the workplace: HR policies, inclusion, PSEA

The BCO has achieved gender parity in staffing since 2019 and is the only UN agency in the country to do so. Parity is monitored regularly and actively addresses some imbalance at national officer levels. The following table was shared by HR during the field visit.

**Figure 7.** Gender parity



**Source:** UNICEF Internal Database Insight

UNICEF uses the staff selection guidance to ensure that values of diversity and gender equality are included during recruitment. Overall, BCO staff were appreciative of the commitment to gender and the practical application for gender parity in staffing, illustrated by the number of women in leadership positions. This is particularly appreciated given the strong patriarchal cultural roots of the country.



“We offer very generous compensation, flexible working arrangements and are an employer of choice in Bangladesh” – *Key informant*

Female BCO key informants and workshop participants however mentioned concerns regarding ageism and sexism. For example, they felt that male counterparts’ voices carry more weight than women’s, no matter where they are in the hierarchy and younger women particularly face cultural barriers in their voices and decisions being respected. These concerns prompted detailed discussions during the UNICEF workshops with female staff, who proposed to have a functional code of conduct regarding remarks regarding attire, and language. They felt this needed to be formally addressed, since men may inadvertently be using sexist language due to their cultural mindset.



“Sometimes male colleagues make derogatory remarks that a women’s job or generating income is optional, but men have to support family.” – *Key informant*

“When I returned from maternity leave, a male colleague said – Oh, you are back from holiday!” – *Key informant*

“Women need to work from home more than we men do.” – *Key informant*

“Male colleagues shared that their wives were mothers, housewives – what they see in their everyday lives is different from UNICEF.” – *Key informant*

In parallel, male staff workshop participants, while accepting gender parity, felt that gender should not be “prioritized” over merit. Both male and female participants agreed on the importance of recognizing gender champions at all levels in the organization.

The PSEA Policy is very well entrenched in both CO and field offices. However, the procedure for redressal according to discussion with BCO female staff at the participatory workshop is too long drawn and the need for swift resolution was emphasized both in the KIIs and workshops.

The Work from Home Policy is well appreciated and used more by women than men, yet women feel hesitant to use it fearing that this may reflect on their commitment to work. Young women felt that work pressures make them hesitant to build a family. They appreciated benefitting from maternity leave but regretted that pregnant staff are responsible for redistributing their own tasks and finding colleagues to replace them, given that it often concretely overloads colleagues.



“There is zero consideration for pregnant women and depends on senior management culture, but now we have a result-oriented culture, and no one cares about the personal condition and only look at performance.” – *Key informant*

“Women are scared for motherhood, no work-life balance but I am growing older.” – *Key informant*

## EQ3 - Programmatic results

**To what extent have UNICEF's programmatic results for gender equality throughout the life course been met across all five Goal Areas, particularly to advance adolescent girls' leadership and well-being, in both development and humanitarian settings?**

### In summary

Sectors are challenged by the context in which programmes operate where discussions on gender are likely to be gender-sensitive and at best gender-responsive. This may be attributed to a pervasive patriarchal culture. All sectors work on gender, mainly by developing interventions focused on girls and women. These have shown great results such as the successful rollout of the HPV+ (with 7 per cent set aside funds) vaccine, WFHI, advocating for a gender-responsive curriculum and ALPs for girls and boys. For Goal Area 1, UNICEF BCO led the Mothers@Work programme, successfully working with the Garment Manufacturers Association to provide breastfeeding spaces and breaks, childcare facilities, paid maternity leave, cash benefits, health care, employment protection and a safe work environment for working mothers and pregnant women. This programme has been expanded substantially. WFHI resulted in more women accessing health services. With UNICEF's support, the government developed a National Adolescent Health Strategy. About 88 per cent of girls were reached with the HPV+ vaccine. For Goal Area 2, the BCO successfully supported the government to review textbooks and roll out a gender equality curriculum for primary and secondary schools. ALP includes hands-on centre-based occupational training along with entrepreneurship training and other relevant soft skills for out-of-school adolescent boys and girls with girls being offered non-gender stereotypical (auto repair, mobile repair, electrician, driver) skill training. For Goal Area 3, UNICEF with UNFPA implements the GPECM, now in its third phase. For Goal Area 4, UNICEF supported the National Menstrual Hygiene Management Strategy (and costed action plan) which is an important buy-in from the government. For Goal Area 5, the Cash Plus programme is offered to all children. However, there is little gender analysis which challenges the systematic integration of gender equality in the sectoral programmes.

The Adolescent Girl Programme has seen significant results. For ECM, BCO supported the government to strengthen the monitoring of ongoing public investments at the subnational level. The ALP is a market driven skill training and job placement project for out-of-school children focusing on the most marginalized boys and girls and these programmes ensure that at least 50 per cent of girls are enrolled in school. Government-supported adolescent girl clubs in communities are popular and girls report benefitting from these in terms of knowledge of child rights, social norms and agency. They are not involved in programme design, M&E, and this is a missed opportunity to promote girls' agency. UNICEF also works with adolescent sex workers and others who are very vulnerable. Adolescent-friendly health services have helped better access. These results are especially significant in a conservative country context. About two-thirds of staff felt that they needed to better understand 'how' to change norms to enable them to address the drivers of harmful norms and power asymmetries. Greater engagement with boys and men, families, communities, local institutional structures, including religious ones with IPs are likely to support norm change.

The evaluation outlined several enabling and hindering factors internally and externally for the implementation of the GAP and the Gender Policy. Lessons learned by the BCO for broader application in programme design and implementation included leveraging UNICEF's unique position as a child rights organization and championing the rights of adolescent girls in a uniquely challenging socio-cultural context.

Across sectors, there is a need to move the needle from gender-sensitive to gender-responsive and -transformative programmes which in turn would require the sectors to address the multi-dimensional and intersectional dimensions that shape gender inequality.

## Gender equality across all Goal Areas

The BCO Gender Equality Strategy developed in 2021 resonates with the GAP and the Strategic Plan and elaborates the gender dimensions for each of the Goal Areas. It recognizes that a twin track approach is required for gender integration across sector strategies alongside a few targeted priorities. In each of the Goal Areas, there are positive results in integrating gender equality. These are outlined in the sections below.

Programme sections are challenged by the context in which they operate where discussions on gender are likely to be gender-sensitive and at best gender-responsive. This may be attributed to a pervasive patriarchal culture in Bangladesh. For example, in teacher training for a gender-responsive curriculum, sub-national government officials found it difficult to accept that women can graduate, choose a profession and earn a living. For them, it was enough that girls were in school and staying there. Gender parity in schools has been successful in Bangladesh which is, misleadingly construed as gender equality by government decision-makers who claim that Bangladesh has now achieved gender equality. Overall, there are cultural barriers to accept girls' and women's empowerment (in particular decision-making) and gender-responsive or -transformative results.



“Gender is a right or is gender an issue and UNICEF does not give enough attention to this difference in its advocacy with government...” – *Key informant*

“Often the UNICEF senior staff are the only female among mostly male government officials. These officials insist that gender equality has been ‘addressed’ in Bangladesh.” – *Key informant*

Among about two-thirds of BCO staff, the understanding of gender equality results and the gender continuum (gender-blind, gender-sensitive, gender-responsive and gender-transformative) seems to be basic both in the central and field offices. About two-thirds of staff requested a better understanding of these gender concepts and wanted to know the ‘how’ as well as the ‘what’. UNICEF is present in several working groups with UN agencies in Bangladesh and with other groupings such as the Local Consortium on Women Advancement and Gender Equality, but other UN agencies stated that they were unclear how UNICEF was mainstreaming gender.

About two-thirds of staff acknowledged that the context of Bangladesh is deeply patriarchal and hierarchical, and that gender and social norms need urgent attention but were unable to conceptually link the change in gender norms to gender-transformative results. For example, mothers continue to be the focus for training in BCO nutrition programmes. External stakeholders commented that such an approach by UNICEF is not gender-transformative as men and fathers are not involved in the nutritional care of their children. For example, child health or child malnutrition programmes continue to place the burden of care on women or the skills-based programme for adolescents (with some exceptions with IPs) does not encourage girls to learn non-stereotypical vocations. Programme sections usually do not use rigorous gender analysis to guide their programming.

The personal interest and commitment to gender of chiefs of section is important and influences programming. This also means that every change in leadership impacts the depth and scope of gender programming. While there is evidence of gender work within sections, this consists of implementing programmes that target women and adolescent girls rather than systematically mainstreaming gender within each programme with a gender analysis and involvement of primary stakeholders and rights holders.

The lack of clarity on what is gender-sensitive, -responsive and -transformative in BCO programmes can result in missed opportunities. For example, an IP for an ALP provided girls with options for learning gender stereotypical skills but advocated that by involving girls and achieving parity, they were contributing to gender equality. Another IP made a conscious decision to promote non-gender stereotypical skill training for girls which has the potential for gender equality results, but this example was not highlighted in evaluation interviews with BCO staff.

Externally, UNICEF is perceived as the UN agency for all children, rather than having a targeted focus on gender. This broad perception may dilute efforts to address specific gender-related issues effectively. External respondents felt that while UNICEF has many advantages, such as a large reach, multi-sectoral work, a substantial budget, and government confidence, it did not adequately leverage these strengths to promote gender equality.

Cross-sectoral programmes are difficult to plan and manage and become unnecessarily siloed. For example, the climate change focal point sits in WASH but there are modules on education and climate change and the two sections may not communicate to each other.

Each Goal Area addresses gender within its sectoral plans. Goal Area 1 works with all adolescents (boys and girls) and mothers; Goal Area 2 addresses education for all children in primary and secondary and obtains sex-disaggregated data regarding their progress; Goal Area 3 addresses all children in the justice system as well as harmful practices such as early marriage for adolescent girls; Goal 4 while addressing all for WASH facilities, disaggregates data by sex, age and disability; and Goal 5 provides social protection for all children.<sup>50</sup>

**Goal Area 1: Every child including adolescents survives and thrives with access to nutritious diets, quality health care, nurturing practices and essential supplies**

The BCO is committed to universal health coverage and supporting the government to monitor maternal, infant and young child nutrition. Wasting continues to be an area of concern for all children. Over several years, the BCO has formulated annual nutrition plans for ministries and operational plans for the DGHS and continues to work with mothers for child nutrition and with mother-child pairs for play-based parenting sessions. The BCO supports the government-led WFHI which has been very successful and led to increased utilization of services by women. It is unclear to what extent fathers are involved in parenting or in supporting women in the WFHI. These programmes are gender-sensitive and target women in their biological and gendered roles.

Under the UNICEF-led Mothers@Work programme, UNICEF and the Bangladesh Garments' Manufacturers and Exporters Association and the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association support factories to provide breastfeeding spaces and breaks, childcare facilities, paid maternity leave, cash benefits, health care, employment protection and a safe work environment for working mothers and pregnant women. Building on lessons learned from a UNICEF pilot project, this partnership will improve working conditions for 130,000 women and provide better nutrition services and day-care facilities for 8,000 children. Starting in 80 factories,

the initiative will gradually increase to ultimately reach over 4,000 factories in Bangladesh. The evaluation of the programme indicated positive benefits and gender responsiveness.<sup>51</sup>

UNICEF, together with the Islamic Foundation, empowered Imams and female mosque teachers to disseminate 23 childcare practices and messages related to HPV risks and prevention.

The BCO has supported the government to develop a costed plan of action of its National Adolescent Health Strategy. UNICEF is also supporting capacity building efforts towards adolescent mental health and well-being. Adolescent health and mental health, under the health section, collaborates with other sectors for its programming. One of the successful programmes for this was the rollout of the HPV+ vaccine (7 per cent set aside funds) which reached 1.5 million girls (88 per cent of the target). Adolescent-friendly health services include gender-sensitive training to service providers on GBV and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Although gender issues are part of the training modules, interviews with BCO staff indicated that there was no clarity about the extent to which the content was gender-responsive or transformative. The section is working closely with the gender specialist to enrich the gender component in all the training modules. UNICEF has supported the development of the standard operating procedure for adolescent-friendly health services which recommends a female staff member along with a male counterpart so that girls are comfortable talking about menstruation and other SRHR problems. However, it has been difficult to add a female staff member because of a resource crunch. A recent study with Bangladesh University on adolescent gender norms has been commissioned but in general, there is no gender analysis while designing programmes.

Data that is sex-disaggregated are available for all programmes in the BCO and are useful for analysis. For example, it was noted that there were increased numbers of women accessing women-friendly health facilities. Being multi-sectoral, adolescent health also has interventions with sex workers networks, community-based organizations (for HPV+ rollout), as well as with a transgender organization (Bandhu Social Welfare).

## Goal Area 2: Every child including adolescents learns and acquires skills for the future

The BCO is committed to promoting positive gender socialization and has advocated for integrating gender equality content into the national curriculum. The education sector uses a gender lens as an overarching framework. The competency-based, gender equality curricula, teaching-learning materials (TLM), experiential pedagogy, and formative assessment mechanisms – developed with UNICEF’s technical assistance – were rolled out in January 2023, transforming education for four million students, 55 per cent of whom were girls, in grade six and grade seven. The curricula and TLM for grade eight and grade nine are being developed and will be rolled out during the 2024 academic year. An important change was to remove a structural barrier and make science technology engineering and mathematics (STEM) available until grade 10, providing opportunities for girls to graduate in STEM and compete for non-gender stereotypical jobs. Previously, STEM was optional from grade 8, which prompted a majority of girls to choose the arts and commerce streams. These system strengthening initiatives have the potential to transform gender and social norms. One of the challenges is teacher training and although it is being rolled out through master trainers, it is uncertain to what extent teachers will demonstrate less bias towards girls in schools as a result of the new curriculum.

The BCO steered the design, implementation, analysis, reporting, and dissemination of the National Student Assessment (2022), which provides evidence on the levels of learning crisis and its associated factors and will inform the design/implementation of programmes in primary education that will reach 17 million students. The survey will use sex-disaggregated data to inform policy and programmes.

With UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, the BCO is conducting pilot research on gamified learning for SRHR since this topic is usually omitted by schoolteachers. Along with gamified learning, comic books are being developed, so that girls have the agency to learn on their own. The initial results are promising.

In pre-primary education, the BCO supports the government with policy review, teacher training, technical expertise for pre-primary education and a parenting programme (cross-sectoral). UNICEF also supports the Gender and Inclusive Education

Plan and the Special Education Needs and Disability Framework along with an action plan. The challenge has been training government functionaries at the subnational level, who are less receptive of gender equality issues and perhaps find it easier to accept disability.

Addressing the digital skills gap and mental health and well-being are also integral parts of the reform and Skills4Girls intervention. Skills4Girls reaches out-of-school and marginalized adolescent girls with trades, scaling up the ALP. This includes hands-on centre-based occupational training along with entrepreneurship training and other relevant soft skills. The programme works with out-of-school adolescent girls and boys to bring them back onto the learning and skilling ladder and link them with employment opportunities. It has the potential for gender-responsive and -transformative results (see ALP programme in section 3.2 below on results for adolescent girls).

The education programme does not use gender studies or analysis and relies on secondary data such as number of girls dropping out of school to design programmes. It uses the UNICEF Global Education Strategy which includes gender to guide its programming. Notably, the strategy does not include GBV and hence, bullying in schools is not included in BCO programming.

## Goal Area 3: Every child including adolescents is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices

Child protection initiatives included an expansion of the universal child protection system. Through the children’s court and the Justice for Children Initiative, all children had access to a reformed justice system. While these initiatives were for both boys and girls, the flagship programme – GPECM - entered its next phase (January 2024 to December 2030) which specifically targeted the promotion of the rights of adolescent girls to avert marriage and pregnancy and achieve their aspirations through education and alternative pathways. This is the only targeted priority which has a long-term resource commitment at the global level (more details in section on adolescent girls). In other words, while interventions in the child protection sector are gender neutral, the GPECM aims to achieve gender-transformative results.

**Goal Area 4: Every child including adolescents has access to water, sanitation, and hygiene and lives in a safe and sustainable climate and environment**

UNICEF supported the development and revision of key sectoral policies, strategies, and guidelines, including the National Menstrual Hygiene Management Strategy (and costed action plan) which is an important buy-in from the government. In 2023, UNICEF supported messages on menstrual hygiene management (among others) during a dengue outbreak. Continuing programmes include Girls' Toilets and training on menstrual and sexual health. Other initiatives were gender-neutral such as the Hand Hygiene for All Roadmap 2030, National Hygiene Promotion Strategy, climate rationale for the WASH sector and an update of the National Water and Sanitation Policy (1998).

**Goal Area 5: Every child including adolescents has access to inclusive social protection and lives free from poverty**

The BCO piloted the cash-plus approach in one of Bangladesh's most climate-vulnerable districts (Sathkhira) and linked the National Mother and Child Benefit Programme to health, nutrition and birth services. The cash-plus approach contributes to improved mother and child outcomes. This intervention is gender-sensitive and gender-responsive, enabling mothers to spend the money received on improving the health of their children and their own. Various ongoing research will inform future programming, one of which was an analysis of child marriage data using MICS 2019. Community-based protection mechanisms were enabled to be more responsive to the needs of girls. Overall, interventions in this Goal Area are gender-neutral or gender-sensitive.

## Results on adolescent girls

Significant work has been done with adolescent girls. Based on documentary evidence, interviews and field observations of the adolescent hubs by the evaluation team, here are some examples of programmes with adolescent girls:

- ▶ UNICEF and UNFPA supported the Government of Bangladesh to undertake an analysis of its public budget to gain a better understanding of how much – and how well – existing resources

contribute to or can be effectively targeted to accelerate progress to ECM. The outcome of the exercise aimed to better inform and assist line ministries and other stakeholders in budget allocation decision-making to ECM. These findings prompted the government to conduct further analysis of spending flows to ECM and identify a mechanism to strengthen the monitoring of ongoing public investments at the subnational level. The results of the assessment are forming a baseline to determine an implementation budget for the National Plan of Action to End Child Marriage and enable better monitoring of budgetary allocations<sup>52</sup>.

- ▶ UNICEF with the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics analysed child marriage data from MICS 2019. Social media content on ECM and violence against children prevention reached over 400,000 people in 2023. That same year, UNICEF and UNFPA joined forces to design Phase III (2024-2030) of the GPECM. The goal is to implement scalable, evidence-based programmes to empower adolescent girls, strengthen systems, change social norms, and mobilize communities to ECM. The BCO also continued to support the MoWCA, integrating monitoring tools for the National Plan of Action to End Child Marriage and enhancing coordination among 23 relevant ministries.
- ▶ The ALP is a market driven skills training and job placement project for out-of-school children focusing on the most marginalized boys and girls. In these programmes, gender parity is a must and occupational training with apprenticeship is provided with mentoring support. The skills offered are tailoring, mobile phone repair, auto repair, electrician course and driving, amongst others. This programme has attracted both adolescent boys and girls. According to the 2023 COAR for Bangladesh, close to 7,000 adolescents were engaged via pathways for alternative learning. Some of the skills offered to girls were non-gender stereotypical (auto repair, electrician courses), changing social norms and providing new role models for girls.
- ▶ Adolescent girl clubs in communities known as child protection community hubs are popular. During the field visit, girls reported benefitting from these clubs in terms of knowledge of child rights, social norms and agency. Boys attending the clubs were aware of child marriage and child labour. Girls and boys who attended these hubs were actively preventing early marriage by

reporting cases in the community. According to the COAR 2023, establishment of village-based child protection community hubs, government partners, reached a substantial number of beneficiaries. From January to October 2023, 15,619,862 children (54 per cent girls) and 6,375,245 parents/caregivers (63 per cent women) were reached across all districts and divisions. Agency of the girls was evident in all the adolescent workshops conducted by the evaluators. At one of the sessions, it was estimated that 50 per cent of eligible girls came to the hubs, compared to 20 per cent boys. There had been no systematic analysis to understand who has been left behind. Fewer boys seem to attend these clubs, but more information is needed regarding enrolment and regular attendance. Girls had more in-depth understanding of child marriage, GBV and child labour than boys and participated actively in the sessions but were not involved in the programme design, monitoring or evaluation. These are missed opportunities to enhance agency, empowerment and decision-making, all of which are goals that UNICEF aspires for adolescent girls. Also, parents, neighbours and community members, who shape and enforce social and gender norms, were less involved, highlighting a missed opportunity to involve them in potential norm change.

- ▶ The BCO reached 3,500 adolescent sex workers (82 per cent women), drug users, men who have sex with men, and transgender individuals through human immunodeficiency virus counselling and testing, and life skills education. The BCO with UNFPA also provided a comprehensive prevention of mother-to-child transmission and SRHR services for 700 female sex workers through brothel-based service points<sup>53</sup>.
- ▶ To strengthen equitable access to health and realize SRHR for adolescents, a comprehensive training package for service providers on SRHR, mental health, menstrual health management and GBV was developed and disseminated. Overall, 32 district hospitals were assessed through WFHI tools and an action plan was implemented. In total, 42 health managers and 132 providers received adolescent-friendly health services trainings; and 143,579 adolescents received services from UNICEF-supported centres in 12 districts. In addition, 10,992 sexually active adolescents used contraceptive measures while 87,019 received counselling and treatment for reproductive tract

infection or sexually transmitted infection; and 720 adolescents participated in 18 health facility based special service days and 79 participants were trained on psychosocial counselling. More than 3,000 adolescents across 72 secondary schools received education on SRHR and around 2,275 adolescents were reached in 65 secondary schools and 840 adolescents in 12 secondary schools of Dhaka North City Corporation on SRHR. An adolescent health website was developed and as of November 2022, 10,397,363 visitors logged in and viewed the page.<sup>54</sup> The output level data generated across various interventions indicates the variety of interventions for girls and boys, but the data is mostly gender neutral.

- ▶ To tackle the digital gender divide, a pilot initiative included distribution of mobile devices in Cox's Bazar to help girls access digital content and report on the status of WASH facilities.

Senior BCO staff recognize the impressive results of programmes targeting adolescent girls, nudging the government to strengthen the ECM Policy and monitoring systems, the successful rollout of the HPV+ vaccine, embedding girls' clubs in communities, providing opportunities for non-gender stereotypical skills training (auto repair, driving, electrician courses, mobile repair), gamifying SRHR, and ensuring that STEM education is streamlined in secondary education is available. These results are especially significant in a conservative country context. Areas in need of further improvement include strengthening work on gender norms using a multi-sectoral approach and understanding its intersectional nature. About a third of staff regretted that the various adolescent girls' programmes happen in parallel within sections and are not driven by an overall adolescent girls' framework.



“Adolescent girls' programming is a collection of pieces according to sectors like a copy paste rather than an adolescent girl framework.” – *Key informant*

## Transformative changes in gender norms and systems

Several transformative changes have been identified in the section above. To summarize, the BCO has “moved the needle”, despite the conservative environment in Bangladesh by working with marginalized groups on sensitive topics, engaging young girls in male-dominated working areas, catalysing government interest and investment to combat ECM, and influencing department of education systems and materials. Interviews and group discussions with staff indicated different understanding of gender equality results and how to change harmful gender norms. About two-thirds of staff agreed that norms change in the long term and are population based.

However, about two-thirds felt that strengthening the understanding of the ‘how’ of norm change would enable the BCO to address the drivers of norm change and power asymmetries. Greater engagement with boys and men, families, communities, local institutional structures, including religious ones with IPs are likely to support norm change. However, IP’s capacity to understand the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of transformative change will need strengthening along with resources for longer project durations. Some of the areas of improvement related to greater involvement of boys and men, for example, men could be involved in nutrition and immunization programmes, support women’s health initiatives, as well as girls’ and women’s empowerment and decision-making.



“We need to make sure that transformative change is ‘everybody’s business.” – *Key informant*

“We must address the conservative mindset of government officials regarding gender and social norms challenges.” – *Key informant*

“For adolescent girls, while the programming areas are defined, the approaches and methodologies need to be transformative and inclusive. This would require creation of political commitment on the importance of “how” to get to results that are transformative.” – *Key informant*

## Enabling (and hindering) factors and processes, within and outside UNICEF

The evaluation revealed several enabling factors to implement the GAP and the Gender Policy.

### Enabling factors

Internal enabling factors included:

- ▶ The commitment to gender parity and presence of women in leadership positions are highly regarded across the organization.
- ▶ The gender specialist is a national officer and their understanding of the context and sectors is appreciated. The gender team coordinated the GPECM programme (the only programme that targets girls). Currently, an international gender specialist has taken charge of the GPECM programme, with support from a NOB officer, and is in the child protection section. The national gender specialist is available to support the different sectors.
- ▶ Staff are very aware of the need to work on social norm change and about two-thirds feel that gender equality work needs to be strengthened considering the widespread patriarchy in Bangladesh.
- ▶ Younger staff have been recruited and are committed to norm change, gender equality and equitable workplace culture.

External enabling factors included:

- ▶ The BCO has an excellent reputation with the Government of Bangladesh and IPs. This has a positive impact on laying the ground for gender equality in programmes and policies. UNICEF’s emphasis on adolescent girls is recognized and there are many examples of the BCO influencing the government’s work on gender, including curriculum and textbook reform, policies and costed plans to ECM and support for adolescents’ clubs (called hubs), to name a few. For the ECM programme, UNICEF has coordinated 23 ministries and departments for cross-sectoral support. IPs appreciate the collaborations with UNICEF and openness to changes in programme design. They mentioned that UNICEF is a respectful donor and supports them when faced with difficulties.

## Hindering factors

The evaluation identified several internal and external hindering factors that challenged the optimal use of GAP and the Gender Policy.

Internal hindering factors included:

- ▶ UNICEF programme implementation partnership guidelines and systems discourage partnerships with CSOs and feminist organizations. Procedures are arduous and long and the system of reimbursing for expenses is difficult to manage for these organizations as many do not have a large corpus to spend from and then seek reimbursement.
- ▶ Staff have a limited understanding of what constitutes a gender equality programme. This leads to programmes being tagged as gender-transformative when they are gender-sensitive. Insufficient understanding by programme staff inhibits the design and adaptation of programmes. In urban areas there may be some understanding of gender equality but in the rural areas, there needs to be more advocacy with UNICEF field staff, communities and local partners.
- ▶ The GAP and Gender Policy are considered too complex to understand and a one-page summary or a 'light' version was requested by most staff.
- ▶ Many programmes are generic and universal for both boys and girls. While this is a good strategy, girls and women have special vulnerabilities that need gender targeting.
- ▶ A commitment to gender equality and vulnerability faced by girls and women is dependent on the personal leadership of sector leads rather than built into management systems.
- ▶ The appointment of a national gender specialist is a step in the right direction, although not enough for a large office like the BCO. Many of the staff felt that they were overstretched, "how much can one person do". Gender focal points, although available on paper, are not visible and their contribution to the sectors is not streamlined.
- ▶ While the workplace culture is gender-supportive, female staff reported micro-aggressions in speech and behaviour and requested a practical code of conduct for all staff.

External hindering factors comprised:

- ▶ A major area of concern is the tension between attention to overt expressions of gender equality versus less attention to tackling root causes of underlying deep-seated beliefs on gender discrimination. The government showcases female leadership and gender parity in schools and enrolment of girls in skills-based programmes and adolescent clubs to indicate that gender equality is progressing well, which illustrates their commitment to gender equality. However, several UNICEF staff pointed out that the government's efforts to demonstrate positive results hamper the ability of senior officials to consider remaining challenges. For example, it was pointed out that the slow progress reflected by the indicators on early marriage is not given sufficient attention at the senior level, despite district authorities' willingness to tackle the issue.
- ▶ Gender equality advocacy is dependent on individual champions rather than being embedded in government systems. So, although there is a willingness to talk about gender discrimination, it is less likely that actionable steps will be taken. Textbook revision is a case in point where the BCO had to negotiate considerably to include less stereotypical images and text about girls and women. Also, the government feels that girls have successfully begun to attend secondary schools, and the attention should go to boys as they are dropping out of secondary school to pursue livelihood options.
- ▶ Decision-making positions are largely occupied by men, except for feminist organizations and departments dedicated to women and children in the government.
- ▶ Although programmes are focused on gender equality, IPs, and government officers have unconscious bias. Programme officers within IPs may mirror discriminatory gender norms in their programme design and decision-making although the language used is gender-sensitive. Bangladesh has a very hierarchical and patriarchal societal culture which is difficult to challenge.
- ▶ While the focus on adolescent girls has been successful within UNICEF programming, there has been less emphasis and understanding of why a socio-ecological and institutional approach is required for gender-transformative work.



# 5

## Conclusions and lessons learned

The overarching conclusions presented below are derived from the findings of this evaluation that were analysed based on the assumptions in the evaluation ToC.

**Conclusion 1:** The Gender Policy and GAP appears complex and dense to non-gender staff and there is no incentive to drive sectoral programmes towards gender-transformative programming. The Gender Equality Strategy is useful but lacks an action plan to make it implementable across sectors. Sectors generally do not use the GAP, Gender Policy or Gender Equality Strategy and have their own sectoral plan which they use for integrating gender.

**Conclusion 2:** The BCO has very good monitoring systems to track gender related data. Sex-disaggregated data and gender output level data are available for sectors but there is little information regarding gender outcomes that can be linked to how gender-responsive or -transformative the programmes are. Sectors generally do not use gender analysis to design programmes. Bangladesh is just 1 per cent away from reaching the UN-SWAP benchmark of 15 per cent. Coherence between GEM and gender tagging is critical for both programme and M&E functions at the BCO and using both for monitoring change is important to achieve gender-transformative goals. To use gender analysis and many of the monitoring tools, gender capacity and understanding of gender-transformative results was key.

**Conclusion 3:** The BCO has forged excellent relationships with government, civil society and other UN agencies. However, without user-friendly UNICEF programme implementation partnership guidelines and procedures to involve women-led or feminist organizations, it is impossible to involve them systematically. Their engagement is particularly important as they have the reach and programmes to influence norm change at the grassroots and community level. Girl- and youth-led groups are informal and it is unrealistic to assume that these organizations can be created, sustained and contracted using stringent UNICEF systems. This has implications for interventions at the community level for norm change. Different UN agencies work on gender with the same or different government departments leading to lack of synergy and 'one UN voice' with government.

**Conclusion 4:** Political will and senior leadership commitment are critical if the goal is to make everyone responsible for gender outcomes along with management systems to support. Gender outcome needs to be the responsibility of all sectors and staff and not just the gender specialist. Internal and external roll out of the PSEA Policy with partners demonstrated how leadership's commitment along with the highest level accountability embedded it across all of UNICEF's work. M&E systems rolled out globally need to be reviewed to ensure that gender-responsive and -transformative changes are adequately captured in country level monitoring, evaluation and learning

systems to assess process and incorporate learnings in programme implementation.

**Conclusion 5:** Within a challenging context, sectoral commitment to gender equality interventions must be multi-sectoral. Social and gender norm change is addressed mostly by empowering the agency of adolescent girls. Adolescent boys and the wider family, community, peers and religious and state institutions hold the power to influence gender norms and address deeply entrenched cultural beliefs of patriarchy. Their engagement in programmes to understand gender discrimination if strengthened can address the power imbalances that perpetuate gender discrimination and violence.

The work of the BCO has generated important learnings that could inform other country programmes. The following is a summary of **lessons learned** from across the report.

- ▶ UNICEF has successfully leveraged its position as a child rights organization with government along with other UN agencies and civil society for issues related to child marriage, GBV, and adolescent focused empowerment and skilling programmes that have the potential to be gender-transformative.
  - ▶ In a difficult socio-cultural context, the BCO has been able to engage with the government on gender equality, working with vulnerable populations and with adolescent girls. This has made a substantial difference for issues related to education, child marriage and GBV.
  - ▶ Women in senior positions engage with government officials, often as the only women in the room and demonstrate, by example, the commitment of UNICEF for women leadership and decision-making.
  - ▶ The BCO has consistently worked on difficult issues of child marriage through the joint programme with UNFPA achieving national level policy change, coordination across multiple government departments, more robust monitoring systems and costing for these initiatives.
  - ▶ It is important that M&E systems go beyond capturing sex-disaggregated data and capture change in gender outcomes.
- Some overall lessons learned beyond the programmatic ones are as follows:
- ▶ For the Gender Policy and GAP to be used, with its emphasis on transformative programming for gender results, one must address the challenges and the ground reality of countries that are highly patriarchal and have discriminatory socio-cultural contexts.
  - ▶ A strong commitment and leadership for gender results along with a robust integrated M&E system to measure outcomes is essential.
  - ▶ Policies, strategies, and action plans are necessary but not sufficient conditions to embed gender equality approaches at the country level. While having policies, strategies, and action plans in place is crucial, they alone are not enough to ensure gender-transformative change. These must be accompanied by capacity building (i.e., developing the skills and knowledge of individuals and organizations involved in gender programming), a realistic gender architecture (i.e., a framework for how different elements of gender programming interact and support each other), and dedicated resources (i.e., sufficient funding and personnel) capacitated to implement programmes.
  - ▶ Involvement of rights holders, such as adolescents, in a meaningful and non-tokenistic way is critical for gender norm change. This means that those who are most affected by gender norms, such as adolescents, should be actively involved in efforts to change these norms. Their involvement should be meaningful, i.e., they should have a real influence on decisions and actions, rather than being involved in a tokenistic way. This is critical because those who are most affected by gender norms are often best placed to understand these norms and how they can be changed.
  - ▶ Work on sensitive issues, with the most vulnerable marginalized groups, despite the conservative context, is facilitated with collaborations such as the partnership with UN agencies to end child marriage.



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# 6

## Recommendations

These recommendations are presented in order of priority and were derived from the evaluation’s findings and conclusions. They were validated with the BCO during a workshop in October 2024.

**Recommendation 1 (linked to conclusion 1): The BCO should strengthen capacity to increase the understanding of gender equality approaches and programming, and operationalize it across sectors and externally.**

**Priority:** Very high

**Timeframe:** Immediate to long-term

**Responsible units:** BCO management, gender specialists, with support of the RO and HQ

**Cost implications:** Budget for external facilitation will be needed although there are many technical resources that are available, which can be reviewed for experiential learning

All EQs suggest that a profound understanding of gender equality programming and its connection to gender norms is essential. It cannot be assumed that policies, strategies, and action plans can be comprehended and utilized without this fundamental understanding. It is equally crucial to guide programme and M&E staff across sectors to understand why the intersectionality of gender should be incorporated

into programme design through rigorous gender analysis. A tiered (related to the role and responsibilities), contextualized capacity building programme should be introduced from the start, linking work experience and the application of gender concepts, and engaging staff in critical examination of their own gender norms and biases. Such reflective spaces should not be a one-off but happen over time. This is necessary as about two-thirds of staff have a limited understanding of the concept of gender-transformative work and what it entails. A more holistic understanding of capacity building such as experiential capacity building, deep dives into the meaning of gender-transformative and application to one’s work-plan along with cultural understanding is likely to enable progress towards gender-transformative change. One way to kickstart gender-related capacity is to include gender expertise and values of the candidate while recruiting, especially for programme positions, so that both sectoral and gender expertise are available. A simplified and accessible understanding of the GAP and Gender Policy should be included in the training. Identifying gender champions should be included in the holistic capacity building.

Externally, UNICEF needs to continually seek opportunities to advocate the government and partners and identify gender champions. Civil society encompasses a wide range of organizations, and peer-to-peer learning among feminist and other organizations should be encouraged to contextualize

and build synergy for social norm change which is foundationally linked to gender equality results.

**Recommendation 2 (linked to conclusion 5): The BCO should elevate the meaningful involvement of adolescents, especially girls in the design and monitoring of programmes and create an enabling environment through allies such as adolescent boys, parents, family and institutions in the wider community ensuring that no one is left behind.**

**Priority:** Very high

**Timeframe:** Immediate to long-term

**Responsible units:** BCO management, gender specialists, programme staff

**Cost implications:** Moderate to plan and implement participatory programmes

The evaluation found that adolescents' participation does not extend to involvement in programme design, M&E and identified stereotypical gender values in education and skills development for girls, which reinforce traditional gender norms. To address this challenge, there is a need for bottom-up, community-led solutions informed by gender analysis, and programme designed with the active involvement of adolescents. The active involvement of adolescents should include planning, ensuring feedback loops to support the monitoring of the programmes. Include a costed multi-sectoral action plan for adolescents especially girls aligned with the available adolescent frameworks and make management accountable by having it as a standard item at all meetings. Continue to strengthen the country-based Advocacy and Communication Strategy around adolescents, particularly for adolescent girls.

An environment that supports them is critical, especially for girls who often lack decision-making power within families and communities, using socio-ecological, systemic and institutional strengthening approaches. It is important to engage both boys and girls in understanding gender stereotypes, as this is key to changing gender norms. Opportunities for non-stereotypical pathways for economic empowerment are also essential. Programmes do reach out to vulnerable adolescents and efforts must be strengthened to ensure that no one is left behind.

**Recommendation 3 (linked to conclusion 2): The BCO should generate and document evidence by integrating outcome level (including intermediate outcomes) gender indicators into staff reviews for greater accountability and country M&E systems.**

**Priority:** High

**Timeframe:** Immediate to medium-term


**Responsible units:** BCO management, gender specialists, programme staff, chief social policy, monitoring and evaluation


**Cost implications:** Minimal


Including sex-disaggregated data is the first step in monitoring gender equality. Gender outcomes (not just outputs) from various sectors if integrated into the country's reporting system and strategic indicators will strengthen the monitoring of gender-related indicators. Both programme and monitoring staff need to understand and align the GEM and GAP monitoring systems, including quality control and accountability. Utilize findings from GEM and gender tagging to plan, review and strengthen programmes to be more gender-responsive and transformative and link with the overall planning and M&E systems. This gendered data must be utilized for decision-making, and systems must be established to ensure this happens. It is important to clearly identify the roles and responsibilities of all staff members in this process. Encourage programme staff to include gender-related outputs and outcomes that can be assessed by line managers. Including gender-related indicators in performance reviews and making sectors accountable for gender-responsive or transformative indicators will ensure that gender equality is embedded in their work. The commitment of senior leadership for gender-responsive and transformative evidence generation will provide the necessary momentum for tracking and understanding progress on gender issues. This should translate into tracking and assessing the performance of the country programme on gender-responsive and transformative indicators.

**Recommendation 4 (linked to conclusion 4): The BCO should strengthen the gender architecture and develop systems for cross-sectoral integration of gender.**

 **Priority:** High

 **Timeframe:** Medium- to long-term

 **Responsible units:** BCO management, gender specialists, programme staff, in collaboration with the RO


 **Cost implications:** No cost implication - only efficient use of existing resources


The role of the gender specialist and gender focal point is advisory in the current system. To achieve the ambitions of the Gender Policy and GAP, it is key that gender specialists and gender focal points participate in regular sectoral meetings for planning, reviewing and monitoring programmes. This will ensure that gender issues are addressed systematically and intentionally. A robust functioning gender architecture, both specialist and sectoral (focal points), is essential for the ambitious goals of the Gender Policy and GAPs along with capacity, accountability, resources and relevant projects. The gender specialist should be present for all management meetings.

**Recommendation 5 (linked to conclusion 3): The BCO should strengthen coordination between UN agencies working on gender with different government ministries and departments.**

 **Priority:** High

 **Timeframe:** Immediate to medium-term

 **Responsible units:** BCO management, gender specialists, sector leads with UN partners


 **Cost implications:** No cost implication - only efficient use of existing resources


The BCO should establish a Gender Focus Task Force among UN agencies to share gender-related policy and other technical support with government departments and ministries so as not to duplicate and synergize efforts. The UN agencies should plan for joint support where the same government departments are being targeted for gender-related technical support.


In addition to specific recommendations for the BCO, there are broader recommendations that are particularly relevant to this country case study but require attention at UNICEF HQ level. These relate to elements that are part of the recommendations set out in the main evaluation report (at global level) and will be addressed in the corresponding management response.


**Recommendation 6 (linked to conclusion 1): UNICEF should develop simplified versions of the Gender Policy and GAP for wide dissemination across all levels of staff and partners, including how to use it with sectoral strategies.**

The Gender Policy and GAP should leverage communication design and various media to clarify gender and gender equality concepts. Providing guidance to relevant staff regarding the synergies of various strategies is fundamental for planning, designing, and monitoring gender equality in programmes.

 **Priority:** Very high





 **Timeframe:** Immediate to medium-term

 **Responsible units:** Gender team in the PG and RO gender team

 **Cost implications:** Minimal; this can be done in-house





**Recommendation 7 (linked to conclusion 1, 5): UNICEF should address concerns of contextualizing the Gender Policy and GAP for different political landscapes.**

The Gender Policy and GAP are ambitious but challenging to implement in countries where gender issues face backlash or where political will is compromised. Although these documents have a global scope and are meant to be adapted, support is needed to tailor gender issues to the realities faced in different contexts. Guidance should be provided to COs to overcome barriers and challenges in promoting gender equality in such contexts.

 <b>Priority:</b> Very High
 <b>Timeframe:</b> Immediate to medium-term
 <b>Responsible units:</b> Gender team in PG and RO gender team
 <b>Cost implications:</b> Minimal; this can be done in-house

**Recommendation 8 (linked to conclusion 2): UNICEF should address challenges in the M&E framework and strengthen outcome-based M&E to capture gender equality change.**

The Global M&E Framework requires a review to understand to what extent not just outputs, but outcomes are being monitored to capture change in social norms and gender equality practices.

 <b>Priority:</b> High
 <b>Timeframe:</b> Immediate to long-term
 <b>Responsible units:</b> Gender team in PG, Division of DAPM, with RO gender, planning, monitoring and evaluation teams
 <b>Cost implications:</b> This will require a review of the way indicators are captured and how to improve it



## List of annexes

The annexes below are included in a separate document.

- ▶ **Annex 1:** Evaluation Terms of Reference
- ▶ **Annex 2:** Case study Terms of Reference
- ▶ **Annex 3:** Distribution of respondents and list of persons interviewed
- ▶ **Annex 4:** List of documents reviewed for case study
- ▶ **Annex 5:** Methodology: Application of criteria to the evaluation design
- ▶ **Annex 6:** Methodology: Interviews and focus group discussion tools
- ▶ **Annex 7:** Evaluation matrix
- ▶ **Annex 8:** Evaluation Theory of Change
- ▶ **Annex 9:** Evaluation team composition and biography.

## Endnotes

- 1 Based on the triangulation of several sources of data, including this case study (as well as four other case studies, quantitative and qualitative data, a comparative study)
- 2 More details on the methodology to select case study countries can be found in the Inception Report
- 3 GII is a composite metric of gender inequality using three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. A low GII value indicates low inequality between women and men, and vice-versa
- 4 <https://data.humdata.org/dataset/population-and-housing-census-dataset/> (accessed July 15, 2024)
- 5 Country Programme Document for Bangladesh, UNICEF, 2021
- 6 Map Source <https://www.un.org/geospatial/content/bangladesh-0>
- 7 <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/ltd/n21/332/88/pdf/n2133288.pdf?token=prsnUpI6DuyeWF9wME&fe=true> (accessed July 15, 2024)
- 8 Country Programme Document for Bangladesh, UNICEF, 2021
- 9 Bangladesh: A Fifty-year Partnership in Development Achievements Result Brief, World Bank, 2023 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2023/11/20/bangladesh-a-fifty-year-partnership-in-development-achievements>
- 10 Bangladesh Country Office: Summary Narrative Report 2023. End of Year Results Summary Narrative 2023 Bangladesh - 5070
- 11 Gender Equality Brief, UN Women, April 2024
- 12 Gender | Data - World Bank Data
- 13 <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/bangladesh>
- 14 United Nations Development Programme, Human development report (2020)
- 15 <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/time-bangladesh-withdraw-cedaw-reservations-3563516> accessed Sept 20, 2024
- 16 <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GII>
- 17 UNICEF Bangladesh Country Office Gender Equality Strategy August 2021
- 18 <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/media/4526/file/Bangladesh%20Child%20Marriage%20report%202020.pdf.pdf>
- 19 The Situation of Children and Women in Bangladesh (SitAn) 2020, April 2020
- 20 UNICEF Bangladesh Country Office Gender Equality Strategy August 2021
- 21 <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/bangladesh>
- 22 Proportion of women subjected to physical and/or sexual violence in the last 12 months (%) | World Bank Gender Data Portal
- 23 Ibid
- 24 8th Five Year Plan (8FYP) July 2020-June 2025
- 25 Germanwatch, Global Climate Risk Index 2020
- 26 Country Programme Document 2021-PL26-Bangladesh\_CPD-EN-ODS
- 27 Country Programme Document 2021-PL26-Bangladesh\_CPD-EN-ODS
- 28 According to the Bangladesh Gender Equality Strategy, gender-transformative programming aspires to tackle the root causes of gender inequality and moves beyond self-improvement among girls and women to redress power dynamic and structures that serve to reinforce gender inequalities. (footnote 2, pg. 1)
- 29 For more details see Gender Equality Strategy for Bangladesh
- 30 "Extremely rapid socioeconomic and demographic changes and rapid population ageing resulting in a short remaining demographic window of opportunity" see CPD Bangladesh 2021 pg. 4 No. 13
- 31 National level staff are National Officers (NO) ranging from A to D with D being the most senior. Currently, the CO has a NOD and NOB staff dedicated to gender.
- 32 The Gender Evaluation Report UNICEF Bangladesh Country Programme of Cooperation 2017020 UNICEF ROSA, 4 February 2020
- 33 Country Gender Equality Strategy, Bangladesh 2021
- 34 UN SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard, United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2023
- 35 UNCT-SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard, Annual Progress Assessment Report and Action Plan, UNCT Country team in Bangladesh 2023
- 36 GAP Standards ([sharepoint.com](https://sharepoint.com))
- 37 Based on the triangulation of several sources of data, including this Case Study (as well as 4 other case studies, quantitative and qualitative data, a comparative study)
- 38 Drawing on a methodology described in: Mayne, John, 'Contribution Analysis. An approach to exploring cause and effect', ILAC Brief 16, 2008.; Mayne, John, 'Revisiting Contribution Analysis', Canadian Journal of Programme Evaluation, December 2019.
- 39 The process to develop the ToC is described in section 1.2
- 40 The "positive and negative, direct or indirect, primary and secondary, short, medium or long-term change in the lives of children and families produced by an intervention". UNICEF (2023). [UNICEF Evaluation of Impact Strategy and Action Framework 2022-2025](#).
- 41 Thematic analysis involves identifying and analyzing patterns or themes within qualitative data. It is a flexible and adaptable approach that can be used to analyze data from various sources, such as interviews, focus groups, and open-ended survey responses.
- 42 See UNEG Code of Conduct for UN Evaluation (2008) and WHO (2016) [Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Intervention Research on Violence Against Women](#) and UN Protocol on SEA.
- 43 An autonomous committee authorized by the United States Department of Health and Human Services.
- 44 Cyclone Remal Gender Update #1 1-26 May 2024
- 45 Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan (EPRP), UNICEF Chattogram Field Office, 2024
- 46 The evaluation team reviewed the evaluations on Mothers@Work, ECM and nutrition.
- 47 For a CO to obtain the point corresponding on this criterion, it is required that it has at least one output marked principal for gender, or in other words, one output with the gender equality marker 3 (GEM3) and the output narrative reported in RAM for this output must display a gender transformative result.
- 48 This is calculated considering all the activities tagged as gender activities at reporting phase under outputs tagged with Gender Marker 3 (gender as principal objective) at planning stage.

- 49 The Gender Evaluation Report UNICEF – Bangladesh Country Programme of Cooperation (CP) 2017-2020 UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, 2020 available here.
- 50 For this data, rolling work-plans were reviewed for each Goal Area.
- 51 UNICEF Bangladesh, Evaluation of the Mother@Work programme being implemented in the Ready-Made Garments Sector of Bangladesh, 2023
- 52 [Global Annual Results Report 2019 \(Goal Area 3\)](#)
- 53 Annual Gender Results Report for South Asia, 2018
- 54 HQ Gender Reporting, ROSA <https://sddirect.sharepoint.com/:w:/s/Projects-Programmes/ER5RSPOL1PtCtdKewZ06C2kBDyIO-1coltgiRTcGA2-HXjg?wdLOR=c6083166F-814B-1949-8C40-BA53F275401A>



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