

The Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS) statement and questions from the CSOs in Bangladesh on Voluntary National Review (VNR) 2025 of the Government of Bangladesh

Questions:

1. Out of the 250 indicators, baseline data is currently available for 215, updated data is available for 130, and 35 indicators have no data available. Furthermore, the available data is not disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, nature of work, migratory status, disability, geographic location, sexual orientation, gender identity or other characteristics. How will the government of Bangladesh ensure that the collection and collation of data on progress is appropriately disaggregated?
2. What modalities has the government of Bangladesh adopted to ensure meaningful participation of rights-holders, particularly the LNOB groups and those most affected by development challenges, in the elaboration of the VNR? What plans has the government taken to follow up on the VNR at national and divisional levels following the HLPF, and how will CSOs, including other major groups of stakeholders, be involved in this process? How does the government ensure evidence-based policymaking towards achieving the SDGs?
3. Does the government take into account the National Action Plan of Ministries/Divisions by Targets for the Implementation of SDGs and the relevant plans, such as the five-year plan and international commitments, in terms of size, share, and sensitivity during fiscal budgeting, and ensure that the expenditure is available for policy debate through civil society engagement and accountability mechanisms?

Bangladesh witnessed one of its historic events, the July-August 2024 monsoon revolution, a youth-led uprising amplified the frustrations of a generation demanding a fairer, more inclusive future. The movement led to the establishment of an Interim Government of Bangladesh, tasked with redefining governance, rebuilding trust, and restoring economic fairness. This is essentially a call for a whole-of-society approach, where government, civil society, youth, and the private sector collaborate to accelerate the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ensuring that no one is left behind.

In previous years, Bangladesh has experienced consistent economic growth, achieving an average GDP growth of 5%. However, in the current fiscal year 2024–25, it has declined to 3.97%, resulting in an increased poverty rate.

The tax-to-GDP ratio in Bangladesh stands at 7.5%, which is significantly lower than the Asia-Pacific average of 19.3%. Therefore, financing the SDGs presents another pressing challenge that continues to strain public services, notably the healthcare system, demanding urgent attention and investment. The left-behind group of people consistently remains behind.

Despite the challenges, some immense opportunities uphold hope. With a strong emphasis on the LNOB principle, the government embraced a participatory approach through actively engaging CSOs, NGOs, and local communities during the Voluntary National Review (VNR) in 2025. The Interim Government has initiated 16 reform commissions to address critical governance challenges, including enhancing public administration transparency, implementing anti-corruption measures, reforming the judiciary and electoral system, and promoting women's rights.

To achieve the transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda, the government is yet to address the issues of excluded and marginalised communities, such as persons with disabilities, people living in grassroots and remote settings, persons displaced due to migration or climate change issues, violation of rights of indigenous communities, and young people. In terms of the localisation of SDGs, the multisectoral approach has still not been addressed effectively.

Our overall recommendation to the government is as follows:

1. The VNR process must incorporate disaggregated data and qualitative insights to accurately represent the challenges and contributions of these communities. Accurate, disaggregated, and timely data are pivotal for monitoring SDG progress. CSOs have observed persistent data gaps, particularly concerning marginalised communities. While the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) has made improvements, collaboration between the SDG Trackers, BBS and CSOs can further enhance data quality and coverage. We recommend establishing a multi-stakeholder data platform that integrates governmental and non-governmental data sources.

2. To uphold the LNOB commitment, Bangladesh needs to focus on the approach to address the systemic inequalities faced by marginalised groups, including women, youth, children, persons with disabilities, gender diverse communities, indigenous communities, Dalits, climate-vulnerable populations, and the urban poor. Transparent and accountable governance structures are crucial for the effective implementation of the SDGs. Hence, CSOs advocate for the establishment of independent monitoring mechanisms, regular public reporting on SDG progress, and the incorporation of feedback from all stakeholders, including CSOs and marginalised communities.
3. Despite progress, gender disparities persist across sectors in Bangladesh. Efforts must also include monitoring anti-rights movements, reforming discriminatory laws through a uniform family code, revising the National Adolescent Health Strategy, and promoting gender equality in all aspects through adequate resourcing, effective inter-ministerial coordination, and robust monitoring mechanisms. Civil society urges for gender-responsive policies, protection from gender-based violence, inclusive decision-making, and the prioritisation of marginalised groups with sufficient resources. The government should withdraw its reservations to CEDAW Articles 2 and 16.1(c) to ensure gender equality. It should also repeal the special provision in the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017 that permits child marriage under certain conditions.
4. Vulnerability to climate change necessitates urgent action. CSOs advocate for the establishment of a transparent and accountable Loss and Damage fund to support climate-vulnerable communities. Additionally, integrating climate resilience into national development planning and effective implementation is imperative.
5. Recent political transitions have created opportunities for expanding civic space. However, concerns persist regarding the enactment of digital laws without comprehensive stakeholder consultation, which could potentially undermine the freedoms of expression and association. CSOs urge the government to engage in transparent and inclusive dialogues with CSOs, ensuring that legislative reforms uphold human rights standards and democratic principles.

Context and recommendation - zero draft

Disability inclusion

In Bangladesh, approximately 3% to 6% of the population has a disability. However, the National Survey on Persons with Disabilities 2021 reports 2.8%, while the Population and Housing Census 2022 shows only 1.43%.

In Bangladesh, the availability of disability desegregated data is a challenge, particularly for tracking SDGs progress.

Accessible Data Bank

- It is important to acknowledge that the lack of disaggregated data also contributes to the scarcity of available data. In fact, the SDG Asia-Pacific SDGs Report mentions, “the dimension of disability has the largest data gap of 92%.”
- Reporting to the High-Level Political Forum, countries should include disability disaggregated results for the SDG indicators in their Voluntary National Reviews.
- An SDG scorecard aligned with the SDG implementation action plan can be initiated to monitor and assess progress according to national priorities and targets. This database must be available in the SDG Tracker.

Infrastructure and Service Development

- Public service institutions must ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities by providing appropriate equipment and infrastructure, such as ramps, accessible WASH facilities, and elevators. Implementing the Bangladesh National Building Code, along with accessible public transport and spaces like parks, is essential.
- Medical support, including free medicine and facilities for women and children with disabilities, along with sign language training for healthcare staff to improve healthcare communication, is necessary.

Active Participation/ Engagement in Policy Making Process

- The UN CRPD emphasises that persons with disabilities and their organisations should be involved in all decision-making, ensuring their voices are included in planning and implementation.

Ensure Economic Empowerment Through Employment

- Employment opportunities for persons with disabilities should be prioritised by the state, focusing on economic participation, skills training, and SMEs.

- Assistive devices should be exempt from VAT, and bank loans and deposits for persons with disabilities should be tax-free and offered on favourable terms without collateral.

Strengthen Policy Action and Support System

- Inter-agency coordination, a responsive grievance redressal system, including a hotline, is crucial for service-providing agencies to ensure accountability.

Climate Education in Bangladesh: Progress and Recommendations

Bangladesh recognizes climate education as a critical tool for building long-term resilience and empowering future generations to address climate challenges. Significant progress has been made in integrating climate change into the national curriculum at both primary and secondary levels. Climate topics are now embedded in science, geography, and social studies, enhancing awareness among schoolchildren. Additionally, several universities and technical institutions offer specialized programs on climate science, disaster risk reduction, and renewable energy.

Non-formal education efforts, led by NGOs and community-based organizations, complement formal systems by raising awareness among vulnerable populations, particularly in climate-affected regions. Initiatives targeting women, youth, and indigenous communities have contributed to inclusive climate literacy.

By strengthening climate education systems, Bangladesh can accelerate its progress toward achieving SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), while enhancing national resilience to climate change.

Labor migration issues:

Anisur Rahman Khan (A Returnee Migrant)

Executive Director

International Migrant Alliance (IMA) Research Foundation,

Migration is a global and cross-cutting issue, migration should be migrant centric. Migrant workers have immense contributions to Bangladesh and the international context, such as contributing to Bangladesh's economic indicators, expanding and creating a labor market, playing a vital role in socio-economic development, Play the role of cultural Ambassador and civilizations, etc. In Bangladesh, Migrants and migration are directly contributing to

socio-economic development to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1-5, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16, 17 and others. Therefore, migrants and migration should be reflected in VNR.

Bangladesh being a GCM Champion Country, we, migrants, migrant families and communities, want to see a clear reflection of migrants in the VNR. Such as their contributions, their expectations, their perspective, commitments to national, regional and international organizations, their exploitation and suffering such as the highest migration cost in the world, mission service abroad, etc. We want to see the empowerment and participation of migrants on migration issues at every platform, from the grassroots to the United Nations, especially at the individual and organizational levels

Pervez Siddiqui

Films 4 Peace Foundation

Facilitating Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration – SDG 10.7

This statement was prepared by civil society organizations and grassroots groups working on labour migration, youth empowerment, and skills development in Bangladesh, with inputs from migrant communities.

Labour migration continues to play a central role in Bangladesh's development. As of 2024, remittances contributed over USD 26 billion, supporting poverty reduction, youth employment, and rural development. Migration has helped alleviate poverty, reduce unemployment, and expand income opportunities, especially for marginalized rural populations.

However, systemic concerns remain. BMET data shows that over 50% of migrant recruitment in the last six years was to Saudi Arabia, with an additional 10% to Oman. This overdependence on a single region—driven by informal chain migration and weak destination diversification—makes our labour market highly vulnerable to shocks.

Furthermore, migration remains supply-driven. 41% of workers are low-skilled, and only 1% are professionals. Lack of recognition of Bangladeshi skill certifications in destination countries continues to limit opportunities and keeps remittance income low.

We call for Strategic diversification of migration destinations and professions, led by government and private sector collaboration. International recognition of Bangladeshi training certifications to promote higher-skilled migration. Pre-decision awareness programs and ethical recruitment enforcement, especially for women and rural youth.

Migration must shift from survival-based deployment to a rights-based, skill-oriented, and choice-driven system. Civil society remains committed to working with the government to achieve SDG 10.7 through more equitable, safe, and sustainable migration governance.

Water, Satiation and Hygiene (SDG#6)

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[This year, the VNR report has not yet been prepared. Therefore, this information has been sourced from UNICEF and NGOs working on water, sanitation, and hygiene in Bangladesh]

According to the JMP (Joint Monitoring Program) 2022 report prepared jointly by UNICEF and WHO, 62% of the population in rural areas and 54% of the population in urban areas have access to drinking water that is free of contamination. This means that 38% of the population in rural areas and 44% of the population in urban areas have yet to meet SDG #6.1. Similarly, 32% of the population in rural areas and 20% of the population in urban areas are using safely managed sanitation, indicating that 68% of the rural population and 80% of the urban population in Bangladesh have yet to meet SDG #6.2. The data suggests that Bangladesh will not be able to meet the targets of SDG 6 unless accelerated initiatives are taken.

Accessible Data Bank:

There are two systematic and data bank and progress monitoring systems in place, one is MICS (Multiple Cluster Survey) conducted in a 5 year interval and JMP in every alternate year. There is no yearly national report through which the progress in WASH can be known. However, NGOs, government and UN prepare project-based reports which can be accessed on request.

Infrastructure and Service Development

Government and NGOs have given special attention to build climate resilient WASH services such as flood resilient toilets, water points, and faecal sludge management (FSM). T

Active Participation/ Engagement in Policy Making Process

The civil society organizations in Bangladesh are very active and vibrant. Meanwhile, the Sector Development Plan has been developed, the National Adaptation Plan has been finalized, and the Safe Water Supply and Sanitation Policy is currently under review. Civil society organizations in Bangladesh are actively engaged in the policymaking process.

Ensure Economic Empowerment Through Employment

The government is promoting the sanitation business. Employment and business opportunities in the water sector are also growing. The engagement of the private sector and business community is very high. Previously, the fully government-led water sector contributed 100% of rural water supply; now, it accounts for only 10%, with the remaining 90% provided by the private sector. This contribution from the private sector has resulted in 98% of the population having access to water.

Strengthen Policy Action and Support System:

There are a good number of policies in Bangladesh, but there is a significant gap in translating these policies into action. The lack of knowledge and skills to implement the policies is the main reason for this issue. Additionally, the constitutional government has been removed from power, creating a void in the power structure and slowing down the rate of implementation. One adviser is now in charge of several ministries, and consequently, the necessary attention is lacking in these sectors.

Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is home to over 54 Indigenous communities who speak more than 35 distinct languages. According to the 2022 census, approximately 1,650,159 Indigenous people live in the country, constituting around 1% of the total population. Bangladesh has not adopted the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and the economic and political rights of the country's indigenous peoples remain ignored.

Due to limited official data, the following insights are drawn from three key reports conducted by UNDP/CHTDF, Oxfam UK, and the Indigenous Navigator Factsheet Bangladesh, focusing on Indigenous populations in both the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and the plains regions:

Poverty and Income:

Indigenous communities experience poverty at rates significantly higher than the national average—65% in the CHT and over 80% in the plains. Average incomes are also much lower, standing at 26% of the national average in the CHT and 41% in the plains.

Livelihoods:

A vast majority depend on agriculture—about 80% in the plains and 72% in the CHT. Only 3% of Indigenous people in the CHT and less than 1% in the plains are employed in salaried jobs or operate businesses.

Land Rights and Ownership:

Around 90% of Indigenous households in the CHT hold some form of land entitlement, with a median ownership of 3.2 acres, mostly hilly terrain. However, land disputes are widespread; nearly everyone faces challenges related to land recognition, and 25% have lost land over the past 30 years.

In contrast, two-thirds of Indigenous households in the plains are effectively landless. Certain groups such as the Santals, Mahato, and Pahan face even greater restrictions on land access.

Regional Disparities:

Indigenous communities in the northern, southern, and western parts of the plains are among the most marginalized and impoverished.

Access to Financial Services:

Access to credit remains limited—54% in the CHT and 62% in the plains. Among these, around 10% rely on informal moneylenders.

Government Support and Awareness:

Awareness of the Special Affairs Division Fund (now called Development Assistance for Special Areas—excluding CHT) is very low, with only 5% of plains Indigenous people aware of its existence.

Civil Society Engagement:

Despite a strong presence of NGOs in the plains, very few Indigenous communities are meaningfully included in NGO-led programs or initiatives.

The Situation of Dalits in Bangladesh:

Background:

Bangladesh is home to an estimated 6.5 million Dalits, a population subjected to systemic exclusion, social stigma, and economic marginalization rooted in caste-based discrimination, or discrimination based on work and descent (DWD). Despite constitutional commitments to equality, Dalits remain largely absent from national policy and development frameworks, with their realities obscured by the lack of disaggregated data and political will. There exists no national action plan, legal and institutional mechanism to systematically address caste-based discrimination and ensure their development needs.

Dalits are concentrated in segregated settlements with inadequate access to housing, water, sanitation, and electricity; 56% of Dalit households are landless, and their livelihoods are confined to caste-based occupations such as sanitation, leatherwork, tea plantation, pig rearing, and manual scavenging—often in unsafe, underpaid, and degrading conditions. These intergenerational jobs are sustained by a deeply entrenched belief in “purity and pollution,” which also bars Dalits from entering public places, accessing equal services, or participating in public life.

Dalit children face high levels of educational exclusion: less than 30% attend school, 80% face discrimination in admission, and a third experience verbal or physical abuse from teachers or peers. Dalit women and girls are doubly marginalized, regularly exposed to sexual violence, abduction, forced marriage, and religious conversion, with little access to protection mechanisms as well as limited access to expose themselves to development interventions.

Recommendations:

1. Pass the Anti-Discrimination Bill with clear legal provisions that recognize and criminalize caste-based discrimination, aligned with international human rights standards.
2. Establish a National Dalit Commission as a statutory body with the authority to monitor rights violations, oversee development policies, and ensure Dalit representation in public institutions.
3. Mandate the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and relevant agencies to collect and publish caste-disaggregated data across all national surveys, censuses, and SDG monitoring systems.

4. Adopt a National Policy and Action Plan for Dalit Inclusion with measurable targets and a dedicated implementation budget.
5. Introduce affirmative action measures, including reservation quotas for Dalits in government jobs, public universities, and scholarships.
6. Ensure basic services in Dalit settlements by allocating funds for piped water, climate-resilient housing, modern sanitation, and electrification.
7. Create legal aid centers and crisis response mechanisms specifically for Dalit women and girls facing violence, abuse, or discrimination.
8. Guarantee political participation of Dalits by establishing reserved seats or proportional representation in local government and national policymaking bodies.
9. Include the term "Dalit" explicitly in all national budget lines and introduce targeted budgetary allocations for Dalit-focused development programs.
10. Engage Dalit civil society, youth, and women's groups meaningfully in SDG consultations, VNR processes, and policy dialogues at all levels.

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Women's Rights & Their Future Impact in Modern Bangladesh

Bangladesh has made notable strides in advancing women's rights, yet significant challenges persist. As of 2023, women hold 20.86% of seats in the national parliament, reflecting ongoing efforts toward political inclusion. However, societal biases remain deeply entrenched; over 99% of Bangladeshis harbor at least one bias against women, with 69% believing men make better political leaders.

Violence against women is a pervasive issue. A 2024 survey revealed that 70% of women have experienced some form of intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetime, with 41% reporting such experiences in the past year. Despite existing laws, enforcement remains inconsistent, and many survivors do not seek help due to societal stigma and lack of awareness about support services.

Economically, women's participation in the labor force stands at 42.68%, significantly lower than men's 82.4% . Women are often confined to low-paying, informal sectors, and only 13% own land. Recognizing unpaid domestic work and promoting shared household responsibilities are crucial steps toward economic empowerment.

Education remains a critical area for improvement. While there have been gains in girls' education, barriers such as early marriage and poverty continue to limit opportunities, particularly in rural areas . Investing in girls' education, especially in STEM fields, can equip them for better economic prospects.

Looking ahead, addressing these challenges is vital for Bangladesh's development. Empowering women through consistent law enforcement, economic inclusion, educational opportunities, and societal attitude shifts can lead to a more equitable and prosperous society. Achieving gender equality is not only a matter of justice but also a catalyst for national progress.

Gender equality remains severely off track, with adolescent girls facing disproportionate barriers. Child marriage, and limited SRHR access persist. Digital exclusion, online violence, and the burden of unpaid care work further hinder girls' participation. After the massive change in the politics of Bangladesh, the Interim Government formed a reform commission for women affairs. The Women's Affairs Reforms Commission submitted its report to chief adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus on April 19, recommending measures for elimination of discrimination against women and attainment of equality with men. Although the commission's overall aims are admirable, several of its recommendations appear out of sync with Bangladesh's socio-economic and religious context that made them controversial and difficult to implement. Perhaps the most divisive recommendation in the report is the call for a uniform family code to ensure equal rights for women in marriage, divorce, guardianship and inheritance across all religious communities. As a rationale for this proposed code, the commission briefly asserted that religious doctrines are inherently discriminatory and must be amended. Since the submission of the report, religious political parties have voiced strong opposition. A strong Anti Rights Movement started against this reformation commission's recommendations and they bullied the members of the commission. Civil society members expressed disappointment over the interim government's silence following criticism and attacks on the Women's Affairs Reform Commission after it submitted its report.

Recommendations:

- Governments, regional organizations, intergovernmental agencies, and civil society must actively counter attempts to reverse progress on gender equality, and safeguard international and regional conventions, agreements, frameworks, and laws that affirm equal rights and dignity for all.
- Governments should give particular attention to safeguarding the rights and dignity of girls and women as well as enhancing women's equal access to land and productive resources.

- The Bangladesh Government should promote gender transformative education including comprehensive sexuality education, in both formal and non formal settings.
- Bangladesh Government should amend the discriminatory laws and policies that hinder equal rights, especially for the land and resource distribution. Also, the special clause (“special circumstances” under section 19) of Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2017 (CMRA) should be amended.
- Bangladesh Governments should implement strategies to address sociocultural norms and stereotypes underpinning gender inequalities, employing inclusive, gender transformative approaches that engage men and boys, community and religious leaders and other influencers.
- Governments should strengthen and fund the collection and use of gender-sensitive data. Also, Bangladesh Government should work more closely with the civil society and community for accelerating the civic engagement.

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Advancing SDG 4 Through Public Libraries in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, public libraries hold huge potential for promoting Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote learning opportunities at all ages. They are community-based learning spaces and hence popularly known as the ‘people’s university’, open to serve any person irrespective of age or gender, education or no education, background or no background. According to the Department of Public Libraries, there are 56 government district public libraries across the country, which are essential in narrowing the information gap and promoting lifelong learning where economic and regional disparities restrict educational opportunities. This, therefore, gives these institutions an opening to contribute to the realization of national education goals through providing free access to knowledge, resources for building skills, and community programs.

Libraries can become spaces that are tech-savvy and welcoming to all. Digital libraries and assistive technologies like Braille materials, audio books, and sign language items can make fair access for all, especially for people with differences and countryside communities. Also, libraries can join hands with

schools, NGOs, and local groups for teaching climate lessons, health awareness and digital literacy.

However, the public libraries face big challenges. Most of them are very much outdated technologically, with poor internet access and insufficient digital tools. Besides, the library personnel often do not have training or the capacity to provide modern and inclusive services. In fact, without investment in both infrastructure and human resources, libraries will never realize their potential.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Youths in Bangladesh

According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2022, there are 45.9 million of the population aged between 15-29 years, covering approximately 27.82% of the entire population of the country. Majority of these young people are going through their adolescent period, experiencing physical and mental changes, without any proper information to tackle the situation. The social stigma associated and misconception on SRH are subjected to labelling, shame, disapproval and discrimination, especially for adolescents and youths. Furthermore, without proper guidance due to taboo and stigma associated with sexual and reproductive changes during adolescence, most of the information sourced by adolescents are misguided and unreliable, such as peers, pornography, etc. Such information not only navigates them to have an unrealistic idea about femininity or masculinity but also draws them back from receiving scientific explanations which empowers them to make informed decisions about physical and mental health.

Introducing Comprehensive Sexual Education at Secondary School Level is crucial to educate adolescents on gender-sensitivity, acceptance about diversity and importance of consent; with the objective to build a healthy, informed and empowered young population. Although, aiming to provide-evidence-based, scientific and non-judgmental information, the government of Bangladesh in 2023 has incorporated a progressive curriculum addressing adolescents' period, gender, sexuality, gender diversity, etc., however, a major backlash from the conservatives right-wings has forced to revise the text book by removing specific chapters. This action not only deprived the youths to have proper knowledge but also took the country moving backwards towards concealing the sensitive yet important issues

that are associated with the overall health and well-being of the one-fifth of population of the nation.

Recommendations:

1. Revise the National Adolescent Health Strategy to ensure sexual and reproductive health services are added, including information, counseling, and contraceptive methods. Continue taking measures to ensure content on SRHR, available support services, sexual harassment, gender-based violence, cybercrime, child marriage, critical reasoning, and negotiation skills are included in school curriculum.
2. Address intersectional vulnerabilities by tailoring SRHR programs for minorities, people with disabilities, and climate-affected populations.
3. Integrate comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) into national curricula to empower youth with accurate, age-appropriate information.
4. Provide a clear, inclusive, and dignified definition of 'Hijra gender' in the law, and also clarify the distinction between 'intersex', 'transgender,' and other gender identities by enacting legislation that protects and promotes the fundamental rights of all individuals with diverse gender identities.
5. Ratify the CEDAW Article 2 and 16.1(c), to enshrine gender equality in marriage and domestic legislations, along with the constitution.
6. Criminalize marital rape, to recognize and enforce the equal rights of women in family and married life.
7. Revoke the 'special provision', which permits child marriage in special contexts with the consent of parents or guardians in conjunction with a magistrate, from the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017, thus removing the contradictory clause and accelerating the elimination of child marriage.

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3. Does the government take into account the National Action Plan of Ministries/Divisions by Targets for the Implementation of SDGs and the relevant plans, such as the five-year plan and international commitments, in terms of size, share, and sensitivity during fiscal budgeting, and ensure that the expenditure is available for policy debate through civil society engagement? What accountability mechanisms have been established to progressively secure, respect, protect, and fulfil human rights for all?

Bangladesh witnessed one of its historic events, the July-August 2024 monsoon revolution, a youth-led uprising amplified the frustrations of a generation demanding a fairer, more inclusive future. The movement led to the establishment of an Interim Government of Bangladesh, tasked with redefining governance, rebuilding trust, and restoring economic fairness. This is essentially a call for a whole-of-society approach, where government, civil society, youth, and the private sector collaborate to accelerate the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ensuring that no one is left behind.

In previous years, Bangladesh has experienced consistent economic growth, achieving an average GDP growth of 5%. However, in the current fiscal year 2024–25, it has declined to 3.97%, resulting in an increased poverty rate. In 2024, poverty rates in Bangladesh rose compared to 2022, with the percentage of poor households increasing from 24.73% to 26.43%. Extreme poverty has escalated in both urban and rural areas. The World Bank projects that the national poverty rate will reach 22.9% by 2025.

The tax-to-GDP ratio in Bangladesh stands at 7.5%, which is significantly lower than the Asia-Pacific average of 19.3%. Therefore, financing the SDGs presents another pressing challenge that continues to strain public services, notably the healthcare system, demanding urgent attention and investment. The left-behind group of people consistently remains behind.

Despite the challenges, some immense opportunities uphold hope. With a strong emphasis on the LNOB principle, the government, for the first time, embraced a participatory approach through actively engaging CSOs, NGOs, and local communities during the Voluntary National Review (VNR) in 2025. The Interim Government has initiated 16 reform commissions to address critical governance challenges, including enhancing public administration transparency, implementing anti-corruption measures, reforming the judiciary and electoral system, and promoting women's rights.

The Women's Affairs Reforms Commission submitted its report to chief adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus in April 2025, recommending measures for elimination of discrimination against women and attainment of equality with men. Perhaps the most divisive recommendation in the report is the call for a uniform family code to ensure equal rights for women in marriage, divorce, guardianship and inheritance across all religious communities. As a rationale for this proposed code, the commission briefly asserted that religious doctrines are inherently discriminatory and must be amended. Since the submission of the report, religious political parties have voiced strong opposition. A strong Anti Rights Movement started against this reformation commission's recommendations. Civil society members expressed disappointment over the interim government's silence following criticism, bully and attacks on the Women's Affairs Reform Commission after it submitted its report.

To achieve the transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda, the government is yet to address the issues of excluded and marginalised communities, such as persons with disabilities, people living in grassroots and remote settings, persons displaced due to migration or climate change issues, violation of rights of indigenous communities, and young people. In terms of the localisation of SDGs, the multisectoral approach has still not been addressed effectively.

Our overall recommendation to the government is as follows:

6. The VNR process must incorporate disaggregated data and qualitative insights to accurately represent the challenges and contributions of these communities. Accurate, disaggregated, and timely data are pivotal for monitoring SDG progress. CSOs have observed persistent data gaps, particularly concerning marginalised communities. While the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) has made improvements, collaboration between the SDG Trackers, BBS and CSOs can further enhance data quality and coverage. We recommend establishing a multi-stakeholder data platform that integrates governmental and non-governmental data sources. Also SDG Trackers should be functional.
7. To uphold the LNOB commitment, Bangladesh needs to focus on the approach to address the systemic inequalities faced by marginalised groups, including women, youth, children, persons with disabilities, gender diverse communities indigenous communities, Dalits, climate-vulnerable populations, and the urban poor. Transparent and accountable governance structures are crucial for the effective implementation of the SDGs. Hence, CSOs advocate for the establishment of independent monitoring mechanisms, regular public reporting on SDG progress, and the incorporation of feedback from all stakeholders, including CSOs and marginalised communities.
8. Despite progress, gender disparities persist in various sectors. Government should Ratify the CEDAW Article 2 and 16.1(c), to enshrine gender equality in marriage and domestic legislations, along with the constitution.

Government should revoke the 'special provision', which permits child marriage in special contexts with the consent of parents or guardians in conjunction with a magistrate, from the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017. Government should accelerating the elimination of child marriage by removing this contradictory clause of CMRA2017.

The Bangladesh government should monitor and control the anti-rights movement. Also, Government can promote gender equality by amending the discriminatory laws, especially uniform family code to ensure equal rights for women in marriage, divorce, guardianship and inheritance across all religious communities. CSOs emphasise the need for gender-responsive policies, protection against gender-based violence, and the promotion of women's

participation in decision-making processes. Furthermore, the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, gender diverse communities and other marginalised groups must be prioritised with appropriate resource and operation framework.

9. Vulnerability to climate change necessitates urgent action. CSOs advocate for the establishment of a transparent and accountable Loss and Damage fund to support climate-vulnerable communities. Additionally, integrating climate resilience into national development planning is imperative.
10. Recent political transitions have created opportunities for expanding civic space. However, concerns persist regarding the enactment of digital laws without comprehensive stakeholder consultation, which could potentially undermine the freedoms of expression and association. CSOs urge the government to engage in transparent and inclusive dialogues with CSOs, ensuring that legislative reforms uphold human rights standards and democratic principles.
11. Revise the National Adolescent Health Strategy to ensure sexual and reproductive health services are added, including information, counseling, and contraceptive methods. Continue taking measures to ensure content on SRHR, available support services, sexual harassment, gender-based violence, cybercrime, child marriage, critical reasoning, and negotiation skills are included in school curriculum.
12. Due to the ongoing political turmoil, the investment on the business and production have dropped significantly which is resulting in the rise of unemployment. Special attention is needed to accelerate economic growth and create an enabling environment for investment.
13. There is no visible attention as well as involvement of the CSOs to achieve the targets of SDG#14. Accelerated effort and attention is needed in this area.
14. Support and initiate more young people and women-focused entrepreneurship programmes to empower young people in all their diversities to live an independent life (through interest-free loan support, free scholarships and education courses on small business management for those who want to create their own income).