



#BalanceforBetter

WHY IWD STILL MATTERS IN 2019

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Each year, International Women's Day (IWD) thematically focuses a call to action while also celebrating the social, cultural, political and economic achievements of women. This year's theme – "better the balance, better the world" – picks up after 2018's #TimeIsNow to drive forward the effort for change through gender balance.

While March 8 itself is a day of celebration, the call to action propels the beginning of a year-long campaign targeting the theme. Despite the many glass ceilings women shatter each year, the relevance to strive for gender equality remains a continuous process. As a result, a new theme is chosen each year to centre efforts and provide direction to women's

movements.

Why is a day needed to celebrate women and mark the beginning of a new thematic campaign? Let's explore this year's theme to understand where we stand in terms of women's equality in today's world. Gender balance refers to the proportionate participation of men and women, making it an integral part of achieving gender equality by creating access for the gender that is underrepresented. The argument behind the theme is that economies and communities perform better when they are gender-balanced. Thus, gender balance isn't just about women.

From making the country proud in sporting events to dominating the sky as peacekeeping contingents, Bangladeshi women have been making their presence

felt across multiple fields. The country is headed by a female Prime Minister, the first female Speaker now presides over the Bangladeshi parliament, and a significant portion of the parliament consists of female members. There has been a growing presence of women in law enforcement and combined military forces. The number of female entrepreneurs and leadership roles in business and commerce has been increasing. Women continue to form the greater segment of the RMG workforce in the country, contributing significantly to the economy through their hard work.

While these are astounding feats, it is important to remember that women have surmounted innumerable cultural and social barriers to arrive at this status. Misogyny remains rampant across all

strata of society, embedded in the very fabric of the society. A large number of cases of violence against women are tallied each year. These systematic forms of discrimination and exclusion create multiple obstacles to women's participation in public life.

A step to mitigating these barriers is increasing women's participation through actively promoting gender balance. Last year, IWD's campaign urged women to stand up for their rights. This year, the struggle for equality will continue through deliberate actions that develop access for women so there is balance in all aspects of our societies for women and men alike.

Nooha Sabanta Maula is currently exploring a career in the development sector. Send her your thoughts to noohamaula@gmail.com

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