



Men must also engage as active allies in the fight for gender equality.

PHOTO: TASLIMA AKHTER

The costs and consequences of biases against women



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Nine out of 10 people in the world hold fundamental biases against women that span across regions, income levels, and cultures, according to the recently released UN Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI) by the UN Development Programme.

The sobering statistics in the index provide critical insights into the state of gender equality worldwide and demand our immediate attention. In Bangladesh, the index also reveals challenging statistics. Despite commendable strides towards gender equality in recent decades, entrenched discriminatory beliefs and practices continue to stifle women's access to resources and opportunities. This results in unequal access to education and jobs, limited participation in decision-making, and a persistent gender wage gap.

Bangladesh finds itself at a critical juncture, where the need for transformative action to challenge these norms has never been more pressing. So how can we redefine gender-biased norms and achieve true equality in Bangladesh?

The persistence of gender bias

Bangladesh has demonstrated a firm commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment, evidenced by its gender-responsive policies and budgetary allocations. Indeed, gender equality is firmly cemented in the constitution of Bangladesh. Yet, disparities persist.

Women spend eight times more time on unpaid care work than men and, according to the Labour Force Survey 2022, only 42 percent of working-age women participate in the labour force, often earning less than men, while only 13 percent of women own land.

Disturbingly, as per BBS data, 54 percent of women have experienced physical and sexual abuse at least once in their lifetime, and according to a recent study by Dhaka University and UNFPA, the preference for a son is still prevalent among parents in Bangladesh, with some choosing to undergo sex-selective abortion.

why does gender discrimination persist despite efforts by the government and other stakeholders? The crux of the issue seems to rest on deep-rooted social norms and biases that policies alone cannot dismantle. These norms need a fundamental shift, starting with attitudes.

The GSNI highlights a troubling reality. Over 99 percent of people in Bangladesh hold at least one bias against women, with 69 percent believing that men make better political leaders and 88 percent thinking that men are more capable business executives and are deserving of greater job opportunities. Even more concerning, over 99 percent of women hold biases against their own norms is therefore essential not

gender, perpetuating the very norms

that hold them back. Understanding the root causes of gender bias

At the heart of gender bias in Bangladesh lie norms undervaluing women's rights and capabilities. The roots of these are complex and intertwined with historical, cultural, social, and economic factors. Patriarchal norms still dictate men as primary decision-makers and breadwinners, while relegating women to subordinate roles. Child marriage persists, limiting girls' access to education and economic opportunities, reinforcing traditional gender roles.

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labour market and social norms discouraging women's participation contribute to and perpetuate this inequality. Despite improved education access, women's economic prospects remain limited due to perceptions limiting their involvement in the public sphere. Balancing family and work is a challenge, which hinders economic independence. Political corporate leadership in Bangladesh remains male-dominated, limiting women's influence.

The economic and political case for gender equality

The GSNI highlights the close link between gender norms and other development indicators such as health outcomes and environmental sustainability. Challenging these

only for gender equality but also for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

For Bangladesh to prosper economically and politically, embracing gender equality is nonnegotiable. The McKinsey Global Institute pinpointed a staggering \$28 trillion potential boost to the global GDP by 2025 if women played an identical role in the economy to

Notably, countries with women at the political helm tend to prioritise crucial public goods - like education and infrastructure - championing just immediate progress but fostering profound social transformation. An illustrative case is the US Congress, where female legislators consistently eclipse their male peers in legislative productivity and securing resources for their constituencies. For Bangladesh, the path is clear: investing in women is not just ethically right, it is an economic and political imperative.

Addressing discriminatory social

Genuine progress requires us to challenge entrenched beliefs and empower women to thrive as equal partners in Bangladesh's development journey and progress. Addressing these deep-seated norms requires a coordinated and whole-of-society approach. To create lasting change, we must adopt a proactive strategy that begins with nurturing the minds of future generations through gendersensitive education that fosters critical thinking and reshapes societal perceptions. Moreover, engaging with local communities grassroots organisations, including religious groups, is crucial to cultivate progressive attitudes towards women's rights. Social media can be a potent tool to challenge stereotypes and biases, amplifying women's voices, and advocating for their rights.

But advocacy alone won't cut it. We must enforce existing laws and close legal loopholes. Sensitising law enforcement about gender issues is essential for effective implementation.

Promoting women in leadership and ensuring equal pay is vital. Policy reforms and parental leave incentives can alleviate the unpaid care burden on women, while encouraging men to share responsibilities. Innovative and inclusive policy solutions tailored to diverse women's needs must be developed and adequately financed.

Women cannot achieve all this alone; men must also engage as active allies in the fight for gender equality. Challenging discriminatory beliefs benefits everyone, as traditional expectations of masculinity often challenge men's own well-being. Promoting positive masculinity and debunking traditional stereotypes will foster an environment where men can actively empower women.

The 2023 GSNI is a call to action an opportunity for Bangladesh to continue evolving towards a brighter, more equitable future. Together, we can build a society where every individual, regardless of gender, can contribute to making Bangladesh and the world a better place for future generations.

I am. We are.



Dr Rubana Huq is vice-chancellor of Asian University for Women.

RUBANA HUQ

I am a wall where many wars have as "consensual" while Hermoso is ended; many conversations have drenched my texture, where many secrets have made it in through the cracks and dried up. I am a wall with many stories. My chapters are inked with revenge, abuse, and bias. I have a line drawn all around me, so that I remain five feet of concrete and serve my limited purpose. I cannot take a step or bend to breathe. The protective line around my existence, my Lakshmana rekha, is not just myth; it's a constant metaphorical reminder of limits and rules set for me.

I am Rassundari Devi, who learned to read and write at the age of 26, wanting to respond to the letters from my son. I stole a sheet from my husband's copy of *Chaitanya* Bhagavata, hid it in the kitchen, compared the palm leaves on which my son had practised handwriting, compared the letters with the sheet, and finally learned the language. I wrote on the walls of my kitchen and then published my story in 1876: Amar Jibon. Don't wash my walls, ever. The akshara, the scratches, the scribbles are all mine.

I am Draupadi from the Mahabharata, disrobed in an open court as a result of being offered as a wager in a dice game; I am Joan of Arc, dying from the "purifying flames." I am the Shrew, the Katherine of The Taming of the Shrew, who was once rich, witty, and lashed out at suitors. I was berated for my temper and tongue, diminished to being an obedient wife after being subjected to hunger and thirst. I now call the sun the moon, if my husband desires. I accept this as I realise that I am in a status quo of an identity which defines who I have become. I no longer need to be Tamed.

I am Wisława Szymborska, a Polish poet, who only wrote "I don't know" to respond to every question being asked. I did not know my own name, my age, why I dug the burrow, how long I had been hiding, why I bit my finger, and whether my village existed or not. I just knew that I was a mother and I knew my children. My poem "Vietnam" was about me being only a mother, a childbearing machine.

I am Cecelia Payne, the English scientist who wasn't given a degree by to migrate to the US to get my first PhD in Astronomy from Radcliffe. However, my dissertation was reviewed and I was dissuaded from concluding that the composition of stars was predominantly of hydrogen and helium, as that contradicted the consensus of male astronomers. Later on, I won my battle as I was acknowledged by the same astronomer, Russell. Nevertheless, instead of me, he is often credited for the thesis.

I am Ana Orantes. I was burned to death by my ex-husband in 1997 after I had appeared on a television show and described decades of abuse by him. After my death, I thought that the Machista was done for. But it was only the other day that I ended up being the kiss that Rubiales forced onto Hermoso (of Spain women's national football team) to celebrate "his" win. Till date, I am being claimed

sticking to #SeAcabo ("It's over"). Is it

really over for Spain? I also go by the name of enfranchisement. It was only in 1971 that the Swiss women won me, the right to vote, in federal elections; it was only in 1918 that Canada passed a legislation allowing suffrage to female citizens, yet excluding Asian-Canadian and Aboriginal women, who only won the right to vote in the 1940s and 1960s, respectively. Women in Greece started to vote from 1952. Japanese women won the right to vote in 1945; French women won me in a well-bred woman. I also caused 1944 while in the US, I was celebrated internal bleeding and indigestion. I

KNOT SO TRUE where self-determination is a lost cause for women, who are still trying to make it to lands which promise them better. I am Populism that allowed Duterte and Bolsnaero to incorporate gibes about rape in their political rant. I allowed Salvini, the prominent figure in the Italian government, to use sexual slurs to insult female politicians.

I am the four pairs of shorts that the four female footballers of Tentultala Super Queen Football Academy in Khulna got beaten up for. Apparently, I am forbidden. Even with long, black stockings coming all the way up to their thighs, I am not supposed to be worn by the sportswomen. So far, the athletes have been given assurance of safety measures, while I hang to dry on their laundry lines at home. After all, with all the threats of acid attacks on the footballers, I should not be risked being worn, right? After all, I am also the corset, which caused breathing difficulties for women in the Victorian era, but was a sign of



ARTWORK: MANAN MORSHED

by all the women in 1920 through the am the crinoline, made of steel hoops 19th amendment to its constitution.

I am the prison that hosted women who needed permission to open bank accounts, rent apartments, start businesses, apply for passports, and last but not the least, seek permission to leave me even when have gradually changed; my iron bars have now been relatively weakened by the Crown Prince's vision to build a modern economy where women make up a substantial percentage of the workforce. I am now warming up to Justin Bieber, BLACKPINK, and Bruno Mars headlining while humans mingle freely in public spaces. Yet, I am still the partitions which divide workplaces for men and women. When, indeed, will they finally issue another fatwa declaring me illegal? I truly can't wait for my own demise.

I am the border that is supposed to be impervious to eager feet, yearning to cross over to freedom. I have gone through years of starvation, war, and terror that ultimately culminated to a new peak in August 2021 as the Taliban took power. Two-thirds of those who live within my territory depend on humanitarian assistance,

to compliment the puffed shapes of the women's gowns, and caused deaths to thousands of women while their dresses caught fire. Those who disallowed me then were known as "loose women."

I am Apathy, too, who impacts the sentence was over. I used to be every UN General Assembly, and Cambridge University, which led me the place where women couldn't makes SDG 5 look limp. And yet, I drive for the longest time. Things am the woman who is expected to know everything, from juta shelai to Chandipath.

So, stop asking me what my family situation is every time I apply for a job; stop asking me if there's anything in my life that will affect my personal situation in the next year-and-a-half; stop asking me during an interview if I am averse to a high-pressure role, because I am going to rise above your boundaries and not be etched as an expected tragedy in the memories of all the newsrooms in the world.

Today, I am Mahsa Amini, the 22-year-old who died a little over a year ago in police custody for not complying with the dress code in force for women in Iran. I don't want the bland. I want brighter and shorter. Today's no more about wearing just the blacks, browns, or greys.

Take your hands off my body, State. That's not too much to expect, right?

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh



Office of the Executive Engineer **Education Engineering Department** Lakshmipur District

Invitation for e-Tender (IFT)

Dt: 13/09/2023

Tender Notice No. e-GP/EED/Lakshmi/2023-2024/01,

Ш	The e-I	The e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP system Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of following works:						
	SI	Package No.	Tender	Name of tender	Type	Tender document last	Tender closing &	
Ш	No.		ID No.		method	selling/downloading	opening	
						(date & time)	(date & time)	
	01.	Rev/Fur/SHED/	868225	Manufacturing and supplying of furniture at Kadir	NCT, LTM	Date: 02.10.2023	Date 03.10.2023	
Ш		2023-24/G01		Panditer Hat High School under Kamalnagar		Time: 12:00pm	Time: 12:00pm	
				Upazila in Laksmipur District.				
	02.	Rev/Fur/SHED/	868226	Manufacturing and supplying of furniture at	NCT, LTM	Date: 02.10.2023	Date 03.10.2023	
Ш		2023-24/G02		Joypura S. R. M. S. High School and College		Time: 12:00pm	Time: 12:00pm	
				under Ramganj Upazila in Lakshmipur District.		-		
	03.	Rev/Fur/SHED/	868227	Manufacturing and supplying of furniture at Ziaul	NCT, LTM	Date: 02.10.2023	Date 03.10.2023	
Ш		2023-24/G03		Hoque High School and College under Ramganj		Time: 12:00pm	Time: 12:00pm	
				Upazila in Lakshmipur District.		·		
	04.	Rev/Fur/SHED/	868229	Manufacturing and supplying of furniture at Abdul	NCT, LTM	Date: 02.10.2023	Date 03.10.2023	
		2023-24/G04		Hadi College under Ramgati Upazila in		Time: 12:00pm	Time: 12:00pm	
				Lakshmipur District.				
	05.	Rev/Fur/SHED/	868230	Manufacturing and supplying of furniture at K. S.	NCT, LTM	Date: 02.10.2023	Date 03.10.2023	
		2023-24/G05		Public High School under Rajpur Upazila in		Time: 12:00pm	Time: 12:00pm	
				Lakshmipur District.		·		

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender Proposal will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit, e-Tender registration in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) is required. The fees for last selling/downloading the e Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered banks branches.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

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