



*Faces of Progress*  
Women Driving Bangladesh Forward





# 19 Years of SANEM

RESEARCH | KNOWLEDGE | DEVELOPMENT





*Happy New Year 2026!*

## **Executive Director's Note**

As we enter 2026, we are very proud to present the theme of this year's calendar, "Faces of Progress: Women Driving Bangladesh Forward". This calendar honors the amazing women all over Bangladesh who are not only breaking down barriers but also bringing about significant changes in every area. Their strength, vision, and unwavering dedication to progress demonstrate a profound impact on the future of our country. Their stories help us understand that gender equality is not just a social belief, it is also a driving force behind the country's cultural, social, and economic progress.

At SANEM, we believe in the power of inclusive development and the significant role women play in driving economic growth. Women are leading the way in efforts to break down traditional barriers, from rural areas to big cities. Women are pushing the envelope in many fields, including the care economy, RMG, agriculture, business, education, healthcare, sports, politics, peacekeeping, and technology. They are also inspiring the next generation of leaders and proving that the best way to make progress is to ensure that everyone reaches their full potential.

We hope that this calendar, which highlights the inspiring contributions and successes of women, will remind people of how important it is to support and empower women in every corner of Bangladesh. Their stories are not just individual triumphs but collective victories that contribute to a brighter and more equitable future for all. Let's celebrate the achievements of our proud women and continue working toward gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

**Dr Selim Raihan**  
**Executive Director, SANEM**



*Readymade Garments*

Photo credit: MEHEDIHASAN/NURPHOTO/PA

# 2026 *January*

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# Ready-made Garments (RMG)

Who has been the driving force behind Bangladesh's rise as a global RMG powerhouse?

In the 1990s, estimates suggest that women made up nearly 90% of the RMG workforce, shaping an industry that lifted millions out of poverty and placed Bangladesh firmly on the global map. Today, that presence is quietly shrinking. The 2019 Survey of Manufacturing Industries (SMI) by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) found that women represented 59.4% of the RMG sector's 3.26 million employees. As reported by the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) in June 2024, women accounted for 52.28% of the total workers. As automation spreads and labor-saving technologies replace low-skilled roles, women, once the backbone of the sector, are being edged out of its future. Growth that forgets its pioneers risks becoming exclusionary.

The real test for RMG now is whether efficiency can move forward without leaving behind the very women who built the industry.





*Agriculture*

Photocredit: Farhan Sadik

# 2026 February

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21 February- International Mother Language Day

# Agriculture

When we say ‘farmers’, we often picture men working in the agricultural lands, but in Bangladesh, can we imagine agriculture without the contributions of our women?

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2024 by BBS shows that women make up to 55.88% of the agricultural workforce, working across crops, livestock, and post-harvest activities. Yet when it comes to ownership, their presence fades. Women solely own around 10% of total agricultural land, limiting their access to credit, technology, and decision-making as per the 2018 report on “The Gender Gap in Land Rights” by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Agriculture will only flourish sustainably when the women who sweat in the fields are given equal rights and recognition.





# 2026 March

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26 March- Independence Day

Care Economy

Photo credits: Fabeha Monir

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## Care Economy

She is just a housewife - a familiar connotation that undermines one of women's biggest contributions to the economy.

Unpaid domestic and care work contributed BDT 6.67 trillion in 2021- equivalent to 18.9% of Bangladesh's GDP, according to the country's first official Household Production Satellite Account (HPSA) by BBS. Women contributed around 85.37% of all unpaid household work. From cooking and cleaning to childcare and eldercare, women spent more time than men sustaining families and communities. Women's contribution in terms of GDP calculation for childcare stood at BDT 2.2 trillion, whereas men contributed 343 billion.

Recognizing unpaid household work is not about sentiment; it is an economic imperative. As per HPSA, women spend 7.3 times more hours on unpaid labor than men, which directly limits their opportunities for paid work, education, etc. Until this invisible labor is acknowledged in policy and labor frameworks, women will continue to subsidize economic growth with their time, health, and futures. The economy may count the money, but women will pay the price.





Sports

Photo credit: ICE Business Times

# 2026 April

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# Sports

Women are often labeled “physically weak”, yet Bangladesh’s female athletes continue to excel on the international stage.

Razia Sultana, who helped the Bangladesh U-18 football team remain unbeaten in the 2018 SAFF Championship in Bhutan, tragically passed away after childbirth - a stark reminder of how quickly female athletes are forgotten once the applause fades. Still, they keep pushing forward. The women’s football team lifted back-to-back SAFF titles in 2022 and 2024 and made history by securing their first appearance at the AFC Women’s Asian Cup, earning a well-deserved spot on the continental stage. Meanwhile, the women’s cricket team has not only claimed historic ODI and T20 victories against top teams like India, Pakistan, South Africa, and the West Indies, but also won the major Asia Cup title in 2018, highlighting their rising dominance in the region. In the 2016 South Asian Games, women won three of Bangladesh’s four gold medals, and in 2019, they earned 11 of 19 golds.

Training with minimal facilities, inadequate pay, and little long-term security, women’s accomplishments are hard-earned. True progress means not only celebrating their victories but also ensuring dignity, care, and protection for those who carry the nation’s flag.





# 2026 May

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*Peacekeeping*

Photo credit: Bangladeshi Engineer Contingent (RPF-1)/UNMISS

# Peacekeeping

Bangladesh is globally recognized for its role in UN peacekeeping. According to the Armed Forces Division, over 200,000 personnel have been deployed since 1988. Women are part of this legacy, yet their participation remains limited. Only 1,718 women from the Bangladesh Armed Forces have served in peace missions, with 373 currently deployed.

Deploying women abroad without strengthening their representation at home highlights a disconnect between stated commitments and lived realities. Without systemic change, international deployments risk becoming isolated successes rather than catalysts for broader transformation. To ensure participation is substantive rather than symbolic, Bangladesh must expand recruitment, create clear leadership pathways, and provide sustained institutional support that normalizes women's presence across all levels of the armed forces.





# 2026 *June*

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*Climate Resilience*

Photo credit: Md Harun Or Rashid, UN WOMEN

# Climate Resilience

When rivers overflow, and land turns saline, adaptation often begins at home. Women manage water, preserve seeds, secure food, and prepare families long before disaster response arrives.

Women's leadership in environmental conservation, adaptation initiatives, and community mobilization is increasingly being recognized. Ten grassroots women were named Climate Champions at the Annual Community of Practices (CoP) Network Convention 2025 for driving local adaptation efforts and building resilient communities.

Despite their contribution, women remain largely excluded from land ownership, climate finance, and formal planning platforms. True climate resilience will not come only from infrastructure; it will come from integrating the local knowledge women are already using to protect lives and livelihoods.





# 2026 *July*

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*Manufacturing Beyond RMG*

Photo credit: Oporajita, H&M Foundation

## Manufacturing Beyond RMG

Female employment in the manufacturing sector accounts for only 8.52% of their total employment, according to LFS 2024. Despite low participation in manufacturing, women are increasingly demonstrating strong capabilities in precision work, quality control, assembly, and technical operations in sectors such as electronics, pharmaceuticals, agro-processing, light engineering, ceramics, and automotive components. Expanding women's access to these industries will help reduce overdependence on a single sector, strengthen supply chains, and raise overall productivity.

Despite this potential, women face barriers including limited technical training, workplace safety concerns, and restrictive social norms in male-dominated industries. Addressing these challenges through targeted skills development, supportive labor policies, and safe working conditions can help unlock women's full contribution. Greater inclusion of women across manufacturing subsectors will support both industrial growth and gender equality.





Healthcare

Photo credit: Afia Afrin

# 2026 August

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# Healthcare

From community clinics to hospitals, women are the backbone of Bangladesh's healthcare system. They lead frontline service delivery, particularly in maternal and child health, improving outcomes for millions.

Yet their labor remains undervalued. Women in health and care earn 14.8% less per hour than men, as stated by the World Health Organization (WHO) and International Labour Organization (ILO) in the 2022 report on "The Gender Pay Gap in the Health and Care Sector: A Global Analysis in the time of COVID-19". Long hours, emotional strain, and limited leadership opportunities further threaten workforce sustainability.

Supporting women healthcare workers is not only about fairness; it is about protecting the resilience of the entire health system.





# Migrant Workers

Photo credit: Richard Wainwright Photography

# 2026 September

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
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# Migrants Workers

When Bangladeshi women leave their villages to work as migrant workers in the Middle East or other regions of the world, they not only carry a suitcase, but they also carry the hopes of their families. Across Bangladesh, hundreds of thousands of women follow this path, taking up domestic, caregiving, and service-sector jobs abroad, often remitting a higher share of their earnings than male migrants. These remittances not only support households but also contribute significantly to national income.

Still, female migration faces growing challenges. Concerns about recruitment practices, safety, and limited worker protection have reduced the flow in recent years. According to the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET), 105,466 women workers went abroad in 2022. This figure dropped to 76,108 in 2023, marking a 27.84% decline. In 2024, the number further decreased to 61,158, a 19.64% reduction from the previous year.

Strengthening regulations, bilateral agreements, and reintegration support are essential to ensure that women's migration remains a route to dignity, economic security, and empowerment.





# 2026

## October

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Entrepreneurship

Photo credit: Richard Wainwright Photography

# Entrepreneurs

Despite social, familial, and economic challenges, women across Bangladesh are building businesses from roadside stalls to tech startups with determination and hard work.

Digital finance, microcredit, and women-focused banking initiatives have expanded access to capital and training. Still, collateral requirements, social expectations, and weak market linkages constrain progress. The Economic Census 2013 reported that women led only 7.2% of all enterprises in Bangladesh, with 99% of these classified as Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs).

Supporting women entrepreneurs is not a charity; it is a strategic investment in innovation, job creation, and a more resilient economy.





*Education*

Photo credit: Malala Fund

# 2026 *November*

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# Education

Every year, when public exam results are released, newspapers brim with smiling girl faces- top scorers, medal winners, symbols of progress.

The percentage of girl student has increased over the years. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), the country has reached gender parity in secondary (Grade 6-10) and higher secondary (Grade 11-12) education, with girls' presence slightly surpassing boys. According to BANBEIS 2024 data, girls make up 53.68% of students in secondary education, while their share in higher secondary education is 50.04%. But education is not just about attendance or applause. The real gap emerges later. At the tertiary level (postgraduate degree), women's participation drops to 30.78%, and the transition from education to work remains deeply unequal. Only around 40% of women with tertiary education join the labor force, as per LFS 2024. Early marriage, safety concerns, and unpaid care work continue to narrow women's options long after exams are over.

Girls are excelling, but excellence alone does not ensure equal futures. The real challenges are retention, transition, and outcomes.





*Political Representation*

Photo credit: Rajib Dhar, TBS

# 2026 December

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16 December- Victory Day

# Political Representation

Bangladesh often appears as a paradox in global gender rankings. It shines on paper. In the Global Gender Gap Report 2025, the country ranks 3rd worldwide in political empowerment, a position shaped by decades of women holding the highest offices - Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, and Speaker.

Beyond the headlines, however, women remain largely absent from grassroots politics and competitive electoral spaces. In the 12th Parliament, only 14 of 300 directly elected members were women- just 5.4%. Most female representation still comes through reserved seats, a system that limits political agency, visibility, and accountability.

This contrast explains why Bangladesh continues to lag in broader political and economic participation. Barriers such as party nomination practices, campaign financing, political violence, and deeply rooted social norms keep women away from real corridors of power. Leadership at the top may inspire, but democracy matures only when women can compete freely, safely, and equally at every level.



# 2027 *Calendar*

## January

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## February

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## March

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## April

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## May

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## June

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## July

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## August

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## September

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## October

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## November

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## December

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