Report

Assessing Enabling Environment, Institutional Capacity and Pathways to Transformative Gender Responsive Budgeting in Bangladesh

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Photo: IRRI

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Acronyms

CEDAW- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CGIAR - Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research

CSOs - Civil Society Organizations

FD – Finance Division

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

GFT - Gender Finance Tracking

GFTM - Gender Finance Tracking Model

GIAs - Gender Impact Assessments

GRB – Gender Responsive Budgeting

GSNI - Gender Social Norms Index

iBAS - Integrated Budget and Accounting System

ICSAN – Industrial Cassava Stakeholders Association of Nigeria

IRRI – International Rice Research Institute

IWMI – International Water Management Institute

LGD - Local Government Division

MoEFCC - Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

MoF - Ministry of Finance

MoHFW - Medical Education & Family Welfare Division

MoWCA - Ministry of Women and Children Affairs

NHA - National Housing Authority

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

SDG - Sustainable Development Goals

UN Women- United Nations Programme for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

WEF – World Economic Forum

Context

Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) is an international planning instrument developed to enable national governments to plan, implement and track the outcomes of gender equitable budgets[1]. Without a robust and strategic gender budgeting system, it is not possible to translate policy prescriptions to gender equality. More than 100 countries have initiated efforts on gender-responsive budgeting to address the historical underinvestment in women and girls. Data from over 105 countries assessed for the time period 2018-2021 shows that only 27 countries have comprehensive systems to track gender equality allocations in their financial reporting systems.

Bangladesh was an early adopter of the Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) strategy. The country formally introduced GRB as part of the Financial Strategy in 2009–10, initially piloting the approach in four ministries. Currently, 61 Ministries in Bangladesh operationalize the GRBand in 2025, nearly one-third (33%) of the national budget, equivalent to over BDT 260,000 crore (USD 2.1 million), was tagged as gender-responsive. This reflects official and regulatory commitment to promoting gender equity through fiscal mechanisms.

Bangladesh has also formally demonstrated its commitment to international gender equality policies and goals, but there are deep-rooted cultural challenges to ensuring gender equality. For example, Bangladesh ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1984. The CEDAW is a worldwide human rights charter for women that outlines provisions for equal rights for women, including prevention and control of trafficking, exploitation and discrimination on gendered grounds, and on improving education, health, and employment rights. Bangladesh submits periodic reports to the CEDAW Committee on progress and challenges, however, there are reservations: Article 2 - namely, incorporation of equality into legal systems and practices, and Article 16.1(c) - equal rights and responsibilities in marriage and divorce are both not applicable in Bangladesh. These challenges, as we discuss below result in contradictions in gender gains.

For example, according to the 2025 World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index Report, Bangladesh is amongst the 5 economies that have had most success in narrowing the gender gap. In South Asia, Bangladesh leads in achieving gender equality as per the WEF's Gender Gap Index criteria consisting of four parameters – economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment – making it the most gender-equal country in the region, a position it has held for the past few years. However, Bangladesh fares differently in other assessments of women's empowerment. As per the UNDP's 2023 Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI) which focuses on deep-rooted social norms – Bangladesh's rank is 129 out of 191 countries, a position well below Sri Lanka and Bhutan in the region.

Regardless, Bangladesh's Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) and the country's numerous and prominent gender activists have continuously tracked the Government's commitment to global gender commitments, including the Beijing +30 agenda. In 2025, the MoWCA identified the robust implementation of the GRB as a key priority for the national roadmap to meeting the Beijing +30 agenda.

This prioritization of GRB is strategic, as analysis undertaken by the OECD[2] in 2025 indicates that gender budgeting in Bangladesh remains challenging, given structural barriers, which have resulted in the "widest gender employment gaps in Asia, with women disproportionately engaged in low-paid, informal work, as well as enduring disparities in leadership (political) representation, wage equality, and safety outcomes". This report notes that these gaps are not only socially regressive but economically costly. The IMF estimates that closing the gender employment gap could raise Bangladesh's GDP by nearly 40%. Effective and robust GRB can help close these gender gaps.

[1]Oxfam. A Rough Guide to Gender-Responsive Budgeting. Oxford: Oxfam GB, 2021. https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/rough-guide-to-gender-responsive-budgeting-620429/

[2]OECD (2025). Gender budgeting in Bangladesh (unpublished).

In Bangladesh, the Finance Division (FD) under the Ministry of Finance (MoF) is responsible for coordinating the GRB and applying a Gender Finance Tracking (GFT) model to enable targeted investments across key thematic areas. The adoption of the Gender Finance Tracking (GFT) model in the 2024-25 fiscal year includes automated, real-time tracking of gender-sensitive expenditure in Bangladesh, through an Integrated Budget and Accounting System (iBAS++)[3]. This has been a game-changer in enabling real-time, transparent assessment of the GRB across line ministries. According to the 2025 Gender Budgeting Report, the GFT model was designed to effectively and transparently track targeted investments across key thematic areas for gender equality – i) empowerment and enhanced social status; ii) economic participation and equality, iii) access to public services, and iv) women's education, health, and wellbeing.

The Finance Division of the MoF is also responsible for producing an annual report that assesses the state of the GRB[4]. In the 2025 GRB Report, the Secretary Finance Division noted that, "increasing budget allocation alone is not the end in itself; a thorough analysis is required to assess how efficiently the budget has been utilized and what influence it has had on reducing gender discrimination". An independent review of the operationalization of the GRB in Bangladesh (Bidisha et al., 2023) identified the following key challenges:

- Despite progress in GRB allocation, robust monitoring and evaluation of projects is lacking, and there is lack of insight on how the GRB addresses key national objectives of women empowerment, as well as SDG 5 outcomes - including health and well-being, education, enforcement of gender equality, and decent work and economic growth.

- The lack of gender-segregated data is a key gap in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of the GRB.

- There is little evidence of the GRB integration with relevant national plans and policies (for e.g., NAP), as well as the allocation of the GRB for gender-specific hard-to-tackle issues like child marriage, domestic violence and intra-household inequalities that are shaped by social and cultural norms and values.

- There is significant need to strengthen capacity of line ministry officials involved in the formulation of the budget and implementation of programs, on key areas like gender budgeting, gender awareness and to create and disseminate tools, approaches and global best practices (such as gender audit, ex-ante and ex-post gender impact assessment of policies, needs assessment, baseline analysis, gender dimension in resource allocation, etc.).

The lack of a robust monitoring system is a root cause of ineffective implementation of the GRB in many countries. Without an overarching guiding framework, there is often a lack of approach and methods to assess gender inequality needs and challenges, design context-specific processes, and identify outcomes of gender responsible budgeting.

From a review of secondary literature, it was also evident that the operationalization of the GRB requires close coordination and joint responsibilities between the Finance Division and the 61 line ministries. This study was designed to assess these linkages as well as assess enabling environment and capacity for implementing and monitoring the GRB in five sectoral ministries – which are responsible for the strategic focus areas for gender equality (see above).

[3]iBAS++ (Integrated Budgeting and Accounting Software) is a centralized, integrated Internet and Oracle based financial management information system for the Government of Bangladesh. Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of Bangladesh. "iBAS++ Brochure (English)." Accessed 20/11/2025

[4]Ministry of Finance, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. *Gender Budget Report 2025–26.* Dhaka: Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, 2025

Methodology

The study was designed through active consultation with the Finance Division (FD) of the Ministry of Finance, who are primarily responsible for the GRB in Bangladesh. This collaborative design ensured a demand-driven, participatory and policy-relevant approach to the assessment, as the FD is the primary end-user of the study recommendations, and through them, relevant line ministries.

The selection of respondents for this study was purposive, intended to capture a representative assessment of GRB know-how within the GRB team in the Finance Division and across five ministries of the Government of Bangladesh. The research team co-designed a conceptual framework to guide this assessment (see Figure 1 below), with the aim to undertake a rapid assessment of the structural factors impacting implementation of the GRB, as well as capacity to plan and assess outcomes of the GRB. The framework had three key thematic areas of focus: technical capacity, data and reporting infrastructure, and organizational processes around GRB across select ministries. Along these three focus areas, nine criteria, three for each thematic area helped assess gaps and structural inefficiencies, and explore possible solutions to address these challenges (see Figure 1 below).

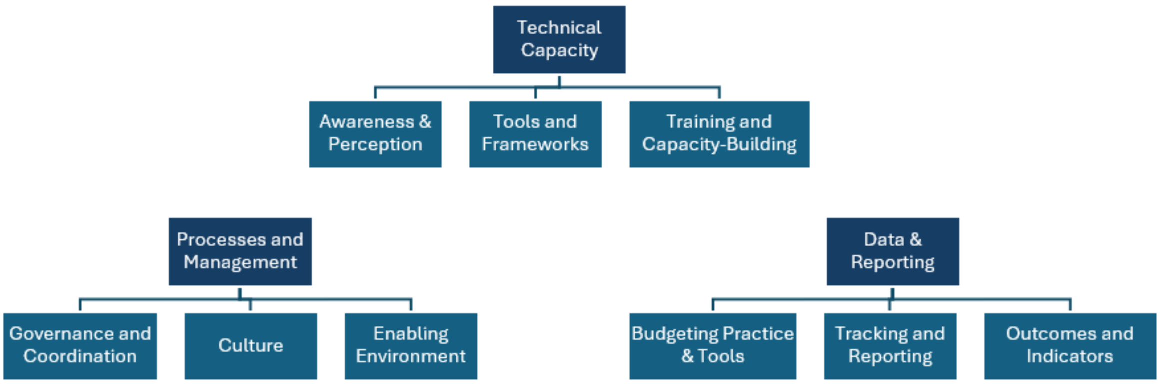

Figure 1: Conceptual framework underpinning the GRB institutional assessment questionnaire

The research team interviewed 13 officials in senior and mid-level positions (see Table 1 below) involved in Gender Responsive Budgeting including gender focal points in select ministries. Interviewees included joint secretaries and deputy secretaries from the MoF, as well as line ministries including the MoWCA, the Ministry of Education, Local Government Division, and the Ministry of Environment. All the interviewees had key GRB responsibilities, including two who had key prior responsibilities at the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) and at the Finance Division. The team also interviewed a prominent academic from Dhaka University, who had undertaken an analysis of the GRB in 2023. This mix of respondents help provide a holistic perspective on the challenges to a robust implementation of the GRB and identification of potential pathways to tackle these gaps.

Table 1: Break-down of interviewees by organization

Organization	Interviewee Count
Finance Division, Ministry of Finance (MoF)	6
Local Government Division (LGD)	2
Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)	1
National Housing Authority (NHA)	1
NTRCA, Ministry of Education (formerly Gender Budget Desk Lead at MoWCA)	1
Medical Education & Family Welfare Division (MoHFW)	1
Academic / University (Dhaka University)	1
Total	**13**

A workshop involving all informants, as well as relevant government and non-government stakeholders will be organized in December 2025 to validate the findings outlined below.

Photo: Bappy K. Mohonto (IRRI)

Key Findings

Technical Capacity

Awareness and Perception

In every ministry, designated officers are responsible for preparing the gender budget, and for sourcing and collating relevant data from line departments. Several of the respondents identified that this task of "*budget preparation is not considered to be prestigious, hence people holding these positions are often ad-hoc, and not essentially skilled for this task*". Furthermore, line ministries also do not yet consider "GRB" as strategic for the ministry, i.e. a core activity of the ministry. Since managing the budget desk has little appeal and visibility, officers who are directly recruited through the prestigious and highly competitive Bangladesh Civil Services exams (also considered most capable) are not assigned a budget desk management job. The relatively low value and importance associated with this position means that this is not considered strategic enough or prioritized for higher effectiveness and efficiency.

It was evident that GRB is perceived to be the responsibility of the Finance Division. In other words, line ministries do not see themselves as having key responsibilities for Gender Finance Tracking. This was a perception of almost all interviewees. This was also reflected on awareness of the GRB instruments, purpose and agenda. Respondents from the FD rated awareness of GRB as high (between 4-5 on a 5-point scale). In comparison, line ministry respondents consistently rated a low awareness of GRB using the same scoring system. Many respondents perceived gender budgeting as "allocations for women," rather than understanding it as a planning tool or an analytical framework for shaping budget decisions.

Training and Capacity

In line ministries, gender budgeting teams are formed every year to fulfil the reporting requirement and then dissolved after the budget is sent to the FD. As noted by several respondents both in the finance and line departments, these are, *"not fixed teams, the teams and personnel change every year."* Many respondents in the line departments noted that most of their work on the GRB is ad-hoc, which results in low capacity, varied interpretations and weak follow-through. Frequent transfers of officials within the government system further challenges continuity of work on the GRB.

Interestingly, several respondents had attended GRB-related training organized by the UNDP, UN Women, OECD, as well as internal trainings conducted by the MoF. However, these training courses were identified as being ad-hoc or tied to the annual budget reporting cycle and not conducted as a longer-term capacity-building plan. Also, knowledge dissemination on gender is inconsistent at the organizational level as participation in GRB-specific events and meetings is typically limited to gender focal points or officers directly involved in GRB reporting. One respondent from a line ministry noted that *"Those who work specifically on gender-related work might get gender-specific training, but most others are engaged in service-oriented training, which is often not gender-related."*

Tools and Framework

Respondents noted the absence of a clear, overarching analytical framework for operationalizing the GRB as well as the lack of monitoring guidelines. Respondents from the FD explicitly said there is no framework or method for assessing outcomes, and that impacts why the GRB is not implemented in its spirit and poorly understood. In fact within the MoF as well, the GRB is not implemented well, "*The reason for not doing [innovative allocation] is because, the gender aspect has not been incorporated into our ministry budget framework or MBF [Ministry Budget Framework]. Since there is no goal, KPI or output indicator, there is no scope for innovative ways to address the GRB."*

Processes and Management

Governance and Coordination

The study findings make it evident that GRB is perceived as a MoF-driven process. "*Gender budgeting is seen as the Finance Division's work… it feels like it is not their (line ministries) responsibility but that of the Finance Division."* The implicit expectation is that the FD (or broadly the MoF) enforces and is therefore responsible for the GRB. This perception impacts on the ability of line ministries to operationalize the GRB as per their specific mandates, as the line ministries essentially perceive the GRB as a reporting compliance to the MoF rather than as an internal planning process.

Culture and An Enabling Environment

GRB implementation and tracking processes remain largely ad-hoc. Since committees are formed on a needs-basis, there is poor continuity and institutional memory. As explained, there is a lack of defined workflows and clear responsibilities, "*It is individually driven, personally motivated and not [an inherent culture] organizationally motivated*." In our interviews we noted that, in the preceding 12-18 months, several line ministry officials involved in gender budgeting had been transferred to different ministries and new positions that have no links to gender budgeting – leading to a loss of domain-specific knowledge (acquired through trainings). Another theme that emerged consistently in the interviews was that in the line ministries gender focal points and other staff have no clear roles or tasks specified for GRB-related work.

Data and Reporting

Tracking and Reporting

Most of the respondents identified the absence of sex-disaggregated data as the single biggest limitation to a meaningful GRB implementation and outcome. Officials emphasized that while allocations can be tracked, the lack of detailed gender data makes it difficult to conduct assessments on whether resources reach intended beneficiaries or meaningfully improve gender equality outcomes. As one line ministry respondent explained, "*…gender-disaggregated data is not available… with accurate data our planning would be much easier*."

The Gender Finance Tracking (GFT) model to track GRB expenditure was introduced in 2024-2025, but only one respondent (from the FD) reported having used it in practice. Most respondents, especially in the line departments had not heard of the tool, or did not have access to it, and some FD respondents also feel that the GFT is still "at the proposal stage." Interestingly, It was also noted that the GFT model is only a technical reporting tool and does not contain indicators or frameworks linked to on-ground outcomes. "*[It is] Not used for outcomes…We [only] use the gender finance tracking model for allocation tracking*."

Outcomes and Indicators

The above challenges impact setting gender goals, aligning GRB interventions to line ministry strategic areas of focus, and planning for specific GRB outcomes. There is no mechanism that links budgetary allocation to gender needs and demands on the ground. "*When the line ministries assess a project… there is often no mechanism to assess gender outcomes… there are no proper records or (baseline) information.*" (external observer). This explains how the process of GRB is in practice reduced to a "report on spending", and not a transformative framework for gender transformative change.

Ways Forward

In a personal interview, a senior academic administrator who has studied the GRB closely, summed up the key challenge: "*there needs to be a rethinking of the GRB, focusing on outcomes and impact beyond tracking of budgets and spending*". This requires some key changes:

i. enhancing scientific evidence on gender inequality - collating and analyzing gender disaggregated data to identify real needs and demands,

i. building technical capacity and know-how on gender and social inclusion among all implementation actors to enable effective implementation of gender transformative interventions

i. co-design of a GRB framework and approach that enables GRB spending aligned to relevant national policies and objectives, and effective tracking of outcomes.

Going forward, this study identifies the following key steps:

1. **An Overarching GRB Expenditure-to-Outcomes framework to enable a shift in focus from tracking expenditure to mapping gender inequality challenges and tracking outcomes.** Currently, the Finance Division uses the Gender Finance Tracking (GFT) model only to track budgetary spending. More work is needed to focus on the purpose and objective of the GRB by enabling effective strategies to operationalize the system and achieve outcomes. This would require the design of indicators mapped to ground realities of gender inequalities as well as an alignment of the GRB/GFT to specific outcomes. In sum, the scope of the GFT then needs to be expanded, or alternatively a new outcomes-based framework needs to be designed and mapped back to the expenditure tracking done through the GFT.

2. **Strengthening capacity on gender tools, methods and approaches across line ministries.** Line ministries, including the MoF and their implementing institutions at scale need planned and consistent capacity strengthening to apply gender responsive tools, methods and approaches, as well as clarity on the purpose and value-add of the GRB as a systems transformation mechanism. This could be mediated through external stakeholders including CSOs, gender experts and or via the Ministry of Women Affairs. As a first step, the GRB budget can be used for agenda-setting and prioritization, and for capacity strengthening to generate sex-disaggregated data across line ministries which would then serve as a baseline for planned interventions.

3. **Clear definition of institutional roles and responsibilities.** Currently, the FD enforces the GRB and line ministries treat the mechanism as budgetary reporting compliance. Establishing stable gender expertise across line departments including the MoF, enabling these staff to plan, implement and track GRB outcomes through coordination and collaboration with other technical departments will help embed the GRB in organizational structures and cultures.

The OECD assessment (2025) also identifies similar challenges, and spells out a roadmap to more effective targeting of the GRB and achievement of SDG outcomes, which include:

- Identifying gender data gaps to understand where gender-disaggregated data is missing or underutilized across policy areas.
- Developing a Gender Data Action Plan to guide systematic data collection, reporting, and use.
- Piloting Gender Impact Assessments (GIAs) in selected ministries to evaluate the actual impact of budget measures on gender equality.
- Creating a Gender Budgeting Roadmap to establish clear, time-bound milestones.in the medium and longer term, and embed these reforms within Bangladesh's broader PFM Reform Strategy and Action Plan.

Future work supported by the CGIAR Scaling for Impact Program will involve working closely with the Ministry of Finance and key partners (including OECD) as well as the Ministry of Women Affairs to work on the above identified issues.


Photo: IRRI

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Photo: IRRI

Appendix

A. Conceptual Framework

Organization	Interviewee Count
Analytical Capacity	Awareness and Perception
	Tools and Frameworks
	Training and Capacity-Building
Processes and Management	Governance and Coordination
	Organizational Culture
	Enabling Environment
Data and Reporting	Budgeting Practice and Tools
	Tracking and Reporting Cycles
	Outcomes and Indicators

Appendix

B. Select Quotes from the Study

Category	Specific Challenge	Illustrative Quotes (Interview Source)
Institutional	GRB treated as compliance, not planning; Lack of coordination	*“We only use the gender lens for allocation tracking… we don’t track spending or outcomes.” “Gender budgeting has become a reporting formality. Line ministries don’t follow the same guideline.”*
	Lack of institutional memory and ad-hoc processes	*“The committee is formed during budget preparation and after that it no longer exists.” “We work from January to May, after publication we become free (i.e. do little else on the GRB).”*
	Weak enforcement and accountability for GRB mandates	*“Every ministry should create a gender desk, but they still haven’t… that’s a big challenge.” “Guidelines exist but compliance and accountability mechanisms are weak.”*
Technical	Absence of reliable gender-disaggregated data and indicators	*“Clear gender-segregated data is not available anywhere… with accurate data our planning would be much easier.”* *“We need segregated data and to strengthen communication with BBS.”*
	Limited or inconsistent use of GRB tools and frameworks (GFTM)	*“We are aware of GFTM but haven’t used it yet “The model is not 100 percent authentic yet; we are working on it.”*
	Weak monitoring and evaluation systems	*“There is no system for monitoring… tracking is not enough.”* *“We don’t track the spending, thus we don’t have any way of tracking outcomes.”*
Cultural / Social	Limited understanding of GRB beyond “women’s issues”	*“People think GRB is 50-50 budgeting for men and women.”* *“We think gender budgeting is only the work of Women and Children Affairs… other ministries don’t feel responsible.”*
	Patriarchal mindsets and low prioritization of gender equality	*“People are not giving it much priority… they are not aware and really don’t know how to use it”* *“Decision-making is still male-dominated; gender equality seen as a women’s issue.”*

Category	Specific Challenge	Illustrative Quotes (Interview Source)
Administrative / Human Resource	Frequent staff transfers and lack of trained personnel	*"If someone is trained up from MoWCA or Finance but due to transfer he fails to complete his work."* *"The people we need or manpower with the right skills is not always available."*
	Limited training, awareness, and capacity-building opportunities	*"We need better training on GRB."* *"Lack of awareness related to gender and development concepts."*
	Resource constraints for GRB activities	*"There is no separate project or program for GRB; we have to arrange it internally."* *"We don't have someone skilled enough to train others; experts capable of giving training are not present."*

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