

Gender Policy for Open School, Bangladesh Open University

Open School
Bangladesh Open University

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Preamble to the Constitution of Bangladesh

The Constitution of Bangladesh has strongly introduced an article which covers and secures the rights and dignity of all the citizens of Bangladesh. 28(1), 28(2), 28 (3), and 28 (4), which cover; (1) The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. (2) Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and of public life, (3) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort, or admission to any educational institution, (4) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making special provision in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens.

1. The Open School

The Open School is one of the core schools at the Bangladesh Open University.

1.1 Objectives

The aim of the Open School (OS) is to impart formal education for the learners by giving especial emphasis to the dropouts who are unable to continue their studies due to various socio-economic reasons. In addition, OS also sets principles to achieve the following specific objectives:

- To cater mass people through out the country through wide network for providing them flexible education, giving provision through open schooling using ICT and audio- visual support;
- To provide non-formal education in various areas;
- To support the disadvantaged and excluded group of the population through implementing the life-skills courses of studies for making them partners in economic development;
- To create an opportunity for the existing Open School learners for further studies.

1.2 Functions

The Open School works for the junior secondary, secondary, higher secondary, graduation, and post graduation levels for the learners based on their specific needs.

1.3 Strategies

The Open School strategy is to implement the gender-responsive educational programs through open and distance learning mode. The OS will give emphasis by supporting the rules and regulations towards women participants on access to Open School, BOU. It will also consider the Government policy towards the women and other excluded groups' education in the country. Gender sensitive study and training materials will be developed towards the learners' empowerment.

1.4 Challenges

The challenges of the Open School are to come out successfully after addressing the prevalent issues in the society towards gender.

2. Rationale and Background

In Bangladesh, women constitute a great majority of the population. Women Development is, therefore, imperative to national development. Therefore, the country needs to establish equal opportunity and equal rights to ensure national development. In 1997, the Women Development Policy was formulated in wide consultation and exchange of views with the leaders of the society for reflecting long struggle to establish rights of women of this country.

Bangladesh Government took initiative to reinstate the Women Development Policy formulated in 1997 to ensure women empowerment, equal rights and opportunities. In line with this, the government formulated the National Women Development Policy 2011. Now the national policy is being implemented.

Bangladesh emerged as an independent state through the blood bath of War of Liberation under the leadership of the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1971. The government of Bangabandhu founded the Bangladesh Women Rehabilitation Board in 1972. The terms of reference of this board that deserve mention are: (a) conduct survey to collect correct information about the women and children abused and to arrange for their rehabilitation; and, (b) impart various vocational training of these victimized women. Alongside the government, the NGOs continued with their various programs improving socio-economic lot of in the outreach areas of the country. The Women's organizations alongside the political parties participated directly and indirectly in the struggle for establishing democracy in the country. And they became conscious about establishing their socio-economic and political rights that created a grand prospect in development of women in the country.

Inter-sector initiative was undertaken for the first time to engage women in income generating activity in the First Five Year Plan. The Ministry of Social Welfare had introduced Vocational Training Program (Women's Club). The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development started Mass Education Program. Later this program was converted into Women's Co-Operatives Program with assistance from the World Bank.

Under the 3-year recurring plan and Annual Development Plan, programs included: self-employment, resistance to women abuse, non-formal and vocational training, establishment of day care centres, assistance to women program, establishment of career women's hostel, food aid program for vulnerable people, food for education program, compulsory primary education, free education of the rural girls at secondary level, health care services and immunization program.

In the fifth 5-year plan the efforts at mainstreaming of women in development was further strengthened and there was strong reiteration of firm commitment for elimination of all forms of discrimination to women charter, Beijing Platform for Action and implementation of national plan for women development. The gender perspective was given to the micro chapters concerning agriculture, rural development, industry, health and family planning, education, minerals, transport, labor and employment and information and communication (IT). The seventh 5-year plan also made provision for women and integrating the ICT aspects.

In addition, Bangladesh is a signatory of CEDAW (International Frameworks Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women) in 1984, Beijing Conference in 1995, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The gender has been mainstreamed in Bangladesh through the GOs, NGOs and international agencies initiatives and there is a provision of having the gender policy for every organization. Open School should have the gender policy and in line with this, this document develops the provision for gender development for open schooling in Bangladesh.

3. Gender Vision

Gender Vision of the Open School, BOU in the context of gender policy is:

"Comprehensive gender inclusive learning environment with universal and flexible access leading to gender equity, equality, mainstreaming and social justice in open schooling"

4. Gender Mission

The School is guided by the following gender mission:

- 4.1 contribute towards gender sensitization of stakeholders through open schooling;
- 4.2 providing relevant, continuing and holistic gender sensitive support through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode;
- 4.3 provide gender neutral education to the target groups to reinforce gender equity, equality, social justice towards empowerment;

BOU shall endeavor to take following steps to achieve the mission:

- 4.4 designing and developing gender sensitive programs that are relevant to the stakeholders;
- 4.5 adopting gender friendly delivery methods that are suitable and appropriate for its diverse learners;
- 4.6 preparing gender sensitive learners to function in a fast changing knowledge economy;
- 4.7 instilling values of peace, tolerance and human dignity towards an equitable and just society through its educational activities

5. Scope of Gender Policy

- 5.1 identify the particular needs of women in relation to employment, income, consumption; and control over and access to natural and other resources; education and health, political representation, physical security, and legal and human rights;
- 5.2 clearly spell out goals to address gender concerns so as to achieve gender parity in enrolment, retention and achievement of learners;
- 5.3 ensure gender parity in the academic, administrative, support staffs and other stakeholders;
- 5.4 review the existing curricula and self-learning materials towards gender sensitivity;
- 5.5 analyse each programme from gender perspective;
- 5.6 design plans and activities in promoting and integrating gender equality;
- 5.7 ensure all areas and programmes of Open School are in compliance with the aim, goals and objectives of the national and other gender policies in which Bangladesh is signatory;

- 5.8 impart gender sensitive orientation and training to the learners and other stakeholders of OS;
- 5.9 determine that resource allocation takes place in a gender responsive manner in preparing budget;
- 5.10 closely monitor and evaluate from a gender perspective the stated goals, objectives, timeframes and methodologies for achieving these periodically;
- 5.11 The following areas and issues will be monitored on a regular and systematic basis to ensure compliance with set standards and quality assurance which secure gender balanced institutions:
 - School Committee
 - Curriculum Committee
 - Examination Committee
 - Examination Centre Committee
 - Journal Committee
 - Academic Affairs
 - Financial Management
 - Inspection Committee
 - Journal Committee
 - Programme Design & Development
 - Teaching-Learning Strategy
 - Learner Support Services
 - Learning Materials e.g. Print, PPT, Audio, Video
 - Designing Open Educational Resources
 - Learner Assessment
 - Admission Processes
 - Physical Infrastructure and Resources
 - School Staffing
 - Advocacy and Information Dissemination
 - Research
 - ICT Integration
 - Monitoring and Evaluation
 - Documentation

- 5.12 It is also to be made known to all that every facet of OS activity/business shall be bound by this gender policy which has been written for the School and is defined on the principles of gender equality and empowerment. The School will monitor and evaluate the defined principles of gender policy in the key environment, research and its implementation, also in the community mobilization and participation.

6. Aim

Open School, BOU is committed to provide quality, sustainable, inclusive and flexible gender neutral education.

7. Objectives

The objectives of this Gender Policy are to:

- 7.1 maintain gender sensitization in the management, planning, allocation and distribution of resources;
- 7.2 develop and implement gender specific as well as gender sensitive procedures to prioritised groups, keeping in view the local, regional, national and international educational needs in open schooling;
- 7.3 define gender sensitive standards for academic and vocational skill building programmes, training and research;
- 7.4 ensure gender sensitivity, equity, equality, and social justice in all programmes and procedures, inter alia, admission, learning resources, learner support services, evaluation;
- 7.5 identify and promote areas where learners can be gender sensitized;
- 7.6 maintain standards to ensure equivalence with the formal education;
- 7.7 monitor and evaluate using gender sensitive indicators to ensure gender sensitivity in program policy.

8. Policy Values

The Gender Policy is framed with the following values:

- 8.1 develop guidelines that define values and purposes specific to the gender policy;
- 8.2 participation of stakeholders in the policy processes to implement the policy effectively;

- 8.3 ensure that the gender policy be implemented in the teaching and learning processes;
- 8.4 provide the excellence in the provision of comprehensive and sustainable education based on the research on gender issues;
- 8.5 collaborative partnership with GOs, NGOs, UN and other international organizations in the country to develop and organise gender sensitive programmes, trainings, workshops and seminars;
- 8.6 ensure that the environment of the study centre is gender friendly;
- 8.7 ensure gender equity, equality and social justice in the admission policy;
- 8.8 ensure the evaluation practices that are gender neutral –
 - i. It implies the location of the examination centre accessible and safe to the learners;
 - ii. Time and place of examination may be different for hilly areas, disaster prone areas like haor, disadvantaged and remote areas and coastal areas of Bangladesh where mobility is limited;
 - iii. The exam centre should have provision of appropriate sanitary facilities for all genders;
 - iv. Proper seating facilities for all genders without any discrimination;
 - v. Equal gender parity in invigilation is encouraged.
- 8.9 Employment facilities available to be gender friendly that take into account gender equity, equality and social justice-
 - i. Job advertisements should to based on gender equity;
 - ii. All genders should be encouraged in applying to the post;
 - iii. Equal pay for equal work should be ensured;
 - iv. Equal benefits/opportunities for promotion towards professional growth should be ensured;
 - v. Provide medical benefits like maternity leave and include paternity and Child Care leave;
 - vi. Create day care facilities for the employees' children, at the headquarters, regional and study centres as per need/demand;
 - vii. Provide rest rooms to the women who are pregnant and lactating at the headquarters, regional, study centres and examination centres.

- viii. Provision for reimbursements of medical bills for the immediate family according to law.

9. Strategies for Implementation

Gender mainstreaming requires changes at different levels within the Open School, in agenda setting, policy making, planning, budgeting, learner support services, monitoring, implementation and evaluation. The effective implementation of the Gender Policy needs a gender sensitive awareness among all stakeholders for good practices. Hence, orientation and training programmes, workshops, dialogues for building a change of mind set amongst the workforce needs to be designed and implemented.

This can be better achieved by setting up:

- 9.1 A Gender Sensitive Committee at the head office to:
 - i) ensure gender sensitive learning resources for all programmes;
 - ii) organize gender sensitive trainings and workshops for all stakeholders;
 - iii) develop a gender code of conduct for OS.
- 9.2 A Sexual Harassment Prevention Committee is to resolve issues related to sexual harassment and gender based violence if any, be established at the Head office, Regional and local centres;
- 9.3 A Gender Budgeting and Auditing Committee is to analyse the resource allocation of the programmes of the Open School of Bangladesh Open University;
- 9.4 A Guidance and Counselling Committee/Cell is to guide and counsel on various matters associated with gender as well as address grievances of all genders i.e. the affected men, women and transgenders;
- 9.5 A Gender Justice Unit which will be like an umbrella overarching all the above mentioned Committees/Cell will help in the implementation of the Gender Policy;
- 9.6 A Gender Resource Unit should be set up in the library for giving access to material and resources in the area of Gender Studies.

In order to ensure gender justice, socio-cultural and economic perspectives should be taken into consideration.

10. Glossary of Terms (including Terms for understanding concepts)

- 10.1 Masculinity is a set of attributes, behaviors, and roles generally associated with boys and men. Masculinity is made up of both socially defined and biologically created factors.
- 10.2 Femininity is a set of attributes, behaviors, and roles generally associated with girls and women. Femininity is socially constructed, but made up of both socially defined and biologically created factors.
- 10.3 Transgender people are individuals of any age or sex whose appearance, personal characteristics, or behaviours differ from stereotypes of being men and women and fall outside of stereotypical gender norms. Transgender has become an umbrella term that is used to describe a wide range of identities and experiences, including transsexual people; male and female cross-dressers; intersexes individuals; men and women whose identity or behaviours are gender atypical and fall outside the stereotypical gender norms. Trans is a term which is used to refer to all persons whose own sense of gender does not match with the gender assigned to them at birth.
- 10.4 Gender is used to describe those characteristics of individuals, which are socially constructed, while sex refers to those which are biologically determined. People are born female or male but learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. This learned behaviour makes up gender identity and determines gender roles.
- 10.5 Gender Identity refers to a person's internal, deeply felt sense of being either man or woman, or something other or in between.
- 10.6 Gender Expression refers to all of the external characteristics and behaviour that are socially defined as either masculine or feminine, such as dress, mannerisms, speech patterns and social interactions
- 10.7 Gender also refers to the roles and responsibilities of women/girls and men/boys in construction of roles and relationships that are created in our families, our societies and our cultures between women and men. The concept of gender includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes, and likely behaviours of both women and men (related to femininity and masculinity). These roles and

expectations are learned. These are not biologically predetermined nor are these fixed forever.

- 10.8 Gender Roles are learned through socialisation processes; they are not fixed but are changeable. Perspectives on gender are Schoolalised through educational, political and economic systems; through legislation; and through culture, religion and traditions.
- 10.9 Gender Roles and Relations usually result in women and girls having different and less access and control to resources and decision-making processes than men and boys, which may lead to unequal power relations. These unequal power relations hinder equitable development and make it difficult for women and girls to fully participate in development processes that affect them.
- 10.10 Gender Gaps in learning environments stem from socio-cultural values, beliefs and attitudes. Such gender gap in learning environments refers to differences in access, participation and benefit from learning opportunities for women/girls, men/boys and transgender people.
- 10.11 Gender Blind implies the inability to recognize the differences amongst all genders leading to failure in understanding the needs and provide for differences.
- 10.12 Gender Bias refers to the unequal treatment in employment opportunity and attitudes based on the sex of an employee or group of employees. Gender bias can be a legitimate basis for a lawsuit under anti discriminatory statutes.
- 10.13 Gender Discrimination refers to the prejudice or discrimination based on person's sex or gender and has been linked to gender stereotypes and gender roles. Gender discrimination continues to get perpetuated with the belief that one sex or gender is intrinsically superior to the other. Another commonly used term for such discrimination is sexism. Extreme sexism may foster sexual harassment, rape and other forms of gender violence.
- 10.14 Gender Stereotype is a rigid and over-simplified definition of a group of people in which all members of that group are labelled with similar characteristics. Stereotypes produce behaviour patterns that conform to expectations. Gender stereotypes inhibit women and girls and the transgender people from realizing their full potential because of societal barriers.

- 10.15 Gender Disaggregated Data are the data that are collected and presented separately on all genders women, men and transgender persons.
- 10.16 Gender Parity is attained when the same proportion of women and men, relative to their respective age groups, enter the learning environment or education system and complete and advance through different cycles of learning and education.
- 10.17 Gender Equity refers to fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities amongst women and men and transgender people. The concept recognises that women and men and transgender people have different needs and power and that these differences should be identified and addressed in a manner that rectifies the imbalance between the sexes and amongst all genders.
- 10.18 Gender Equality means that all genders have equal conditions for realizing their full potential and for contributing to and benefitting from economic, social, cultural and political development. It is based on the principle of all genders being full partners in their home, community and society. The advancement of the goals of gender equality and empowerment are central to the agenda of learning for development.
- 10.19 Challenges in Promoting Gender Equality - changing socio-cultural values, beliefs and attitudes become a challenge in promoting gender equality.
- 10.20 Existing power structures must change, and all genders must be full partners in development processes. There is a need to move from a gender neutral perspective to a gender-responsive approach.
- 10.21 Gender Sensitivity is the translation of awareness into practices, which result in changes in the perceptions, plans and activities of people, society, Schools and organizations.
- 10.22 Gender Inclusive term denotes that all genders and the excluded groups of people who are eligible to learn integrated part of the processes of education aiming at mainstreaming for equity, equality, justice and empowerment.
- 10.23 Empowerment - this is about people taking control over their lives, setting their own agendas, gaining skills, building self-confidence, solving problems, and developing self-reliance, irrespective of their gender. Society as well as Schools can support processes that can nurture self-empowerment of individuals or groups.

- 10.24 Gender Mainstreaming is a strategy for making women's, men's as well as transgender concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres, such that inequality between men, women and transgender persons is not perpetuated.
- 10.25 The Gender Parity Index (GPI) is a socioeconomic index usually designed to measure the relative access to education of males and females. In its simplest form, it is calculated as the quotient of the number of females by the number of males enrolled in a given stage of education (primary, secondary etc.). The calculation to include transgender people in GPI is yet to be evolved.
- 10.26 Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is an index designed to measure the gender equality. GEM is the United Nations Development Programme's attempt to measure the extent of gender inequality across the globe's countries, based on estimates of-- women's relative economic income, participation in high-paying positions with economic power, and access to professional and parliamentary positions. GEM is determined using three basic indicators: -1) Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments, 2) percentage of women in economic decision making positions (including administrative, managerial, professional and technical occupations) and 3) women's share of income. The GEM is thought to be a valuable policy instrument because it allows certain dimensions that were previously difficult to compare between countries to come into international comparison.
- 10.27 The Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite statistic of-1) life expectancy, 2) education, 3) income indices used to rank countries into four tiers of human development, created by Prof. Amartya Sen and Prof. Mahbub ul Haq in 1990 published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
- 10.28 Gender Analysis is the systematic examination of the roles, relations and processes, focusing on imbalances of power between women, men and transgender persons in all societies. It is the basis for planning an initiative that has realistic objectives and activities related to the promotion of gender equality.
- 10.29 Gender Budgeting is critical for ensuring that resource allocation takes place in a gender-responsive manner. Gender budgeting

involves the examination of all expenditures and revenues from a gender perspective. This implies that all expenditure is examined for its relevance, accessibility, impacts and consequences for women and men and transgender people. For example, when an School devotes a percentage of its budget to provision of accommodation or scholarships, the question of how much of it will benefit women, will emerge. When an School budgets for a crèche for staff children, the question of what is the impact on the female and male workforce will emerge.

- 10.30 Gender Audit is a process for organizational assessment and is an audit tool for action planning. The audit process helps to identify organizational strengths and challenges for monitoring gender integrity in the organisation's systems and operations, and programmes and projects. It works in a two stage process that allows for the collection of information to assess the status of gender equity in a given environment of the organisation.
- 10.31 Gender Policy is developed out of recognition that there are deficiencies in the operation of Schools and organizations in their fair and equitable treatment of all genders i.e. women/girls, men/boys and transgender community. A gender policy is an instrument for tackling those deficiencies in an organized manner with stated goals, timeframes for achieving them, methodologies for achievement of goals and strategies, and programmes through which the policy will be applied.

10. Select References and Readings (Printed/Online)
