

Position Paper on Gender, Social Equity and Inclusion (2025–2028)

Bangladesh Country Programme

1. Introduction

Helvetas Bangladesh aligns with the [global vision](#) of fostering a just world where all people can self-determine their lives with dignity and security, while using environmental resources sustainably. As of 2024, our country programme has made significant improvements in being gender-sensitive and is now strategically positioned to move toward gender-transformative development by 2028. This position paper outlines our commitment, grounded in Helvetas' [Gender and Social Equity \(GSE\) policy principles](#), and [2025-2028 vision and actions](#), and contextualizes the Helvetas global [GSE Capability Statement \(2022\)](#) within the Bangladesh country programme and outlines how we will progressively apply a justice lens over the period 2025–2028.

2. Vision and Commitment

Our commitment to Gender, Social Equity and Inclusion¹ (hereafter GSEI) is rooted in a rights-based approach and guided by a growing commitment to applying a justice lens. **A justice lens in gender and social equity and inclusion** means going beyond participation and equity to actively identify and address the **root causes of exclusion, discrimination, and unequal power relations**. It calls for **intentional actions** that move beyond surface-level inclusion and drive structural change, ensuring that all individuals — especially those who are most often left behind — can access their rights, exercise agency, and thrive with dignity.

While Helvetas globally refers to Gender and Social Equity (GSE) as transversal priority, the Bangladesh country programme explicitly acknowledges the importance of addressing power relations, discriminatory norms, and structural inequalities as part of our equity and inclusion efforts. We recognize the individuals and communities we work with not as '*beneficiaries*' but as '*rights holders* and *active agents of change*' therefore, recognizing them as *project participants*. We aim to support transformative change by gradually integrating approaches that contribute to shifting social norms, challenging structural barriers fostering inequalities and influence the power dynamics embedded [in political, economic, and social systems](#). Helvetas Bangladesh applies GSEI across all three thematic areas—Skills, Jobs and Income (SJI); Voice, Inclusion and Cohesion (VIC); and Water, Food and Climate (WFC)—while progressively incorporating justice-oriented thinking into programme design, partnerships, and learning systems.

Moving forward, Bangladesh country programme will deepen integration of gender and social inclusion as a non-negotiable commitment across all human resource practices, partnerships, and project cycle management. As the context becomes more fragile and unpredictable, we will also

¹ In this document, the term Gender, Social Equity and Inclusion (GSEI) is used to emphasize Helvetas Bangladesh's commitment to go beyond equity in principle and to actively address structural discrimination and unequal power relations by inclusion of left-behind groups.

increase our focus on social protection as a critical link between development and humanitarian work.

Our Gender, Social Equity and Inclusion Guiding Principles²:

Following our commitment toward transformative change, our actions are guided by the nine core principles of Helvetas' Global [Gender and Social Equity Policy \(2022\)](#). These principles shape how we design, implement, and reflect on our projects — and in the Bangladesh country programme, we apply them with a progressive justice lens to better address structural barriers and power imbalances.

Our guiding principles and working approaches as follow:

1. We intervene in an inclusive and systemic manner, practicing conflict sensitivity and Do No Harm.
2. We involve the underserved and marginalize and consider the practical and strategic needs and opinions of all genders
3. We address violence, harmful practices and promote / support human rights
4. We value unpaid care work, informal work whilst promoting decent & dignified employment
5. We promote inclusive leadership and socially diverse representation in our projects. In Bangladesh, this includes fostering leadership among left-behind groups and progressively shifting decision-making power toward local actors as part of our justice-oriented approach.
6. We integrate Gender, Social Equity and Inclusion in social protection, considering social, economic and environmental safeguards and climate change
7. We highlight and advocate Gender, Social Equity and Inclusion in development and humanitarian policies and strategies
8. We consider and integrate Gender, Social Equity and Inclusion in our partnership processes and agreements and code of conduct. In Bangladesh, we emphasis PSEAH explicitly addressed in our partnership process and systematically in organizational behaviour through COC and other policy and process.
9. We integrate Gender, Social Equity and Inclusion and participatory MEAL in our quality assurance.

Adapting above principles, Bangladesh country programme will further focus on following strategic approaches to guide our journey from gender-sensitive to responsive and eventually transformative programming:

- Apply an intersectional lens to address multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination.
- Shift power to women, youth, and left-behind groups by enhancing leadership, voice, and access to decision-making.
- Embed the justice lens in all stages of the project cycle management (PCM).
- Strengthen local partnerships to drive inclusive, context-driven changes and promote locally led inclusive, equitable and sustainable development and resilience.
- Establish institutional accountability through monitoring tools and feedback systems.

² Gender, Social Equity and Inclusion (GSEI) is built on the organization's established GSE principles. For clarity and alignment, GSE and GSEI are considered complementary.

- Advocate for structural changes at national and sub-national level to break the barriers through collective endeavors

3. Strategic Framework and Roadmap (2025–2028)

Helvetas Bangladesh adopts the global [gender and social equity \(GSE\) principles](#) and grounds them in our operational context. Over the next three and half years, our roadmap is structured around strategic actions and system-level enablers that incrementally shift from gender-sensitive to gender-transformative practices.

4. Key Commitment Indicators

Indicator 1: By 2028, 70% of Helvetas Bangladesh projects will be assessed at least once using the GSE(I) Marker to measure gender and social inclusion integration.

We will systematically apply the existing [GSE\(I\) Marker](#) to all projects, especially from 2026 onwards, prioritizing assessments during the design or implementation phase. The results of these assessments will be documented and used to inform project reflection, adaptation, learning, and reporting.

Indicator 2: By 2026 onwards, at least 50% of new awarded projects of Helvetas Bangladesh (including those implemented with selected partner CSOs) will conduct a gender and power analysis at the design or inception phase.

This practice will include the mandatory integration of gender and social inclusion considerations during the project design phase. Wherever feasible, the analysis will be co-designed and facilitated jointly with local partner CSOs to ensure shared ownership, grounded insights, and alignment with community realities. Findings will be documented in project inception reports to support transparency and accountability.

Indicator 3: By 2028, at least 50% of new projects will include one initiative that increases leadership, decision-making, or control over resources for underserved women and youth.

This could include support for women-led CSO, cooperatives, inclusive decision-making spaces, youth led network or collective initiative for advocacy, technology access etc. Projects will identify and select initiative as per project goal and document how these groups are supported as active agents of change rather than only as participants.

Indicator 4: By 2028, at least four partner NGOs of Helvetas Bangladesh will have strengthened their organizational and technical capacities to independently integrate gender and social inclusion into all their projects – beyond Helvetas.

As part of our commitment to localization, Helvetas Bangladesh will support selected and committed local NGOs to deepen their understanding of gender, social equity and inclusion; improve their internal policies and systems and build staff skills. This support will help partners confidently apply key gender and social equity, inclusion principles on their own, demonstrate good practices, and become recognized local leaders in promoting gender, social equity and inclusion.

5. Roadmap to Achieve 2025–2028 Indicators

Our roadmap consists of four strategic pillars with concrete actions and milestones:

▪ Institutionalization:

- Review, adapt GSEI tracker to improve usability and consistency; and roll out the GSEI Marker yearly.
 - Conduct a contextualized GSEI study in selected programme areas to identify current trends, barriers, opportunities, and both active and passive actors influencing gender equality, social equity, and inclusion. The findings will inform scenario-based planning and be made available to teams for use during new project design.
 - Operationalize GSEI compliance guidelines to support a gender and social inclusion into project management and partnership approach.
 - Revise the current proposal's development format and budget template to ensure this commitment is clearly mentioned in each project proposal.
 - An expert panel at CO and HQ level must screen all project proposals and budget to assure that these commitments are being followed systematically.
- **Partner Capacity Strengthening:**
 - Identify GSEI gaps applying a justice lens through organizational capacity assessment (OCA).
 - (Co) Lead and/or (Co) Facilitate the design and organization of GSE and justice capacity training/workshop/ periodic discussion and orientation sessions with partners as necessary
 - Partner capacity assessment and investment to strengthen their ownership and commitment for effective internalization of GSEI and tracking the changes.
- **Learning and Accountability:**
 - Integrate GSEI and gradually emphasis justice lens in annual reflection workshops and a participatory project review system
 - Public reporting of progress toward indicators in country annual reports.

6. Conclusion

Helvetas Bangladesh is committed to operationalizing gender equality, social equity and inclusion, applying a justice lens in its organizational structures and culture, and across its projects and working areas of expertise. This position paper will serve as a guiding framework for strategic decision-making, proposal development, partner engagement, and monitoring. Through a strong focus on localization, we will support to strengthening local actors to lead the agenda independently. Through realistic indicators and a clear roadmap, the country team and programme will systematically shift from gender-sensitive to responsive approaches—laying the foundation for transformative change—anchored in the principles of equality, equity, inclusion, dignity, and justice for all.

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