

# **A Framework Document for Preparing National Gender Action Plan (GAP) of the Jute Sector**

(Based on a Case Study - Bangladesh)



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## **(Based on a Case Study - Bangladesh)**

*“For all the progress women have made around the world, too many gaps persist – the wage gap, poverty gap, education gap, technology gap, access-to-capital gap etc. By closing those gender gaps, we can increase both equity and growth - and do it without breaking the bank.”*

.....*Amb. Karen Kornbluh.*

### **Introduction:**

Jute, as one of the most important commodities, is environment-friendly and provides employment opportunities to lacs of people in farms, industries and service sector of the jute growing countries viz. Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Vietnam etc. Jute sector holds great potential in terms of geographic coverage, employment generation, environment protection and contribution to the national economy both in internal income generation and export earnings. The entire jute sector globally employs more than 4 million people including farmers, workers in the jute mills/industry and people working in the Jute Diversified Product (JDP) sub-sector. No reliable statistics of women employment or involvement in the jute sector is available. But women participation in the JDP sub-sector is significant. Jute sector is helping to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment, since many women, mainly in rural areas, are directly involved with the production of craft items using jute as the main raw material. Besides, a significant part of the family labour used in the jute cultivation esp. post-harvest activities i.e. retting, fibre extracting, washing and drying comes from women. Present trend of production and promotion of jute diversified products (JDPs) is opening up new possibilities like the pattern of garment sector for revival of the jute sector and is creating additional employment opportunities, helping in improvement of the economic conditions of farmers and workers, particularly women.

### **Background:**

Traditionally and historically women have had limited access to income or land, and also limited scope to join agriculture cooperatives, which provide production inputs & commercial opportunities to become independent commercial producers. In Bangladesh, jute sector can provide the second most significant area for women empowerment after garment sector. Though the term gender sensitization and gender equality are sex neutral, this action plan focuses only on the issues relating to women.

Almost in all sectors, gender analysis assumes that women and men differ in the goods and services they produce and in their degree of access to and control of resources and decision-making. Thus, like any other sector, a number of questions arise from the gender perspective in the way to identify women’s contribution to the productive system of the jute sector.

The majority of the world’s governments have signed a number of international agreements and have committed to work for gender equality through the 1979 UN Convention on the

Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the World Conference on Human Rights (1993); the International Conference on Population and Development (1994); the World Summit for Social Development (1995); the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women 1995), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Declaration (2000), Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (2002) etc.

The much cherished Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) cannot be achieved in isolation. It is not possible to achieve environmental sustainability (Goal 7) and also improve maternal health (Goal 5) or reduce child mortality (Goal 4) while poverty (Goal 1) and inequities between men and women (Goal 3) continue to exist. Gender equality and equity are prerequisites to poverty eradication. In many societies, women as well as men are agents of change, but their contributions do not receive equal recognition. Gender equality between women and men plays a positive cumulative role in the poverty alleviation.

MDG 3 is recognized as key to the achievement of all the other MDGs. Yet, today women make up only 30 % of the world's formal workforce, earn 10 % of the world's income and own only 1% of the world's property. Of 1.2 billion people living in poverty worldwide, 70% are women. In many cases, women took the brunt of the economic crisis.

According to the 2005 UNDP Human Development Report, gender continues to be one of the world's strongest markers for disadvantage" and reducing inequality would be instrumental in progress towards the MDGs which has set a target of achieving the cherished objectives by the year 2015.

The year 2010 marked the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Conference on Women, which declared '*Women's rights are human rights*'.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pointed out, "*Women and girls are one of the world's greatest untapped resources.*" With all these cherished declarations and intentions it is time to assess the ground realities in a developing country like Bangladesh and especially in its jute sector economy.

Discrimination against and the oppression of women remain ingrained more or less in almost all societies worldwide but it is more prevalent in the underdeveloped and developing societies. However, winds of change are spreading in such societies as well and more and more women are able to effectively participate in all areas of society, becoming involved in decision-making, having access to economic opportunities, and assuming key roles in social, political and cultural activities.

International Jute Study Group (IJSG) is committed to address the issues of poverty alleviation, employment and development of human resources, particularly women in other words to the promotion of equality of opportunity and empowerment of women in the jute sector.

In view of the above recently the IJSG Secretariat organised a day-long interactive workshop in Dhaka on "*Gender Sensitization in the Jute Sector – Bangladesh*". The workshop provided a forum for women engaged in different areas of the jute sector to discuss the entire gamut of their economic, social and familial issues, the challenges and the future possibilities. The

workshop was able to attract about 100 women participants representing different strata and areas of jute economy like farming, jute industry, small/medium enterprises, associations, research & development, NGOs, trade/ marketing and other commercial sectors etc.

Through presentations, open discussions and interactions, the workshop could explore deep insight into the actual position of women, engaged in different capacities in the jute sector, helped in identifying the actual problems and prospects existing in the sector along with a number of valuable findings, observations, suggestions and recommendations. Nine out of ten presentations were made by women representatives from different fields of the jute sector. In the workshop it was emphasized that increasing participation of women in jute sector - from farming and post harvest to manufacturing and marketing would not only boost export but could change the dynamics of the sector.

### **Findings / Outcomes of the Workshop:**

Some very important and also alarming findings were highlighted in the presentations focusing on a study conducted by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh; and also the presentations by other resource persons as follows:

1. The jute manufacturing sector of Bangladesh is a male dominated sector. 97% of total employees are male and 96% of total workers are male. The ratio of male and female workers in this sector is about 30:1.
2. Employment of female workers is relatively less in the jute sector, esp. in the public sector jute mills, compared to other sectors (e.g. more than 80% female in RMG sector).
3. Female workers employed in public sector jute mills are very few. In BJMC mills it is 4.4%, in BJMA mills - 29%, whereas in BJSA mills, it is as high as 51%.
4. Female workers are largely employed in less skilled jobs with low basic wages & allowances mainly due to nature of job and/or job contract.
5. Very few female workers are employed in weaving operations (male-female ratio -153) and partly in spinning operations (male-female ratio -5).
6. A large number of workers mainly the female workers are not able to afford animal protein in their everyday diet.
7. Both male and female workers of public private jute mills are unable to bear the cost of schooling for their children.
8. Because of low basic wage and lack of housing facilities majority of the female workers have almost no savings.
9. Worker related social compliances esp. safety and security related compliances including Medicare facilities in jute mills require substantial improvement.
10. Lack of explicit demand and poor financial condition of some jute mills are partly responsible for inadequate improvement of compliance standard in the jute mills.
11. Shortage of permanent male workers in the jute sector may be overcome by training and employing more female workers and thereby improve gender ratio.
12. Female workers should also be provided with same technical / skill development trainings as male workers for skill oriented operations and the outcome may be equally productive and efficient like RMG sector.
13. In general, the wages in the jute manufacturing sector needs to be revised (for both male/female) in order to retain the existing experienced/good workers and attract new workers in the sector.

14. Compared to other major manufacturing industries in Bangladesh, growth of production and export of jute goods has been slow.
15. Global production of jute goods has grown marginally between 2001-02 and 2008-09.
16. During last decade, the diversified use of jute though accounted for small quantities of fibre, their share in the value of total exports is rising (in Bangladesh-USD 2.3 m from export of 1870 MT of JDPs in 2008-9; in India – from USD 56.39m, 22% of the total export of jute product in 2004-5 to USD 65.46m, 28% in 2008-9).
17. Recent changes in global market indicate better prospect for jute and jute goods in the coming years.
18. Although Bangladesh manufactured about 30% of global production of different kinds of jute goods, most of them suffered in achieving noticeable growth.
19. Demand for jute yarn has registered steady growth over the years and within last 2/3 years it reached from around 2,50,000 tons to 3,80,000 tons in 2010 .
20. Growth of export of jute goods is much lower compared to that of other manufacturing products (e.g. RMG).
21. Substantial investment is urgently required through a target oriented approach for reduction of gender disparity and for improvement of gender parity esp. in the jute manufacturing sector.

Based on the information, knowledge, awareness and the feedback obtained from the workshop, the IJSG aims at developing strategies and a Gender Action Plan towards achieving one of the most important goals of IJSG in conformity with its mandate.

The GAP for jute sector defines the role of a catalyst that IJSG would like to play in stimulating and facilitating efforts, both in-house and with partners at the national, regional and global levels, to overcome constraints and take advantage of opportunities to gender equality and equity within the jute sector. This is IJSG's response to contribute towards gender empowerment as per the developmental goals of its Members.

### **Gender Action Plan:**

Women's empowerment is critical for economic growth. It is not just equity to almost half of the world's population, but is simple economics. There is broad consensus that when women prosper, their children prosper, communities become stronger and economies are more productive and sustainable.

The main objectives are:

- To address gender issues and try to create gender equality through gender sensitization;
- To address gender impacts and facilitate and encourage women's increased involvement and/or ensure women empowerment;
- To facilitate implementation of the gender design elements like roles & rights to education, training, skill development, credit/loan etc.
- To develop gender monitoring and evaluation indicators; and
- To replicate the success stories of women empowerment in RMG/IT/Telecom sectors in the jute sector.

The Action Plan identifies the main issues and areas of concern while action by the IJSG, the National Governments or the Private sector industries and Entrepreneurs, other stakeholders etc. are not necessarily limited to the issues/concerns mentioned in this document. It is expected that these will receive adequate consideration and attention at all levels.

The Action Plan is an opportunity to increase the quantity and quality of policies for facilitating gender equality, consequently improving the lives of women in the developing world. It calls for an approach beyond usual development targets and attempting to address oppressive societal attitudes towards women in the jute/kenaf growing countries. It includes specific actions on trade, agriculture, employment, education, health, skill development, land ownership etc. Thus, the GAP recommends a number of actions to be taken in the realm of gender equality and equity for the jute sector.

**Action Plan:**

Sl. No.	Issues & Areas of Concern	Plan of action	Timeline	Responsibility
1	Sectoral imbalance in women employment, roles and rights mainly in organised jute industry and at policy and managerial levels of jute sector	<p>A strong commitment and willingness on the part of the management.</p> <p>Ensure a fair and balanced task distribution between male/female working in the organisations.</p> <p>Include gender aspects in different work programmes.</p> <p>Promotion of women, address needs of the women like provision of childcare, resting facilities in the work places.</p> <p>Opportunities for part-time working, working from home, maternity leave, etc.</p> <p>Availability of infrastructure for the compatibility of family and job.</p>	Long term (continuous)	National Govts./ Private Sector jute mills/NGOs/ IJSG
2	Inequality and inadequacy in education/ training and skill development of women in the jute sector.	<p>Strengthen gender – specific capacities through capacity building initiatives</p> <p>Increase women’s participation in different roles and levels through consultation with the management both in the govts.</p>	Long term (continuous)	National Govts./ NGOs/ Private Sector/ IJSG

		and the private sector		
3	Large scale investment from private/public sector to improve the working conditions in factories/mills for better compliances	Secure commitment from public/private sector and also international donors.	Medium term	National Govts./ Private Sector/ IJSG/International donor agencies
4	Availability of credit/loan, marketing & market linkage support	Play a proactive role in making credit/loans available.	Medium term	National Govts./ Private Sector/NGOs/ IJSG/Banks/Financial Institutions
5	Access to basic inputs e.g. raw jute, yarn, fabrics, chemicals, designs, accessories etc.	Set up adequate raw material banks and design banks that are women-user friendly.	Long term	National Govts./ Private Sector/ NGOs/ IJSG
6	Access to vocational training centers, colleges, universities and poly-technique institutions etc.	Strengthen formal/ non-formal education, family planning, health education, etc. for women.	Long term	National Govts./ Private Sector/ NGOs/ IJSG
7	Evolution of positive, progressive and liberal attitudes towards women in family, at work place and in society at large	Awareness & motivational programmes and activities devoted to gender related topics. Knowledge generation on gender and gender mainstreaming. Academic modules at all levels of education as in AIDS. Accountability system for gender –balanced treatment.	Long term	National Govts./ Private Sector/ NGOs/ IJSG
8	Tap women's potential to attain their full contribution & reduce poverty of women the jute growing countries	Develop gender expertise to support gender mainstreaming in all core priorities. Develop gender integrated work plans for future activities. Replicate the model of RMG sector of Bangladesh, as far as possible/feasible working hours, security etc..	Long term	National Govts./ Private Sector/ NGOs/ IJSG
9	Gender sensitive/ responsive Budget /Resources & Gender	Ensure that gender element/ criteria are included and gender sensitivity is formally	Medium term	National Govts./ Private Sector/NGOs/ IJSG

	Sensitive Schemes	incorporated in the National policies.  Provide technical assistance to the concerned govt. agencies to develop gender sensitive schemes / programmes / activities & plans of actions.		
<b>10</b>	Policy Coherence for Development, as efforts to put gender equity in all mainstream areas of development work	Ensure that all new regulations / laws enacted related to the jute sector are gender sensitive and of salutary impact.	Long term	National Govts./ Private Sector

**Conclusion:**

It is hoped that through implementation of this Action Plan the involvement of women in the jute sector will grow increasingly to bring further advancement of the sector. This will encourage dialogue on gender equality, gender mainstreaming and suggest specific policies that will help in the achievement of the MDGs related to gender.

It is crucial for the success of the Action Plan to have an inclusive process that requires that adequate resources are available and guaranteed, and necessary reservations and prioritization for women is ensured for its effective implementation. It goes without saying that commitment and socio-political will to achieve a true gender equality and gender empowerment is the starting point.

The challenge in this Action Plan has been to relate the broad objectives to the specific works. It may not represent a complete roadmap towards achieving all the objectives, it is now up to the governments of the IJSG Member countries to use it as a starting point to continue pursuing the desired objectives through sustained efforts.

Moreover, this Action Plan is not a static document and needs to continue evolving according to changing institutional, political and global and regional realities. IJSG is committed to work in consultation with the national governments and organisations, jute related associations/ bodies, gender experts, and other entities to facilitate implementation of this Action Plan in future.



### **Gender related terminology**

#### **1. Access**

Access to resources implies that women are able to use and benefit from specific resources (material, financial, human, social, political etc.).

#### **2. Control**

Control over resources implies that women can obtain access to a resource as and can also make decisions about the use of that resource. For example, control over land means that women can access land (use it), can own land (can be the legal title-holders), and can make decisions about whether to sell or rent the land.

#### **3. Empowerment**

Empowerment is about people taking control of their lives. It is about people pursuing their own goals, living according to their own values, developing self-reliance, and being able to make choices and influence – both individually and collectively – the decisions that affect their lives. Empowerment is a process, which can be long and complex. It is both a process and an outcome. Empowerment of women implies an expansion in women's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them. For women and men to be empowered, conditions have to be created to enable them to acquire the necessary resources, knowledge, political voice and organizational capacity.

#### **4. Gender**

Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and learned through socialization processes. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman and a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control of resources, as well as decision making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context. Other important criteria for socio-cultural analysis include class, race, poverty level, ethnic group and age.

#### **5. Gender Action Plan**

The Gender Action Plan is a tool to pull all elements for mainstreaming gender together. It identifies strategies, mechanisms and /or project components, and budget provisions for addressing gender concerns, and reports on how women are to be involved in the design, implementation and monitoring process. Key aspects of the GAP are to be incorporated into project planning and developments.

#### **6. Gender analysis**

A tool to assist in strengthening development planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation; to make programmes and projects more efficient and relevant. Within the UN system, gender analysis has been established as a basic requirement for the mainstreaming strategy. The current situation of rural women and men in relation to different issues/problems and the impact of agricultural and rural development policies, legislation, and projects and programmes on women and men respectively – and on the relations between them – should be analyzed before any decisions are made. Gender analysis helps us to frame questions about women and men's roles and relations in order to avoid making assumptions about who does what, when and why. The aim of such analysis is to formulate development interventions that are better targeted to meet both women's and men's needs and constraints.

**7. Gender balance**

It refers to the numbers of women and men in various positions of a particular sector. The term refers to both quantitative aspects (the no. of women/men in various positions) and qualitative aspects (the extent to which women/men have equal career opportunities to serve not only at all levels like promotion, appointment, training, mentoring, but also in all occupations for which they are qualified). It prompts consideration of male/female staffing ratios at all levels of an organisation.

**8. Gender-blind**

An approach/ strategy/framework/programme may be defined as gender-blind when the gender dimension is not considered, although there is clear scope for such consideration. This is often as a result of lack of training in, knowledge of and sensitization to gender issues, leading to an incomplete picture of the situation to address and, consequently, to failure.

**9. Gender equality**

Gender equality entails that all human beings, both are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by the stereotypes, rigid gender roles, or prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. This does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.

**10. Gender equity**

This means fair treatment for both women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but that is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities. In the development context, a gender equity goal often requires built-in measures to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages of women.

**11. Gender mainstreaming**

This is the process by which reducing the gaps in development opportunities between women and men and working towards equality between them become an integral part of the organization's strategy, policies and operations, and the focus of continued efforts to achieve excellence.

Gender mainstreaming implies assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, and ensuring that their concerns and experiences are taken fully into account in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all development activities. The aim is to develop interventions that overcome barriers preventing women and men from having equal access to the resources and services they need to improve their livelihoods.

**12. Gender-neutral**

An approach/strategy/framework/programme may be defined as a gender-neutral when the human dimension is not relevant, and thus gender is not an implication.

**13. Resources**

Resources are means and goods, including those that are economic (household income) or productive (land, equipment, tools, work, credit); political (capability for leadership, information and organisation); and time.