

GIZ Bangladesh’s Journey towards Gender Equality

Corporate Culture

Bangladesh and Germany have both ratified Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 1979 and International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention No. 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) 1958. The Government of Bangladesh has also adopted the National Women Development Policy 2011. However, while the Global Gender Gap Report 2018 by the World Economic Forum (WEF) commended Bangladesh in terms of political empowerment, it also warned that the country is experiencing “a widening gender gap in terms of labour force participation”.

Issues such as gender-based discrimination during recruitment, lack of gender-responsive working environment and sexual harassment in the workplace are considered as bottlenecks to achieving gender equality at the workplace. Moreover, socio-cultural norms, gender stereotypes, as well as lack of women’s agency, coupled with challenges in work-life integration of working mothers and low rates of female participation in higher education in Bangladesh are said to contribute to a sizeable gender gap in employment and gender pay gap.

As of 2018, around 29 percent of GIZ Bangladesh (GIZ BD) national employees were female. The gender ratio of national employees at GIZ BD is reflected in Figure 1. Achieving gender equality within the company remains one of the strategic elements of focus in the GIZ Gender Strategy. In this regards, GIZ BD is committed to the principles of gender equity and equality and to creating a gender-sensitive working environment.

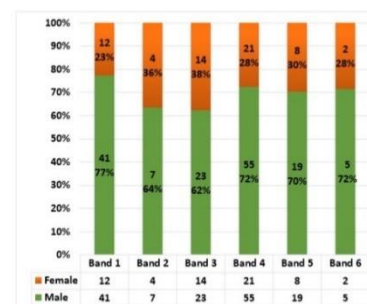


Figure 1: Gender ratio by band among national employees at GIZ BD

Gender equality in the workplace starts with fostering of organizational culture. In order to develop a potentially successful corporate culture, a company’s gender mainstreaming strategy, organizational policies and procedures can act as success factors for development of an enabling environment towards achieving gender equality. Taking such issues into consideration, GIZ Bangladesh (GIZ BD) has adopted an affirmative action policy as a gender equity measure towards achieving gender equality within the company, especially regarding achieving gender balance across hierarchies. In the recruitment process, for example, if both a male and female candidate gets equal scores, the female candidate is given preference in hiring. The recruitment process in relation to gender and inclusion, such as what questions to include or exclude in the job application, interview questions, etc. has also been reviewed by a Country Planning Working Group for GIZ BD Human Resources (HR) unit and management in 2016.

GIZ BD is an equal opportunity employer which advertises the following in its job circulars to strive towards gender balance i.e., **“Women and impaired persons are especially encouraged to apply, and they will be selected in case of equal qualification with other candidates”**.

In 2016, GIZ BD’s Human Resources Unit and Gender Working Group organised the first of its kind Training for Female Leaders in Bangladesh by Academy for International Cooperation (AIZ), especially for GIZ BD female employees in band 4, who are aspiring for leadership positions at GIZ. GIZ BD is taking to address its gender gap in employment as best practice measures taken.

GIZ BD enacted its Sexual Harassment Redressal Policy along with its accompanying sexual harassment redressal committee and procedures in March 2015 in order to enable a gender-responsive working environment. This policy was developed in line with GIZ’s policy banning sexual harassment at the workplace, GIZ’s codes of conduct, GIZ Gender Strategy, the Bangladesh High Court Ruling 2009 and labour laws regarding addressing sexual harassment at the workplace. The policy and procedures have been developed after review by a senior legal expert, and with extensive inputs from the GIZ BD Gender Working Group (GWG), the national personnel’s Staff Representative Committee (SRC), HR and management. This policy is to be reviewed every five (5) years or based on changes in national legislations and policies.

The Sexual Harassment Redressal Committee is chaired by an external Ombudsperson with expertise in gender as well as legal matters, who reports directly to the Country Director. Such external representation is expected to not only bring in senior expertise, but also contribute to independence and neutrality of the committee. Other committee members include Chair and member from the GWG, Head of HR, as well as an option to assign another external member, based on expertise need. GIZ BD disseminates this policy to its employees, through incorporating regular sessions on gender and sexual harassment in its Staff Orientation as well as Introductory Course. It is also included in the national employee handbook for GIZ BD.

As a family friendly organization, GIZ BD also provides 24 weeks of paid maternity leave and seven (7) calendar days of paid paternity leave as a best practice in line with existing market practices in the development sector in Bangladesh. The benefits are beyond the legal requirement in Bangladesh which provisions for only sixteen (16) weeks of paid maternity leave and no paternity leave in the labour laws. This enables both mothers and fathers to have a healthy life and child, enjoy parenthood and supports in retention of female employees.

In 2017, GIZ BD with support from the GIZ BD Gender Working Group and HR has also established day care services for children of GIZ BD employees. Employees can avail these creche services for their children from 6 months up-to six (6) years of age i.e. in line with the Bangladesh labour laws. It is also expected to enhance the work-life integration of GIZ BD employees.

However, initially the challenge was that there was lack of in-house capacity to operate a day care centre at GIZ premises. As such, GIZ BD representatives visited existing day care facilities in the secure diplomatic zone around GIZ BD offices, and decision was taken by the management to outsource the day care services to one of these existing day care centres in the office locality through a competitive tender bidding process, coupled with a rigorous technical assessment. Beyond the labour law requirement which requires day care services to be provided specifically for female employees, GIZ BD also makes its day care services available to its male employees to be at gender par.



Day Care Center GIZ Bangladesh (©Little Steps)

Recently in 2019, GIZ BD has also adopted a policy for mobile working, to enable work-at-home modalities for its employees, if they so require due to matters such as security, work-life integration, etc.

Gender Competence

According to GIZ Gender Strategy's strategic element, gender competence is to be developed to apply and use the relevant instruments in contributing to gender equality and elimination of gender-based disadvantages and discrimination as well as to achieve gender competence under business development.

To promote and achieve this Gender Equality and Gender Competence within the company most effectively GIZ Bangladesh established the Gender Working Group (GWG) task force in the year 2011 as part of the Gender Week in 2011. In the past, gender focal points and other relevant staff have received training on subjects i.e. Gender in the Project Cycle, Inclusive Development Training on Gender and Disability, etc. However, challenges remain for gender focals in finding appropriate trainings on gender to learn from, which specifically caters to their sectoral gender context. Since its establishment, the GWG has organised and hosted many events for employee awareness on gender and women's empowerment issues i.e. during GIZ's Gender Week and Sixteen Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence.



The GWG has also been actively involved in advising management on gender-based policy matters. etc. Regular sessions on gender and sexual harassment are conducted by GWG members during the Staff Orientation as well as Introductory Course organised by GIZ BD HR to orient new employees on the subject matter as well as relevant policies at GIZ BD in this regard.

In terms of commission management at GIZ BD, increasingly the need has been felt by management that while each project develops its own project gender analysis, there is lack of sectoral as well as country level overview of these gender analyses. As a result, there has also been duplication of efforts in knowledge management at GIZ BD. In this regards, the project and cluster Gender Focals and many of the GWG members are also contributing to the 2019's country planning working group which is working towards developing sectoral-level gender analyses as well as a country-level gender analysis for GIZ BD, based on incorporation of knowledge and gender analyses from the individual projects and inputs from the clusters and programmes. These sectoral level as well as country level gender analyses are expected to contribute to organisational learning, as well as act as a knowledge management and acquisition tool, especially via a centralised management overview and quality assurance.

In 2013, the then GWG also published the gender brochure "Let's talk about Gender ... Gender mainstreaming initiatives in GIZ Bangladesh". Gender mainstreaming initiatives and best practices in GIZ BD projects during that time were documented in this gender brochure for organisational learning as well as a promotional, acquisition and knowledge management tool.

Cooperation

The Gender Working Group (GWG) is composed of Gender Focal Points assigned by respective AVs or management from each project / programme / cluster as well as from the GIZ Office along with several voluntary members. The GWG also has two country level gender focals as the Chair and Co-Chair of the working group. As of today, the GWG has 17 members.

The GWG has been playing an active role as a team in achieving the goals of gender mainstreaming within the company since 2011. Key outcomes of GWG advocacy and implementation efforts within GIZ BD have been enactment of the Sexual Harassment Redressal Policy at GIZ BD in 2015 and establishment of the Day Care Centre for GIZ BD employees in 2017. The national personnel Staff Representative Committee (SRC) and HR Unit at the time were the key team players for them in achieving these outcomes.

This strategic close collaboration and coordination between GWG, SRC and HR has been one of the key success factors towards achievement of these outcomes. Moreover, the Gender Working Group has received a lot of support from different organisational units within GIZ Office as well as the projects / cluster to implement their annual action plans i.e. from the HR, Admin and Contract Units as well as from proactive and gender-responsive staff members within the company.

The major challenge in this cooperation mode is the constraint of time as these assignments are additional tasks outside of the core tasks of these staff members. As such, there is at times lack of political will and accountability by both managers and the cooperating members to allocate adequate time and resources for these activities. On the other hand, passion, self-driven motivation and positive attitude of majority of the GWG members towards striving for gender equality has been a key success factor in this context.

Last but not the least, an essential key success factor for the cooperation has been political will and support from GIZ BD's top management. GWG representatives have been for example given the opportunity in the past to present their issues to top-management at Management Team Meetings (MTM) as well as Extended MTMs. Currently the GWG Chair is also invited to represent the GWG at GIZ BD's Country Planning in an effort to provide a gendered lens to the planning.

As an effort to internalise gender competence within GIZ BD, the management has adopted a country-level objective in 2019 to develop sectoral-level and country-level gender analyses. Moreover, GIZ BD's top management has maintained a participatory approach and attitude at gender-based policy development and review as well as process management at GIZ BD over the years.

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