

Gender Charter of Commitment for News Media

Introduction

Journalists and journalistic content in Bangladesh need equal and equitable presence and participation of female, male and all other genders. A charter of commitment to gender sensitivity has been developed to help news media attain this. This charter envisages that the news outlets will commit to ensuring the presence and participation of people of all genders equally and equitably within their institutional structures and in journalistic content.

A 10-member team comprising journalism educators, newsroom decision-makers, journalists, rights activists, development professionals, gender specialists and a legal expert drafted the charter after thorough discussion and consultation with stakeholders. The team held 11 meetings to decide on the course of work, review its progress and finalise the charter. The team also conducted 15 focus group discussions with 129 stakeholders from Dhaka and outside to get their perspectives and accommodate their recommendations. The Media Resources Development Initiative (MRDI) formed the team and facilitated the process.

In this charter, "gender" refers to women, men and people of other sexes and gender identities. While "sex" refers to biological characteristics, "gender" is a social and cultural construct. This charter acknowledges both as dimensions of diversity. Gender equality and sensitivity have been perceived as equal rights, opportunities, and presence as well as sensitive treatment and representation of all genders in news organizations and their content. The charter aims to mainstream these aspects rather than addressing them separately.

Objectives of the Charter

This charter aims to achieve gender equality, equity, dignity and sensitivity in the news media. It specifies the standards, policies and actions required to achieve these goals.

The objectives are:

1. To have written policies and supportive measures for gender equality and equity among journalists.
2. To ensure by written policies, equal and equitable representation of all genders regarding responsibilities, work shifts and daily tasks; management functions; decision-making processes; capacity development; training and work environments. To achieve the same in all journalistic content (e.g., reports, opinions, visual materials) across all the platforms.
3. To ensure the coverage of under-reported gender-related issues in all types of journalistic content.
4. To guard against harmful and stereotypical portrayal of gender in advertisements.

Commitment Charter

We, the undersigned, agree and commit to the following:

1. Equality in Participation

We will develop policies and action plans in our organisation to ensure gender equality and equity in all respects.

1.1 Human Resource Management:

1.1.1 We will be transparent and fair in the process of recruitment and promotion, be it through advertisements or headhunting.

1.1.2 We will follow a pay structure as per the relevant law or by a fair standard, ensuring equal pay and benefits for equal work.

1.1.3 We will take into account a candidate's educational qualifications and skills as the key considerations for recruitment. We will also assess their attitude and outlooks for gender sensitivity. Candidates from women and marginalized genders will be prioritised in cases of equally qualified candidates.

1.1.4 We will adopt affirmative action policies to facilitate the participation of different genders. We will strive to ensure gender diversity in recruitment; if required, we will adopt inclusive measures.

1.2 Workplace Management:

1.2.1 We will take active and visible measures to eliminate gender disparity in recruitment and placement processes to ensure the participation of all genders at decision-making levels.

1.2.2 We will prioritise professional skills, performance and leadership qualities for managerial responsibilities and positions. We will not discriminate against any gender in this regard. We will try and provide support to get women and persons of other marginalized genders into management positions.

1.2.3 News media managers will regularly monitor compliance with these standards.

1.3 Workplace Environment and Atmosphere:

1.3.1 To help us maintain equality in the workplace environment, we will eliminate all factors that lead to gender-based derogation and deprivation.

1.3.2 We will ensure visible and prompt measures from the highest organisational level to prevent and deal with any behaviour, decision, or practice that discriminates against gender or other diversities and special needs of a worker.

1.3.3 We will develop a gender-sensitive code of conduct and ensure its implementation. To facilitate this, we will disseminate information on the code, organise discussion and training sessions, as well as follow up and monitor the process.

1.3.4 We will strive to provide enabling facilities (e.g., separate toilets for female, male and other genders and persons with special needs; creche; comfortable workspaces) to ensure full participation of all.

1.3.5 We will ensure maternity leave as per the law and provide other similar leaves as necessary. Flexible work hours will be considered for new parents. We will watch against discriminatory treatment or resistance towards employees when they return from such leaves. We will make sure that the absence during the leave does not impact the person's performance appraisal.

1.3.6 We will introduce regular discussions, workshops and other creative programmes or systems involving the employees to enhance their understanding of gender-related concepts, sensitivity and amity; and help to change negative mindsets.

1.4 Training:

1.4.1 We will ensure gender balance while nominating candidates to participate in training at all levels-in-house, local, national and international.

1.4.2 We will introduce sessions on gender concepts, sensitivity and equity in all training for professional capacity development.

1.4.3 We will ensure gender balance among participants at all training on new technologies.

1.5 Allocation of Responsibilities:

1.5.1 We will strive to achieve gender equality in all responsibilities including decision-making ones.

1.5.2 We will assign work according to one's professional competence, not being biased by gender stereotypes.

1.5.3 We will ensure training and support as required by employees of different genders to carry out their responsibilities. If necessary, we will provide individuals with special assistance.

1.5.4 We will not do any gender-based discrimination in the allocation of resources and equipment needed for daily tasks. We will uphold the same rule for providing assistance to procure such equipment personally.

2. Representation and Presentation of Gender in Published News

2.1 We will develop specific ethical guidelines and directives regarding gender representation in news-related content. We will not publish or promote any content that provokes hatred, animosity or hostility towards any gender, race, religion, caste, community, state of capacity, class or profession. We will not perpetuate gender stereotypes. We will inform people about diverse lives and their needs.

2.2 We will portray the diverse roles and participation of different genders in communities. We will include voices, perspectives and views of diverse genders in all our journalistic content including news reports and features. In our content, we will try to bring in persons of different genders as experts, spokespersons, eyewitnesses and stakeholders.

2.3 We will ensure that the visual elements accompanying a news story are relevant to the content. We will guard against defaming or causing unwarranted harm to anybody in the news. We will respect privacy and human dignity. We will be careful not to violate these standards, not only in visuals but also in all the elements and the story as a whole.

2.4 We will develop a style guide with clear directives to avoid direct or indirect derogatory treatment of any gender through words, description, tone or storyline.

2.5 We will be careful not to share on our social media platforms any news, photos, videos or clips that are unduly derogatory or harmful.

2.6 We will acknowledge our factual errors or commission of unwarranted harm and publish full and detailed corrections in all our editions. On digital platforms, we will carry out the corrections and add a correction note.

2.7 We will be watchful so that advertisements do not carry out these insensitivities and representations.

3. Policy Framework

3.1 We will ensure clear inclusion of gender perspectives in all our written policies, e.g., recruitment policy, human resources policy, editorial policy, ethical guidelines, gender policy, safety and security policy, advertisement guidelines and social media policy. The gender perspectives will include issues related to participation and representation.

3.2 We will acknowledge relevant national laws, rules and policies in our house policies. However, if any national regulation or policy goes against gender equality and equity, or free and fair journalism, we will take decisions as appropriate.

3.3 We will adopt affirmative action policies to ensure the participation of all genders.

4. Health, Safety, Security

4.1 We will exercise the highest care to ensure the safety and security of all employees irrespective of their genders.

4.2 We will provide safe transport facilities as and when needed.

4.3 We will particularly ensure the safety and security of journalists who are women or of marginalized genders in the evening and late hours.

4.4 We will form an institutional complaints committee as per the High Court's directives or guidelines of 2009 on sexual harassment. Besides, we will have proper systems to address complaints of any forms of discrimination.

4.5 We will develop written policies and ensure mechanisms to protect employees from work-related hazards including physical and psychological health risks, cyber harassment, financial insecurity and legal risks. The policy will cover hostile environments (violence, conflict, natural or manmade disasters etc.) and any other situation which might put journalists at risk. We will assess the risks and take appropriate control measures.

5. Monitoring

We will monitor if the pledges made in the charter are being implemented and ensure due accountability.

Those who drafted the Charter of Commitment

Lead

Dr. Gitiara Nasreen, Professor, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka

Members of Working Group (Alphabetically)

1. **Dr. Kaberi Gayen**, Professor, Department of Mass Communication & Journalism, University of Dhaka
2. **Fowzul Azim**, Retired Judge, Bangladesh Judicial service
3. **Hochemin Islam**, Gender Rights Activist
4. **Masuma Billah**, Programme Head, Gender Justice and Diversity, BRAC
5. **Qurratul-Ain-Tahmina**, Journalist and Trainer
6. **Sajjad Sharif**, Executive Editor, Daily Prothom Alo
7. **Sheepa Hafiza**, Equality & Human Rights Activist and Social Scientist
8. **Shima Moslem**, Joint General Secretary, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad
9. **Talat Mamun**, Executive Director, Channel 24

Stakeholders who contributed to the Charter of Commitment

1. Editors and owners of the news outlets
2. Editor of local newspapers
3. Representatives of journalism associations
4. Representatives of women journalists' associations
5. Reporters, Sub-editors and newsroom editors
6. Decision makers of news outlets
7. Decision makers of online and digital platforms of news outlets
8. Teachers of journalism department of public and private universities
9. Representatives of NGOs working on Gender Equality and Diversity (e.g., Dalits, Ethnicity, Class, Sex and Gender, Disability)
10. Representatives from NGOs working on News Media and Cyber Security
11. Representatives from NGOs working on Legal Aid, Human Rights and Gender Justice
12. Three age groups of audience and readers outside Dhaka

Signatories to the Charter (in order of signature)

1. Tasmima Hossain, Editor, The Daily Ittefaq
2. Matiur Rahman Chowdhury, Editor, Manabzamin
3. Abu Sayeed Khan, Advisory Editor, Samakal
4. Zafar Sobhan, Editor, Dhaka Tribune
5. Zulfikar Russell, Editor, Bangla Tribune
6. Toufique Imrose Khalidi, Chief Editor, bdnews24.com
7. Fahim Ahmed, CEO, Jamuna tv
8. Anwarul Kabir Nantu, Acting Editor, Loksamaj, Jashore
9. Mobinul Islam Mobin, Editor, Gramer Kagoj, Jashore
10. Akbarul Hasan Millat, Editor, Sonar Desh, Rajshahi
11. Mahfuz Anam, Editor, The Daily Star
12. Mohiuddin Sarkar, Editor, Dhaka Post
13. Talat Mamun, Executive Director, Channel 24
14. Shykh Seraj, Director and Chief News Editor, Channel I
15. Shoaib Chowdhury, Chief Editor, Daily Provakor, Habiganj
16. Shamsul Huq Zahid, Editor, The Financial Express
17. Rezaul Karim Reza, Editor, Daily Uttarkantho, Natore
18. Matiur Rahman, Editor, Prothom Alo
19. Golam Rahman, Editor, Ajker Patrika
20. Mustafa Mamun, Editor, Daily Desh Rupantor
21. Rusho Mahmud, Editor, Suprobhat Bangladesh

