

# Summary: Female Death Registration in Rangpur, Bangladesh

## Background and Methods

Despite a long-standing legal mandate for timely and accurate death registrations in the country, Bangladesh has persisting under-reporting of deaths with a pervasive gender disparity—particularly affecting female death registrations. This study, conducted as part of a multi-country initiative led by the Gender Equity Unit of the Data for Health Initiative at Johns Hopkins University and funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies, sought to understand the systemic barriers and enabling factors regarding female death registration in Bangladesh. The research was carried out by the Humanitarian Hub at BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University, in collaboration with Vital Strategies and the Government of Bangladesh. Data were collected through in-depth interviews (IDIs), key informant interviews (KIIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs) in Dinajpur and Panchagarh districts of Rangpur division, engaging a wide range of stakeholders including family members, community leaders, health workers, and registration officials. The study received ethics approval from BRAC JPG School of Public Health Institutional Review Board and Johns Hopkins University Institutional Review Board.

## Results

### Barriers to Female Death Registration

- **Perceived Benefit for Registering Women's Deaths:** Families were less likely to register a woman's death as there was no immediate material benefit. Because women often owned less property, less likely to have formal bank accounts, or draw less pensions, their deaths were not frequently reported to prompt the legal or administrative processes (e.g., inheritance or bank settlements) that compelled actions.
- **Socio-cultural Norms and Attitudes:** Traditional perspectives undervalued the importance of registering women's deaths. Inheritance claims and property transfers typically motivated registration for men, but similar triggers were far less common for women. Community practices around mourning and burial also tended to be less public and formal for women, which reduced external reminders to register deaths officially.
- **Gendered Family and Decision-Making Dynamics:** The responsibility to register deaths typically fell upon male family members who might deprioritize female deaths. Women themselves seldom led the process, and their limited agency or dependence on male relatives further delayed or prevented registration.

### Facilitators to Female Death Registration

- **Legal or financial requirement** (e.g., settling loans, closing bank accounts, claiming social protection allowances, or processing inheritance). Female death was noted to be registered as a prerequisite, when a woman owned property or financial assets.
- **Prior Knowledge and Exposure:** Families with previous experience navigating registration or who received guidance from education campaigns were better able to complete the process, including for female relatives. Prior exposure increased confidence and practical know-how.

# Recommendations to improve Female Death Registration

- **Awareness Campaign:** Develop targeted messages with clear, culturally sensitive communication materials specifically addressing the importance of registering female deaths to reach men and women in the community including decision-makers within households.
- **Strengthening Capacity of Staff on Gender Sensitivity:** Provide structured gender sensitivity training for all staff involved in death registration developing their skills in recognizing and addressing gender biases, understanding the unique challenges women face and fostering respectful, non-discriminatory attitudes.
- **Addressing Social Norms:** Engage community leaders, religious authorities, and influential family members by organizing dialogue sessions, community events, and public forums to discuss and challenge deep-rooted cultural beliefs and highlight how formal death registration can protect women's rights for property, legal claims, and dignity after death.
- **Employing More Female Registrars:** Recruit and deploy more women to act as registration officers, especially in union and municipality offices.
- **Equal Access for Women:** Consider elimination of procedural and practical barriers that disproportionately affect women, for example, accept alternative documents when National Identification or Birth Certificate is missing, flexibility in time of registration, waiver or subsidy for death registration, etc.

The full report is available here:

