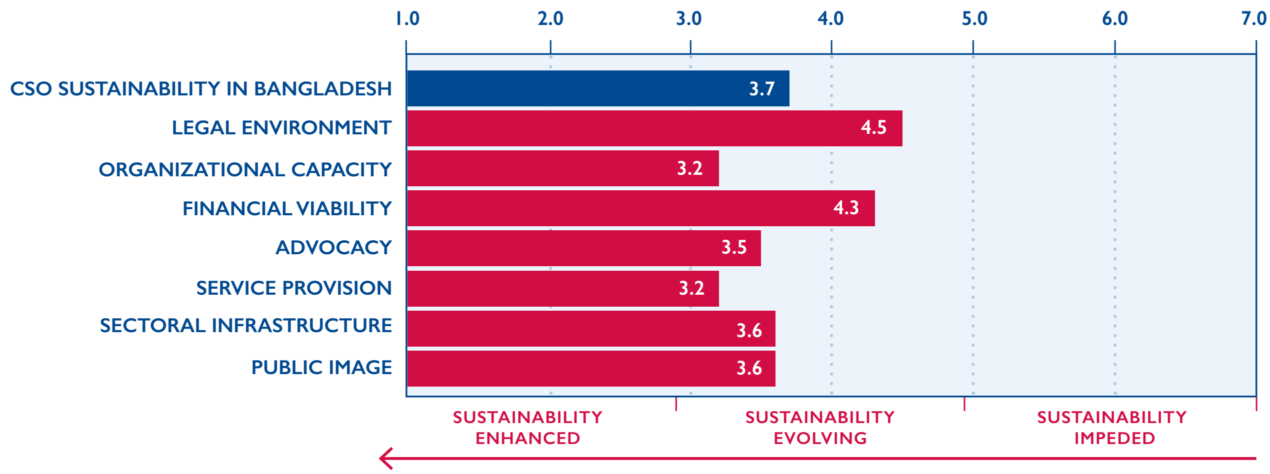
BANGLADESH

Capital: Dhaka
Population: 157,826,578
GDP per capita (PPP): $4,200
Human Development Index: Medium (0.608)
Freedom in the World: Partly Free (47/100)

OVERALL CSO SUSTAINABILITY: 3.7



The political situation in Bangladesh deteriorated in 2017, with increasing divisiveness among political parties and shrinking democratic space. For example, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and other opposition parties faced restrictions in organizing public demonstrations. The Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index (BTI) 2018, which covers the period from February 1, 2015 to January 31, 2017, newly classified Bangladesh as an autocracy because it did not record the minimum threshold scores in all seven areas required for democracies.

The country also grappled with natural disasters and a significant refugee crisis during the year. More than one-third of the country flooded between June and August 2017, affecting over 4 million people and creating a food shortage. In addition, more than 700,000 Rohingya from Myanmar took refuge in Cox's Bazar, a major tourist area, creating additional economic, social, and environmental pressures. Many donors and CSOs shifted their priorities to provide support to the Rohingya refugees.

Despite these challenges, Bangladesh's GDP grew in 2017 by 7.28 percent—an all-time high—attributed to growth in the industrial and service sectors. While the country has made significant advances in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)—including poverty reduction, education of girls, and lower infant and maternal mortality rates—significant socioeconomic challenges remain. As of 2016, about 24.3 percent of the population still lived under the poverty line, with 12.9 percent of the population living in extreme poverty. Moreover, socioeconomic inequalities, youth employment, corruption, and the quality of public services all continue to be problems. However, Bangladesh continues to strive to become a UN-designated Developing Country by 2024 and a Developed Country by 2041. Bangladesh has adopted a so-called Whole of Society approach to ensure the widespread participation of CSOs, development partners, the private sector, and the media in formulating and carrying out the country's plan for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

The sustainability of CSOs in Bangladesh declined in 2017, with negative developments noted in nearly all dimensions of sustainability. Legal environment, advocacy, and public image deteriorated as civil society groups faced pressure from both state actors (security forces and intelligence agencies) and non-state actors (extremist groups), including escalating harassment and surveillance by the former, and death threats and attacks from the latter. Freedom of expression was severely limited as authorities used overly broad provisions, including Section 57 of the Information and Communications Technology Act (ICT Act), to stifle criticism. The enacted Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act 2016 (FDRA 2016) significantly increased government control over the work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), threatening them with deregistration for making "inimical" or "derogatory" remarks against the constitution or constitutional bodies. Many national and international NGOs urged the government to repeal the Act. Furthermore, donors shifted their funding away from local CSOs, impacting financial viability, service provision, and even the sectoral infrastructure, as organizations had less funding to provide services or access training and other resources.

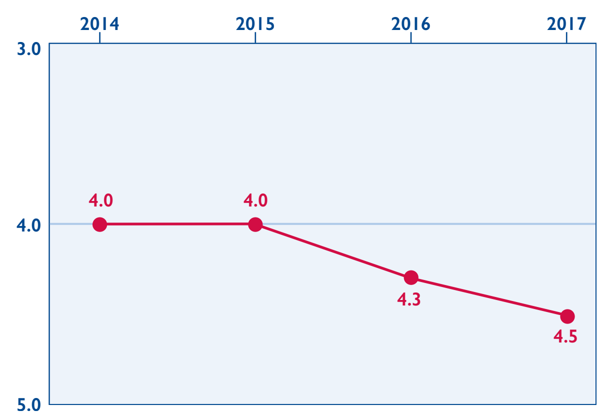
CSOs that receive foreign funds need to register with the Non-Governmental Organization Affairs Bureau (NGOAB) and are called NGOs. According to NGOAB, as of April 2018, 2,351 local NGOs and 259 foreign NGOs from twenty-seven countries were operating in Bangladesh. Local CSOs working without foreign funding can register with a few different government bodies: 50,997 are registered with the Department of Social Service; 15,325 with the Department of Women's Affairs; 9,031 with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms; and 329 with the Microcredit Regulatory Authority.

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 4.5

The legal environment for CSOs in Bangladesh deteriorated significantly in 2017. Government restrictions and controls on CSOs were heightened; some CSOs were shut down; registration processes were delayed; and fees for registration and renewal increased.

Various framework laws, including the Societies Registration Act (1860), the Trust Act (1882), the Co-operative Societies Act (2001), and the Companies Act (1994), govern different types of CSOs. Other laws that regulate CSOs include the Voluntary Sector Welfare Agencies (Registration & Control) Ordinance (1981), the Micro-Credit Regulatory Authority Act (2008), and the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Act 2016 (FDRA 2016). CSOs working in the Chittagong Hill Tracts must register with the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council established under the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council Act 1998 (Act XII of 1998). Obtaining timely registration with any registration authority frequently involves bribery of registration officials to expedite the process. CSOs claim that bribe amounts increase every year. Many CSOs view political connections as an important factor in obtaining registration.

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT IN BANGLADESH



CSOs that receive foreign funds need to register with the NGOAB and receive project-by-project approval. According to the NGOAB's Citizen Charter, a public information document explaining the services provided by the NGOAB, registration should be completed within ninety days and renewal should take sixty days. However, registration is often not completed within the stipulated timeframe. Registration is frequently delayed on the pretext of police verification and is sometimes denied due to negative police reports citing "prejudicial activities." There are no mechanisms by which CSOs can question decisions of the NGOAB. Although the government created an online grievance redress mechanism in late 2015, it is not functional.

The FDRA 2016 is the latest government attempt to regulate foreign funding of CSOs. The new FDRA allows the NGOAB to cancel the registration of an NGO—and thereby prohibit it from receiving foreign funding—if it makes an offensive comment against the constitution or constitutional bodies, which includes the parliament, the president, the judiciary, and the public service commission. In addition, NGOs are now obligated to regularly report to the NGOAB about their activities, incomes, and expenditures, and District Commissioners (DCs) and Upazilla Nirbahi Officers (UNOs, sub-district units) must hold monthly coordination meetings with NGOs in their respective geographical areas to monitor and evaluate NGO activities. If an NGO is suspected of engaging in any illegal or harmful activity, the DC and UNO must inform the NGOAB.

The FDRA also made the registration and renewal process with the NGOAB more expensive in 2017. The new law increased registration fees from BDT 20,000 (about $240) to BDT 50,000 (about $600) for local CSOs, and from $3,000 to $9,000 for international CSOs. Moreover, the law imposed VAT of 15 percent on registration fees. Fees for registration renewal also increased to BDT 30,000 (about $360) for local CSOs and $6,000 for international CSOs. Recording changes to CSOs' constitutions costs BDT 13,000 (about $150) plus VAT. On a positive note, the new FDRA provides that registration is valid for ten years, an increase from five years under the previous law. Finally, the new law restricts administrative expenses and staff costs to 20 percent of project costs.

While the new FDRA expands the powers of the NGOAB, NGOAB's capacity has not increased. According to a 2016 UNDP capacity assessment, staffing levels at NGOAB have not changed since its inception in 1990, when only 394 NGOs were registered, compared to more than 2,500 in 2017. There are only fifty-seven permanent staff members. Only nine staff members have any decision-making powers; the other forty-eight are clerical staff. This staffing crisis has rendered the NGOAB dysfunctional. As a result, there is a huge backlog of files and significant delays in releasing approved foreign funds. According to *The Kalerkontho*, a national daily, "The proper implementation of [the] new law is quite impossible due to existing staff crisis of NGOAB."

CSOs faced pressure from both state and non-state actors in 2017, including death threats, forced disappearances, attacks from extremist groups, and escalating harassment and surveillance by security forces and intelligence agencies. The 2017 Bangladesh Annual Human Rights Report, published by Odhikar, noted continued extrajudicial killings under the pretext of "crossfire," as well as enforced disappearances and torture and death while in the custody of law enforcement. Sultana Kamal, a prominent lawyer and renowned human rights activist, was publicly threatened with violence, arrest, and forced exile by the radical group Hefazat-e-Islam Dhaka City Committee. The group willfully misrepresented comments Kamal made during a talk show broadcast, claiming she had called to remove all mosques from Bangladesh. In addition, the Ministry of Home Affairs shut down the activities of twelve CSOs involved in Rohingya relief—including Sage, Kalb, Waffa, Jagoron, AMPDR, Manabadhikar, Shad Wash, Tie Bid, Sripip, Grameen Bank, Lachun, and Shilaf—on the ground that their activities encouraged the unregistered entry of Rohingya into Bangladesh.

The freedom of expression was also increasingly limited in 2017 as authorities used overly broad laws to stifle dissent or perceived criticism. The government continued to use Section 57 of the ICT Act to punish critics. Section 57 states that if anyone publishes or transmits false or obscene material that causes another to "become dishonest or corrupt, or causes to deteriorate or creates possibility to deteriorate law and order, prejudice the image of the state or person or causes to hurt or may hurt religious belief or instigate against any person or organization, then this activity will be regarded as an offence." According to *The Daily Star*, over 300 cases were filed under Section 57 in the first seven months of 2017. In September 2017, the special public prosecutor of the Cyber Tribunal told *The Dhaka Tribune* that 65 to 70 percent of cases filed under Section 57 cannot be proven in court and "Some cases are totally fabricated and are filed to harass people." The draft Digital Security Act—designed to replace Section 57 of the ICT Act and approved by the Cabinet at the end of the year—proposes even harsher penalties for vaguely defined crimes of national security, defamation, and "hurting religious feelings."

The National Online Mass Media Policy, approved by the Cabinet in June 2017, empowers the National Broadcast Commission to monitor and impose additional control over the online publications of CSOs and others. The draft Digital Securities Act carries similar risks for online publications.

Under the Income Tax Ordinance of 1984, CSOs must have an income tax identification number and submit income tax returns annually. CSOs engaged in economic activities must pay taxes on the profits they earn and must spend the income for charitable purposes. According a report by the Financial Express, in fiscal year 2016-17, the National Board of Revenue—the central tax authority of Bangladesh—received BDT 2.84 billion ($33.7 million) in income tax from registered CSOs. CSOs are allowed to generate income by selling goods and services or by engaging in microfinance activities. Microcredit and income-generating CSOs must pay 15 percent VAT according to the VAT and Supplementary Duty Act of 2012. Individuals and corporate entities that donate to CSOs focused on any of twenty-two designated public benefit purposes are eligible for tax deductions from their income up to 15 percent of the amount of the donation.

CSOs generally have access to lawyers and the courts to defend their legal rights, as well as those of their constituencies. Bangladesh Legal Aid and Service Trust (BLAST), Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA), and other legal aid organizations provide capacity-building support to division and district level lawyers on rules and laws related to CSOs.

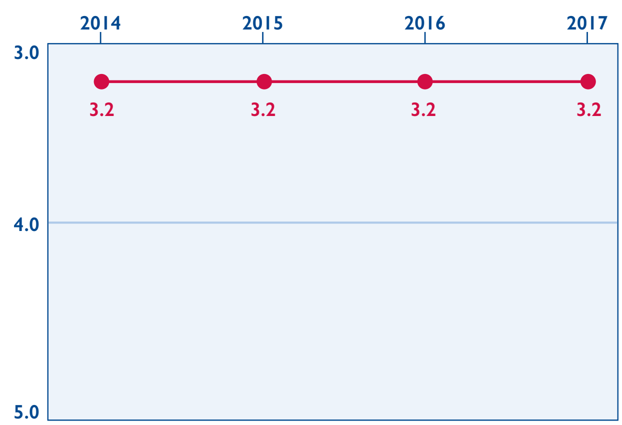
ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 3.2

The organizational capacity of CSOs in Bangladesh did not change significantly in 2017. Donor funding shifts to address the Rohingya crisis caused some small and medium sized CSOs to lose program funding and downsize their staff and office space. In addition, implementation of the FDRA's restrictive provisions is causing problems for many NGOs, especially those focused on rights-based work and democracy promotion. Since the adoption of the new law, there has been a shortage of funding for such work, putting CSOs working in these areas at risk of shutting down. However, most of the CSO sector does not receive foreign funding and was therefore unaffected by these developments.

Most CSOs work to build constituencies by identifying potential beneficiaries, meeting their needs, and engaging them in program implementation. Large CSOs such as The Hunger Project (THP), BRAC (formerly the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Services (RDRS), Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM), Nijera Kori, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), Thengamara Mohila Sabuj Sangha (TMSS), and SHUSHILAN mobilize and empower different groups as part of their program strategies. However, constituency building efforts may have stagnated or somewhat decreased in 2017 due to funding constraints.

Most CSOs in Bangladesh have clear missions. Most large and medium sized CSOs—classified here as such based on their budget levels, staff levels, geographic coverage, and magnitude of programming interventions—have the long-term resources needed to make clear strategic plans and incorporate strategic planning techniques into their decision-making processes. Such CSOs develop operational plans to align with their strategic plans, as well as in consideration of the SDGs, the government's Vision 2021, and the national Seventh Year Plan of Bangladesh. Most small CSOs, on the other hand, make only short-term plans as they do not have reliable resources to develop or implement clear, long-term strategic plans.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY IN BANGLADESH



Most large and medium-sized CSOs are registered and have well-written constitutions establishing organizational structures, roles and responsibilities, and transparency and accountability mechanisms. Some even have policies and manuals on human resources, administration, finance, child protection, gender, sexual harassment prevention, anti-corruption, program operation, d other areas. Still, most CSOs do not have well-functioning internal management and governance structures, and do not even follow adopted policies and manuals.

Particularly in small and medium sized CSOs, governing bodies are dysfunctional, sometimes existing just to maintain their constitutional requirements and approve documents. Small and rural-based CSOs often operate as "one-leader" organizations, where the founder serves as both chief executive and the chairperson of governing bodies. It is common for founders of CSOs to appoint relatives as members of governing bodies or to other prominent positions. In contrast, some large and medium-sized CSOs have strong governing bodies that provide strategic direction, policy advice, and guidance on specialized projects, and play a key role in ensuring internal democratic practices and accountability.

Most CSOs that receive foreign funding maintain full-time paid staff and ensure an appropriate division of labor between board members and staff. However, most staff work on a project basis due to dependence on project-based donor funding. Some CSOs have core staff who work beyond project periods. A few CSOs rely on volunteers to carry out their activities.

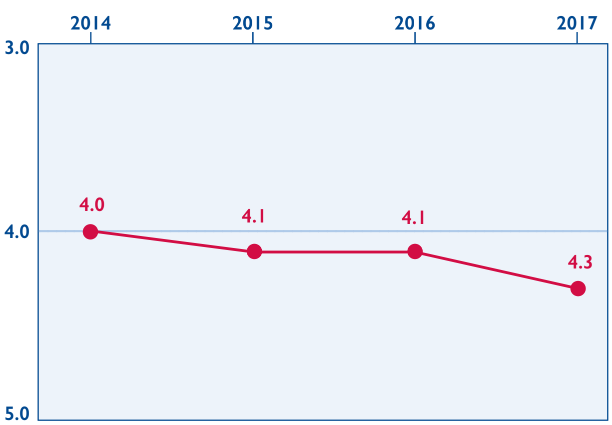
CSO staff in both rural and urban areas have access to equipment like laptops and desktop computers, multimedia projectors, printers, smart phones, and Internet connectivity. Many CSOs in both rural and urban areas use social media to communicate about their work.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 4.3

The financial viability of Bangladeshi CSOs deteriorated significantly in 2017 due to continued declines in the availability of foreign funding to local CSOs. In addition, implementation of the FDRA's restrictive provisions reduced foreign funding for rights and democracy work.

Although most of the CSO sector does not receive international funding, the majority of CSOs registered as NGOs depend heavily on such funding. Major funders include the US Agency for International Development (USAID), UK Aid Direct, the European Union, the Asian Development Bank, and the World Bank. Most NGOs work in diverse thematic areas, prioritizing these areas based on the availability of donor funding. Donor funding is generally project-based, typically spanning between three and five years. Project funding is sometimes renewed.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY IN BANGLADESH



According to many prominent CSO leaders, donors began reducing their funding to Bangladesh after it was designated a lower middle-income country in 2015. In 2017, the decline in donor funding worsened significantly. The NGOAB approved 1,037 projects valued at BDT 55 billion (about $657 million) in fiscal year 2016-2017, an increase from 986 projects valued at BDT 49.32 billion (about $589 million) in fiscal year 2015-2016. However, according to Financial Tracking Service (FTS), BDT 27 billion (about $323 million) of the approved funding was for support to Rohingya refugees, most of which went to international CSOs and UN organizations. Meanwhile, only a few domestic CSOs, mainly located in Cox's Bazar, work to serve the Rohingya refugees.

The decline in donor funding for projects beyond the refugee crisis especially impacted local-level NGOs that depend on foreign funding. Numerous print and online publications reported the mass closure of local NGOs, with one major newspaper, *The Daily Prothom Alo*, declaring, "The NGO sector is in crisis." According to *The Daily Star*, an anonymous NGOAB source said that only 1,400 out of 2,565 foreign-funded NGOs are fully operational.

Government funding for CSOs continues to be limited. Some CSOs benefit from public funding, but only for projects aligned with government policy. For example, Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (PKSF), a government-owned financial and development institution, provides financial and technical support to 276 partner CSOs for poverty alleviation projects. In addition, Bangladesh Bank and several ministries—such as the Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, and the Ministry of Youth and Sports—provide project grants to CSOs.

Some CSOs are identifying alternative sources of income, including charging fees for services; providing fee-based training; renting out training centers; and even developing enterprises. For example, RDRS rents out space in its building to other CSOs to use as office space or for training, meetings, and other purposes; TMSS operates a number of enterprises, including a medical college and technical institution; and the Center for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed (CRP) has become a model for earning income through the physical therapy and rehabilitation services it offers. According to a survey report on the state of social enterprises in Bangladesh published by the British Council in 2016, social enterprise activity is growing in Bangladesh. Approximately 90 percent of these enterprises work with individuals from socially and economically disadvantaged communities, creating employment opportunities especially for disadvantaged groups.

Microfinance organizations are financially stronger than most other types of CSOs. However, they faced obstacles in 2017 due to growing concerns about the country's banking sector. According to Credit & Development Forum (CDF), the alliance of microcredit CSOs, there are 700 microcredit CSOs in Bangladesh, employing 1.5 million people and serving almost 30 million beneficiaries. Beneficiaries provide almost BDT 37 billion (about $442 million) of funding into the sector. The microcredit sector contributes almost 7 percent of the GDP. However, according to a statement by CDF submitted to the Governor of Bangladesh Bank, since mid-2017, private banks have not been able to provide the needed capital to CSOs; in addition, banks have increased interest rates. As a result, microcredit CSOs often cannot lend to potential beneficiaries.

Corporate partnerships with CSOs are nascent. CSOs lack the capacity and clear strategies to solicit funding from corporations. Most corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities are implemented by banking and financial institutions, as well as large corporations like UNILEVER, SQUARE, and Grameenphone. For example, in 2017 Grameenphone partnered with the Special Olympics Bangladesh to support its efforts to train people with mental and physical challenges to participate in Special Olympics sporting events worldwide. However, most CSR activities are episodic, through informal partnerships with local or national CSOs.

Some religious-based CSOs like Qawmi Madrashas and Anjuman Mofidul Islam collect donations from individuals, both locally and abroad, to provide their services, which includes religious education to thousands of students.

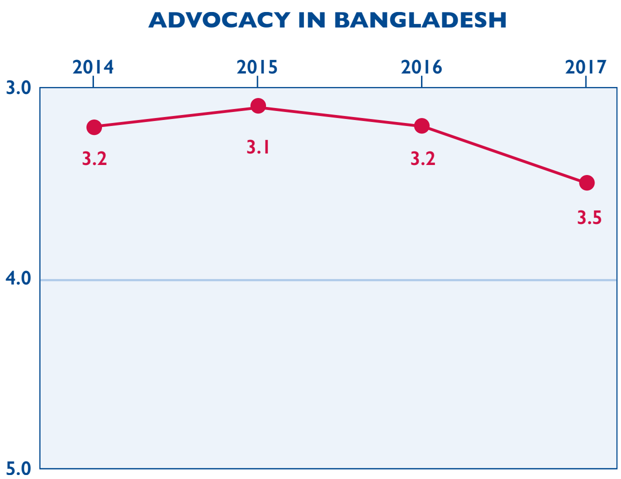
To demonstrate transparency and accountability, CSOs prepare annual programmatic and financial reports detailing their income, expenditures, and assets. However, reporting and management mechanisms vary across different types of CSOs, and donors are concerned about CSOs' lack of transparency and capacity to manage grants.

ADVOCACY: 3.5

Advocacy by CSOs significantly declined in 2017, as CSOs faced escalating pressure from both state and non-state actors. As authorities stepped up surveillance of CSOs and took steps to stifle dissent or perceived criticism, CSOs working on issues such as labor rights, land rights, human rights, and LGBTI rights refrained from significant advocacy with the state during the year. CSOs were also subject to pressure from radical religious groups. In general, CSOs only conduct isolated advocacy initiatives on select issues and self-censor on issues that go against government policy, as they fear being labeled "anti-government."

In 2017, the government extensively used Section 57 of the ICT Act to punish critics, as described above. During the year, it also produced the final draft of the Digital Security Act, designed to replace Section 57. CSOs organized protests and other advocacy campaigns against both Section 57 and the draft Digital Security Act.

Despite these efforts, the Digital Security Act, which introduces even harsher penalties than Section 57 for vaguely defined crimes of national security, defamation, and "hurting religious feelings," was approved in January 2018. Critics fear this could further limit the freedom of expression regarding human rights and government criticism.



CSOs continued to promote the use of the Right to Information (RTI) Act, but neither they nor the state conducted the kind of mass public awareness campaign needed for such efforts to have a significant impact.

Sometimes the government solicits the opinions of CSOs—such as for the draft Child Marriage Restraint Act and on the formation of the Election Commission in 2017—but ultimately upholds most of its views. Even when the government has agreed to adopt the policies recommended by CSOs, these decisions are often not implemented or implementation is severely delayed. For example, although the government agreed to adopt many CSO recommendations to strengthen the Election Commission, it did not actually implement them.

After years of CSO advocacy, particularly by women's organizations and networks, the government adopted the new Child Marriage Restraint Act in 2017, which provides greater protections than the previous law. However, CSOs widely criticized its provision that allows girls under eighteen to marry in "special cases."

CSOs, particularly women's and human rights organizations and networks, have long been advocating for new anti-dowry legislation. As a result of these efforts, the government developed a draft Dowry Prohibition Act in 2017; the draft was approved by the Cabinet in early 2018.

To be involved in SDG implementation, CSOs, led by the Center for Policy Dialogue (CPD), formed the Citizen's Platform for SDGs in 2016. In addition, the government has established an SDGs Implementation and Monitoring Committee in the Prime Minister's Office. This committee works with NGOs to engage them in the implementation of SDGs.

In 2016, based on demands of radical Islamist groups, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board removed from the primary and secondary education curriculum certain writings by progressive authors and poets, replacing them with readings recommended by radical Islamist groups. Secular and progressive CSOs protested against these changes and advocated for a non-communal, secular, progressive, and modern curriculum. However, these efforts did not lead to any concrete reforms in 2017.

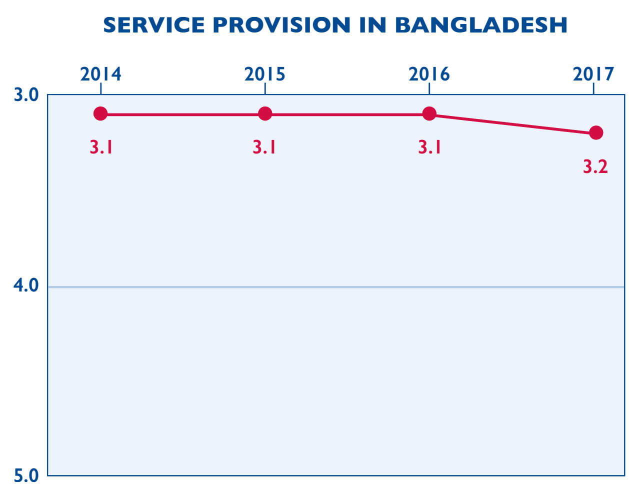
CSO networks, such as the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) and the Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh (FNB), do not currently have a strong position vis-à-vis the government to protect the enabling environment for CSOs. As a result, there were no major advocacy initiatives to amend FDRA 2016 or other laws affecting the sector during 2017. However, in 2017, local CSOs worked with the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) to analyze draft implementing regulations of the FDRA and make recommendations based on international standards for the freedom of association.

SERVICE PROVISION: 3.2

Service provision by local CSOs deteriorated somewhat in 2017, as a significant amount of donor funding was shifted to international CSOs and UN agencies to meet the humanitarian needs of Rohingya refugees.

CSOs continue to play a prominent role in national development through long-standing programs aimed at improving the quality of life of the rural poor and disadvantaged. They provide critical services in areas such as social and economic development, essential healthcare, informal education, disaster management, law, environment, gender, governance, rural infrastructure, and community capacity building. CSOs also educate and empower marginalized groups, including indigenous groups, ethnic minorities, and Dalit (untouchables). While CSOs continued to provide these services, their geographical coverage and the number of people they served declined somewhat in 2017 due to funding shortages.

CSOs strive to provide quality services to their beneficiaries within their limited resources. Large CSOs follow a client-centered, integrated approach, with attention to modern concepts of service delivery. For example, CSOs that work with victims of gender-based violence aim to ensure adherence to case management protocols, including proper needs assessments, service planning, and implementation. CSOs routinely ensure community participation and mobilization in service delivery. However, CSOs' responsiveness to community priorities and needs varies, and is often influenced by donor priorities and funding opportunities.



While CSO services have contributed to the country's development, the impact is often short-lived due to constituents' dependence on services and major challenges such as natural disasters and political unrest. Furthermore, CSO services almost completely depend on donor funding, shifts of which seriously affect the ability of CSOs to maintain services. In addition, some donor agencies focus on capacity building without providing direct grants for CSO services, which has led to dramatic decreases in CSO service provision in such areas as health, education, and sanitation.

More than 700,000 Rohingya refugees fled from Myanmar, taking shelter in Bangladesh in 2017. The Bangladesh Army and UN agencies are conducting the entire relief and rehabilitation effort in the Rohingya refugee camp. According to a circular by the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, only a few CSOs—primarily international CSOs such as Save the Children and Handicap International—are permitted to work in the camp on issues such as education, sanitation, and skill-based training. This policy was established in response to reports that some CSOs were promoting extremist religious thought among refugees. In addition, at the early stages of the Rohingya influx, there was no proper mechanism to control and coordinate CSO humanitarian support programs, leading the local administration to impose temporary restrictions on CSOs' work. The Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG) was established in 2017 to ensure better coordination between partners working on the Rohingya crisis response.

In 2017, Bangladesh experienced a devastating flood in the northern part of the country. Over 700,000 homes were entirely or partially destroyed, crops and fisheries worth tens of millions of BDT (roughly hundreds of thousands of US dollars) were lost, and at least 150 people were killed. However, unlike the case for previous natural disasters, the government and CSOs provided very limited response or relief, possibly due to the lack of funding and government prioritization.

Most CSOs do not charge fees as their target groups are unable or unwilling to pay for services; the public generally expects CSO services to be free. Microcredit CSOs can sustain their efforts through the service fees and loan interest they charge. Only a few CSOs like CRP, which provides physical therapy and rehabilitation services, have the skills to provide specialized services that enable them to win service contracts from government and other development agencies.

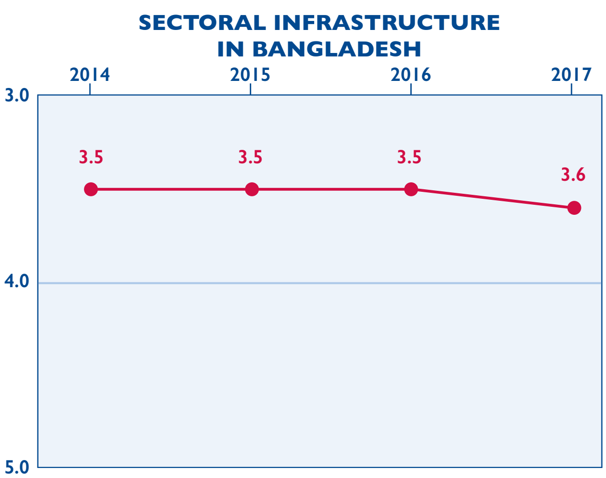
The government generally recognizes the role of CSOs in development and appreciates CSOs that provide services that it lacks the capacity to provide. However, government agencies often view CSOs as competitors, as opposed to complementary service providers. The government provides some funds and technical support to local CSOs, but these are mainly given to CSOs with political connections.

SECTORAL INFRASTRUCTURE: 3.6

The infrastructure supporting CSOs in Bangladesh deteriorated in 2017. As a result of the continued decline in donor funding, CSOs had fewer opportunities to access training, grants, technical support, and knowledge products.

Most local CSOs face challenges accessing resources and obtaining technical assistance to build their capacities. Only a few CSOs, like BRAC, CRP, Association for Social Advancement (ASA), DAM, Caritas Bangladesh, Rural Reconstruction Foundation (RRF), Christian Service Society (CSS), and RDRS have their own office buildings and robust resource centers that offer CSOs trainings, workshops, and meeting space.

International organizations such as UNDP, UNICEF, Save the Children, and Oxfam receive funds from donor agencies, re-grant some funding to CSOs, and provide technical services to grantees in order to maximize the impact of these grants. However, fewer funds were re-granted in this manner in 2017.



There are a number of CSO coalitions, networks, and forums, including apex bodies like ADAB and FNB, and thematic groups like National Forums of Organizations Working with Disabled (NFOWD), Election Working Group (EWG), and Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), Bangladesh Shishu Adikar Forum (BSAF), Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA). However, the capacity of these entities progressively weakened in 2017 due to lack of donor funding, while government harassment led to increased self-censorship.

Most intermediary support organizations (ISOs) and larger CSOs offer professional training and facilities relevant to CSO activities, although such offerings declined in 2017. Prominent training topics include fundraising, financial management, program development and management, monitoring and evaluation, and communication and report writing. Only a few ISOs and training institutes have the capacity to conduct advanced courses on accounting and financial management. To access more specialized training, CSOs must send staff abroad, typically with the help of donor funding. Training materials for CSOs are available both in local and English languages and training is conducted in the capital city and at local levels.

Despite mutual mistrust, some government-CSO partnerships exist in the fields of health, education, gender-based violence, anti-corruption, and local governance. For example, PKSF—a financial institution founded by the government to finance rural development and provide training—implements its programs through partnerships with local CSOs.

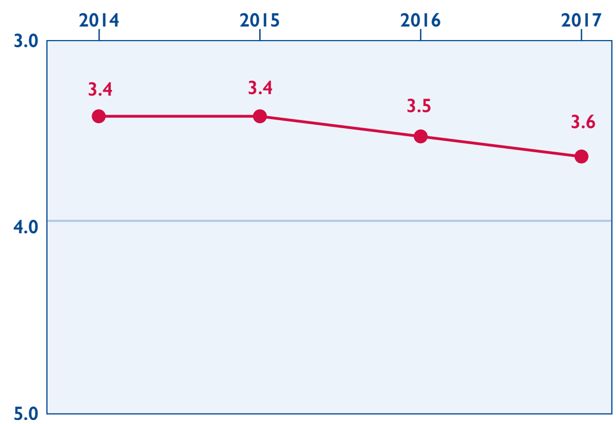
In addition, a few CSOs partner with the private sector to implement CSR programs, mainly in education, health, disaster relief, arts, and culture. CSOs also build partnerships with local and national level media for advocacy on various issues.

PUBLIC IMAGE: 3.6

CSOs' contributions to national development since Bangladesh's independence have been well-publicized, with various media outlets reporting on CSOs' activities and roles. In 2017, however, media coverage of CSOs' work dramatically changed, with reports on NGOs' funding crisis, the closure of their activities, and concern about the survival of the NGO sector, as well as allegations by the government that CSOs were provoking trade unions and workers to protest. Furthermore, media reported more on CSOs' connections with religious extremists than the public welfare activities of CSOs.

The public often criticizes CSOs for shifting their missions, having a short-term project-based approach, and not being accountable to their beneficiaries. The hundreds of microcredit CSOs in the country are often criticized for their high interest rates and harsh approaches to their beneficiaries when seeking to collect loan repayments. At the same time, the public generally has good impressions of CSOs that work in health, education, agriculture, and other development-related areas. CSOs that advocate for people's rights are also popular among the people.

PUBLIC IMAGE IN BANGLADESH



While there is little research on the government's perceptions of CSOs, significant distrust and misunderstanding are observed, and government officials increasingly criticize or vilify CSOs. In 2017, government officials made three major statements against CSOs in prominent publications, including *The Daily Star, The Daily Ittefaq*, and *Bangla Tribune*. First, in November, the government alleged that CSOs were provoking trade unions and workers to protest. Also in November, a number of ministers publicly demanded stricter monitoring of local and foreign CSOs. Third, in July, intelligence agencies claimed to identify seventeen CSOs involved in terrorist financing.[1]

When CSOs raise issues about human rights or good governance, politicians and government officials counter CSOs by questioning their sources and uses of funding. In general, the government appreciates service-providing CSOs more than advocacy-oriented CSOs. Political loyalties are also a significant factor in government perceptions of CSOs. CSOs that support the ruling government party receive various benefits, while supporters of opposition parties encounter harassment. The government uses many of its media channels to promote the country's development successes without recognizing the contribution of CSOs, which may further impact public perceptions of CSOs.

Many journalists cover CSOs and conduct research or write analyses out of personal interest. Most CSOs have their own websites to showcase their activities and demonstrate transparency. The media also considers these websites as reliable sources of information. CSOs also use social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to reach out to peers and stakeholders.

CSOs are legally required to submit annual programmatic reports and submit them to the government, and most CSOs meet this requirement. Only larger organizations publish annual reports with financial statements. Most CSOs still have not adopted a code of ethics or concept of self-governance.

1 The CSOs accused of being involved in terrorist financing included Bangladesh Krishi Kalyan Samity, Muslim Aid Bangladesh, Rabeta Al-Alam al-Islami, Qatar Charitable Society, Islamic Relief Agency, Al-Furkan Foundation, Kuwait Joint Relief Committee, International Islamic Relief Organization (IRO), Hayatul Ighachha, Revival of Islamic Heritage Society, Tawhidi Noor, and Al-Muntada al-Islami.