
IS BANGLADESH A GENDER IN DEVELOPMENT SUCCESS STORY?

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The Bangladesh Development Puzzle, Paradox, Surprise

- Social development more than economic development
- Social transformation preceded economic development
- Role of NGOs and development aid profiled
- Less attention to systemic change
- Less attention to role of government

Three questions addressed in this presentation

- Has Bangladesh's development policy been inclusive of women?
- Do the trends to date amount to women's empowerment?
- Is women's empowerment essential to Bangladesh's development success?
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What about gender matters?

- I propose that gender issues are best conceptualized on a continuum beginning with inclusion and progressing towards empowerment through greater equality in earnings, agency towards empowerment.

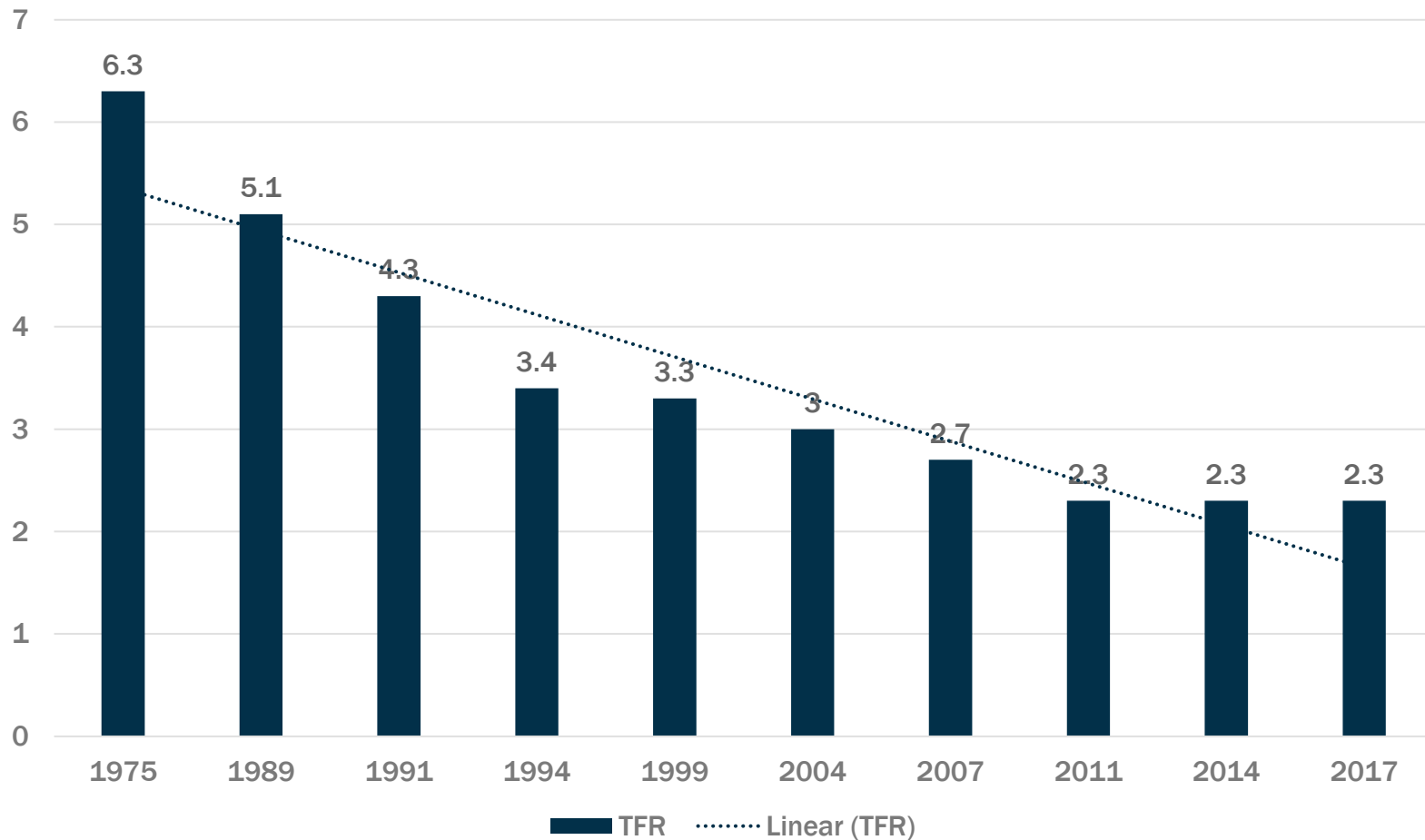
Women in Bangladesh through the decades

- 1970s Women frontline Family Planning workers
- 1970s and 1980s Health and Education Sector recruited female frontline workers
- 1980s to 1990s
 - Girls' preferential treatment in education
 - Preferential recruitment of teachers
 - Explosive growth of the garment sector relying mostly on female workers
- Microfinance programs targeted to women

Family Planning and Fertility

- Emphasis on access to modern methods of contraception (female controlled ?)
- Low emphasis on male methods
- Community outreach
- Impact on fertility led to a pace of decline that was unusually rapid for the time

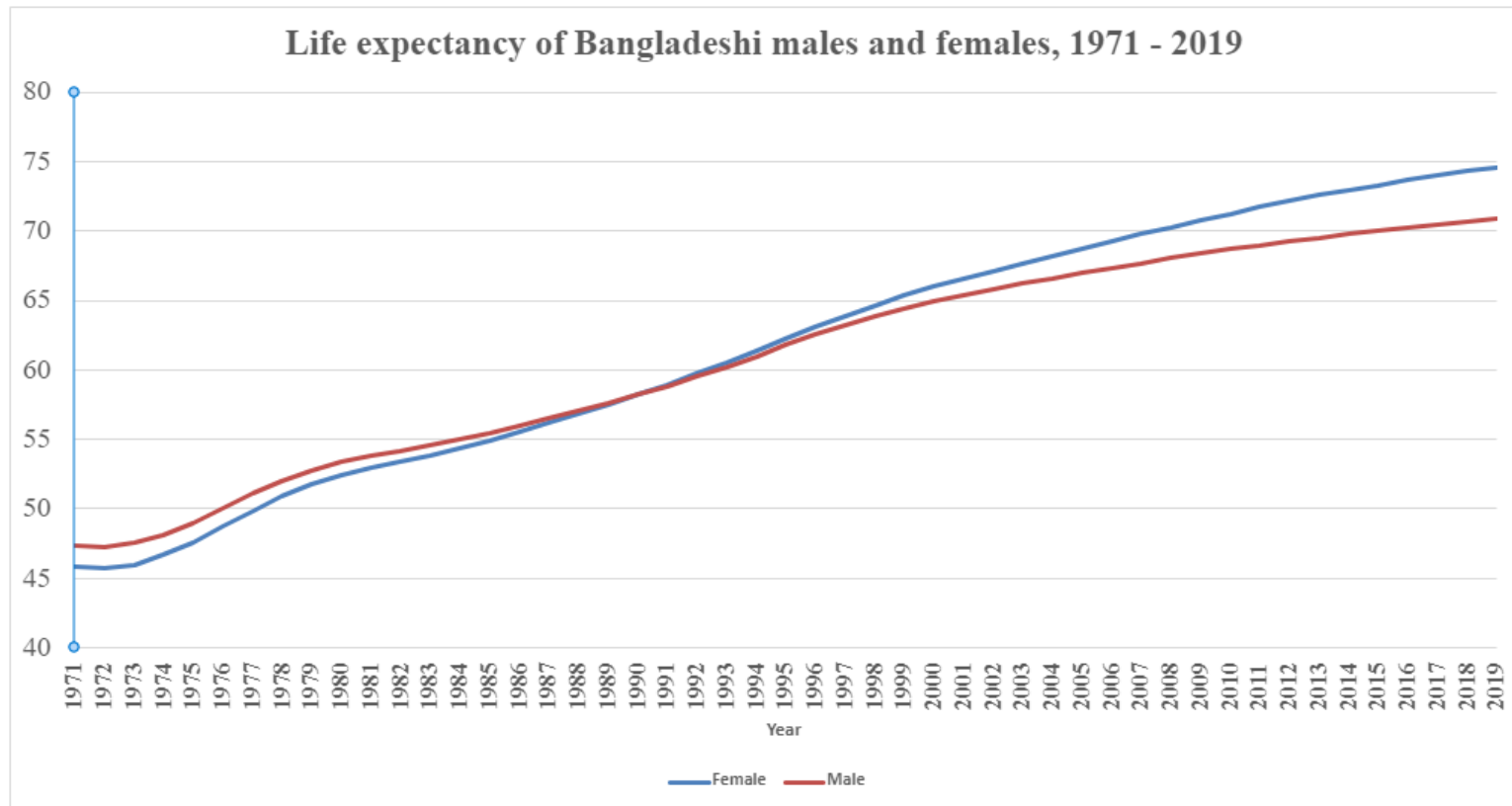
Total Fertility Rate, Bangladesh 1975-2017



Improvements in health targeted women

- Emphasis on preventive health
- Campaigns for immunization
- Large scale national roll out of water and sanitation interventions to target
 - Sanitary latrines
 - Oral rehydration campaigns
 - Tuberculosis programs
 - Covid-19 immunization
 - Reliance on community health workers and female family planning workers

Male and Female Life Expectancy





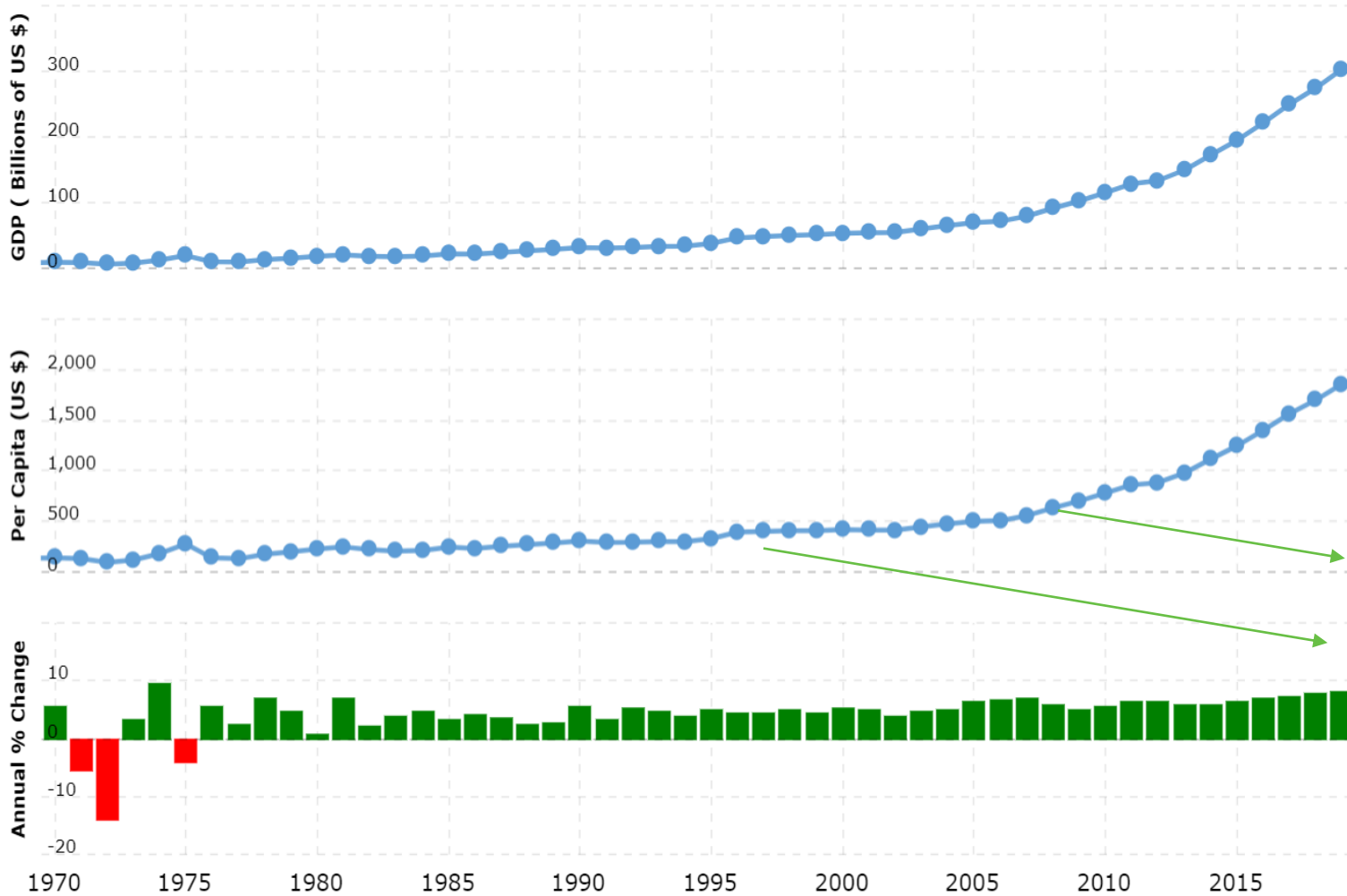
**POPULATION
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Ideas. Evidence. Impact.

BACKDROP OF ECONOMIC GROWTH

Figure 3 GDP Growth

(GDP per capita, PPP (constant 2017 international \$) - Bangladesh
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.KD?locations=BD>)



Education

- Enrollment drives
- Recruitment of **female** primary school teachers
- Early focus on **girls' education**
- Scholarships for **girls** 1990 onwards
- Stipends for poor students

Gender parity index for gross enrollment ratio in primary education, Bangladesh

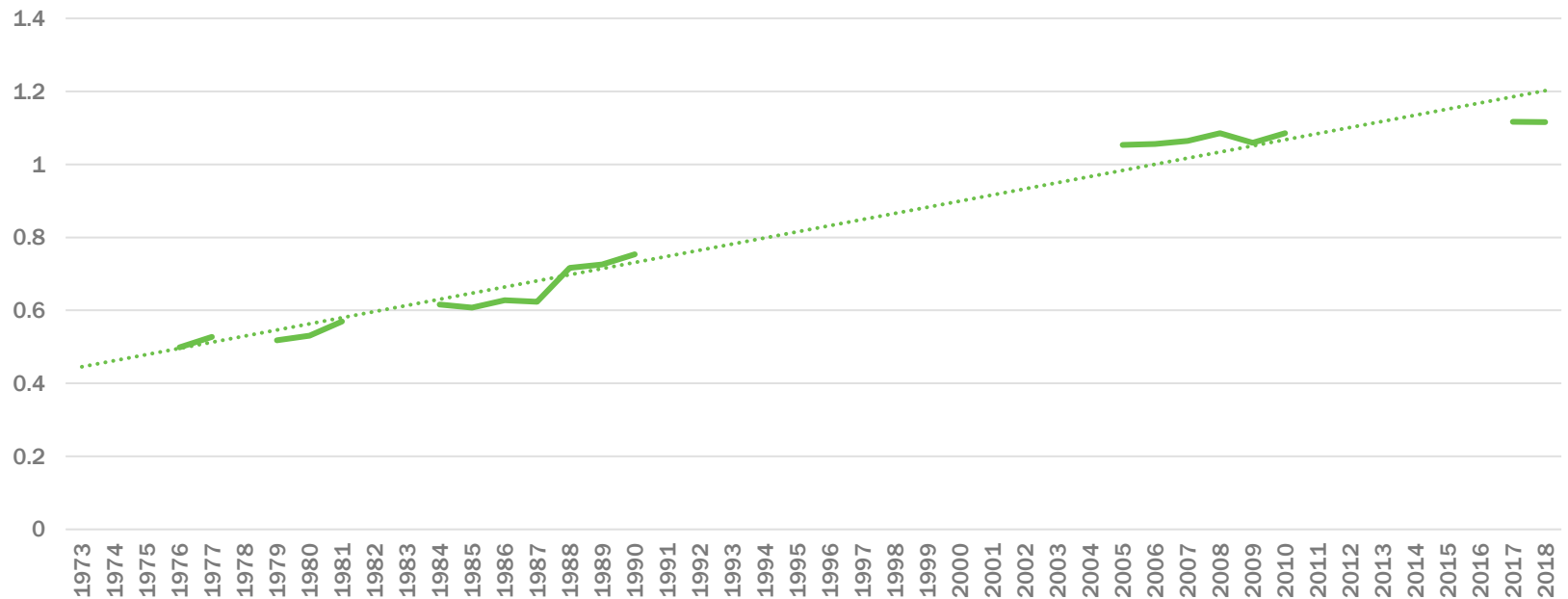
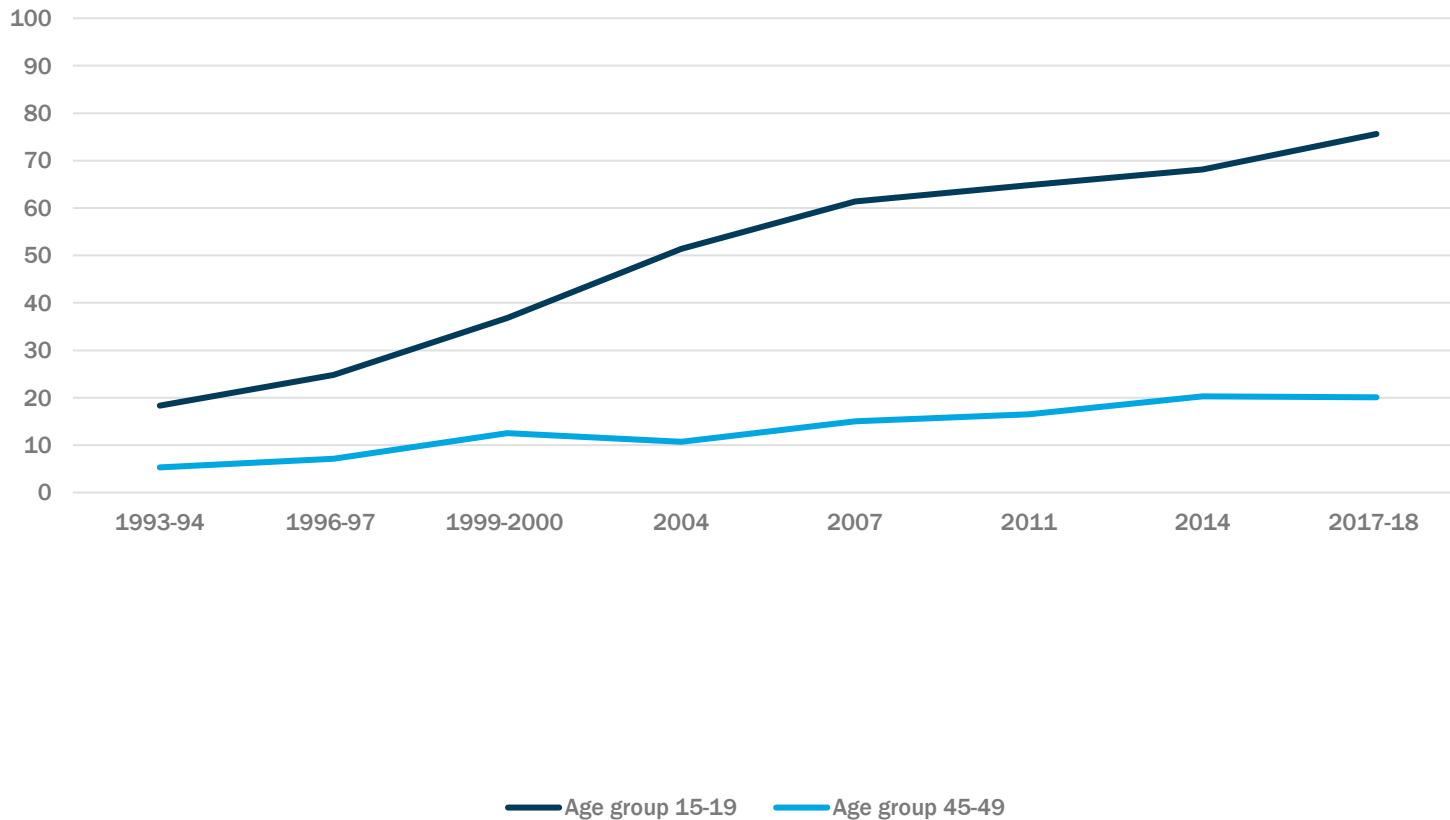


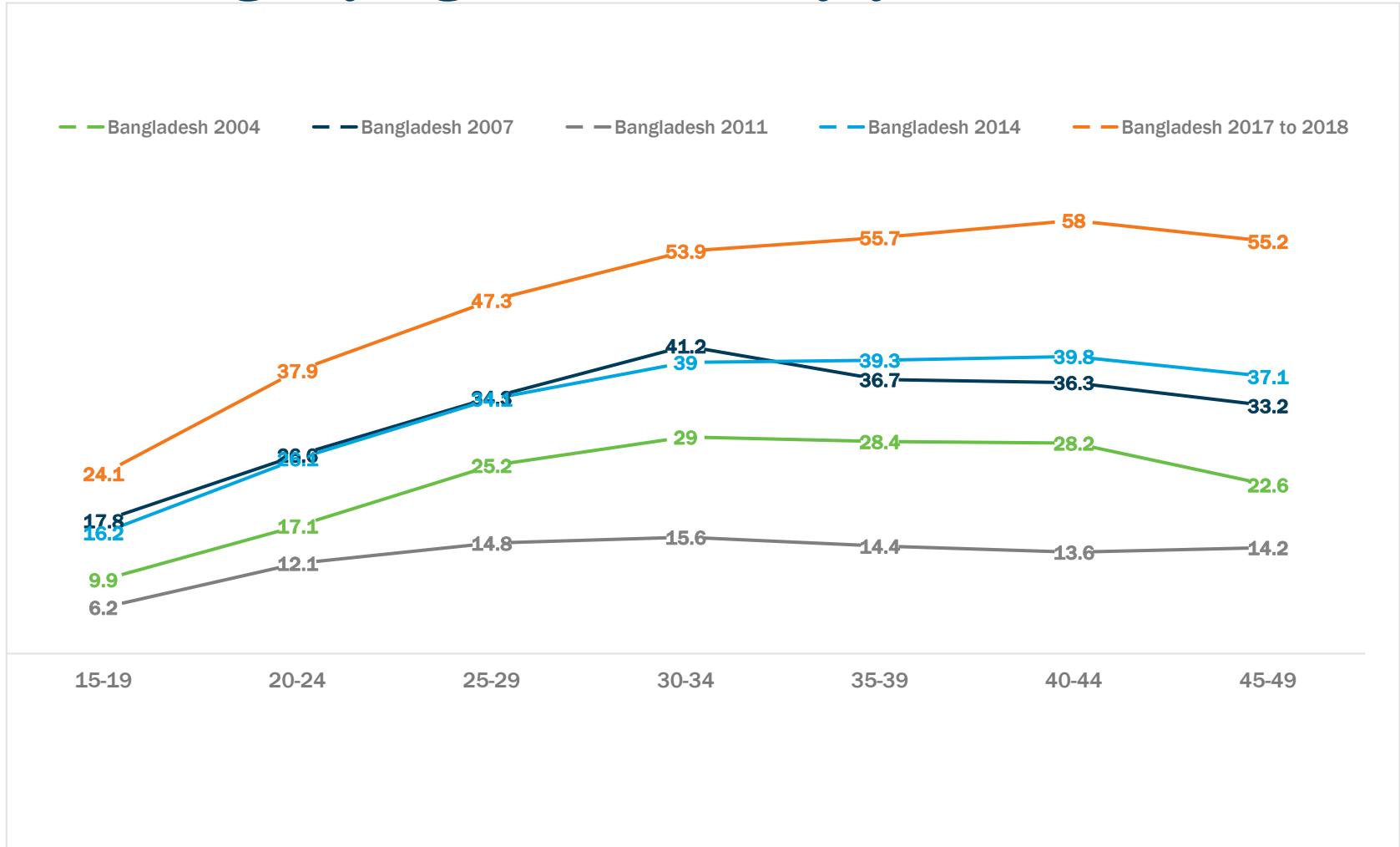
Figure 5: Women who completed secondary+ education, 1993-2018



Female Labor force participation

- Increasing reports of productive work
- Focused on homebased activities
- Role of formal sector opportunities for low skilled women
- Emergence of new opportunities in skilled sectors

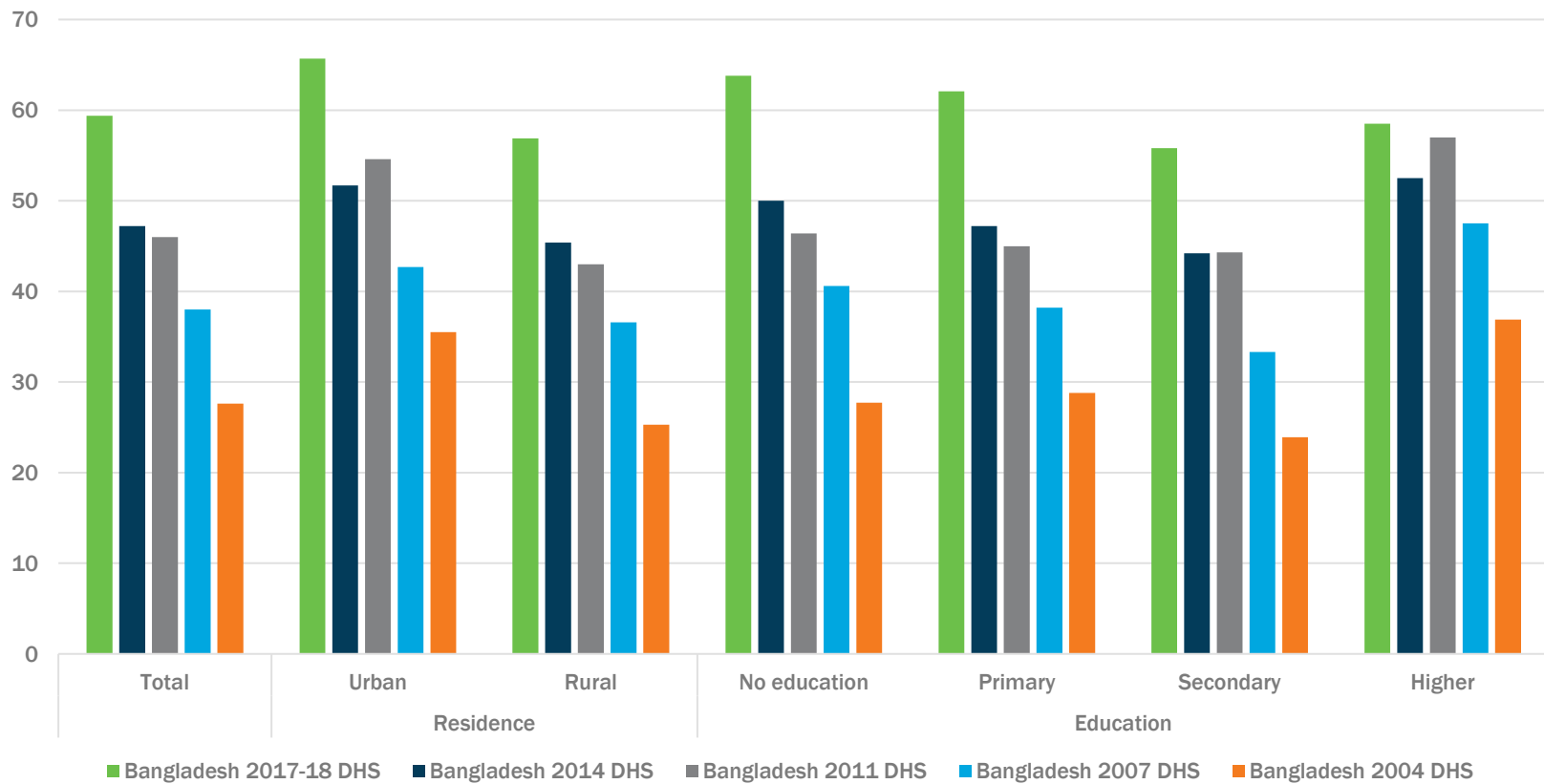
Figure 6: Percentage of women currently working, by age and survey year



Has Inclusion amounted to empowerment?

- Reports of participation in decision-making
- Correlates with education, urbanization

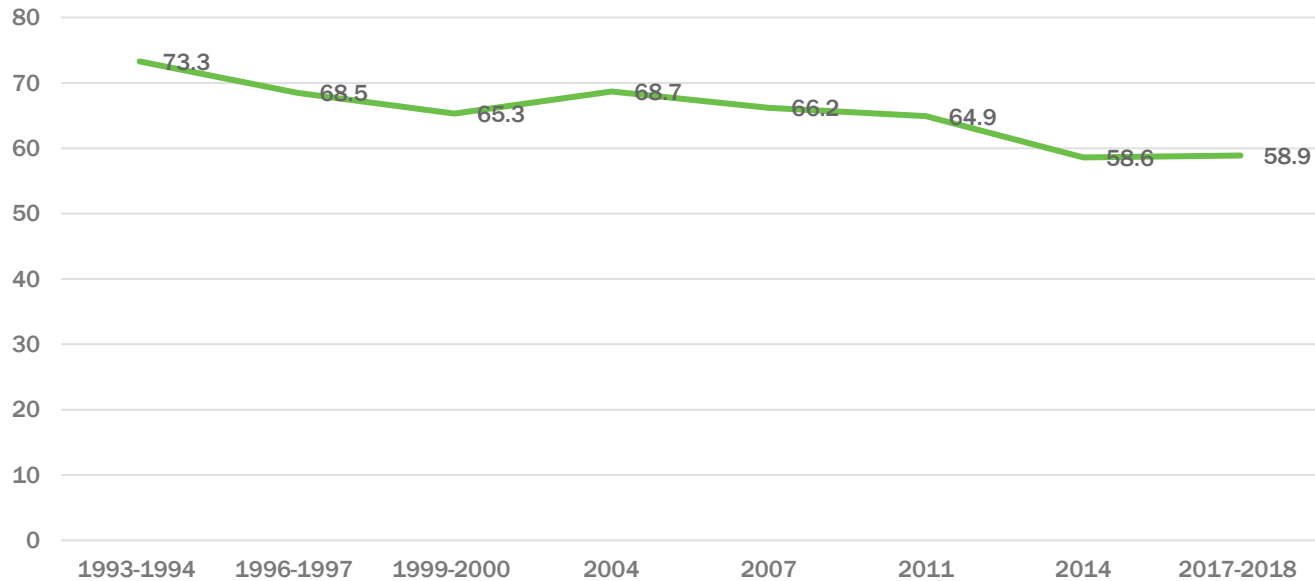
Figure 7: Women participate in major decisions, DHS, 2004-2017



Child marriage trends

- Some decline in the long run but relative stagnation in the past 20 years
- Some examples of successful “boutique” programs but no evidence of impact beyond program areas despite widespread effort
- Indicative of persistence of culturally entrenched values

Figure 8 : Percentage of women aged 20–24 married by the age of 18, DHS, 1993–2018



Three questions addressed in this presentation

- Has Bangladesh's development policy been inclusive of women?
 - Yes, as target beneficiaries and as the frontline and central to the success as measured in social and human capital indicators.
- Do the trends to date amount to women's empowerment?
 - A somewhat tempered yes with significant pockets of incomplete transformation as in gender based violence and child marriage
- Is women's empowerment essential to Bangladesh's development success?
 - For the kind of success that we count, perhaps inclusion and some degree of agency is enough to enhance women's capabilities, provide options and build capacity but not enough to bring about complete gender transformation.
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Concluding Thoughts

- Large-scale programs in the health and education sector have been inclusive of women
 - Women are in the frontlines
 - Programs focus on women
- Many of the key strategies for inclusion were instrumental in nature and were not intended as empowerment strategies
- The absence of spillover to spheres like child marriage is indicative of the limits of inclusion and the need for intentional programming