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Just Energy Transition Conference 2026

Voices for Gender-Responsive Energy Future

Manusher Jonno Foundation



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Introduction

A. Background and Rationale

Bangladesh stands at a significant moment in its energy transition. As the country expands renewable energy and pursues low-carbon pathways, questions of equity, inclusion, and justice are becoming increasingly central. Yet policy discussions continue to prioritise technology, finance, and infrastructure, often overlooking the social dimensions of energy transition, particularly the roles, voices, and leadership of women and young people.

Women, especially those from grassroots and climate-vulnerable communities, are already deeply engaged as energy users, managers, innovators, and advocates. Young people are also emerging as strong voices for climate justice and sustainable energy futures. Despite this, their lived experiences, priorities, and locally grounded solutions rarely influence policy debates or private-sector decision-making processes.

The post-election period offers a timely opportunity to reconnect policymakers with citizen-led perspectives and demands. At the same time, the private sector is playing a growing role in shaping Bangladesh's renewable energy landscape, yet meaningful engagement with grassroots actors and women-led initiatives remains limited.

B. Just Energy Transition Conference 2026

Just Energy Transition Conference 2026 was organized by the Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) on February 1, 2026. The conference, themed "Voices for a Gender-Responsive Energy Future," took place at the Military Museum's Multipurpose Hall in Dhaka. It convened a diverse group of stakeholders, including government representatives, women innovators and entrepreneurs, grassroots leaders, youth leaders, private-sector actors, and representatives from marginalized communities, political parties, and policy institutions. The Just Energy Transition Conference 2026 is conceived as a bridge-building platform to foster dialogue, highlight practical solutions, and translate lived experiences into clear policy recommendations for a more inclusive and just energy transition in Bangladesh.

C. Objectives

The conference aims to advance a just and gender-responsive renewable energy transition in Bangladesh by:

1. Building sustained collaboration between the private sector and grassroots actors, linking innovation and investment with community realities.
2. Capturing and amplifying women's and youth voices on energy transition in the post-election context, grounded in lived experiences and priorities.
3. Converting these narratives into clear policy demands and presenting them directly to policymakers to inform inclusive, gender-responsive energy policies.

Event Details

The event began with a welcome speech by Ms. Shaheen Anam, the Executive Director, Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF). Ms. Shaheen Anam delivered the welcome remarks at the Just Energy Transition Conference 2026, setting a tone of urgency regarding the intersection of climate change and gender equity. Drawing on MJF's 23-year history of working with marginalized communities, she emphasized that a just transition is essential because climate vulnerability disproportionately affects women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. She noted that women at the grassroots level are among the largest

energy users, yet much of their energy consumption relies on unhealthy and environmentally harmful methods. For example, traditional stoves expose women to hazardous fumes, and women in rural areas often walk long distances to collect water, damaging their health. Concluding her speech, she stressed the need for strong advocacy with the incoming government to prioritize renewable energy and climate justice. Ms. Anam highlighted the importance of elevating youth voices, encouraging social responsibility, and fostering dialogue across all sectors. Finally, she called on the next government to amplify the experiences of those suffering most at the grassroots and to take meaningful action to address their concerns.

Shaheen Anam, Executive Director, MJF: *“Women in char walk for miles to bring water for home, which is extremely harmful for their spinal cord. The stove they use gives off gases that could be hazardous to their health. So, energy must be clean, it should be green, and it should be for the people’s welfare.”*

A. Panel Discussion followed by open discussion: Energy Policy and Governance in the frame of Women's Empowerment

The first panel discussion session, “Energy Policy and Governance in the frame of Women Empowerment,” chaired by Banasree Mitra Neogi, Director, Rights and Governance Programmes, MJF, posed a central question: “Just transition for whom?” She said a transition cannot be called just if it excludes any community. A keynote presentation, titled “Just Energy Transition and Gender Perspectives: Rights, Rules & Reforms,” was conducted by M Zakir Hossain Khan, Executive Director of Change Initiative. He emphasized that energy is a “natural right, not a privilege”. The keynote presentation highlighted that a Just Energy Transition (JET) must go beyond shifting from fossil fuels to renewable energy; it must ensure fairness, livelihood protection, affordability, and equitable distribution of benefits. The other discussants for this segment included Tanzina Dilshad, Programme Manager, Environment and Energy at the European Union Delegation to Bangladesh, and Hasan Mehedi, Chief Executive of CLEAN.

The panel discussions highlighted governance gaps, fiscal constraints, long-term contractual burdens, and the absence of a gender-responsive JET framework, underscoring how current systems often exclude women and local communities from meaningful decision-making processes. The session further introduced the concept of Natural Rights Led Governance (NRLG) as a practical compliance and screening framework to embed justice, community stewardship, and environmental protection into energy investments. Mr. Zakir stressed the urgency of institutional reforms, gender-targeted financing, inclusive procurement practices, and accountability mechanisms—particularly within the post-election policy window.

Tanzina Dilshad said women remain underrepresented in implementation roles in the energy sector. She stressed the need for women-friendly policies that recognise career breaks and remove structural discrimination so women can participate without being penalised. She referred to Shoktikonna as an initiative supporting young women’s entry into the transition space.

Hasan Mehedi, Chief Executive of CLEAN, recommended decentralised and democratised energy governance, affordable financing including low or no-interest lending mechanisms, and stronger incentives for hiring women, proposing recruitment targets that exceed 10 percent.

The event concluded with a call for a time-bound action plan to integrate women and youth as active energy actors rather than passive beneficiaries, positioning equity and community rights as mandatory conditions in future energy projects. Some of the salient discussion points and key takeaways are mentioned below:

- Just Energy Transition must prioritize rights, equity, and affordability alongside decarbonization.
- Bangladesh faces governance, financing, and regulatory challenges that risk exclusion by design.
- Gender-responsive policies and procurement scoring are essential for inclusive transition outcomes.
- Immediate policy actions (first 90 days) and a phased 12–24-month roadmap are critical for implementation.
- Private sector engagement must institutionalize women and youth participation in energy value chains.
- Tackle governance failures—idle capacity, long fossil contracts, fiscal gaps—while decentralizing fund flows so allocations can reach grassroots actors.

B. Panel Discussion: Power-Equality-Business

The second panel discussion, “Power-Equality-Business,” was chaired by Dilruba Haider, Programme Specialist, Climate Change, DRR and Humanitarian Action at UN Women. This session addressed historical gender and class disparities within the renewable energy sector in Bangladesh. The main concept paper for this segment was developed by Banasree Mitra Neogi and presented by Wasiur Rahman Tonmoy, Lead- Youth and Social Cohesion, MJF. The panelists for this particular discussion consisted of Fredrika Noren, Second Secretary, Inclusive Economic Development, Embassy of Sweden, Navid Hasan, Founder of For the Light, and Mollah Amzad Hossen, Editor, Energy and Power.

The paper emphasized that the long-standing power structures based on gender, class, geography, and ethnicity have left many women—especially rural, Indigenous, coastal, and low-paid workers—excluded from leadership and decision-making roles. As Bangladesh aims for 40% renewable electricity by 2041¹, the growing renewable energy sector offers a chance to address these inequities. However, women's participation in the energy workforce is only about 10%², with even fewer in technical and senior positions. Studies show that gender-diverse organizations enhance financial performance, with closing gender gaps potentially boosting Bangladesh's GDP by up to 28%³. Therefore, integrating power equality into renewable energy business models is crucial for a just energy transition. Structural barriers such as limited access to finance, gaps in STEM education, restrictive social norms, and weak gender-responsive policies must be addressed to prevent perpetuating these exclusions.

¹ <https://eprc.gov.bd/pages/static-pages/6922de66933eb65569e>

² <https://www.manusherjonno.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Assessment-of-Gender-Impacts-in-Renewable-Energy-Sources-and-Technologies-in-Bangladesh.pdf?>

³ <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/economy/news/gender-equity-sustained-business-success-3265036?>

The panelists underscored that although Bangladesh has a generation capacity of around 20,000 MW, renewable energy contributes only a small fraction to the national grid, with solar accounting for just about 2% compared to 23% in Europe. Discussions emphasized the need to decentralize energy systems, promote solar-based business models (such as solar irrigation and home systems), and leverage sectors like RMG to train women in operating renewable-powered machinery. However, patriarchal norms, weak policy enforcement, limited institutional intent, and lack of awareness among women—especially in rural areas—continue to hinder inclusive participation.

The speakers further stressed that while Bangladesh has green financing mechanisms, women access only about 2% of these funds, and female ownership of solar systems remains as low as 5%. Panelists called for coordinated efforts between government and NGOs to build women’s technical capacity, create enabling financial policies, ensure gender-segregated data for transparency, and support women entrepreneurs—particularly in high-vulnerability regions. The discussion concluded that a just energy transition requires not only investment in infrastructure but also purposeful reallocation of power through women’s access to skills, assets, finance, and decision-making authority.

Major discussion points:

- Make gender and intersectionality non-negotiable in energy finance
- Invest in women’s technical and leadership pathways in renewable energy
- Support decentralised and community-owned energy business models
- Strengthen gender-responsive policy reform and accountability mechanisms
- Shift power by funding women’s voices, networks, and movement-building

Dilruba Haider, Programme Specialist, Climate Change, DRR and Humanitarian Action, UN Women: *“The accelerating climate crisis makes renewable energy an urgent pathway, and the women’s empowerment in the sector requires active engagement from men as well.”*

Fredrika Noren, Second Secretary, Inclusive Economic Development, Embassy of Sweden: *“Gender responsive transition requires changes across multiple layers of society, including skills development and access to finance. I recommend making investment access easier for women and establishing decentralized funds at the sector level, not only at the national level, while treating gender responsiveness as a core element of financing discussions.”*

Navid Hasan, Founder of For the Light: *“Women remain largely absent from renewable entrepreneurship and ownership, and I recommend strengthening financial policies to address gender equality in the energy sector, including targeted green financing and training.”*

Mollah Amzad Hossen, Editor, Energy and Power: *“Bangladesh’s renewable share remains low, and many installed solar panels are not fully utilized. I highly recommend expanding technical training for women, developing solar irrigation into a viable business model, and increasing women’s participation with support from the local government.”*

C. From Dialogue to Commitment: Holding Political Parties Accountable for a Gender-Responsive Energy Future

A third session, “From Dialogue to Commitment: Holding Political Parties Accountable for a Gender Responsive Energy Future,” was chaired by Shaheen Anam. This session focused on translating policy dialogue into concrete political commitments ahead of national elections. Among the discussants present were representatives from prominent political parties and other dignitaries, such as Sharif Jamil, Member Secretary, Dhoritri Rokhhay Amra (DHORA), Fahima Nasrin Munni, Assistant Secretary for International Affairs, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Navid Nowroz Shah, Joint Chief Coordinator, NCP, and Bonni Bepari, Vice-President, Jatiya Sangskritik Party, Jatiya Party.

Participants emphasized that Bangladesh's high vulnerability to climate change requires urgent action. They pointed out that while fossil fuels are finite, renewable energy offers scalable and increasingly cost-effective solutions. Despite extensive discussions on climate issues and energy transition, political manifestos have not consistently prioritized renewable energy, nor have they included a focus on gender responsiveness. Given that women make up more than 50% of the voter base, the speakers stressed the importance of incorporating their voices and leadership in energy policy and decision-making processes, which are still largely dominated by men at both the household and national levels.

Political representatives acknowledged the existing gaps and expressed varying levels of commitment to advancing a more inclusive energy agenda. Several pledged to advocate within their parties for stronger renewable energy targets, increased women’s participation in the workforce, and gender-sensitive policy reforms. Biogas and decentralized renewable solutions were identified as practical opportunities for expansion and job creation. The discussion emphasized that moving toward a just and gender-responsive energy future requires clear commitments to be embedded in party manifestos, ensuring the security and empowerment of women while holding political actors accountable for delivering inclusive, climate-resilient energy pathways.

Sharif Jamil, member secretary, Dhoritri Rokhhay Amra (DHORA): *“The just transition should move from dialogue to commitment, and that election manifestos should clearly address renewable energy in view of Bangladesh’s climate vulnerability.”*

Fahima Nasrin Munni, Assistant Secretary for International Affairs, BNP: *“Women remain constrained in participation across sectors and are particularly invisible in the energy sector. Decision-making is still dominated by men, and the changing climate context makes inclusion more urgent. My party will definitely look into the crisis faced by women in the energy sector if we are in power.”*

Navid Nowroz Shah, Joint Chief Coordinator, NCP: *“Our party will seek to strengthen women’s empowerment in the upcoming days by making our manifestos and plans more gender responsive.”*

Bonni Bepari, Vice-President, Jatiya Sangskritik Party, Jatiya Party, and nominated candidate of Dhaka-10 constituency: *“Biogas is a practical option for the future, and I will ensure to influence within party discussions to advance renewable energy and gender responsiveness in our future works.”*

D. Launching WEE-Net

The conference culminated in the official launch of WEE-Net (Women's Energy Empowerment Network), a network formed by 38 women-led CSOs and individuals in Bangladesh. This network will act as a watchdog and advocacy engine, ensuring that the 100-day agenda of the incoming government remains gender-responsive. While the country has achieved near-universal electrification, gaps remain in clean cooking access, affordability, reliability, and women's participation in energy governance and enterprise. WEE-Net seeks to move the transition beyond megawatts toward justice, inclusion, and women's leadership by ensuring their meaningful participation in renewable energy policy, business, and decision-making spaces.

The network aims to expand gender-responsive access to clean energy, create economic opportunities for women—particularly in rural, coastal, char, haor, and hill regions—and advocate for stronger integration of gender equality in national renewable energy policies. Through capacity building, mentorship, enterprise support, and campaigns on clean cooking and energy justice, WEE-Net envisions a climate-resilient, low-carbon energy future where women are leaders, communities are empowered, and no one is left behind.

Key Recommendations

The collective discussions, expert analyses, and powerful testimonies from the conference culminated in a clear and actionable roadmap for policymakers, government agencies, and civil society. The following recommendations represent a comprehensive strategy for achieving a just energy transition in Bangladesh.

1. **Non-Negotiable Clean Cooking:** Safe and clean indoor cooking must be treated as a fundamental health right for women.
2. **Gender-Centric Policy Reform:** All energy policies should be audited for gender sensitivity, ensuring the inclusion of marginalized populations such as indigenous people, youth, and persons with disabilities.
3. **Decentralized Financing:** Establish decentralized funds at the local level to provide easier investment access and low-interest loans for women-led energy enterprises.
4. **Recruitment Targets:** Energy organizations should set mandatory targets (proposed at 20%) for hiring women in technical and decision-making roles.
5. **Skills Development:** Expand national technical training and mentorship programs (like "Shoktikonna") to transition women and youth from "beneficiaries" to "leaders and implementers".
6. **Political Accountability:** Political parties must include specific, gender-responsive energy transition commitments in their election manifestos.
7. **Governance & Transparency:** Utilize a public dashboard, such as the Gender JET Dashboard, for quarterly reports on gender-segregated energy spending to eliminate barriers created by "corrupt bureaucracy" and ensure fund integrity reaches grassroots levels.

Conclusion

The Just Energy Transition Conference 2026 has delivered a clear strategic mandate: there is no transition without justice, and no justice without the equal participation of women and youth. As Bangladesh pursues its target of 40% renewable energy by 2041, the integration of 51% of our population is a prerequisite for success. By bringing grassroots voices directly to policymakers and political leaders, the event established a framework for accountability and inclusion. The launch of WEE-Net marks the beginning of a sustained collective movement to ensure that the future of energy in Bangladesh is not only low-carbon but fundamentally fair and people-centered.