

Socio Economic Development And Women Empowerment in Bangladesh:

In order to reduce poverty and further a countrys economic development, it makes sense to address women, their economic empowerment and contribution. Women empowerment refers to the ability of women to achieve their rights and well-being while also reducing household poverty, increasing productivity efficiency and economic growth (Golla et al, 2011). As the Noble wining economist Amartaya sen has argued, Nothing is more important for development today than the economic, political and social participation of women (Coleman, 2004). Research shows without the contribution of women, economies can not reach their full efficiency. Research shows that given the right skills and opportunities women can help business and markets grow and women contribute more their families, communities and nations when they are empowered. Womens empowerment can be attained by either building womens power, or by advancing women economically.

To establish equality, development and peace there is no alternative of women empowerment in the world. Half of the population of Bangladesh is women and their economic participation has increased significantly in the recent years. In fact, National and international policy strategies have also been reflected in the policy to ensure womens advancement so that they have control over their lives and play an influential role in society as decision makers. The number of working women increased to 18.6 milion in 2016-2017 from 16.2 milion in 2010. Bangladesh secured the 47th position among 144 countries in 2017 as per The Global Gender Gap Report, when the other countries of south Asia like India, Srilanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Pakistan remain at 108,109,111, 127 and 145 position respectively.

The achievement of Bangladesh in the past decade have been exemplary in many sectores such as in reducing infant and child mortality, poverty alleviation, increase in women entrepreneurship, education and health. FY2018-19 budget highlights focusing womens empowerment.

1. Govt. has initiated 5,292 clubs in 489 Upazilas of 64 division for building awareness and prevention through training against gender-based violence.
- 2.Steps taken to provide access to information technology to 10 million rural and under privileged women in 490 upozillas of 64 districts.
- 3.Revolving credit facilities of tk.5000 to tk. 15000 per person in 488 upazilas of 64 districts under way to facilitate self-employment of women.
- 4.Several training courses in a number of trades have been provided to women entrepreneurs through 25 programs financed from the operating budget.
- 5.Steps taken to provide income- generating training 2,17,440 women at grass root level in 8 divisional and 64 district towns and 426 upazilas.

(01)

6.Reserve quota created by prime minister Sheikh Hasina to help increase number of women in judiciary administrative and Govt. jobs defense and UN peace keeping mission.

7.To enhance the political, social administrative and economic empowerment of women by strengthening social acceptance of womens participation in the work place by preventing violence against women and ensuring security at work place.

Both the Govt. and non Govt. sectors have played significant roles and they have often worked in a collaborative fashion. Early invention were made in the field of family planning to reduce fertility and micro-credit was introduced to provide opportunities for income earning.

Now the women can get the bank loan facilities up to 25 lac (2.5 million) taka without any collateral security. In the 1990s there were efforts made to expand primary education, achieve gender parity in secondary schools through special stipend for female students and improve maternal mortality.

Mobilization of rural women by NGOs in village to get services and use of women community level workers to provide door step services in health and family planning played an important role in improving infant, child and maternal health and income earning opportunities.

A large number of women were employed in the RMG (Readymade Garments) sector but now it is decreasing. Most of the women of Bangladesh are employed in informal sector- which is 85% who do low income job. Though technology based education, they aim for getting jobs in high income industries. Prime minister Sheikh Hasina was honored with the global women's leadership award for her outstanding leadership for the advancement in womens education and women entrepreneurship in Bangladesh and Asia pacific region. In 2016 UN women also awarded Sheikh Hasina with planet 50-50 champion while global partnership forum handed over the Agent of Change Award for her role in womens empowerment. In 2014 she was awarded with WIP global Award forum from women in parliament (WIP) and UNESCO for her leading role in gender gap in the political sphere in south and south-east area. She also received the tree of peace Award for promoting girls and womens education in the same year. For womens development and empowerment Bangladesh Govt. allocated the highest budget in the fiscal year 2018-2019. Bangladesh consider women participation as a vital issue in the path of womens empowerment as one of the main drivers transforming the countrys status from low income to middle income.

Womens advancement through access to education health, labor market, employment and social protection have been prioritized, in the FY19 budget which is around 30% of total budget size. The Govt. also allocated tk.100 (USD) core for women entrepreneurship fund and 25 (USD) core for women development special fund.

(2)

participation of girls in primary schools is increasing as their overall enrolment rose from 57% in 2008 to 95.4% in 2017. Bangladesh has topped the gender gap index in the primary and secondary education category and to continue the efforts to this end, the Govt. has extended its stipend program for female students and undertaken initiatives to make women-friendly environment and infrastructures.

Barriers of women empowerment in Bangladesh. Although women in Bangladesh have made significant strides across major spheres, their participation in economic activities is still very low. Only 36.3% women participate in Bangladesh labour force compared to 81.7% of men and even then the majority of the employed have vulnerable jobs through informal, unpaid, unrecognized or agriculture work. Only 20% of all female workers received full wages. In terms of male and female wage gap it is highest in the agriculture sector 17.3% and lowest in industrial sector 9.9%. Further more about 92% of employed women work in the informal sector with high gender wage gaps and lack of benefits (CPD,2018). Womens economic empowerment is the only solution to achieve gender equality, poverty, education and inclusive economic growth leading up to SDGs.

The obstacle to womens empowerment in Bangladesh include:-

1. Child marriage remains high in rural areas which together with dowry tradition reduces women to the status of a bonded laborer.
2. Bangladesh has a high maternal mortality ratio, where 12,000 women die each year due to pregnancy issue or in childbirth (though it was very high before).

3. Malnutrition in women is common, and almost 30% of adolescent girls have anemia and 37% are iodine deficient.

4. Domestic violence is a serious threat to women sexual harassment, acid attacks and suicide are also frequent.

5. Girls attendance in school is very low and few women receive tertiary education.

6. Many women remain unemployed and those earning wages have very little independence in spending it.

7. Commercial sexual exploitation is a major problem.

Though there are different obstacles in the way of women empowerment in Bangladesh new initiatives are taken by the Govt. There are 50 reserved seats in the parliament for women- through this they are getting politically empowered. When women are empowered they can contribute in the socio-economic development. They can eradicate corruption, poverty, domestic violence, facilitate national development etc. The role models of socio-economic empowerment in Bangladesh are Begum Rokeya, Sufia Kamal, Jahanara Imam, Bir protik Taramon Bibi, Dr. Captain Sitara Begum, Sheikh Hasina, Kaleda Zia, Rowshan Ershad, Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury, Bibi Russel, Nazmun Ara Sultana. Undoubtedly among those women Sheikh Hasina, the prime of Bangladesh, has played an extraordinary role to raise the heads of women of Bangladesh to the world.

(03)

Bangladesh has been a role model in Women's empowerment in the past decade and enhanced the socio-economic development. Women are contributing in agricultural sector and RMG sector mainly. Other than these two they contribute a lot as day-labor. But there is discrimination in wages. Giving the same labor, in most cases, they get lower wage than that of men. But in dignified jobs they get same salary and other facilities.

Top 10 countries with women empowerment in the world- According to Global outlook-

(1) Iceland score 858, (2) Norway 835, (3) Sweden 822, (4) Finland, (5) Nicaragua, (6) Rwanda. (7) New Zealand (8) Philippines, (9) Ireland, (10) Namibia.

Govt. has taken the biggest step in targeting education to achieve women's empowerment in Bangladesh. The Education Trust Act has enabled stipend schemes for girls at the secondary level and the exemption of tuition fees for girls in rural areas. It has created gender parity in both primary and secondary education at the national level.

Suvra Rani Chanda
Professor

Department of Marketing
University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh

Share of Broad economic sectors in employment

Sectors/Years	1999	2005	2010	2013	2015-16	2016-17
Agriculture	47.6	68.1	64.8	53.5	63.1	59.7
Industry	20.0	12.5	13.3	23.7	16.1	16.8
Manufacturing	17.9	11.5	11.7	22.5	14.9	15.4
Service	32.2	19.3	21.8	22.8	20.8	23.5

Source: LFS

Types of female employment (% distribution of employment categories of labor force)

Types/Years	2005-06	2010	2016-17
Wage employment	23.9	18.5	31.2
Self employment	16.0	25.3	39.2
Unpaid family worker	60.1	56.3	29.1

According to UNESCO (2017) adult (both male and female) literacy rate is 72.89, where male -75.7% and female 70.09%. Literacy rate in the recent years has been increased.

Date	Adult literacy rate of female	Adult literacy rate of 15-25 years female
1981	17.97	27.15
2001	40.82	60.26
2012	54.24	79.37
2017	70.09	94.38

It is noted that only 8.2% women are engaged in formal financial income and 91.8% are engaged in informal financial income.