The Impact of Women Empowerment on Their Lives: Bangladesh Context

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Abstract

Women empowerment is the most common phenomena not only Bangladesh but also across the whole world. Women are encouraged to see and bring forth the beauty and strength within themselves, to be inspired to be the best they can be and let their spirit shine through. Most of the researches have been done about women empowerment. But this research paper is trying to find out the present scenario of women empowerment in Bangladesh. This study also focuses on those problems which are associated with women empowerment. The study conducted 10 sample units (of Dhaka City) to find out the problems. This study concludes that, Bangladesh has a huge success in women empowerment but there also be some problems associated with it. This study suggested that, some problems can be solved from government level; some are solved by our business organization. And some problems will be solved in case of changing the general values and perceptions about women.

Keywords: Empowerment, Women Empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Employment refers as a management practice of sharing information, rewards, and power with employees so that they can take initiative and make decisions to solve problems and improve service and performance. Empowerment is base on the idea that giving employees skills, resources, authority, opportunity, motivation, as well holding them responsible and accountable for outcomes of their actions, will contribute to their competence and satisfaction. According to Cambridge English Dictionary empowerment means "to authorize". In the context of the people they have to be authorized to have control over their lives. Women Empowerment (WE) is a social network focused on providing events and communication to inspire women's ambitions through the power of Collaboration, Engagement and Growth. Women's empowerment educates and empowers women who are homeless with the skills and confidence necessary to get a job, create a healthy lifestyle, and regain a home for themselves and their children. Empowering women aims to inspire women with the courage to break free from the chains of limiting beliefs patterns and societal or religious conditioning that have traditionally kept women suppressed and unable to see their true beauty and power.

Women are one of the important elements in human race devised by God (Almighty Allah) to fulfill His Dream of Maintaining the Universe. Men and women are inter-dependent on each other in the continuance of their existence and performing the activities of their life. Women are said as better half of men in all societies of the world.

Bangladesh is a developing country with 140 million populations. The economy is primarily dependent on agriculture. About half of the population is women and the majority of them live in rural areas. Rural women are primarily involved in household activities. Although, women constitute half of the country's population, their engagement in economic activities are very little due to inadequacy of opportunities and social constraints including traditional practices that discourage women's employment outside the home. However, the gender equality and the empowerment of women are now recognized in Bangladesh. The women in Bangladesh have been victims of religious prejudices, superstitions, oppressions and various kinds of discriminations; their empowerment has emerged as one of the major issues of development. Because this is the most effective tool for poverty reduction and sustainable development.

NGOs play a substitute as well as a complementary role to government in empowering the female population in Bangladesh. Now, micro credits programs have flourished in Bangladesh. These programs are sponsored by both the government and non-government organizations. More than 70% micro credit activities are handled by NGOs in Bangladesh. The organizations are Grameen Bank, BRAC, ASA, Proshika, BRDB etc. Study shows that Grameen Bank has disbursed maximum amount to the poor as micro credit followed by BRAC, Proshika, BRDB, ASA and other big organizations. BRAC has the highest number of active members followed by Grameen Bank, BRDB, Proshika and ASA.

In Bangladesh, education levels have also increased among women. From a mere 25.8 percent in 1991, the current literacy rate is 50.50 percent (BBS, 2010). It is expected that as educational levels are enhanced, women will have increased agency as well as negotiating powers both at home and at the work place. Other covariates of empowerment for examples socio-economic status, regional variations, religious affiliation may also have an effect on the empowerment status of women.

In Bangladesh, women's empowerment variable has been included in the BDHS (Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey) since 1993 when the number of female workers had just started increasing. Successive surveys have documented this variable regarding women's empowerment, women's control over their own earnings, women's freedom of movement, and women's participation in household decisions are discussed. This variable has been considered as major indicator of a women's empowerment.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY

The aim of this study to find out the present scenario of women empowerment in Bangladesh. This study also focuses on those problems which are associated with women empowerment.

The objectives of this research are as follows:

- 1. To review and provide information about the contribution of women at their homes and nation.
- 2. To represent the present scenario of women empowerment in Bangladesh.
- 3. To study the contribution of government for women contribution.
- 4. To analyze the problems which are facing by women.

GENDER EQUITY: PRECURSOR FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Women empowerment is the reflection of gender equity which is the precursor to moving the country forward, towards middle income status, toward inclusive and sustainable development. Gender equality is a slogan used currently to motivate the women to participate in all spheres of activities along with men and to show their worthiness in performance. Male are also found sympathetic to women and extend cooperation for their participation. The micro-enterprise development literatures in both developed and developing countries focused on economic outcomes like profitability, sales and employment taking male as a model for success. The male focus is currently changing and the women are entering into entrepreneurial activities in developed countries, and they are achieving success. The story of micro-financed enterprise of Grameen Bank devised by Professor Yunus of Bangladesh shows that women-run businesses often are associated with the best credit risks and more likely to funnel earnings into their children's education and that formal business training is not always a prerequisite to successful business development. The ever-increasing contribution of women is clearly evident in every spheres of the society. Their increasing active participation in all sectors ranging from agriculture to politics has made great impact to the national development. The visible changes in women's political and economic participation throughout the country testify the government commitment and to people's aspiration to a more equitable society.

PRESENT SCENARIO OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN BANGLADESH

According to the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Report 2011, Bangladesh rank 112 out of 187 countries on the Gender Inequity Index, which is defined in the report as "a composite measure reflecting inequity in achievement between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and labour market." The 2011 Global Gender Gap Index, developed by the World Economic Forum, ranks Bangladesh 69 out of 135 countries in terms of gender equity (Hausmann et al. 2011). Thus, based on both gender related indices, Bangladesh ranks among the bottom half of countries included in the each index.

Here I represent the present scenario of women empowerment in Bangladesh. For this I take some indicators such as women education, their marriage, women's control over their own earnings, women's freedom of movement and women's participation in household decision which are directly related to women empowerment.

The education of the women, her autonomy and her decision making role all add up in the same directions. Female schooling does seem to increase several aspects of female autonomy which are also useful ways to strengthen the role of women, in this case her level of empowerment (Basu, 1996). In Bangladesh, women education rate increase day by day. In secondary level, there are 53 percent female students (4th November 2014, Prothom Alo). Also increase the women education rate in secondary and higher studies. The 2014 Global Gender Gap Index, ranks Bangladesh 111 out of 136 countries in terms of women education this year, whereas Bangladesh achieved 115 position in last year. According to BANBEIS (Bangladesh Bureau of Education Information and Statistics) 2012, there are 50.1 percent female students in primary level, 53 percent in secondary level. In SSC Examination, the rates of passing female students are growing rapidly. But in college education, the ratio of female students is below than male students. In this level the rate of female students is 47 percent. Women education rate increase in case of medical, law and engineering degree. In 2011, female education in professional level was 36 percent whereas in 2013 it increases in 38 percent. At university level, now female students are 33 percent whereas 30 percent in 2012.

This paper also focused women's marital status which is the most significant predictor of her empowerment. Unmarried women are more likely to be empowered and spend their income on their own. In the

BDHS data (NIRPORT, 2005) used for the analysis the mean age at marriage was reported to be 14.8 years. The age at marriage in Bangladesh remains usually low, in spite of various efforts to educate women and ensure their workforce participation. In comparison with neighbors like India, where the mean age at marriage is currently 20 or with Muslim states such as Pakistan (age 22), the mean age at marriage is remarkably low. However, on detail examination, it is found that the women who attained secondary education or higher the mean age at marriage is 19.8 years which is very encouraging in the sense that it indicates education may work in delaying marriage (NIRPORT, 2005).

Employment, particularly employment for cash, and control over how earnings are used are important indicators of empowerment for women. According to the BDHS (Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey) 2011, thirteen percent of currently married women age 15-49 being employed. By age, employment increases from 8 percent among women age 15-19 to 16 percent among women age 30-34, before declining to 12 percent in the oldest age group 45-49 years. Table 1 shows the percentage of currently married women age 15-49 and the percent distribution of employed women by the type of earnings they received:

	Among curr	ently married	Percent distribution of currently married women						
	Wo	employed						Number of	
	Percentage	Number of	Cash	Cash and	In-kind	Not	missing/		employed
Age	Employed	women	Only	in-kind	only	paid	don't know	Total	women
15-19	7.9	1925	97.3	1.3	0.8	0.6	0.0	100.0	153
20-24	12.5	3396	94.6	2.9	0.8	1.1	0.6	100.0	425
25-29	15.4	3262	94.7	2.8	1.6	0.9	0.0	100.0	501
30-34	15.9	2532	91.6	4.2	1.8	1.3	1.2	100.0	404
35-39	14.1	2081	91.2	4.7	2.0	2.1	0.0	100.0	294
40-44	13.2	1937	87.5	6.5	3.7	0.8	1.6	100.0	255
45-49	11.9	1501	85.3	8.1	3.9	0.9	1.8	100.0	179
Total	13.3	16635	92.2	4.1	1.9	1.1	0.7	100.0	2210

Table 1: Employment and cash earnings of currently married women (Source: BDHS, 2011)

Besides having access to income,	women need to have control o	over their earnings to be empowered. Table 2							
shows the percent distribution of currently married women about the use of their earnings:									

	Person who decides how the wife's cash earnings are used						
	Mainly	Wife and	Mainly	Other M	Missing		employed women
Background	Wife	husband	husband				with cash
characteristics		Jointly				Total	earnings
Age							
15-19	34.4	47.7	6.9	8.1	2.9	100.0	150
20-24	34.2	49.4	12.3	1.2	2.9	100.0	414
25-29	33.8	56.1	7.5	0.7	1.8	100.0	488
30-34	30.4	59.6	8.1	0.2	1.7	100.0	386
35-39	32.2	57.2	6.2	0.0	4.3	100.0	282
40-44	39.7	52.6	5.1	0.5	2.2	100.0	240
45-49	31.6	56.5	8.1	0.4	3.4	100.0	167
Number of living							
children							
0	37.0	46.0	8.9	3.6	4.5	100.0	254
1-2	34.5	55.1	7.0	1.0	2.3	100.0	1220
3-4	30.7	56.8	10.1	0.3	2.1	100.0	534
5+	29.8	58.1	8.6	0.0	3.5	100.0	121
Residence							
Urban	35.9	56.4	4.6	0.9	2.3	100.0	868
Rural	32.0	53.4	10.5	1.2	2.8	100.0	1260
Education							
No education	25.4	62.6	8.5	0.4	3.1	100.0	581
Primary incomplete	30.3	57.6	8.8	0.6	2.7	100.0	405
Primary complete	36.3	48.8	11.8	1.0	2.1	100.0	216
Secondary incomplete	39.5	47.1	7.9	2.8	2.7	100.0	502
Secondary complete or							
higher	39.6	52.8	5.2	0.5	2.0	100.0	425
Total	33.6	54.6	8.1	1.1	2.6	100.0	2128

Table 2: Control over women's cash earnings (Source: BDHS, 2011)

The above table shows that over one-third of currently married women who earn cash reports that they themselves mainly decide how their cash earnings are used, another 55 percent reports that they decide jointly with their husbands, and 8 percent report that their husband alone decide their earnings are used. Women age 30-34 are less likely than older and younger women to mainly decide by themselves how their earnings are used (30 percent). Women with no children are more likely to make decisions regarding the use of their earnings than women with children. For example, 37 percent of currently married women with no children mainly decide by themselves how their earnings are used compared with 30 percent of women with five or more children. And increasing the number of children indicates that the rate of number of employed women is decreasing. Urban women are more likely than rural women to mainly make decisions themselves about their spending their earnings (36 percent and 32 percent, respectively). Rural women are more likely than urban women to report that their husbands alone make decisions about the use of their earnings (11 percent versus 5 percent, respectively).

Women's decision-making power regarding their earnings increases with their level of education. Two in five women who have at least some secondary education mainly make the decision by themselves on how to use the money they earn compared with one in four women with no education (25 percent). Women with no education are more likely to decide jointly with their husbands (63 percent) about the use of their earnings.

Freedom of movement outside the home is an important aspect of women's autonomy and empowerment. This is particularly true Bangladesh is essentially a Muslim country and it has a long tradition, especially in rural areas, of *purdah*, which is the practice of secluding from the view of men. my survey finds that, women who are more mobile like as they are able to shop alone, go outside for any necessary alone, visit health centre alone without being accompanied by a male relative, have higher degree of empowerment. The degree of being empowered increase with her degree of mobility.

The ability of women to make decisions that affect the personal circumstances of their own lives is an essential aspect of empowerment and serves as an important contribution to their overall welfare. To assess currently married women's decision-making autonomy, the 2011 BDHS collected information on women's participation in four types of decisions: their own health care, major household purchases, their child's health care, and visits to their family or relatives. Table 3 shows the percent distribution of currently married women age 15-49, according to the person in the household who usually makes decisions concerning these matters.

Decisions		Wife						Number
	Mainly	and	Mainly	Someone				of
	wife	husband	husband	else	Other	Missing	Total	Women
		jointly						
Own health care	12.9	50.1	30.6	6.0	0.2	0.1	100.0	16635
Major household purchase	7.0	52.5	29.8	10.2	0.3	0.1	100.0	16635
Child health care	14.5	52.1	19.6	4.6	9.0	0.2	100.0	16635
Visits to her family or	9.7	52.9	28.7	8.2	0.3	0.2	100.0	16635
relatives								

Table 3: Participation in decision making (Source: BDHS, 2011)

Half of the women make each of the four types of decisions jointly with their husband. About thirty percent of currently married women report that their husbands are the main decisions makes for decisions about their health care, major household purchases, and visits to their family or relatives. Women have more decision making power related to their children's health care; 15 percent say that they mainly make this decision, and 20 percent report that their husbands mainly make this decision.

Again women's participation in all four decisions varies by background characteristics. This report finds that participation in decision making is generally increases with age and education. With women age 15-24 being the least likely to participate in all four decisions. Women who have completed secondary or higher education are most likely to participate in all four decisions than those women who haven't completed their secondary degree. Urban women participate more in all four decisions than their rural counterparts. As expected, employed women who have cash earnings are more likely to participate in all four decisions than their second their second the more with no children are less likely to participate in all four types of decisions than women with children.

GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTION FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN BANGLADESH

From 1971 Bangladesh leads by various leaders. Each government took several steps for women empowerment. Because of that in 2011, female education rate is 80 percent whereas in 1971 it was only 27 percent (4th November 2014, Prothom Alo). Now, micro-credit programs have flourished in Bangladesh. These programs are sponsored by both the government and non-government organizations. Micro credit programs improve socioeconomic conditions of the rural women. The impact of micro credit programs is twofold – economic and

social. Micro credit increases economic gains for the borrowers. Rural women are economically empowered through the increase of income, economic security, self-employment and productivity. The social impacts are related to social empowerment, nutrition and health, housing and sanitation conditions, family education, and family interactions. Credit program increases the mobility of rural women through the communication with lender's office. Women can take decision about the small and even large purchase of things for the family because of having money in their hands. Micro credit increases the education levels of women herself and other members of her family.

Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equal opportunities for both men and women in all spheres. Job opportunities and placement of women in top executives and administrative posts in the higher status bodies like planning commission, university grants commission or in the prestigious services like Judicial services, competitive government executive services, top diplomatic services, vice-chancellorships in the universities are hardly available for women either for non-availability of candidates or for male domination. Currently women are found occupying these coveted positions.

The sixth Five year Plan (2011-2015) of Bangladesh government, which is the national medium term development plan committed to transforming Bangladesh into a middle-income country by 2012 (also known as vision 2012), considers women's engagement in political and economic activities as a cross-cutting issue with women's empowerment as one of the main drivers of transforming.

The current government is committed to attaining the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2015 of gender equity and empowering women as well as implementing the convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Bangladesh has already substantially achieved the MDG3 as it has secured gender parity in primary and secondary education at the national level.

The current government has been working relentlessly for ensuring women's overall development by affording them equal and active participation in the socio-economic activities and removing the various impediments to their empowerment. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2012 by World Economic Forum, Bangladesh was ranked 8th position globally in term of political empowerment of women due to government's pro-women policies. To expedite women's economic empowerment, comprehensive initiative have been undertaken by providing extensive training, creating job opportunities, ensuring participation in labor market and providing support to small and medium women entrepreneurs. Extensive social safety net programmes have been undertaken to provide various kinds of allowances, such as destitute women allowance, maternity and lactating mother allowance, disabled women allowance, divorced women allowance etc.

For the economic empowerment of rural women, collateral free micro-credit is given with 5% service charge. Women entrepreneurs receive 10% of Small Enterprise Fund and 10% industrial plots. Currently more than 3% women are working in the RMG sector alone. Bangladesh has enhanced its women labor force from 24% in 2010 to 36% in 2013. Like the year before, gender sensitive budget were prepared for 40 ministries in the recently passed budget 2014-2015 and a special allocation of TK. Is 1 billion was provided for development of women.

Bangladesh government dreams for a democratic and inclusive society of Bangladesh. With the aim of making reality Vision-2021, the government has been taken some amazing initiative that definitely deserve appreciation, JOYEETA is one of them. JOYEETA, an initiative of the Ministry of Women and Children affairs establish to empowering rural women of Bangladesh. It's a business platform to support and facilitate the grass root women entrepreneurs to showcase and market their own arts, crafts, products, and services. To promote the products of women entrepreneurs for the first time an independent sale centre was established at the Rapa Plaza of Dhaka under the programme of "Development Efforts of Women Entrepreneurship" of Department of Women Affairs. At present 180 entrepreneurs are being provided with 140 stalls. Disabled and oppressed women entrepreneurs are also provided with stalls.

Bangladesh was the first country in South Asia to achieve gender-parity in primary education. Achieving this milestone is a result of effective public policy, resource allocation, and strong commitment from public and non-government sectors. Primary educations are compulsory and free for all children aged between age 6 and 10. All children attending primary and secondary schools receive textbooks free of cost. The education of girls up to grade XII in public institutions is also free. To encourage girls students to continue their studies and also to reduce drop-out rates, stipends and awarded. This proactive strategy for girls' education resulted in gender parity. For example, in primary schools, female enrolment is now 51% and in secondary schools it is now 53%, while male is 47%, a sharp departure from even just a few years ago when male was 65% and female was 35%.

In December 2010, Parliament passed the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010, which was the first express recognition of the problem of domestic violence in Bangladesh by the State. This Act signified Bangladesh's fulfillment of state obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as well as Article 28 of the constitution, guaranteeing special measures for the advancement of women and children. In order to effectively implement this law, the

government has formulated the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Rules 2013.

In order to enhance women's empowerment, the number of seats reserved for women in the National Parliament have been increased by 5, and made 50. There has been a sharp increase in the number of women parliamentarians elected (20% of total seats) in the last national election. To create opportunities for women's increased participation in politics, reserved seats for women in union council, Upazila Parishad and municipalities have been increased to one third of the total and women are to be directly elected to those seats. More than 12,000 women were elected as public representatives in the last round of local government elections. Women's participation in local level elections was perhaps one of the greatest milestones for Bangladesh.

At present in Bangladesh, the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, Speaker and Deputy Leader of the House are all women. Number of women among the Justices of the Supreme Court, top positions of the administration – secretaries, additional secretaries, joint secretaries, deputy commissioners, and top positions in the police, armed forces and UN peacekeepers indicates improvement in women's empowerment. This has been possible due to a reserve quota crated by this government for women employment at every level of administration to enhance women participation in government jobs.

FINDINGS

The percentage of women empowerment is increased day by day not only Bangladesh but also across the whole world. This is a very good sign for any country. This report identified some problems which are associated with women empowerment in Bangladesh. Education is the prime precondition for women empowerment. Now in Bangladesh female education rate is much better. But female education rate is increased slowly in college and university level than in primary level. Because some guardian wants to take decisions about their daughter's marriage at early stage due to security. There is another major problem is that, when female students wants to running their study away from their home they face residence problem. Hostel facilities are not enough for female students at higher studies institutions.

The increased participation of women in the workforce has resulted in higher level of anxiety, depression and hostility among the working women. Recent studies have showed increased rates of high blood pressure (Cooper and Davidson, 1982) and heart diseases (Haynes and Feinleib, 1980) among working women. An earlier study of Hauenstien et al. (1977) also concluded that women over 40 years of age who are highly committed to their jobs were found to have higher blood pressure than those who were less career committed. Another interesting finding of Davidson and Cooper (1988) argued that entering male dominated field such as management makes women more vulnerable than restricting themselves to traditionally 'female' jobs because of the unique pressures, conflicts, prejudices and isolation they encounter. Managerial work is inherently more stressful than other types of occupations, because of high levels of role overload, role conflict, and role ambiguity and also due to intense level of interaction requirement in the managerial job. Indeed most empirical studies of managerial activity show that a high proportion of time is spent on interaction with others (Guest, 1955; Mintzberg, 1973). Women may feel even more pressurized than their male counterpart because they are not as accepted as the male in managerial roles. Female managers' stress levels are equal to or higher than their male counterparts'. This report also found that a lower suicide rate for women in male dominated jobs than those of female dominated occupations. Likewise, Harlan and Jansen (1987) found that compared to women in femaledominated occupations, those in male-dominated jobs had lower levels of depression, anxiety, physical symptoms of illness and medication use, and higher levels of job satisfaction.

This report find stress may become more intense for working women with children. Role of parent was a major source of stress in the middle years (Barnett and Baruch, 1985). Many other studies also approved a relationship between parenting and different forms of strain for working women (Cleary and Mechanic, 1983; Lewis and Cooper, 1987). Light (1984) reported that women who have placed career roles over family roles (specially parenting) scored significantly higher on anxiety and hostility scales than those for whom family roles were more important. The more roles, including parenthood, fulfilled by a woman, the less psychological distress she exhibits. This report also found evidence of a salutary effect of multiple roles on women's health. By playing multiple roles was beneficial only for martially induced stress and was detrimental for work related stress. It has been suggested that stress brought about by problems in the marital life be offset by women's paid employment and parenting. However, multiple roles elsewhere only magnify the stress generated at work. This branch of research supports the proposition those women who play the multiple roles of mother, wife and worker generally experience higher level of stress.

There are also a group of studies, which have found that for men, work stress tends to spill over into family and personal life, lowering marital satisfaction and raising family stress levels (Burke, 1982; Evans and Bartolome, 1980, 1984). This report found that stress and dissatisfaction from work life spilled over into the family domain and in a reciprocal fashion, stress and dissatisfaction at home affected work satisfaction.

I am trying to link spousal support with advancement of women's career. Women who have difficulty in getting spousal support perhaps feel resentful and neglected. Supporting spouses are important in reducing

women's role conflict (Poloma, 1972) and women experiencing both high conflict between family and work roles and low spousal support have higher marital adjustment problems (Barling and Suchet, 1986). Thus it seems that spousal support is important to married working women with or without children in reducing anxiety, stress, and conflict.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From this study, it is seen that Bangladesh has a huge success in women empowerment. It is possible only when the problems will be solved which are associated with it. Government should take some initiatives to overcome the problems like as, increasing female student rate at higher educational level by ensuring the residence facilities of female students. Other private educational institutions should ensure facilities for female students where they continue their study smoothly. A large number of Multinational Corporation running their business activities in Bangladesh. They can take such steps which are helpful for empowering women. Like as ensuring stipend for poor merit female students. For solving working mothers' problem, company organized day care facilities at their office premises where working mother put their kids near to them which relief them from mental pressures. This research paper also finds some problems which are related to thinking about women. It is a long process to solve these kinds of problems, sometimes incurable. Changing the values and perceptions about women, is the only way to solve those kinds of problems.

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