



Bangladesh Review

Paper Number 02

Women Empowerment Showcase Bangladesh

Aroup Raton Shaha

Chief Editor

Professor Mizanur Rahman, PhD

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH LAW OF THE COMMON PEOPLE (ELCOP)
House # 10, Road # 12, 1st Floor, Dhanmondi, Dkaka-1209, Bangladesh

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Aroup Raton Shaha
Research Consultant, ELCOP

Published in 2023

Empowerment through Law of the Common People (ELCOP)

Printed in Bangladesh

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Cover Photo © by *Whiteboard Magazine & Social Responsibility Asia (SR Asia)*

ISBN : 978-984-35-4376-9 (Print)



Published By

Empowerment through Law of the Common People (ELCOP)

House # 10, Road # 12, 1st Floor, Dhanmondi,
Dkaka-1209, Bangladesh

Price

BDT : 300/- US \$20

Foreword

Bangladesh is standing at a crucial crossroads in its history. She has celebrated the birth centenary of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the golden jubilee of its independent existence, respectively in 2020 and 2021. Soon she will graduate from the least developed countries (LDCs) group to middle-income countries. A basket case, once called by Henry Kissinger, has recently extended its helping hand to Sri Lanka, struggling in the post-pandemic economic recession. Miracles are taking place in the infrastructural sector and the use of technology is undergoing tremendous change in the last decade or so. However, we have some challenges to overcome, such as climate change, therefugee crisis, etc. We are not overlooking these problems. Nonetheless, we want to celebrate our achievements so that we can reinvigorate ourselves to work further for our motherland.

On November 24, 2026, Bangladesh will graduate from the LDCs list of which she became a member in December 1975. It recognises the fulfillment of all three graduation criteria i.e. gross national income (GNI) per capita, Human Asset Index, and Economic Vulnerability Index. It shows the impressive performance of Bangladesh in the field of the major socio-economic sectors of development. Bangladesh has long ago surpassed Pakistan in terms of GDP and recently left India behind.

The amazing track record of Bangladesh on various social development indicators such as education, healthcare, social safety network, etc has demonstrated its tenacity of purpose. For instance, life expectancy is 72.6 years, a great leap forward from 46.6 in 1972. Moreover, in terms of female literacy, Bangladesh (72 percent) is ahead of India (66 percent) and noticeably more advanced than Pakistan (46 percent). In South Asia, Bangladesh is number one in women's empowerment. In addition to that, the female participation rate in the labor force of Bangladesh is 36 percent which is higher than that of Pakistan (21.9 percent) and India (21.5 percent). Similarly, its infant mortality stands at 26 deaths per 1,000 births, which is lower than India's (28) and Pakistan's (67). In 1971, the infant mortality rate was 158. In this regard, Bangladesh has achieved tremendous progress in the last fifty-two years. Here the fertility rate is also much lower than that of India and Pakistan. World Bank data indicate an astonishing improvement in primary education. Now almost every child goes to school. The dropout rate is also diminishing.

Apart from the worm's eye view i.e. impact on an individual level, if we cast a bird's eye view, that is to say- a broader picture, we will witness a huge leap forward in infrastructure, for instance, Padma bridge, metro rail, highways, etc. No nation could develop economically if its infrastructure is poor. No industrialization is possible without it.

Bangladesh realizes its importance and invests a large amount of the national budget into this sector. Businesses and people, in general, are getting their benefits. A country devastated by the Pakistan Occupation Forces during the Liberation War in 1971 has performed an infrastructure miracle.

The Bangladesh success story has become possible due mainly to the government's policies, incentives, and aid in the past decade and a half to ramp up economic development. On top of that, maintaining political stability for such a long period, creating a business-friendly environment, and extensive diplomatic efforts to bring investment to Bangladesh have come to fruition.

However, Bangladesh is beset with problems that we need to address and solve. That does not mean our situation is as gloomy as it is propagated by certain quarters. We are marching in the right direction- though the pace could be accelerated in some sectors. We could have fared better in health and education which are the backbone of our nation.

Empowerment through Law of the Common People (popularly known as ELCOP) has undertaken a research project titled 'Human Rights Situation in Bangladesh' to evaluate the overall socio-economic development and human rights condition. As a part of this project, we have decided to publish a series of research papers on various socioeconomic issues, the present paper being one of those

Before bidding adieu, we want to emphasize that economic development is a series of wagons of a train, while civil and political freedom is the engine. One is meaningless without the other. Nobel-winning economist and philosopher Amartya Sen discussed it in his germinal book 'Development as Freedom'. He argues that "[d]evelopment consists of the removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with little choice and little opportunity of exercising their reasoned agency." It seems to be written to theorize the journey of Bangladesh. Economically Bangladesh is trying hard to remove the obstacles of unfreedoms that hinder the progress of its citizens. Politically speaking, Bangladesh is the most modern nation-state in South Asia and fought for its independence in the hope of attaining civil, political, and economic freedoms. So far, she has done a commendable job.

With these few words, I am delighted to introduce this paper to the readers. I believe it will be of interest to anyone who would drive in the domain of the socio-economic development of Bangladesh. I hope it will give a true picture of the progress in Bangladesh. With the needs of general readers in mind, this paper has deliberately tried to keep it as nontechnical as possible. Lastly, I wish for its wide readership.

Prof Dr. Mizanur Rahman

Chairman, Empowerment through Law of the Common People &
Former Chairman, National Human Rights Commission, Bangladesh

About this paper

In 2023, Bangladesh celebrates its 52nd year of independence and has emerged as a source of inspiration for many nations. The country's journey from a struggling state to a role model of development has been arduous, but the resilience of its people, guided by various principles and policies, has made this transformation possible. Notably, the architect of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, placed a strong emphasis on women's empowerment as a fundamental principle and policy for shaping the nation's future. The first constitution of independent Bangladesh established equal status for men and women, empowering the state to enact special measures for women's empowerment.

This paper commences with a summary of Bangladesh's achievements in women's empowerment over the past decade. The historical account of this development is remarkable, with numerous women leaders, educators, and other eminent figures contributing to this journey. The paper presents a narrative of these contributions in subsequent sections. Bangladesh's political empowerment of women has garnered global acclaim. Notably, the country is ranked 71st globally, with 72 female parliamentarians constituting 20.7% of the total 350 members. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) recognized Bangladesh's impressive progress in increasing female labor force participation and reducing gender wage gaps in the Human Development Report 2020. This paper outlines the political empowerment of women at both the national and grassroots levels in Bangladesh, while also highlighting the process of achieving the 50-50 target by 2030.

Women in Bangladesh face distinct challenges in achieving economic empowerment, including limited access to education, financial resources, and employment opportunities. The Bangladesh government has formulated detailed plans to promote the economic empowerment of women in the country. This paper has shed light on some of these initiatives, the challenges faced, and the enforcement measures in place to address them.

In Bangladesh, numerous stakeholders have actively contributed to shaping women's rights in various domains such as social, cultural, economic, and political spheres. Notably, women-focused organizations have played a crucial role and deserve special recognition. This paper focuses on the functions, significance, and achievements of select organizations, highlighting their valuable contributions to the advancement of women in Bangladesh.

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Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASK	Ain o Salish Kendra
BWCCI	Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industries
BNWLA	Bangladesh National Women Lawyer's Association
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
GB	Grameen Bank
GDP	Gross domestic product
GPI	Gender Parity Index
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
LDC	Least Developed Countries
MFI	Micro Finance Institutions
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MOWCA	Ministry of Women Child Association
PG	Poverty Gap
PM	Prime Minister
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TBS	The Business Standard
FE	Financial Express
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WB	World Bank
WEF	World Economic Forum

Abstract

Over the course of 50 years, Bangladesh has undergone a remarkable transformation, evolving from a struggling nation to a shining example of development. Throughout this journey Women's empowerment has been a central focus of the country's development agenda, which played a crucial role for Bangladesh's progress. Women of this nation are inspiring others across the globe. It is important to recognize the immense sacrifices made by women during the war of liberation while discussing women's empowerment. This paper delves into the initiatives, efforts, and success stories surrounding women's empowerment in Bangladesh. Gender equality and the empowerment of women are essential for sustainable development and societal advancement. Thus, this paper begins by presenting Bangladesh's achievements in women's empowerment over the past decade, as indicated by various international indices. The country, in collaboration with national and international organizations, has implemented policies and programs to improve women's status, rights, and opportunities in various domains of life. The subsequent section explores the historical journey of women's empowerment in Bangladesh, which has been a top priority since the country's inception. It highlights the policies enacted under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and subsequent governments, as well as the guiding principles that have shaped this development trajectory. The paper then focuses on the political empowerment of women, an important target of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in which Bangladesh has achieved significant success. Additionally, it discusses the noteworthy contributions of women to Bangladesh's GDP, highlighting their economic empowerment. The government's initiatives to support women entrepreneurs, provide training, and implement financial policies are showcased. It is crucial to acknowledge the organizations that have played a pivotal role in these accomplishments. The final part of this paper explores the contributions, functions, and achievements of these organizations. Ultimately, the paper concludes by addressing the challenges faced and expressing hope for the future of women's empowerment in the country.

1

Introduction

For me, a better Democracy is a Democracy where woman do not only have the right to vote and to elect but to be elected.

Michelle Bachelet
Former High Commissioner, UN Human Rights

Bangladesh is regarded as the role model of development in its 52nd birthday. It has achieved significant progress in various sectors over the past 50 years. Bangladesh's extraordinary improvement in economic growth, poverty reduction, literacy, health, agriculture, gender parity, climate change, sanitation, women empowerment and promoting sustainable development has been praised by the UN and world leaders.¹ For instance, in the Human Development Report 2020, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) acknowledged Bangladesh's impressive progress in increasing female labor force participation and reducing gender wage gaps.²

In 2009, "Digital Bangladesh" goal was set by the people to transform Bangladesh." Since then, the government has implemented several plans of action and initiatives to promote the participation of women in all aspects of national development, starting from the grassroots level. The country has taken various initiatives, such as gender responsive budgeting, life skills training, Joyeeta Foundation, entrepreneurship, etc. In FY22, the allocation for women's development was Tk198,587 crore (5% of GDP)³. These initiatives boost women's participation in social, economic, political, entrepreneurial, administrative, military and all other

¹ United Nations Development Program, 'Human Development Report 2020', [online] Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2020.pdf> (Accessed: 29 April 2023).

² Ibid

³ Tribune Report, "'Gender Budget Must Be Spent Effectively'" (Dhaka Tribune - Current & Breaking News Bangladesh & World, 9 June 2022) accessed 21 May 2023

sector of nation building. Consequently, Bangladesh's overall development became inevitable.⁴

Bangladesh as a nation developed even in times of global uncertainty. The world Bank Report 2023 regards this country as one of the fastest-growing economies where GDP per capita has increased from \$134 in 1971 to \$2,503 in 2021⁵. The reduction of Extreme Poverty has been cut from 34 percent in 2000 to 13 percent in 2016 a lower-middle income status in 2015⁶. It is on track to graduate from the UN's Least Developed Countries (LDC) list by 2026⁷.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Gap Index Report 2022 says that Bangladesh is the best performing country in South Asia⁸. The country has done exceptionally well and ranked 07 among all the nations in the world in terms of political empowerment of women. Since 2009, Bangladesh is very much committed to continue the empowerment of women and overcoming all the challenges.⁹

⁴ United Nations Development Program Bangladesh 'Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment', [online] Available at: <https://www.bd.undp.org/content/bangladesh/en/home/ourwork/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment.html> (Accessed: 27 April 2023).

⁵ World Bank Group (2023) A journey together: Bangladesh and World Bank Celebrate Historic Partnership, World Bank. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2023/01/22/a-journey-together-bangladesh-and-world-bank-celebrate-historic-partnership> (Accessed: 03 May 2023).

⁶ Household Income and Expenditure Survey Hies 2022, Bangladesh Bureau Of Statistics (BBS) Statistics And Informatics Division (Sid) Ministry Of Planning, Published in 12 April 2023, available at chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/57def76a_aa3c_46e3_9f80_53732eb94a83/2023-04-13-09-35-ee41d2a35dcc47a94a595c88328458f4.pdf, (last accessed, 17-05-2023)

⁷ Bangladesh graduation status | LDC Portal - International Support Measures for Least Developed Countries (2021) United Nations. Available at: <https://www.un.org/ldcportal/content/bangladesh-graduation-status> (Accessed: 09 May 2023)

⁸ Global Gender Gap Report 2021 INSIGHT REPORT MARCH 2021 (2021) World Economic Forum. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2021> (Accessed: 02 May 2023).

⁹ Ibid 06

2

Women Empowerment in Last Decade



First Female Metro Rail Driver in Bangladesh
Source : Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha

various steps and policies to ensure the development of women and children. Through the Vision 2021 and 2041 a momentum has been created for taking forward Bangladesh to a middle- and high-income level respectively.

Bangladesh has made remarkable achievements in women's empowerment. The country has witnessed significant progress in improving women's access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. The government's commitment to gender equality, along with the efforts of various organizations and initiatives, has played a pivotal role in driving these positive changes.

1. The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report 2018 says about the Equal enrollment of boys and girls in Primary education that the GPI index primary education is 1.00 for Bangladesh in 2018¹⁰.

¹⁰ Global Education Monitoring Report Gender Review. rep. (2018) Global Education Monitoring Report Team. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000261593> (Accessed: 03 May 2023).

2. Literacy rate for female is 72.82.¹¹
3. World Bank report shows that Bangladesh has made progress in bringing down maternal mortality, from 441 death per 1,00,000 live births in 2000 to 123 deaths in 2020,¹²
4. Female labor force participation rate was 36.3 percent, which increased to 42.68 percent in 2022,¹³
5. Bangladesh globally ranked 9 in political empowerment of women among all the country in the world¹⁴.




Source : La vie foundation

¹¹ Bangladesh Bureau Of Statistics (2023) Population & And Housing Census 2022 ; Preliminary Report, Statistics And Informatics Division & Ministry Of Planning. Available at: <http://www.bbs.gov.bd/site/page/47856ad0-7e1c-4aab-bd78-892733bc06eb/Population-and-Housing-Census> (Accessed: 06 May 2023).

¹² Trends in maternal mortality 2000 to 2020, (2023) Estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and UNDESA/ Population Division, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240068759> (Accessed : 04 May 2023)

¹³ TBS Report (2023) ‘More women joining the workforce’, The Business Standard, 29 March. Available at: <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/more-women-joining-workforce-607426> (Accessed: 04 May 2023)


¹⁴ Ibid 03, Global Gender Gap Report 2021

5 GENDER EQUALITY  **Bangladesh's Achievement in Women Empowerment in last decade**

Bangladesh has made significant successes in different indicators of Women Empowerment in last decade. The highlights of SDG -5 and national achievements are given below¹⁵.

End Discrimination

TARGET 5-1




END DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Bangladesh ranked 71, topped in South Asia in Gender Parity. (WEF GPI)

Equal enrollment of boys and girls in Primary education. (UNESCO)

Literacy rate for female is 72.82

Bangladesh globally ranked 9 in political empowerment of women among all the country in the world




END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

END VIOLENCE

National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children (2018-2030)

12 One Stop Crisis Centre to cater service to the victim

TARGET 5-3



ELIMINATE FORCED MARRIAGES AND GENITAL MUTILATION

National Action Plan to Prevent Child Marriage (2018-2030)

Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010

END HARMFUL PRACTICES

¹⁵ Ibid 08, Global Gender Gap Report 2021 INSIGHT REPORT MARCH 2021, see also Global Education Monitoring Report Gender Review. rep. (2018), see also, Bangladesh Bureau Of Statistics (2023) Population & And Housing Census 2022, 08, 09,10 & 11

SDG Goal 5 and National Achievements



Bangladesh value unpaid worker is 0 percent of Bangladesh's GDP in fiscal 2016-17, and women account for 81.4 percent of the amount (SANEM)

12 One Stop Crisis Centre to cater service to the victim

Recognize and value unpaid work

Sexual and Reproductive Health is a RIGHT



WB Report Says Bangladesh has reduced maternal mortality significantly. (Deaths per 1,00,00)

123 deaths in 2020

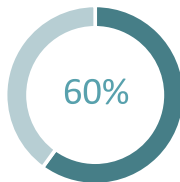
441 death in 2000

Ensure access to sexual and reproductive health and rights



TARGET 5-A
EQUAL RIGHTS TO ECONOMIC RESOURCES, PROPERTY OWNERSHIP AND FINANCIAL SERVICES

- Female labor force participation rate was 36.3 percent, which increased to 42.68 percent in 2022
- 60% positions are reserved for women in government primary schools



(Source : footnote 15)



TARGET 5-5
ENSURE FULL PARTICIPATION IN LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING

- Bangladesh globally ranked 9 in political empowerment of women among all the country in the world
- Ranked 71 and topped in South Asia in Gender Parity.
- At present 20 women directly elected and 50 women occupied the reserved seats as member of parliament.
- Prime Minister, Speaker of the National Parliament, Deputy leader of the house of Parliament and leader of the opposition are women.

3

Historical Account of Women Empowerment in Bangladesh

Bangladeshi women have made considerable progress since the birth of this nation¹⁶. Starting from the scratch women empowerment of this country has reached at such a height that it is often described as a “Role Model of Development”. However, the journey towards gender equality in Bangladesh has been challenging, and women have had to overcome various social, cultural, and economic barriers to attain their rights and freedoms.

The struggle for women's rights in Bangladesh can be traced back to important contribution of Begum Rokeya. She went against stereotypes of that time and became thought leaders in educational and political empowerment

HISTORICAL MILESTONES OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

- 1** The Constitution of Bangladesh, adopted in 1972, guaranteed equal rights for women and men. It also prohibited discrimination based on gender and special Provision for women.

Bangabandhu Shiekh Mujibur Rahaman (1972)
- 2** ESTABLISHMENT OF THE GRAMEEN BANK 1983

pioneered the concept of microfinance, which provides small loans to women in rural areas to start their own businesses.
- 3** Bangladesh ratified CEDAW in 1984 but with reservations on articles 2, 13(a), 16.1(c), and 16.1(f).

BANGLADESH RATIFIED CEDAW 1984
- 4** FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN IN BEIJING 1995

Bangladesh was one of the 189 countries that signed the Beijing Declaration, committing to promoting women's empowerment and gender equality.
- 5** Women & Child Court, Provision for Rape child, Provisions for News coverage of women and child victim, Special Time Frame, Dowry, Death due to dowry, sexual assault.

THE WOMEN & CHILDREN REPRESSION PREVENTION ACT 2000
- 6** DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND PROTECTION ACT 2000

It establishes a framework for preventing and addressing domestic violence.
- 7** It was introduced in 2011 to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. The policy aims to create equal opportunities for women in education, employment, and political participation.

NATIONAL WOMEN DEVELOPMENT POLICY 2011
- 8** CHILD MARRIAGE RESTRAINT ACT 2017

One of the major issue in empowerment is Child Marriage. This Act addresses this particular issue and successfully reduced child marriage in some extent.
- 9** The Act has has made dowry is a crime, (ii) filing false cases is an offence, (iii) applicability of CrPC during trial, (iv) the period of limitation has been lifted.

DOWRY PREVENTION ACT 2018
- 10** CHILD DAYCARE CENTRE ACT 2021

The Act provide maximum 10 years in jail and Tk 5, 00000 as penalty in case of failure to ensure proper security and safety of children.

Source : ELCOP Research Desk

¹⁶ Nazneen, S., Hossain, N. and Sultan, M. (2011) ‘National Discourses on Women’s Empowerment in Bangladesh: Continuities and change’, IDS Working Papers, 2011(368), pp. 1–41. doi:10.1111/j.2040-0209.2011.00368_2.x

for women in today's Bangladesh¹⁷. Pritilata Waddedar and Kalpana Datta are also pioneers of women empowerment of this land. They fought against all odds and took up arms in the nationalist struggle against the British occupation.¹⁸

Following Bangladesh's independence, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of the nation, took the initiative to elevate the status of women through the 1972 constitution. This constitution not only guaranteed equal rights for women in all aspects of life but also included specific provisions to empower them, outlined in articles 17, 19, 27, 28, and 29 of the inaugural constitution. Under Bangabandhu's guidance, the Women's Development Board was established to aid the rehabilitation of women who had experienced torture and suffering during the war of liberation. However, from 1975, the year of Bangabandhu's assassination, until 1997, military governments failed to make any significant progress in this area. In 1997, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, a crucial stakeholder in women's empowerment, was established and since then the ministry is dedicated to promoting women's rights and achieving gender equality.

In the early years of Bangladesh, many NGOs and INGOs engrossed on relief work and poverty reduction; including education, healthcare, and food assistance.¹⁹ Gradually, NGO's began to shift their attention to long-term plans or development initiatives, which includes women's empowerment²⁰.

Grameen Bank, established by the Grameen Bank Ordinance 1983, later Grameen Bank Act 2013, is the first NGO to work on women's empowerment in Bangladesh. The Bank initiated microfinance in Bangladesh. Small loans are given to women in rural for their own business²¹. This approach proved to be highly successful and has

¹⁷ Aroma Dutta and Sufia Khanom (2021),The story of women in politics in Bangladesh, WhiteBoard is a Quarterly Policy Magazine. Available at: <https://whiteboardmagazine.com/2087/the-story-of-women-in-politics-in-bangladesh/> (Accessed: 09 May 2023).

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Werker E and Ahmed F, 'What Do Nongovernmental Organizations Do?' (2008) Journal of Economic Perspectives VOL. 22, NO. 2, SPRING 2008 (pp. 73-92) 73. DOI: 10.1257/jep.22.2.73

²⁰ Stiles, Kendall. 2002."InternationalSupport for NGOs in Bangladesh: Some Unintended Consequences". World Development,30(5):83546.

²¹ Report SB, 'Grameen Bank Act Gets Passage' (The Daily Star, 5 November 2013) available at :<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/grameen-bank-act-gets-passage#:~:text=The%20parliament%20yesterday%20passed%20the,increment%20of%20its%20ownership%20stakes.> accessed 10 May 2023

been replicated by many other NGOs and INGOs in Bangladesh and around the world²².

Another key player in women's empowerment in Bangladesh is the BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), which was established in 1972. BRAC started by providing basic services to the poor, including healthcare and education, but has since 1979 the NGO started to include a range of development programs, including microfinance, women's empowerment, and human rights.²³

Through the country's Vision 2021 and 2041, a momentum has been created for taking forward Bangladesh to a middle- and high-income level respectively.²⁴ The state undertaken various steps to enable women and children to play their role in this journey.

²² Ahmad MM, 'Distant Voices: The Views of the Field Workers of NGOs in Bangladesh on Microcredit' (2003) *The Geographical Journal* 65 Vol. 169, No. 1 (Mar, 2003), pp. 65-74 (10 pages) available at : <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3451540>

²³ Harrow J and others, 'BRAC' [2010] *International Encyclopedia of Civil Society* 78

²⁴ Planning Ministry, 'Making Vision 2041 a Reality: Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2021-2041' (Evidence Library – The EdTeh Hub, 25 February 2020) <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://oldweb.lged.gov.bd/uploadeddocument/unit-publication/1/1049/vision%202021-2041.pdf> accessed 10 May 2023

4

Guiding Principles of Women Empowerment

Women empowerment has always been one of the priorities of Bangladesh. The country has set a target of 50:50 participation in all jobs of the country²⁵. Father of the Nation Bangbandhu Sheikh Mujibur initiated the concept of women empowerment for nation building. The 1972's constitution is the main guiding star for the women empowerment.

4.1 Constitutional Provisions for Women Empowerment: The Constitution of Bangladesh provides several provisions for women's empowerment. Here are a few notable ones:

Equality before the law: Article 27 of the Constitution states that all citizens

Constitutional provisions for women empowerment

1. Article 27: all citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination on the grounds of sex.
2. Article 28: prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex and ensures equal access to education, employment, and other opportunities for women.
3. Article 29. Ensure equal opportunity for women in public employment and affirmative action
4. Article 65: reservation of seats in parliament.

are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination on the grounds of sex. This provision ensures that women are treated equally under the law and have the same rights and opportunities as men.²⁶

Non-discrimination: Article 28 of the Constitution prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex. This

²⁵ 'Brochure on Women Empowerment, Protection and Uphold the Rights of the Children' (Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, 12 December 2023) Available at [http://www.mowca.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mowca.portal.gov.bd/publications/7f74480f_7119_4b91_8ed8_96739608bfd/Brochure.pdf](http://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/http://www.mowca.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mowca.portal.gov.bd/publications/7f74480f_7119_4b91_8ed8_96739608bfd/Brochure.pdf) accessed 11 May 2023

²⁶ Constitution of Bangladesh Article 27 http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/print_sections_all.php?id=367

provision ensures that women have equal access to education, employment, and other opportunities.²⁷

Non-discrimination in Public employment: Ensure equal opportunity for women in public employment is ensured by article 29 of the constitution of Bangladesh. The provision also gives power to government to take affirmative actions for women.²⁸

Reservation of seats in Parliament: Bangladesh Constitution reserves seats for woman in national Parliament in article 65(3). This provision ensures that women are represented in the highest levels of government and have a voice in decision-making.²⁹

4.2 The Women and Children Repression Prevention Act: The Women and Children Repression Prevention Act is a Bangladesh law that was enacted in 2000 to address violence against women and children. The Act covers various crimes such as rape, acid violence, and human trafficking, and it provides for the establishment of special tribunals to try these offenses³⁰.

The Act is an important step towards protecting the rights of women and children in Bangladesh. It recognizes the specific forms of violence and discrimination that women and children face, and it provides for measures to prevent and respond to such violence. The Act has been amended over time to strengthen its provisions and ensure better protection for women and children³¹.

4.3 The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act: The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act is a law in Bangladesh that was enacted in 2010 to address domestic violence against women. The Act recognizes domestic violence as a distinct form of violence that can take in many forms, including

²⁷ Constitution of Bangladesh, Article 28. [/bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/print_sections_all.php?id=367](http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/print_sections_all.php?id=367)

²⁸ Constitution of Bangladesh Article 29 http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/print_sections_all.php?id=367

²⁹ Constitution of Bangladesh, Article 65(3). http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/print_sections_all.php?id=367

³⁰ Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000 (Bangladesh), available at http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/print_sections_all.php?id=203.

³¹ Ibid

physical, sexual, emotional, or economic abuse. It provides for legal and institutional measures to prevent and protect victims of domestic violence³².

The Act is a significant step towards protecting the rights of women in Bangladesh. It establishes a framework for preventing and addressing domestic violence, including measures such as protection orders, counseling and rehabilitation services, and legal aid for victims³³. The Act also establishes special tribunals to try cases of domestic violence, and it provides for penalties for offenders.

4.3. The National Women Development Policy (2011): The National Women Development Policy was introduced in 2011 to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. The policy aims to create equal opportunities for women in education, employment, and political participation. It also addresses gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and healthcare.³⁴

To oversee the implementation of the development policy, the government formed a 50-member National Women and Child Development Council chaired by Prime Minister.³⁵

4.4 The Labor Law: The Labor Law was amended in 2013 to promote gender equality in the workplace. The law provides maternity leave and other benefits for women workers. Maternity leave, which enables women to balance work and family responsibilities. Under the Labor Act, women are entitled to 16 weeks of paid maternity leave, which can be extended by two additional weeks if required for medical reasons. This provision enables women to take care of their newborn children and return to work after the leave period.³⁶ The Act prohibits any

³² Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000 (Bangladesh), available at http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/print_sections_all.php?id=203.

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, 'National Women Development Policy' (2011) http://www.mowca.gov.bd/site/page/bbfa64b2-5be6-4b5e-95b7-9c47d0917f04/-#nwD_Policy.

³⁵ IBID Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, 'National Women Development Policy 2011', Government of Bangladesh website (accessed 13 May 2023) https://mowca.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mowca.portal.gov.bd/policies/c722b816_c5b5_4270_b984_0af7084b1228/NWDP_English_1.pdf.

³⁶ ILO, 'Understanding the Gender Composition and Experience of Ready-Made Garment (RMG) Workers in Bangladesh' (International labor Organization) accessed 11 May 2023

discrimination against women in recruitment, promotion, wages, training, and other employment-related matters.

Moreover, the Labor Act also ensures safe working conditions for women. It mandates employers to provide separate toilets, washrooms, and other facilities for women workers.³⁷ The Act also prohibits women from working at night without adequate protection and provides for the establishment of childcare facilities in the workplace. These provisions in the labor laws of Bangladesh play a significant role in promoting women's empowerment in the workplace³⁸.

4.5. CEDAW Compliance:

Bangladesh is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and has taken various actions to implement its provisions.³⁹ Here are some of the actions taken by Bangladesh under CEDAW Convention:

National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2019-2022): Bangladesh has developed a National Action Plan to implement the provisions of CEDAW. The plan includes measures to eliminate discrimination against women and promote their rights in all spheres of life⁴⁰.

Legislation: Bangladesh has enacted several laws to protect women's rights and prevent discrimination, including the Domestic Violence (Prevention and

³⁷ 'Brochure on Women Empowerment, Protection and Uphold the Rights of the Children' (Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, 12 December 2023) accessed 11 May 2023

³⁸ Rumana Liza Anam, 'Inadequacies And Variations Of Maternity Leave Policies Throughout The World: Special Focus On Bangladesh' (2008) V, BRAC University Journal, , 2008, 98 available at <https://dspace.bracu.ac.bd/xmlui/handle/10361/409> accessed 11 May 2023

³⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, 'CEDAW and Bangladesh', Bangladesh Permanent Mission to the United Nations website (accessed 13 May 2023) <https://www.un.int/bangladesh/country-information-0>.

⁴⁰ 'National Action Plan on Women, Pace & Security' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) <https://mofa.gov.bd/site/publications/7e0578ae-0a33-4a39-bb9b-647b4d3f560d/NATIONAL-ACTION-PLAN--ON--WOMEN-PEACE-AND-SECURITY> accessed 16 May 2023

Protection) Act 2010⁴¹, the Dowry Prohibition Act 2018⁴², and the Acid Control Act, 2002⁴³.

Quota System: Bangladesh has implemented a quota system for women's representation in national local government bodies, such as Union Parishads and Upazila Parishads. This has increased the participation of women in decision-making at the grassroots level ⁴⁴ . Currently Bangladesh 20.56% female representation in national parliament and the country has set a plan to have 50-50 gender equality in all sectors by 2030.

Education and Awareness: The combined efforts of government policies, community initiatives, and non-government organizations (NGOs) have enabled significant progress in the development of this specific sector. Bangladesh has reached at a level where girls and boys are enrolling in primary schools in equal number. ⁴⁵ However, there are still numerous unfinished aspects that require attention. Bangladesh has launched various educational and awareness-raising campaigns to promote women's rights and gender equality. These campaigns aim to change social norms and attitudes towards women and promote their empowerment⁴⁶. Some of these programs are given below,

⁴¹ Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010 <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-1063/section-40992.html>

⁴² The Dowry Prohibition Act, 2018 Act No. XXXIX of 2018, <http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-1256.html>

⁴³ Acid Offence Control Act, 2002 Act No II of 2002, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/upload/act/2021-11-17-10-49-08-33.-Acid-offence-ZContrl-Act-2012.pdf

⁴⁴ Pranab Kumar Panday, 'Representation without Participation: Quotas for Women in Bangladesh' (2008) Vol. 29, International Political Science Review accessed 16 May 2023

⁴⁵ 'Breaking Ground in Gender Parity in Bangladesh's Primary Schools' (World Bank Blogs, 7 May 2017)<https://blogs.worldbank.org/end-poverty-in-south-asia/breaking-ground-gender-parity-bangladesh-s-primary-schools> accessed 16 May 2023

⁴⁶ 'Bangladesh Gender Equality: Diagnostic & Selected Sectors' (Asian Development Bank, 5 April 2017) accessed 16 May 2023

- Awareness program on prevention of biased attitude, development of reproductive health, family planning, gender and development /HIV / AIDS etc. through Radio and Television⁴⁷.
- Adolescent Clubs have been established in 44 upazila for social awareness on early marriage, prevention of dowry, etc.
- Under the National Mobile Application Development Awareness & Capacity Building Program, about 1000 women in grassroots level received training⁴⁸

Women's Empowerment Programs: Bangladesh has implemented various women's empowerment programs, including microfinance schemes, vocational training, and entrepreneurship development programs. These programs aim to enhance women's economic opportunities and promote their empowerment. Information about these programs are dealt at later part of this paper.

Human Rights Bodies: Bangladesh has established different human rights bodies, such as the National Human Rights Commission, to monitor and address human rights violations, including those against women.⁴⁹

National Human Rights Commission and other organizations are also making their contribution in reaching CEDAW targets. However, challenges still exist, including gender-based violence, discrimination, and unequal access to opportunities. The government and civil society organizations in Bangladesh continue to work towards overcoming these challenges and achieving gender equality.

⁴⁷ Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, 'Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Commitment to Gender Equality and Women Empowerment ' (Ministry of Women and Child Affairs) accessed 14 May 2023

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ NHRC (National Human Rights Commission) available at: <http://nhrc.portal.gov.bd/site/page/bc88bebb-d716-490c-aebb-8c4b645c34d8> accessed 17 May 2023

5

Women Leadership in Politics

Bangladesh has a strong commitment to women's empowerment, and this has been reflected in its policies and programs. A research highlights that the representation of women in national parliaments, indicating that in 2003 Rwanda had the highest percentage of women at 48.8%, followed by Sweden at 45.3% in 2002 and Norway at 38.2% in 2001⁵⁰.

In contrast, Bangladesh was ranked 122nd globally in 2001 with only 2.0% women in its national parliament. However, recent statistics show a positive trend. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2019), as of now, Bangladesh ranks 71st globally with 72 female parliamentarians, accounting for 20.7% of the total 350 members¹.



Source : The Asian age

5.1 Government Initiatives

Bangladesh has set to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and transition from a middle-income country to a developed country by 2041 with the joint efforts of men and women. Gradually, the country will turn into the dream of *Shoanr Bangla* or Golden Bengal. To materialize these plans along with execution of Delta Plan 2100 women empowerment is must, especially women's political empowerment. The Government has set women's political empowerment a priority

⁵⁰ Zaman, R (2012) 'Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers', Journal of International Women's Studies, <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/women-in-parliament-beyond-numbers-a-revised-edition.pdf> 13(3), pp. 78-94 (p.83). accessed 27 April 2023

and initiated many actions in that pursuit. Highlights of some of the events are given below.

1. **Female Representation in Politics:** National Election Commission sets a rule for 33% female representation in all committees is a must for registration of a political party.⁵¹
2. **Reserved Seats in National Parliament:** Reserved seats in National Parliament has been increased to 50⁵². This increased the female participation in parliament, which is now 20.87% against the total seats⁵³.
3. **Gender Budgeting:** An important contribution of Bangladesh in women empowerment is the gender budget. The budget for the financial year 2022-23, 2 lakh 29 thousand 484 crores have been allocated for women development. Which is 33.84 percent of total budget and 5.16 percent of GDP.
4. **Female literacy rate:** Since, 2009, Bangladesh has emphasized on the progress of women's education with the aim of women's liberation and women's empowerment. According to the August 2021 report of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the literacy rate among people above 15 years of age in the country is 75.6 percent and the literacy rate among women in this age group is 73 percent.⁵⁴

5.2 Women in National Parliament:

The history of Bangladesh Parliament shows upward trend of female participation, both in electoral and representative politics. From 1991, onwards, Bangladesh has been led by two female prime ministers, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda. Although, presence of women in ministries have increased but still in miniscule. Since 2009 the women participation in politics changed dramatically. Following table shows the trend of political empowerment of women.

⁵¹ Section 90 (B), The Representation of the People Order, 1972 (2013 Amendment)

⁵² Article 65 (3A) of Constitution of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh, was inserted by the Constitution (Fifteenth Amendment) Act, 2011 (Act XIV of 2011), section 23 (ii)

⁵³ Editorial Desk, 'Women's Representation in Parliament: Let There Be Direct Voting' Prothom Alo available at <https://en.prothomalo.com/opinion/editorial/49j7fsm96r> (Dhaka, 23 March 2023)

⁵⁴ Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 'Literacy and Education', Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics website (accessed 13 May 2023) <https://bbs.gov.bd/Home.aspx>.

Table 1

Election Year	% of women candidates	Women elected in general constituencies	% of women elected in general seats	Women elected to reserved seats	% of women against total seats
1973	0.3	0	0	15	4.8
1979	0.9	2	0.7	30	9.7
1986	1.3	5	1.7	30	10.6
1988	0.7	4	1.3	---	1.3
1991	1.5	5	1.7	30	10.6
1996	1.39	7	2.3	30	11.2
2001	1.9	8	2	--	2
2008	3.54	19	6.33	45	18.6
2014		20	6.9	50(2 elected)	19.88
2018		22	7.1	72	20.56

Source: Bangladesh Election Commission, & AK Goswami; 2010⁵⁵

In the 2008 parliamentary election, only 18 women were elected out of 300 seats.⁵⁶ However, the number of women elected in parliament increased to 22, and in the 2018 election, this number increased further to 71, when added with the reserved seats, marking a significant milestone in women's political empowerment in Bangladesh⁵⁷.

⁵⁵ Goswami, Arun Kumar. (2010), "Political representation of women in Bangladesh". *Empowerment*, Vol 17, p-21-38

⁵⁶ Ara F and Northcote J, 'Women's Participation in Bangladesh Politics, the Gender Wall and Quotas' (2020) 40 South Asia Research, 266

There is immense the importance of women's representation in national parliaments for ensuring that policies and decision-making processes are considered the needs and perspectives of all citizens.⁵⁸ Women bring a different perspective to politics, which is essential for developing policies and programs that consider the needs and interests of all citizens.⁵⁹

a. Political Empowerment of Women at the Grassroot Level:

The state has taken several steps to increase women's participation in grassroots level politics, including reserving seats for women in local government bodies. such as Union Parishads and Upazila Parishads. The significant initiatives of the Bangladesh in last decade are given below⁶⁰,

- One of two elected Vice-chairman at Upazila must be female.
- 1/3 of the City Corporation, Upazila Parishad and Union Parishad seats are reserved for women.
- Women Development Forum has been formed to enhance the capacity of elected women representative at Upazila level.

This has resulted in increased representation of women in these bodies, with women now holding more than 30% of the seats in Union Parishads. In addition to these initiatives, the state has implemented several programs to promote women's political participation and leadership in last one decade.

While Bangladesh has made significant progress in political empowerment of women, there is still a long way to go. Continued efforts are needed to ensure that

⁵⁷ Tania Hossain, 'Gender Equality in Bangladeshi Politics: Progress and Challenges', Women's Studies International Forum (2019) 73, p. 87.

⁵⁸ Htun, M, and Weldon, S.L, The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence Against Women in Global Perspective (Cambridge University Press 2018).

⁵⁹ UN Women, Women in Politics: 2021 (March 2021) <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/03/women-in-politics-2021> accessed 13 May 2023.

⁶⁰ Ibid 46, Ministry of Women and Child Affairs, 'Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Commitment to Gender Equality and Women Empowerment' (Ministry of Women and Child Affairs) accessed 14 May 2023

women have equal access to political power and can fully participate in the country's political processes.

In conclusion, the political empowerment of Bangladeshi women has significantly improved since 2009, with more women elected to Parliament and local government bodies. National efforts to promote women's political participation and create an enabling environment for women's empowerment have been instrumental in achieving this progress.⁶¹ However, there is still a need for continued efforts to ensure that women have equal access to political power and are represented in decision-making processes.

Bangladesh has launched training programs for women politicians and leaders, and support for women's political networks and associations.



Source : BBC News

⁶¹ Zaman, H. (2018) 'Women's representation in the Bangladesh cabinet: A historical overview', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 19(2), pp. 159-170.



Women in Bangladesh Politics





Speaker : Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury

Women leaders in Parliament



1. Speaker : Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury
2. Leader of the House: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina
3. Deputy Leader of the House: Matia Chowdhury
4. Leader of the opposition Rowshan Ershad

Voice of the Women at the National Level



1. Reserved seats for women increased from 45 to 50
2. 20 Women directly elected as MP and 50 reserved MPs are working a National Parliament now. 33.3% Female representation in all committees by PRO 1972 (2013 Amendment)



Political Empowerment at the Grassroot level



Present Government has taken a number of initiatives in order to ensure participation of women in local governments.

Women's Participation at the local Government

1 UNION PARISHAD

- Union Parishad's are the lowest tiers of Elected Representative
- Three seats out of nine are reserved for women.

2 MUNICIPAL AREAS

- One thirds of the counsellors seats are reserved in municipal areas.

3 UPAZILLA PARISHAD

- Upazilla Parishad Act 2009 ensures one of two elected vice chairman must be women.

4 • In Union Parishad election 2022, 45 women got elected as Chairman.

Source : ELCOP Research Desk

6

Economic Empowerment of Women



Source : Financial Express

The economic empowerment of women in Bangladesh has been a focal point for development efforts in recent years. Historically, women in the country have faced numerous challenges that hindered their ability to participate fully in the economy. These challenges included limited access to education, financial resources, and employment opportunities. Recognizing the importance of empowering women economically, the Bangladesh government has implemented various initiatives and formulated detailed plans to address these barriers.

6.1 Bangladesh Banks Policy Initiatives for Women Entrepreneurs:

Bangladesh Bank has taken a significant initiative for women's economic empowerment. The central Bank has reduced interest rate from 7% to 5% to encourage women entrepreneurs to engage in business with low-interest loans⁶². At the same time, the central bank has reduced the interest rate from 3% to 0.5% at the institutional level as an incentive to banks and financial institutions for providing loans to women entrepreneurs.⁶³ A minimum of 15% of all refinance windows for SMEs and special programs has been specifically allocated to women entrepreneurs by the SME and Special Program Department. To ensure greater participation and

⁶² SME and Special Program Department, 'Policy Initiatives for Women Entrepreneurs (Updated)' (SME Web Portal), Bangladesh Bank, accessed 15 May.

⁶³ 2023TBS News Desk, 'Female Entrepreneurs to Get Loans at 5% Interest' (The Business Standard, 18 April 2021) <https://www.tbsnews.net/economy/banking/female-entrepreneurs-get-loans-5-interest-283549> accessed 14 May 2023

support for marginalized and home-based women entrepreneurs, a loan limit of BDT 10,000/- has been set, and group-based lending of up to BDT 50,000 is permitted.⁶⁴.

6.2 Women empowerment through Microfinance:

The microfinance Institutions (MFI) has played a crucial role in providing women in Bangladesh with access to credit and other financial services. Microfinance institutions (MFIs) in Bangladesh have focused primarily on lending to women, as women in remote areas often have limited access to credit markets.⁶⁵Traditionally, men in rural areas have dealt with local moneylenders for their credit needs. However, MFIs have made it easier for women to access credit. This preference for lending to women is reinforced by evidence showing that women tend to have better repayment records than men.

Organizations like Grameen Bank and BRAC have provided microfinance services to women, which has helped them start small businesses and improve their economic status.⁶⁶

6.3 Trainings for Women Empowerment:

The Government of Bangladesh has set to provide access to women in Bangladesh economy as a priority. Different departments of government have launched multiple training programs for women. Descriptions of some these programs are given below.

⁶⁴ Ibid 59, SME and Special Program Department, ‘Policy Initiatives for Women Entrepreneurs (Updated)’

⁶⁵ Sara Gustafson and Shahidur Khandker, ‘How Microfinance Has Reduced Rural Poverty in Bangladesh’ (International Food Policy and Research Institute , 20 September 2016) accessed 14 May 2023

⁶⁶ Md. Ruhul Amin “The impact of Micro-finance program on the poor: A Comparative study of Grameen Bank, BRAC and ASA in some selected areas in Bangladesh’ (2011 European Journal of Business and Management, Vol 3,No 4, available at efaidnbmnnnibpajpcglclefindmkaj/https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/234624073.pdf accessed 15 May 2023

High-tech training on consumer electronics, electrics, and motorcycle servicing:

Department of Women Affairs launched three high-tech training programs on consumer electronics, electrics, and motorcycle servicing in 2014. Bangladesh has seven such training centers in total which are dedicated for women, while two of them – in Bogra and Gazipur.⁶⁷



Source : The Business Standard

Success Story of Women Empowerment

"It is my happiness that I could earn & make conditions better,"

Tazrina learnt motorcycle servicing at Bagura Training Centre. Thereafter she got a job at the Pran-RFL factory in Habiganj. Currently, she serves the company at its Duranta bike factory in Rangpur as an operator. (Source TBS 23 August ,2022)

The district office of the Department of Women Affairs reported that, to date, a total of 828 women have enrolled in three courses, with 778 successfully completing their training. During training, they receive free accommodation and food. Among the participants, 272 received training in consumer electronics, 254 in electrics, and the remaining 210 focused on motorcycle servicing.⁶⁸

6.4 Training by different Government Organization:

The Department of Women Affairs, Joyeeta, and Jatiyo Mohila Sangstha are actively engaged in empowering women through their regular programs and diverse

⁶⁷ Khorshed Alam, 'A Training Centre, Hundreds of Women and Their Success Stories' (The Business Standard, 23 August 2022) accessed 16 May 2023

⁶⁸ Khorshed Alam, 'A Training Centre, Hundreds of Women and Their Success Stories' The Business Standard (Dhaka , 23 August 2023) accessed 15 May 2023

projects across various regions of the country⁶⁹. The Joyeeta Foundation, established in 2011 under the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in Bangladesh, aims to empower women and promote their socio-economic development.⁷⁰ The foundation has been successful in promoting women's entrepreneurship in Bangladesh through various initiatives. They offer a range of skill development training aimed at enhancing women's capabilities and fostering their empowerment. Some of their training programs are as follows,

Beautification	Fashion Designing	Crystal Show Piece and Candle Making
Sharranchi and Handicrafts Making	Food Processing and Marketing	Baby Care and House Keeping
Poultry Business	Computer Servicing and Repairing	Salinity induced crop cultivation

Access to credit: The Joyeeta Foundation provides credit facilities to women entrepreneurs through its microcredit program. The program provides loans to women entrepreneurs at a low-interest rate, which has helped them start and grow their businesses.⁷¹

Empowering women economically in Bangladesh is not only a matter of social justice but also a strategic imperative for sustainable development. By investing in women's education, entrepreneurship, and financial inclusion, Bangladesh can unlock the full potential of its female population, leading to increased productivity, reduced poverty, and a more inclusive and prosperous society for all.

⁶⁹ 'Brochure on Women Empowerment, Protection and Uphold the Rights of the Children' (Ministry of Women and Children.Affairs)://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://www.mowca.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mowca.portal.gov.bd/publications/7f74480f_7119_4b91_8ed8_96739608bfbfd/Brochure.pdf accessed 11 May 2023

⁷⁰ 'Joyeeta Foundation' <https://joyeeta.portal.gov.bd/site/page/8726b1e6-5412-40cb-b784-bafff0d08b43/-accessed> 15 May 2023

⁷¹Ibid

7

Organizations for Women



Bangladesh has witnessed active involvement from various stakeholders in shaping women's rights across multiple spheres, including social, cultural, economic, and

- the number of small and medium women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh is about 2.4 million. (World Bank Groups IFC's Report)
- Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry has trained 27 thousand 490 women entrepreneurs till 31 December 2015.

political domains. Women-focused organizations have particularly played a pivotal role in this regard and warrant special acknowledgment. This article centers around the roles, importance, and accomplishments of

specific organizations, underscoring their invaluable contributions to the progress of women in Bangladesh. This article discusses functions, significance, and success of some of these organizations in this part.

7.1 Bangladesh Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BWCCI): It is a relatively new organization. BWCCI provides platform to women entrepreneur's through promoting a women friendly business environment. This

organization visions to build a prosperous Bangladesh through progress and economic empowerment of women.⁷²

This organization has been playing a great role in giving training, recognition, and a women friendly environment. Many achievements and targets of this country will be much easier due this organization.

7.2 Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK):

ASK, founded in 1986, is a non-governmental organization (NGO) focused on providing legal aid and promoting human rights. Initially, ASK offered free legal assistance to underprivileged and impoverished women, working children, and laborers residing in Dhaka city. Over the past twenty-five years, the organization has devised numerous strategies aimed at safeguarding and advancing human rights, contributing to their protection and development⁷³.

Some functions of the Ain o Salish Kendra have been mentioned hereunder⁷⁴.

- It has provided legal aid and support to thousands of individuals, particularly marginalized and vulnerable groups, who faced human rights violations⁷⁵.
- Combating Violence Against Women.
- Combating Human Rights violation through Public Interest Litigation (PIL)⁷⁶
- Legal Advocacy & Policy Reform, Media & International Advocacy
- Mediation & Rapid Response, Litigation, Outreach, Psycho-social & Counseling, Human Rights Awareness, Gender and Social Justice Training

⁷² 'About Us' (Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry), available at <https://bwcci-bd.org/about-us/> accessed 16 May 2023

⁷³ Ain o Shalish Kendra (ASK), 'Ain o Shalish Kendra (ASK)' (Banglapedia) accessed 17 May 2023

⁷⁴ 'Ain o Salish Kendra (Ask)' (Ain o Salish Kendra(ASK)) accessed 17 May 2023

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Ibid

Besides this ASK has successfully advocated for various issues of women rights in the High Court Division and ensured the rights of marginalized women.

7.3 Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association [BNWLA]: One of the pioneer organization working for women's right and empowerment is BNWLA. It is a lawyer's association established in 1979⁷⁷. Its main goal is "to create equal opportunities and equal rights for every woman and child in the country." BNWLA promotes the rights and status of women lawyers alongside fighting for access to justice for all women & children particularly for the most disadvantaged and deprived women and children in Bangladesh.

Some the projects of BNWLA are given below,

- Provision of Legal Assistance and SGBV Prevention and response to the Rohingya Community⁷⁸.
- Reducing Gender Based Violence and Protecting Survivors through awareness and capacity building, comprehensive shelter support and legal service.⁷⁹
- Legal Service, Public Interest Litigation [PIL] as a tool of advocacy
- Networking, Rescue, Release and Repatriation of the victims of All forms of Violence especially Gender Based Violence and Human Trafficking.
- Shelter Service, Reintegration and Rehabilitation of victims into their respective family and society.
- Awareness and Sensitization program for the community,

⁷⁷ BNWLA, 'About' (Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association) available at: <https://bnwla-bd.org/about/> accessed 17 May 2023

⁷⁸ Editorial Team ET, 'Provision of Legal Assistance and SGBV Prevention and Response to the Rohingya Community' (BNWLA, 30 January 2020) , available at : <https://bnwla-bd.org/projects/provision-of-legal-assistance-and-sgbv-prevention-and-response-to-the-rohingya-community/> accessed 17 May 2023

⁷⁹ Editorial Team ET, 'Reducing Gender Based Violence and Protecting Survivors through awareness and capacity building, comprehensive shelter support and legal service' (BNWLA , available at : <https://bnwla-bd.org/projects/reducing-gender-based-violence-and-protecting-survivors/> accessed 17 May 2023

- Strengthening capacity of the NGOs, relevant Government Agencies, Lawyers, and Journalists, Law enforcing agencies, Community members, religious leaders, Marriage Registers, and members of Civil Society.

Bangladesh National Lawyers Association has been a driving force in empowering women in Bangladesh through legal advocacy, education, and support. Their unwavering dedication to advancing women's rights and ensuring gender equality has made a substantial impact on the lives of countless women. By continuing their efforts, the BNLA will undoubtedly contribute further to creating a society where women are empowered, protected, and able to participate fully in all aspects of life.

7.4 The Bangladesh Mahila Parishad (BMP):

It is a non-governmental organization that operates on a voluntary basis, dedicated to the advancement of women's human rights, empowerment, and the promotion of gender equality. In 1970, BMP was established under the leadership of renowned poet Sufia Kamal, who played a vital role in the fight for women's liberation and the freedom of all individuals in society and the nation⁸⁰. It has been very instrumental in shaping women's rights. Functions of the organization are given below,

Awareness Building and Advocacy: It raises awareness about women's issues, challenges gender stereotypes, and campaigns for policy changes to improve the status of women in society⁸¹.

Legal Support: The Mohila Parishad provides legal assistance to women who are victims of violence, discrimination, or other forms of abuse. They offer support in filing cases, accessing justice, and ensuring the protection of women's rights under the law.

Resisting Violence against women: The Mohila Parishad resist violence, discrimination, and injustice women. They have helped women access justice and seek redress for their grievances.

⁸⁰ BMP, 'Legal Rights and Awareness Building' (Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, 13 February 2023) accessed 18 May 2023

⁸¹ Ibid

the Bangladesh Mohila Parishad has made significant contributions to advancing women's rights and empowerment in Bangladesh through its advocacy, legal aid, capacity building, research, and collaborative efforts.

7.5 Bangladesh Mohila Samity:

The Bangladesh Mohila Samiti, is an organization dedicated to promoting women's rights, empowerment, and social development in Bangladesh. It performs several important functions to achieve its objectives. Here are some of the key functions of the Bangladesh Mohila Samiti⁸²:

- **Advocacy and Policy Development:** The organization actively engages in advocacy efforts to influence policy and legislation related to women's rights and gender equality.
- **Awareness and Education:** The organization conducts campaigns, workshops, and seminars to educate women, men, and communities at large about gender-based violence, reproductive health, education, economic empowerment, and other relevant topics. By disseminating information and knowledge, the organization helps empower women and promote a more inclusive society.
- **Skill Development and Economic Empowerment:** One of the core functions of the Bangladesh Mohila Samiti is to enhance women's skills and promote economic independence. It provides vocational training, entrepreneurship development programs, and access to microcredit facilities to help women gain sustainable livelihoods⁸³.

The Bangladesh Mohila Samiti also an important organization in promoting women's rights, empowerment, and social development in Bangladesh. Through its multifaceted functions, it strives to create a society where women have equal opportunities, rights, and a voice in shaping their own lives and the future of the country.

⁸² Editorial Team, 'About Us ' (*Bangladesh Mohila Samity*) available at :<https://bangladeshmohilasamity.com/about-us/> accessed 17 May 2023

⁸³ Ibid

Conclusion

Bangladesh has made momentous strides towards women's empowerment in recent years, but there is still a long way to go. The government has introduced several policies and laws aimed at promoting gender equality and protecting women's rights, such as the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act and the National Women's Development Policy. Additionally, the Constitution of Bangladesh provides a strong foundation for women's empowerment, including provisions for gender equality, non-discrimination, and the reservation of seats in Parliament for women.

Despite these efforts, many women in Bangladesh still face significant challenges, including gender-based violence, discrimination, and limited access to education and economic opportunities. Further reforms and implementation of existing laws and policies are necessary to address these issues and ensure that women in Bangladesh have equal rights and opportunities. Ultimately, promoting women's empowerment is not only a matter of social justice but also an essential step towards sustainable development and a more prosperous and inclusive society.

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