



Implementation of gender action plan and gender mainstreaming - an instrument of poverty reduction

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ABSTRACT

Women in Bangladesh remain particularly vulnerable to living in poverty. Socially prescribed roles have limited women's access to economic resources. Gender action plan is redressing existing gender inequalities and re-defining women's and men's gender roles and relations through guidance on gender mainstreaming. Main objective of gender action plan is creation of equal opportunity for women in social and economic activities. Thus, women's employment opportunities increased significantly, allowing for an improvement in the family's income level and contributing significantly to family expenses. Along with the increase in family income, women's social choices have increased with the globalization phenomenon. All out efforts, both by public and private sectors, have to be pursued to increase labor force participation by eligible women folk as the women participation is yet very low in Bangladesh which is 36.3 percent (world average is 48 percent). Gender equality is an important aspect of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Goal-5 especially emphasizes on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. This goal encourages for adopting and strengthening sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels. Government and Non-Government strategy will focus on the empowerment of women and on narrowing gender gaps through a two-pronged approach combining gender mainstreaming in all activities with complementary specific initiatives to address persistent structural constraints faced by women.

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh has achieved most of its targets of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and is currently making a good stride in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Bangladesh received 'Women in Parliaments Global Forum Award', as the country has ranked 10th out of 142 nations in the political sphere. Moreover, the Prime Minister was awarded 'United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Peace Tree Award' for her commitment to women's empowerment and girls' education, 'Agent of Change Award' by the Global Partnership Forum for her outstanding contributions to women empowerment, 'Planet 50-50 Champion' by UN-Women and 'Champions of the Earth' by United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for Policy Leadership. Women in Bangladesh remain particularly

vulnerable to living in poverty. Socially prescribed roles have limited women's access to economic resources such as capital, skills. These same social norms limit women's participation in political and other forms of decision-making that affects their lives. These restrictions are particularly hard to overcome for women who head households, whether as widows or through divorce or abandonment. However, social attitudes are changing, and some women have taken advantage of new opportunities for economic and social development with far reaching effects. They have improved their potential for taking greater control over their own lives and have sustainable access to the resources necessary to remove themselves and their families from poverty (Siddique 1998).

According to Labor Force Survey (LFS), total 19.2% women working in different sector. Among them 11.9% women working in

public/autonomous sector, 6.2% are working in formal (private) sector, 22.7% women are working in informal (private) sector and remain 44.2 % are working in Non-profit institution sector (LFS 1999-2000).

The government's policy statement on poverty reduction, the National Strategy for Economic Growth, Poverty Reduction and Social Development (NSEGPRSD) frames the current three-year rolling plan and provides strong analysis of the way in which gender gaps are threatening progress already made in Bangladesh. Gaps for women in employment opportunities and in health outcomes and the concentration of poverty among female-headed households are particularly identified. The need to narrow existing gender-gaps and to promote women's advancement is the third area of policy focus among five identified in the document. Maintaining a focus on narrowing gender gaps while supporting poverty reduction is a priority for the government if it is to meet the ambitious targets in the NSEGPRSD (Country Gender Strategy-Bangladesh 2004).

These trends can improve targeting in poverty reduction programs, but other factors also have to be taken into account. The relationship between poverty reduction and economic growth presented in the Millennium Declaration is founded on an analysis of the household that links increasing household income with reduced hunger. This masks significant differences in how men and women contribute to increasing household incomes and to patterns of distribution of benefits from that increase within the household. The major contributors to household income are assumed males as the primary wage earners, and generally, little analysis is given to different types of contributions from women. Women are increasing their participation in nonagricultural wage labor (MDG indicator for women's empowerment) and continue to make significant contributions to agricultural production through unpaid labor not counted in GDP calculations. There are also considerable savings in expenditures provided by women's domestic work such as caring for the sick, preparing food, and performing other domestic tasks (Country Gender Strategy-Bangladesh 2004).

In this paper authors have tried to establish a relation of the poverty reduction with the gender action plan and gender mainstreaming to achieve goal 5 of the Sustainable Development goals.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Effort has been made in this paper to establish a relationship of the poverty reduction in Bangladesh, with gender action plan and gender mainstreaming based on available published documents in the form of published research articles, government policies and strategies related to women empowerment and gender equality.

RESULTS

Gender action plan (GAP) and gender actions

The purpose of the GAP is to make the institutions' activities "gender responsive and transformative, and thus more effective, efficient and successful" by redressing existing gender inequalities and re-defining women's and men's gender roles and relations through guidance on gender mainstreaming (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification UNCCD 2018)

In an infrastructure, development projects in Bangladesh following basic principles are followed for mainstreaming the gender in project process (International Union for Conservation (IUCN 2018a) -

Ensure that women are involved in selection, design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of the subproject activities including land acquisition and resettlement.

Carefully screen the subprojects to identify needs and expectations of, and potential adverse impacts on, women and document them.

Identify the impact details and the most appropriate mitigation measures through intensive consultation with the affected women and their communities, NGOs and civil society organizations, professionals, and the like.

Identify appropriate actions to ensure and maximize project benefits to women through the consultative process.

If women are involved in civil works construction, operation and maintenance of subproject infrastructure, ensure: (i) equal pay for equal work; (ii) gender friendly work environment; and (iii) work place safety for women and children.

The goal of the GAP is to achieve equity between women and men and to support sustainable development through improved governance in participating City Corporation and Municipalities. The specific objectives of the Gender Action Plan (GAP) are (LGED June 2015):

1. To develop, or deepen, the understanding on the issue of gender within the institution;
2. To ensure that the policy programs and activities include a gender perspective;
3. To promote the considerations of gender issues at all policy levels; and
4. To support staff in achieving a sustainable work-life balance.
5. To advance women's equal participation with men as decision makers in the CC development;
6. To mainstream a gender perspective in the work of the Project through the formation of Gender Committee;
7. To reduce gender inequalities in access to and control over the resources and benefits of development in the areas pertinent to the work of the subprojects.
8. Promote women's participation in project planning and implementation.
9. Maximize women's access to project benefits.
10. Minimize social vulnerability.

Gender mainstreaming

This is a strategy to improve the quality of public policies, programmes and projects, ensuring a more efficient allocation of resources. Better results mean increased well-being for both women and men, and the creation of a more socially just and sustainable society. Gender mainstreaming is the public policy concept of assessing the

implications for people of different genders of a planned policy action, including legislation and programs. Mainstreaming offers a pluralistic approach that values the diversity among people of different genders (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification UNCCD 2018).

The five principles of gender mainstreaming are - gender-sensitive language, gender-specific data collection and analysis, equal access to and utilization of services, women and men are equally involved in decision-making and equal treatment is integrated into steering processes.

The constrains in gender mainstreaming women in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Bangladesh (The Financial Express, 08-09 March 2020, Bangladesh) are :Quality human resources development; Universal quality education; Invigorating health and family planning; Nutrition Security; Job creation; Skill enhancement for addressing the challenges of access to technology; Work environment; Care services; Inclusiveness, equal opportunities and stopping discrimination; Access to public resources; Ensuring social security and reducing income inequality; Financial inclusion; Participation in politics and local government and decision-making process; Attaining zero early marriage and gender based violence; Need for coordination among line ministries (Concluded).

Government of Bangladesh has taken some medium-term strategic objectives and activities for advancement of women in the country, which has been summarized in table 1 (Ministry of Women and Children Affairs Chapter-7).

Table 1: Strategic objectives and activities of the Ministry in relation to Women's Advancement

Sl. No	Medium-Term Strategic Objectives	Activities
1.	Creation of equal opportunity for women in social and economic activities	<p>Providing women technical, vocational and income generating training, equipment for production and micro- credit to facilitate self-employment.</p> <p>Forming and registering voluntary social organizations, and providing assistance.</p> <p>Providing training and creating residential facilities to empower women entrepreneurs and enhance their efficiency and skill.</p> <p>Creating opportunities for women and children to facilitate access to modern information technology.</p>
2.	Social protection and justice for vulnerable women and children	<p>To provide allowances to lactating mothers to remove poverty;</p> <p>To provide food assistance and training to vulnerable women under Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) Programme and provide onetime cash assistance and production inputs instead of food.</p> <p>To give maternity allowances for the ultra-poor and pregnant women;</p> <p>To provide medical services and financial assistance to abused/distressed women and children;</p> <p>To provide hostel facilities for working women and day care facilities for their children;</p> <p>To provide medical treatment, legal assistance, counselling, safe shelter and food assistance to abused women and children;</p> <p>To make available residential accommodation for women, girls and children during the trial period in Courts.</p>
3.	Social and political empowerment of women	<p>To arrange training for elected female representatives and organize awareness building programs to increase women's participation in the electoral process.</p> <p>To increase awareness through meetings in the courtyards to prevent women trafficking.</p>
4.	Development of children and adolescents into good Citizens	<p>Operating Children Development Centres and the Sisimpur Program to provide early childhood education for children</p>

DISCUSSION

Bangladesh government policy and role

The study finds that women earn an average of 21 per cent less per hour than men. Controlling for differences in age, educational background, industry, occupation and geographic location, yields an estimated gender wage gap of 15.9 per cent, but including the effects of industrial and occupational segregation into the estimate yields an estimated wage gap of 23.1 per cent. Industrial segregation increases the overall wage gap by an estimated 7 percentage points. Gender gaps are observed in every industry, across all levels of education and in every establishment size class, with the largest gaps observed in the hotels & restaurants and construction industries, among

workers with primary education or less, and in mid-sized establishments. Gender-based occupational segregation increases the gender wage gap in the construction, financial intermediation and manufacturing industries, but mitigates it in the education, hotels & restaurants and other services industries. The results make clear that increased education has an important role to play to lower the gender wage gap in Bangladesh. The largest gender gap is observed among illiterate workers and the second largest gap is observed among literate workers with less than a primary school education (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics-2018).

Due to implementation of the GAP and government policies of gender equality in different projects and industries the average monthly wage

data for men and women in Bangladesh, for 2010 and 2016-17 (refer table 2). Average wages for women have risen, overall and sector-wise, over the period. However, for all the three sectors (agriculture, industry and service), average wage of women was lower than those of men. The lowest difference was for the agriculture sector, while the differences for the service sector and industry sector were significant. Between 2010

and 2016-17, women's wage in the agriculture sector has remained more or less the same but experienced a rise in the other two sectors. The highest change in women's wages is seen in the service sector. In 2016-17, in the service sector, the average wage for women was found to be about 11.0 per cent higher than that of men. (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics-2018).

Table 2: Average Monthly wage by Sector and Gender: (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics-2018).

Sector	2016-2017			2010		
	Male	Female	Female as % of Male	Male	Female	Female as % of Male
Agriculture	8,309.0	8,207.0	98.7	9,891.2	8,022.3	81.1
Industry	12,172.5	10,831.5	88.9	10,188.9	7,006.9	68.1
Service	13,655.7	15,176.6	111.1	11060.6	7866.5	71.1
Total	13,583	12,254	90.2	10,634.4	7,608.7	71.5

Promotion of economic growth and incomes - eradication of hunger and extreme poverty through increased household income

Due to implementation of the GAP and government, policies of gender equality in different projects and industries poverty levels have declined overall in Bangladesh in the past 10 years. Growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been averaging 5% per year, and consumption-based measures indicate that poverty is declining. There has been a reduction in the proportion of the population living below the poverty line from 55.0% in 1985 to 44.7% in 1999.17 Urban areas had much higher growth in average income but also had considerable increases in income inequality. Most of the poor continue to reside in rural areas where income inequalities are less severe.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and Gender equality

Gender equality is an important aspect of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (adopted by UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015) aiming at transforming our world by 2030. SDGs consist of 17 goals. All these goals together identified 169 targets. Although a number of goals have targets on gender issues, Goal-5 especially

emphasizes on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. The targets set against this particular goal include elimination of all forms of discrimination, violence and harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage against all women and girls in the public and private spheres. It also puts emphasis on recognizing unpaid care and domestic work and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family. Ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life and ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights are significant targets against this goal. Apart from these, undertaking reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws and enhancing the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women are given importance. Finally, this goal encourages for adopting and strengthening sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

Women and Children Concerns

The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs is directly or indirectly involved with almost all the policies and strategies mentioned above. Besides, the National Women Development Policy (NWDP), 2011 is the core policy-specific document of the present government in relation to women development. In the light of the Constitutional obligations, the Five Year Plan and the international commitments, the NWDP-2011 has fixed 22 objectives to achieve the SDG-5 formed different policies and laws to safeguard and development of women.

Women development in 7th five-year plan: The consecutive Five-Year Plans (FYP) incorporated provisions for women's development and gender equality in line with international commitments. The 7th Five-Year Plan (7Th FYP) 2016-2020, incorporated strategy for gender equality and women's advancement and subsequent plans (FYPs) will aim at achieving the SDG targets. The government has set national targets and indicators as well as an action plan to implement the SDGs.

The government is preparing its 8th Five-Year Plan (8th FYP) for 2021-2025 and emphasizing the unfinished agenda to achieve the SDGs. Gender equality and women's empowerment is one of 10 priority action areas declared by the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. Therefore, promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment will continue as priorities in the 8th FYP.

Measures to empower women

The following measures suggested to empower women and to narrow gender gaps-

Ensure that women participate in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of developmental projects. Mechanisms and indicators for implementing and monitoring each project will be established in a gender action plan and the executing agency will agree by contract to achieve the indicators in the time specified.

Ensure that gender gaps in wages in Development activities are reduced over time to parity and that

monitoring mechanisms are developed to assist contractors and other agencies to assess progress in this area.

Build the capacity of local government institutions and other partners in gender sensitive policy and program planning, implementation, and monitoring. This will also provide scope for promoting and sustaining gender mainstreaming beyond Non-Government Institutes direct partnership.

Support studies to broaden understanding of gender gaps to identify potential entry points and practical policy levers to encourage female-led small and medium enterprises. Support government achievement of the goals and National Strategy for Economic Growth, Poverty Reduction and Social Development (NSEGPRSD). Links need to be established with the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs for this to be effective and sustainable.

Develop detailed monitoring mechanisms to track progress and to capture good practices in implementing this gender strategy.

To make Bangladesh a role model in Gender Mainstreaming is in south Asia following government initiatives need to be implemented on priority -

- Life cycle-based disease prevention and curative healthcare for women;
- Access to modern reproductive health and family planning services;
- Quality formal education at all levels;
- Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and ICT education for girls;
- Advancement of physically and mentally challenged women/girls;
- Advancement of marginalized women;
- Creating short- and long-term opportunities for decent employment for women;
- Business development services for women entrepreneurs;
- Improving work environment;
- Banning violence and sexual harassment in public spheres;
- Access to, and decision-making over use and protection of community resources;

Participation in national politics and local government;

Remove all discriminatory provisions in laws and policies in consistency with Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW); Gender responsive Budgeting; Joyeeta Extension Programme

All out efforts, both by public and private sectors, have to be pursued to increase labor force participation by eligible women folk as the women participation is yet very low in Bangladesh which is 36.3 per cent (world average is 48 per cent) (Ministry of Women and Children Affairs Chapter-7).

CONCLUSION

Support has been extended to the government's efforts through stand-alone projects funded by a broad range of donors as well as through mainstreaming gender concerns in all areas of programming. Since the incorporation of a gender strategy in the 1999 country operation strategy, projects supported by the Government and Non-Government have made significant contributions to narrowing gaps by ensuring that women participate in project activities and influence decisions concerning their selection, management, and maintenance. Attention has also been paid to ensuring that women benefit equally from employment opportunities created by developmental projects and that they have wage parity with men. In order to sustain poverty reduction, it is important to consolidate these experiences and to ensure women are contributing to economic growth and are agents of change in institutions that manage development. Government and Non-Government strategy will focus on the empowerment of women and on narrowing gender gaps through a two-pronged approach combining gender mainstreaming in all activities with complementary specific initiatives to address persistent structural constraints faced by women.

Significant progress has been made in reducing poverty in Bangladesh over the past three decades;

however, there is concern over the extent to which women have benefited from economic growth and human development and the extent to which they have been able to access or influence institutions that make the decisions that shape their lives. There are persistent gender gaps in development indices linked to social discrimination that distort the impacts of policies and point to the need for specific measures to overcome them. These are new roles for women that contribute to changing gender relations. Men's approval and support for women's participation is also an important positive change. Sometimes, these interventions lead to other strategic results, such as increased access to political representatives, expanded social and economic networks, increased access to government services beyond the life of the project, greater decision-making power in the household and increased self-esteem and self-confidence.

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