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INTEGRATING WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT: UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT OF BANGLADESH

Abstract

The global movement for the recognition of women's rights as human rights attempted to identify those rights crucial to the well being of women. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and other subsequent assertion of equal rights to men and women in spite of their sexual identity are very crucial in this regard. Conventional wisdom suggests that the progress towards equality for men and women has not been satisfactory in developing countries like Bangladesh where women are subject to exclusion as a result of the 'social-economic-political' as well as ideological privileges of men evident in the patriarchal structure of the society. The paper argues that although women's presence and participation in the development process of Bangladesh have not been adequate, the initiatives at various levels to address this inadequacy and progressive movements of women in diverse sectors of Bangladesh have brought in a number of affirmative changes. With this aim, the paper attempts to review the current status of women in the political, economic and social development of the country and examines the strengths and limitations of integration of women in mainstream development structure.

1. Introduction

'Women hold up half the sky', this Chinese proverb clearly demonstrates the significance of women in all kinds of efforts toward building a better world. Women constitute in most cases, half of workforce that can make significant contribution in the progress towards development of any country. Being human, women are and should be entitled to equal rights. Numerous declarations on human rights proclaim the same rights for women as for men in document, but in practice it lacks visibility. Multilayered issues weaved in discrimination and patriarchy instilled in the socio-cultural, economic and political arenas have convoluted the roles and responsibilities of women.[1] Additionally, the differentiation of public and private spheres increases the vulnerability of women in developing societies like Bangladesh, which promotes traditional gender stereotypes and maintains patriarchal societal structure. This conventional wisdom of the status of women is particularly true on the grounds of the privileges enjoyed by men in the society in Bangladesh.

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[1] Amena Mohsin, "Gendering the Nation and Endangering Gender: Bangladesh National Regimes", *BIISS Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 2009, p. 256.

Drawing on these backgrounds, the central theme of this paper is that, in spite of deep rooted dilemmas, the society in Bangladesh which is embedded in patriarchy has showed marked improvement in its attempts to integrate women in the mainstream development process. According to Gender Equity Index (GEI)[2], Bangladesh ranked top in gender equity in South Asia in 2012.[3] The country has also advanced in ensuring women participation in politics, formal economic activities as well as in standard measures of development like female literacy and maternal health. Women's empowerment and mainstreaming gender concerns in Bangladesh evolved from 'charity' to 'rights' and they have grown to become an intrinsic part of the national development policy and all national strategy documents and frameworks. Therefore, although conventional wisdom suggests that women's presence and participation in development process of Bangladesh have not been adequate; this paper provides that initiatives at various levels to address this inadequacy along with a range of progressive movements of women in diverse sectors of Bangladesh have brought in a number of positive changes. Women participation in vital sectors of development has increased in line with these changes in policy.

This paper attempts to explore the linkages between women and development and reviews the actions and policies put forwarded by the state and international actors in their attempts to integrate women in development. It then tries to look into the situation of women in political, economic and social sectors of Bangladesh. It examines the strengths and limitations of each sector and tries to put forward some suggestions with regard to this. The paper is divided into six sections. Section 1 provides an introduction. Section 2 tries to link the concept of 'development' with 'women'. The legal instruments, programmes and policies adopted by various actors to increase women visibility in the development of Bangladesh are covered in Section 3. Section 4 makes an assessment of women participation and progress in political, economic and social context of Bangladesh. Section 5 makes some recommendations and the final section summarises and concludes the paper.

2. Linking 'Women' with 'Development': Theoretical Understanding

The concept of 'development' became popular in the 1950s with reference to human societies that were underdeveloped and the need for the transformation of these societies to modern and developed nation was realised.[4] Development needs were referred to the 'economic South' ignoring the vast differences among these Third World countries. This debate of development evident in approaches like 'trickle down policy', 'dependency theory' or 'basic needs approach' demonstrates the contradictory dynamics of developmentality. In spite of these differences, the centrality of the notion lies in its focus on reducing poverty.

[2] The Gender Equity Index (GEI) is prepared annually by Social Watch, a Manila-based civil society network, which measures the gap between women and men in education, the economy and political empowerment.
[3] "Bangladesh on Top in Gender Equity Ranking in South Asia", *The Financial Express*, 07 March 2012.
[4] Rounaq Jahan, *The Elusive Agenda: Mainstreaming Women in Development*, Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1995, p. 18.

Tracing the evolution of theories of development little discussion can be found about women. This concept of development was predominantly a masculine idea that sticks to merely economic aspects. Even then, it is the concept of development that brought the need for gender equality to forefront. Till the 1960s, women were, for the most part, linked to the traditional and backward aspects of underdeveloped societies, perceived as 'quiet recipients' and 'passive beneficiaries' of development.[5] Policies were directed towards making women as better mothers. Though the 1948 Universal Declaration entitled equal rights to men and women, distinctions were made when it came to ensuring citizen rights, voting rights, right to ownership and women were generally treated almost as untouchable 'irrational' creatures, less than fully human.[6]

The recognition of women's rights was not achieved overnight. The contribution of feminist thinkers and progressive movements in ensuring women's rights in both public and private spheres and upgrading the status of women from private to public arena is noteworthy. Women's concerns were first integrated into the development agenda in the 1970s by a Washington-based network of female development professionals who argued that modernisation ultimately contributed to the relegation of women's rights and status.[7] Thus, to deal with the missing link between women and development policies, Women-in-Development (WID) framework originated. This approach, proposed by liberal feminists, saw the problem of women subordination as linked with their exclusion from developmental programmes and division of labour based on sex. The approach postulated that disadvantages of women can be eliminated by breaking the stereotyped customary expectations held by men and internalised by women. WID advocates were supported by Esther Boserup's seminal book 'Women's Role in Economic Development', particularly its 'welfare approach'.[8] The WID movement demanded social justice and gender equity for women in the first place. But this approach failed to shed light on 'power relations' between men and women and how it affects women's role and responsibilities.

A related framework, influenced by the rise of dependency theory, was introduced in the late 1970s to address the weaknesses of the WID paradigm. This new perspective, known as Women and Development (WAD), advocated by radical

[5] Kazuki Iwanaga (ed.), *Women's Political Participation and Representation in Asia: Obstacles and Challenges*, Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2008, p. 10.

[6] J. Steans, *Gender and International Relations: Issues, Debates and Future Directions,* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006, p. 12.

[7] Manaslu Gurung, "Women and Development in the Third World", WWF Nepal Program Office, 2004, available at http://awsassets.panda.org/downloads/women_and_development_in_the_third_world.pdf, accessed on 29 September 2013.

[8] The welfare approach considers women as passive beneficiaries rather than active participants in development process. S. Razavi and C. Miller, "From WID to GAD: Conceptual Shifts in the Women and Development Discourse", United Nations Development Programme, available at http://unrisd.org/unrisd/website/document.nsf/ab82a6805797760f80256b4f005da1ab/d9c3fca78d3db32e80256b67005b6ab5/$FILE/opb1.pdf, accessed on 25 September 2013.

feminists, assumes that male-dominated states cannot alter gender inequalities.[9] The new approach inspired a new policy perspective towards development of women that focused on small-scale and 'women-only' projects designed to circumvent male domination.[10] Emphasising on the distinctiveness of women knowledge, work, goals and responsibilities, the approach uphold women as important economic actors in the development process. Nevertheless, it may be noted that WAD fails to observe the heterogeneity among women, particularly the racial and ethnic divisions.

Gender and Development (GAD) is a more recent approach articulated by groups of women in the Third World. The Nairobi Conference (1985) and the formation of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) subsequently laid the foundation for the emergence of GAD.[11] This approach focuses on the socially constructed roles of both men and women and observes women in their particular societal context. GAD contributed to the newer understanding centred on 'gender', describing it as the process by which the biological categories of individuals become social categories through the acquisition of locally and culturally defined attributes of masculinity and femininity, replacing 'women' as emphasised in WID and WAD approaches. The actions of GAD were directed to empower women by providing greater self-reliance and to promote equitable sustainable development where women and men would be sharing decision-making authority and power.[12] This approach is, however, criticised as being Western-inspired and is unpopular except with the Third World women.

Apart from these three dominant paradigms, an alternative approach to development has been advanced based on experiences and practices at the grassroots level that contributed to empowerment of poor women, especially in rural areas.[13] The local Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) have played a pioneering role in promoting this alternative view and in tackling Third World problems of integrating women in development structure. These organisations created space for women's voices in participatory processes and challenged the development plans that are biased against women. This view articulates women as 'targets' as well as 'agents' of development.[14] Adoption of this view by NGOs in Bangladesh, and in South Asia, has shown remarkable success in expanding women's role in the social and economic structure of this region. It has ensured access to credit by the poor and asset-less women and contributed in upholding the decision-making power of women in the male-dominated family structures of Bangladesh. This paradigm centres on the need to create a 'pressure from the below' and integrating bottom-up development as the

[9] *Ibid.*
[10] Manaslu Gurung, *op. cit.*
[11] *Ibid.*
[12] William Massaquoi, "Women and Post-Conflict Development: A Case Study on Liberia", Massachusetts Institute of Technology, available at http://dspace.mit.edu/bitstream/handle/1721.1/42108/226315252.pdf, accessed on 02 October 2013.
[13] S. Razavi and C. Miller, *op. cit.*
[14] Manaslu Gurung, *op. cit.*

powerful way to empower women. Thus, through a number of approaches, the link between 'women' and 'development' evolved and women came to be seen as active participant in the policies of development across the world. The need for challenging unequal power relations, fulfilling the strategic and practical needs of women, dealing with feminisation of poverty and empowering women through the redistribution of power and authority between societies began to get attention.

3. Introducing Women in Development: Legal Rights and Policy Instruments in Bangladesh

Integrating women's needs and concerns into mainstream development planning is a complex and multilayered process. The necessity of integration lies not only in addressing gender disparity but also in dealing with the poverty of developing countries like Bangladesh. It is still an impoverished country with a large population living below the poverty line; it is a patriarchal society where women are relegated to a subordinate status and thus women in Bangladesh, especially in rural areas, remains poorest among the poor. There are only 962 females for every 1,000 males, which mean, almost three million women as 'missing women'[15] in the country.[16] Culturally and socially, family is still seen as the dominant arena for women and it is within this arena where power relations are often played out.[17]

Although demographically women constitute almost half of the total population of Bangladesh (48.5 per cent), the social, cultural and religious burden limits the utilisation of their authority in ensuring equal rights. Despite constitutional guarantees of gender equality, as the conventional wisdom suggests, women's active participation is not satisfactory in Bangladesh. However, the legislative and other affirmative interventions by state and non-state actors have played an encouraging role in mainstreaming women in Bangladesh. Inspired by advancement of newer approaches to integrate women in development at the international level, Bangladesh has also adopted a number of policies and established a number of bodies to deal with the issue.

Constitutionally, the People's Republic of Bangladesh has guaranteed equal rights to women in participating in all aspects of public life. Article 28 specifies that the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race,

[15] The concept of 'missing women', developed by Noble Laureate Amartya Sen in the late 1980s, is a way to assess impact of gender bias, insufficient care and discrimination that has led to excess female mortality. It estimates the additional number of females who would have been alive if there had been equal treatment of the sexes and of allocation of survival-related goods. According to Sen, there are near about 100 million missing women worldwide.

[16] Ryan Higgit, "Women's Leadership Building as Poverty Reduction Strategy: Lessons from Bangladesh", *Journal of South Asian Development*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2011, p. 96.

[17] Naripokkho and Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, "Baseline Report: Violence against Women in Bangladesh", available at http://www.iwraw-ap.org/aboutus/pdf/FPvaw.pdf, accessed on 05 October 2013.

caste, sex or place of birth[18] and therefore, women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the state and public life. Besides, articles like 9, 10, 37, and 39 clearly proclaim that steps should be taken to ensure women's participation in all spheres of life, as the key principles of state policy.[19]

In ensuring the constitutional rights of women, the first step towards involving women in development, was taken in 1972 when Bangladesh National Women's Rehabilitation Board was established. Additionally, the declaration of International Women's Year (1975) and the UN Decade for Women (1976-85) that aimed to bring peace, equality and development, created the foundation for advancement of 'goal-oriented programmes' for women's development in Bangladesh. It recognised practical and strategic needs of women thereby, the scope for creation of their rightful place in the society evolved.[20] In reaction to worldwide progress, at the national level, Bangladesh National Women's Association (1976) and the Ministry of Women's Affairs (1978) were established. Bangladesh is one of the few countries to have established a separate ministry for dealing with issues related to women's needs and it is mandated to promote consistent response by all government agencies to the needs and priorities of women. It is generally regarded as the lead government agency to address women's interest and implement the objectives of WID approach in Bangladesh.[21]

The Beijing Conference (1995) is another milestone on mainstreaming gender in state policies.[22] The Fourth World Conference on Women mobilised the Government of Bangladesh to organise local level meetings with NGOs, women's organisations, and other members of civil society. This created a platform for both state and non-state actors to work together for the development of women. In the same year, the National Council for Women Development (1995) was established at the national level to review the development policies and identify the existing gender gaps. The organisation acted as the highest policy making body for women's development. Subsequently, National Plan of Action (1996) was developed, as a follow up of Beijing Conference, aimed at eradicating gender disparities from the society and providing better options to women to ensure their participation in private and public life.[23] The National Action Plan eased implementation of critical policy decisions relating to women's issues and development.[24] To ensure the follow up of the Action Plan, high-

[18] "Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh", available at http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/research/bangladesh-constitution.pdf, accessed on 22 September 2013.
[19] *Ibid.*
[20] Amena Mohsin, *op. cit.*
[21] Ryan Higgit, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
[22] "Promoting Gender Equality: Background on Key International Agreements and Declarations", available at http://unfpa.org/gender/rights.htm, accessed on 03 October 2013.
[23] Social Development Division, Economic and Social Commission for the Asia and Pacific, "Bringing the Beijing Platform for Actions to the Grass Roots", Government Series No. 5, United Nations, 1999, available at http://www.unescap.org/sdd/publications/gender/Pub_2016.pdf, accessed on 05 October 2013.
[24] Amena Mohsin, *op. cit.*

powered inter-ministerial task force and needs assessment teams were also set up at the state level.[25]

The government of Bangladesh, till date, has adopted a number of five year plans. The First Five Year Plan (1973-78) focused on integrating women in productive work. The approach was welfare-oriented with a focus on rehabilitating war-affected women and children. The Second (1978-1980) and Third (1985-90) Five Year Plans concentrated on increasing women's employment and efficiency. The objective was to create an atmosphere to facilitate women's participation in development activities through expansion of opportunities for training, skill development, credit and entrepreneurship development. In the Third Five Year Plan, a rural-oriented health service delivery for women was proposed in which maternal and child health care, family planning, nutrition, immunisation services, family health education and environmental sanitation were the major components. In all the plan documents, the government also proposed to take steps to accelerate and expand the educational facilities for women. For employment, the objective was to achieve the equal opportunity for women workers and integrate them with the labour force.

The Fourth Five Year Plan (1990-95), for the first time incorporated the concept of Women in Development (WID) and placed women within the macro framework with multi-sectoral thrust focusing on gender dimensions of poverty and mentioned gender mainstreaming as a strategic objective to reduce gender disparities. The Fifth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) came up with the strategy to mainstream women in the development process by undertaking necessary steps to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), promoting capacity development, poverty reduction, public expenditure, public employment, education, health, legal protection etc. These plans recognised the roles of all sectors in mainstreaming women's development and emphasised advocacy roles of women's ministry. However, it did not discuss the role of WID focal points in the existing ministries or review their capabilities.[26]

The government has also set up certain institutional mechanisms to implement and monitor its programmes.[27] These are – WID Focal Points, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWCA) and Women's Development Implementation and Evaluation Committee. The objective of this is to review advice and adjust women's development programmes. WID coordination committee has also been expanded at district and thana level for improved coordination.[28] But, the role of WID focal points has not been clarified in the existing ministries which is a major concern.

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[25] Salma Khan, *The Fifty Percent: Women in Development and Policy in Bangladesh,* Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1993, p. 45.

[26] Asian Development Bank, "Country Briefing Paper: Women in Bangladesh", August 2001, available at http://www.adb.org/documents/women-bangladesh-country-briefing-paper, accessed on 05 October 2013.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] Amena Mohsin, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

The most recent contribution to the assurance of women participation in development process came up with the National Women Development Policy in 2011. The government, through this policy, has approved the provision of equal share of opportunity in employment and business.[29] The policy is basically the revival of Women Development Policy of 1997 and upholds the rights of women irrespective of their religion, provides them with full control over their rights to health, education, information, technology and opportunity to earn. The policy also calls for ensuring women's rights in formulation and implementation of economic policies for sectors like trade, currency and tax. The success of this policy is still to be experienced.

These attempts, as a whole, reflect the commitment at the state level to deal with the subordinate status of women, at least at the surface level.[30] Specific laws for the protection of women violence, trafficking and early marriage for girls have been enacted. The principles contained in the constitution impose an affirmative duty on the state to protect the rights of the women. The adoption of policies at various levels is a response to the duty. However, one of the major concerns in terms of gender equality in Bangladesh lies in the fact that the country still holds reservation on a number of articles of CEDAW. Bangladesh has signed and ratified CEDAW, also known as Women's Bill of Rights, back in 1984. There is still reservation on Articles 2 and 16.1C relating to discriminatory laws against women that need to be amended at the national level.[31] The reason cited for reservation is the potentiality of the amendment to go against the religious laws. But placing this reservation is directly denying women their constitutional guarantees. It may be mentioned that initially, Bangladesh also had reservations to Article 13 (a) and 16 (1f) also which was later withdrawn. Such actions also reduce the effectiveness of legal regimes and policy instruments that are already complicated by socio-culturally knotted patriarchal values and patrilineal systems.

4. Status of Women's Integration in Development in Bangladesh

Integrating women in development, especially in developing countries like Bangladesh, is certainly not a linear process. It is more like a process of progressing towards gender aware policies and practices as well as bringing a transformation in values of the patriarchal structure to ensure women's rights at all levels – political, economic and social. Adoption of various strategies at the state level and the force from the bottom by the women activists have made progress possible, albeit slow. The following section looks into the impact of the above mentioned policies and analyses the status of women's integration in the development process of Bangladesh.

[29] "Bangladesh Government Okays National Women Development Policy Ahead of International Women's Day", *The Daily Star,* 19 March 2011.
[30] Amena Mohsin, *op. cit.*, p. 269.
[31] *The Daily Star, op. cit.*

4.1 *The Political Participation*

Women's participation in politics is pivotal to democracy and to determine the process of advancement. Nevertheless, the orb of politics has historically been considered as the masculine domain.[32] In addition, division between public and private sphere and designating the former as men's domain and the latter as women's domain have historically contributed to the marginalisation of women's participation in all forms of decision-making as articulated in the CEDAW.

In Bangladesh, women's place in the 'play of power politics' has taken up a new shape. It would be too early to conclude that women have become self-sufficient in voicing their needs and consideration through their presence in politics and policies. But Bangladesh, since 1991, has been able to establish herself as a unique case where both the posts of leader of the ruling party and main opposition political party are occupied by women. Both of them have contested and won seats from multiple constituencies in direct elections. Bangladesh has also elected a woman as the parliament speaker in April 2013 which reflects progress for women's political participation, a milestone for women empowerment.

Table 1: Representation of Women in National Parliament

Term	Reserved Seats	Directly Elected	Total Female Members of Parliament	Total Female Ministers	Total Representation in Parliament in %	% of Female Minister
1991-96	30	4	34	3	10.3	7.7
1996-2001	30	8	38	4	11.5	9.5
2001-06	45	7	52	3	15.1	5.0
2009-2013	45 (Increased to 50 by fifteenth Amendment)	19	64	5	18.6	15.62
2014-till date[1]	50	20	70	2	19.83	6.89

Source: Compiled from Parliamentary Reports.[33] See also, Amena Mohsin, *op.cit.,* p. 249.

The provision of reserved seats or quota is the major tool used in the country to ensure women's presence in political structures. The aim was to ensure 'protected representation' of female in consideration of uneven political strength in contesting with male in general seats.[34] Article 65 of the Constitution provides for reserved seats for women in legislature and Article 9 provides for special representation of women in

[32] Kazuki Iwanaga (ed.), *op. cit.,* p. 28.
[33] "List of 10th Parliamentary Members", available at http://www.parliament.gov.bd/index.php/en/mps/members-of-parliament/current-mp-s/list-of-10th-parliament-members-english, accessed on 20 December 2014.
[34] Amena Mohsin, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

local government institutions. Reserved seats for women were only 15 in 1973 which have been increased to 50 by the fifteenth amendment of the Constitution (2011). As presented in Table 1, the percentage of women in parliament has increased to 19.83 per cent in the Tenth Parliament from 10.3 per cent in the Fifth Parliament. In the same time, total female members of the parliament have also doubled. In line with increasing participation of women in successive elections, the percentage of women voters has also considerably increased from 41.23 million (2008) to 45.8 million (2013).[35]

Similarly, with the promulgation of Local Government Ordinance (1976), provisions to include two women members in the Union Council were created. Later, with the aim to integrate more women in local government bodies' decision-making, the Local Government Second Amendment Act (1997) was promulgated where reserved seats were increased to three in each Union Council for women where they could be directly elected from each of the three wards. As a result, number of women candidates as well as the percentage of elected women chairmen and members have drastically increased in recent Union Council elections.

In line with progress, it is also apparent that participation of women in politics of Bangladesh is relatively quantitative than qualitative. The strategy to keep reserved seats has, in effect, complicated women's 'effective participation' since these seats often are viewed as 'ornamental', lacking necessary political strength and importance.[36] Deficit practice of democracy within a political party complicates the rise of women leadership and discourages practice of politics at the grassroots level. Majority of the female politicians enter the political spectrum due to their family ties based on the kin factor. Grooming of leaders who do not have a political elitist background is an urgent necessity to ensure continued participation of women in politics which is crucial to generate gender sensitive policies.

Moreover, ministries associated with 'high-politics' are generally not allocated to female leaders. Ministries, such as, Women and Children Affairs, Social Welfare etc., generally termed as 'feminine ministries', are mostly assigned to women ministers. Only the immediate past cabinet had witnessed a deviation from the previous approach of keeping females away from 'high-politics' since Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Labour and Employment were headed by female ministers. This reflects that irrespective of the impressive records of women serving as head of states, across the political arena, 'women leaders' are rarely found. Moreover, they lack equal rights and opportunities due to the institutional gender insensitiveness and weaknesses. Contesting in reserved position ultimately allows others to question

[35] Bangladesh Election Commission, available at http://www.ecs.gov.bd/Bangla/MenuTemplate1.php?Parameter_MenuID=70&ByDate=0&Year=, accessed on 02 October 2013.

[36] Kamal Uddin Ahmed, "Women and Politics in Bangladesh", available at http://www.asiaticsociety.org.bd/journals/Golden_jubilee_vol/articles/H_446%20%28Kamal%20Uddin%29.htm, accessed on 02 October 2013.

their credentials and credibility. However, although the two major parties are headed by women, there is inadequacy in the percentage of involvement of female politicians in party hierarchy.[37] Among the fifty Parliamentary Standing Committees, women are heads of only eight committees and in decision making forums of committees of political parties, women's representation varies in between 2.7 per cent to 11.2 per cent.[38]

Even though the progress seems to be more 'numerical' than 'actual', it is pertinent to note that there has been a gradual progress in total representation and increase in responsibilities of female leaders. With regard to direct election in reserved seats, the National Women Development Policy has suggested special arrangements for it which is expected to offer female leaders a chance to contest from their respective constituencies and judge their electability. This would help them to be properly placed in the power loop that would connect them increasingly to mainstream politics and provide required authority and access to power. Decision, although taken, directed towards by maintaining one-third reserved positions for women in all political parties' executive committee positions is yet to be implemented. This would help to strengthen women's political position through gradual selection of them in highest decision making committees which will help break the traditional patriarchal and institutional negative mind-set regarding the capability of women to perform in highest decision making positions.

4.2 *The Economic Participation*

Females are an essential part of the workforce, both formal and informal. According to Labour Force Survey (2000) of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 37.81 per cent of the workforce of Bangladesh is female and this section of the society contributes substantially to their households as well as in the socio-economic development of Bangladesh. Unfortunately, their contribution is often overlooked because the 'non-market/non-monetised' activities of women is said to have no productive economic value. This is inevitable in a society instilled in the idea of 'sexual division of labour' and the understanding that men do all productive work and women live on men's work.[39]

In Bangladesh, in spite of the unfavourable situation, women have greatly contributed and come forward in expanding their roles and participation in economic arena. Women participation in employment and income-generating activities is important since it offers a means to reduce the disparity between male and female.

[37] M. Rahman Khan and F. Ara, "Women, Participation and Empowerment in Local Government: Bangladesh Union Parishad Perspective", *Asian Affairs,* Vol. 29, No. 1, 2006, p. 23.
[38] "Women's Political Empowerment in Bangladesh: Prospects and Challenges", *Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development,* available at http://www.steps.org.bd/last/images/Aparajita/29.09.14/brochure-aparajita-29.09.14.pdf, accessed on 20 January 2015.
[39] Salma Khan, *op. cit.,* p. 23.

The promotion of the women's agency role[40] in economic development is significant since it offers a way out of feminisation of poverty by allowing feminisation of labour force.

The participation of women in the formal labour force in Bangladesh has increased almost three folds in recent decades primarily due to their employment in ready-made garments (RMG) sector, non-governmental organisations, health care services, education sectors, export processing zones, services sectors and commercial enterprises. It is a positive trend that has contributed to the feminisation of labour in Bangladesh. Today, almost 85 per cent of labour force in the RMG sector is female. Successive governments have also encouraged increasing women's participation in economic sectors by making development interventions; thus creating provisions for 'women's only' jobs. The government has reserved 10 per cent of the high official posts for women. In the Ministry of Agriculture, some positions of poultry farmers and vegetable croppers have been reserved for women only. In the Ministry of National Health and Family Welfare, female family planning workers are recruited to serve as 'change agents'. Primary and secondary school teachers have mostly been recruited from women. Sixty per cent of the vacant posts at the primary school level are reserved for women.[41] In recognition of the need for greater gender equality of employment in the public sector, the government has also introduced a quota system for women with employment targets of 10 per cent for gazetted posts and 15 per cent for non-gazetted posts.[42] In addition, near about 90 per cent of telephone operator's posts have been reserved for women by the government.[43] At the non-government level, there are also over 1,000 local and national organisations that generate self-employment opportunities for nearly 8 million poor, mostly women, through microcredit and training in literacy, technical skills and legal rights.

Another remarkable change is the emergence of women entrepreneurship in Bangladesh. It has opened up a new platform for women to step up in the business world that is considered a competitive male-dominated arena. This emergence of women entrepreneur class has a number of interlinked outcomes. On the one hand, it has contributed to business and export growth, employment generation and skill development of the country. Thus, it adds to economic growth at the macro level. On the other, it has improved women's living conditions and reduced poverty rates at the household level.[44] It may be mentioned here that Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry has been implementing a project named 'Promoting Women Entrepreneurship through Advocacy (PWEA).[45] It has contributed to the economic

[40] Agency refers to an individual's or group's ability to make operative choice in different spheres and uses their endowments to transform the choices into outcomes desired by them. The agency role played by women is central to understand the outcomes of gender inequality.

[41] Amena Mohsin, *op. cit.,* p. 246.

[42] Asian Development Bank, *op. cit.*

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] *Ibid.*

[45] Kamal Uddin Ahmed, *op. cit.*

growth at the macro level as well as reduced poverty rates at the household level. Apart from the participation in formal economic activities, there are many women working in informal sectors of the economy. Participation in the workforce has increased the visibility of women and provided them with a desire to achieve autonomy in their life. This has increased their bargaining power in household, earned more respect in the family and the society, thus, reversing their 'invisibility'.

A number of issues still remain unaddressed. Bangladesh still numerically lacks female participation in agricultural activities since in the country only 59 per cent of women are employed in agriculture as compared to other countries of South Asia like India (74 per cent), Pakistan (64 per cent) and Nepal (85 per cent). Moreover, in the agricultural sectors, women contribute vastly as 'unpaid family workers' that makes them economically inactive population understating their contribution. Sometimes the development policies of the state also add to the insecurity of the marginalised section of the society like introduction of mechanised means to agriculture has complicated the livelihood of the female-headed households by displacing the rural poor from this sector. This is primarily because they are not acquainted with the newer technologies and they are largely excluded from capital accumulation process, thus from being economically independent. Even with formal labour market access, women face wage discrimination and harassment that further aggravate women's exclusion in the society and economy of Bangladesh.

4.3 *Women in Social Development*

Decades back, Mary Wollstonecraft, an advocate of women's rights declared, education is a main factor in ensuring gender equality. To add with her, women's access to education and health care facilities, two core issues of social development, are inextricably linked to their development and empowerment. Access to education and health care facilities are also two of the major goals of Millennium Declaration ratified by Bangladesh during UN Millennium Summit in 2000.

The most notable advancement of Bangladesh in the last decade is perhaps the increased access of women to education. According to the Literacy Assessment Survey 2011, published by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), girls' access to education has markedly increased to 50.2 per cent in 2011 from 33.4 per cent in 2001.[46] Notably, female literacy rate is higher than male both in urban and rural areas for population of age 11-14 years, that is, at the primary and secondary levels. The country has already met its target on male-female ratio in primary and secondary education, that is, gender parity in enrolments in primary and secondary schools.[47] A number of factors seem to have contributed to such achievement. Firstly, state policies like compulsory primary education for all children, free education for girls

[46] Asian Development Bank, *op. cit.*
[47] *Ibid.*

at primary and secondary levels, free books and other educational supplementary material support as well as stipends to female students have given a boost in this increasing interest in female education. Secondly, the economic self-sufficiency of women as a result of their increased participation in the formal labour force has assigned them with greater authority in household decision-making thus, enabling them to decide on whether to send their girl child to school or not. Finally, increase in number of female teachers at the primary and secondary levels has contributed to a change in mindset in countryside regarding the necessity of female education. However, drawbacks remain. The percentage of girls attending school begins to decline in the later secondary level which is definitely a major concern.

Bangladesh, despite its poverty dynamics, has achieved remarkable progress with regard to health care facilities of women particularly maternal health and reproductive rights. The complications of pregnancy and childbirth are two of the major causes of death and disability of women in Bangladesh. But in recent years, Bangladesh has successfully reduced mortality ratio of women from pregnancy related causes to 194 per 100,000 lives from 600 in 1999. The percentage of births attended by skilled personnel was only 13 per cent during 1999. This has dramatically increased to 31 per cent in 2011. The use of contraceptives has also increased which is a clear indication of women's increasing ability to make decision about sexuality and fertility. Even when women get chance to control their fertility, they can also contribute economically, which help to grow their confidence and decision making power. A closer look at the status of MDG will crystallise the progress of women in the social sector of Bangladesh.

Table 2: Status of MDGs of Specific Indicators Related to Women Integration in Bangladesh

Goals	Targets	Indicators		Current Status
MDG:2 Achieve Universal Primary Education	Increase net enrolment ratio to 100% by 2015	Net enrolment ratio in primary education, %		98.7%
	Reduce primary school dropout rates to 0% by 2015	Pupils of Class 1-5		79.5%
		Adult (15+ years) Literacy Rate		74.9% Women (81.9%) Men (67.8%)
MDG:3 Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women	Eliminate gender disparity in education preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015	Ratio of girls to boys in education target:(1:1)	Primary	1.02
			Secondary	1.13
			Tertiary	0.66
		Share of women in wage employment in non-agricultural sector, %		19.87%
		Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament, %		20%
MDG:5 Improve Maternal Health	Reduce maternal mortality to 143 by 2015	Maternal mortality ratio (deaths per 100,000 live births)		194
	Increase the proportion of births attended by skilled birth personnel to 50% by 2010	Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel		31.7%

Source: Bangladesh Planning Commission, *The Millennium Development Goals: Bangladesh Progress Report 2012*, General Economic Division, Planning Commission, June 2013.

Women integration at the societal level also needs to give due attention to the dimension of violence. Even with economic independence, women at the lower strata of the society are often subject to violence at their family and workplace resulting mostly from the traditional norms attached to a patriarchal society.

Another important aspect of women's development is linked with migration. Migrants' remittances are more important than official development aid, and despite the global economic crisis, it remains the second largest financial flow to developing countries after foreign direct investment.[48] It is an important tool to reduce poverty and induce development, as it allows rural women to gain autonomy when they move

[48] "Migration and the Millennium Development Goals", available at http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/policy_and_research/policy_documents/policy_brief.pdf, accessed on 24 September 2013.

to urban areas and get paid jobs while international migration allows female migrants to emphasise their productive role in economy and their social status.[49]

5. The Way Ahead

Lifting the mist of prejudices and understanding the role and significance of women in all kinds of development efforts are urgent requirements to properly integrate them. Bangladesh has achieved a considerable success and established itself as a pioneering country in terms of gender equity and women integration in South Asia. It should also be noted that political commitments to create enabling conditions, policy interventions and institution development are not enough to protect or integrate women. Increasing the number of reserved seats will not make their situation better unless women are properly placed in the power loop that will connect them to mainstream politics by providing the required authority and access to power. What is required for this is to ensure meaningful participation and to train women more capable and robust decision maker. The first and foremost necessity in this regard is educating women and increasing awareness of the prospects of gender sensitiveness at all levels: individual, society and country. This would impact the development of a political culture in the country where women would have both the competence to make their way and people would have the mindset to accept their judgement. Without complementarities, progress is not possible. It is time for women to gradually start to push for direct election that would allow them and others to judge their electability and create an atmosphere of change by increasing the acceptance of women leaders in the society. In addition, to further women's political participation, the political parties also need to show strong commitment as well as provide financial assistance to help women candidates to participate in elections. Thus, the country would be able to create new women leaders with grassroots connections who will eventually rule out the quota system with capacity development. Job description and responsibilities should be properly outlined to widen women's political space. Division between the elite women and the under-represented women should also be addressed. A precise strategy should be worked out to address the rights, needs and concerns of indigenous and marginalised women. It will clearly be a matter of concern if the purpose of political empowerment of the community that constitutes almost half of the population is not served.

Economic development and women participation in labour force are also closely linked with women empowerment. Since women are under-represented at the high-official level, gender based capacity building is required. Social security and work-place environment are crucial factors in deciding the nurturing of a woman and her qualities. A person who stands in a decision-making position must be allowed certain privileges and be provided with support considering the conceptualisation of women as inferior and subordinate to men and the productification of women.

[49] *Ibid.*

Changes in gender roles are adding even more burden on women's shoulder than before. Therefore, their contribution needs acknowledgement. Addressing the negative mind-set and patriarchal structure requires development activists and gender experts to be included in all project design teams as well as in the implementation phase. This would increase the scope of women to flourish, getting to know their needs in a better way and help themselves.

There is no denying the fact that the gender equality is more than female participation in labour force, political process or improved health and education levels of girls and women. It is necessary to create preconditions for gender-inclusive governance; women's access to credit, entrepreneurship, inheritance and income ownership should be fairly addressed. A sustainable livelihood programme addressing food insecurity and malnutrition among women is necessary. Access to credit is often complicated by corruption and the need to develop 'Development Policy' targeting women entrepreneurs.

Monitoring and evaluation should be participative and gender-inclusive. Further strengthening of non-governmental organisations, particularly in rural areas where most poor women live, is central to enhancing women's leadership and participation in governance structures. Gender-inclusive projects can actively contribute to this by encouraging their participation and building their institutional capacities through various activities. Finally, programmes and policies aimed at integrating women in development should be designed and implemented on the basis of their expected gender-specific social, economic and political roles. This would act as a catalyst and stimulate the process of change at all levels that would contribute in raising the status of women in Bangladeshi society.

6. Conclusion

Integrating women into development process is not an easy task. It is more a paradoxical phenomenon. Engendering development requires breaking free from conventional, social and psychological barriers since the roots of discrimination are multilayered. Back in 1776, Adam Smith reflected that the unproductive class enables the productive class to produce more efficiently.[50] So, considering women as inferior and treating them with prejudice are not only a humiliation to women, they also result in a huge cost for men and for the society. Even, internationally equal treatment of women and ensuring their participation at all levels are considered as indicators of good governance and social development. Bangladesh, in its journey of mainstreaming women in development, has achieved a lot. Standard measures of development reflect that progresses have been made in increasing women's participation in mainstream politics, in the formal and informal labour force and

[50] Shamim Hamid, *Why Women Count: Essays on Women in Development in Bangladesh*, Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1996, p. 1.

in improving women's access to education and health care. Bangladesh has been showing obvious signs of progress in this arena and has been appreciated for its extraordinary development in meeting MDGs of United Nations.

Necessary measures to ensure gender-balance in political, economic or social structures have been adopted. It has resulted in a substantive increase in women participations at all levels. But full integration of women in mainstream development process requires not only programmes or policies. In line with the quantitative increase in participation, it is also necessary to look at the qualitative changes. Success will not result from individual effort; contribution of all actors at all levels matters with equal priority. At the family level, sense of respect and honour for women and creating space for their increased participation in productive work should be encouraged. What is needed, is ensuring empowerment of women - political, social, economic, as well as reducing their dependency on men and creating awareness among all. Women themselves should realise the power of their voices and responsibilities.