

The Relationship Between Gender Equality in Bangladesh and Middle Income Country Status By 2021

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ABSTRACT

Bangladesh has been graduated from lower income category to lower middle income category in 2015. It was made possible due to steady growth during 2000's from a mere 2.8% in the 1970's to 6% in 2010's and 7.11% during 2015-16. The per capita income also increased from US \$90 only in 1973 to US \$1314 in 2015. There have been significant achievements in the areas of life expectancy, primary schooling, gender parity in primary and secondary level of education, lowering under-five mortality rate and access to credit by Grameen Bank which have minimized the distance from achieving MDGs. As the study shows, significant gender gap still persists in Bangladesh in the areas like labor force participation rate, in economic activity and in wage earnings, in responsibility for house and care work and in political participation. Bangladesh has now an ambitious goal of achieving middle income country status by 2021 which will require an accelerated growth with a GDP growth of 10%-12% in the face of significant obstacles. This is not possible without ensuring gender equality and therefore requires active participation of men and women side by side. It is to be noted that one of the demographic features of Bangladesh is the increase in the share of working age population from 58.2% in 2000 to 68.9% in 2013 which applies to both men and women. Therefore, it is imperative that we take full advantage of the so-called "demographic dividend" by converting the people of working age into human capital by giving them proper education and utilizing them productively. To address gender-based violence, government and legal agencies need to ensure that exiting human rights laws are enforced.

Keywords: Lower Income Category, Middle Income Country Status, Gender Equality, Demographic Dividend, Human Capital, Gender-Based Violence

INTRODUCTION

The World Bank raised Bangladesh from a Lower Income Category to a Lower Middle Income Category country in 2015. This event was only a matter of time as the country experienced a steady growth during the 2000's, from a mere 2.8 % in the 1970's to 6% in the 2010's and 7.11% during 2015-16. The per capita income also increased from US \$90 only in 1973 to US \$1314 in 2015. This growth was accompanied by a significant decline in poverty, an increase in employment, greater access to health and education, and improved basic infrastructure (<http://www.en/news/infographic/2016>)

As a result, the once poor "bottomless basket" nation is now considered Lower Middle Income nation. Given this strong growth, Bangladesh's ambition to become a middle income country by 2021 seems to within reach. This ambitious initiative will require annual GDP growth of 7.5%–8% and will entail overcoming significant obstacles and seizing on new opportunities brought about by changing global circumstances (ADB, 2016c). Many experts believe that strengthening the country's market based economy is needed to achieve this goal. However a significant challenge remains in ensuring that this growth benefits all levels of society. Though women comprise just under half the total population in Bangladesh, their participation in the formal labor market lags far behind that of men and the rates of business ownership by women is even lower (Taylor, 2017). This has led to our paper, the concern for gender equality in Bangladesh's growing economy as it strives for a middle income status.

WHY GENDER EQUALITY MATTERS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH GAP

Gender equality and women's economic empowerment are considered both a human rights imperatives and a necessary condition for sustainable development. According to the final report of the 2012 OECD Ministerial Council Meeting "gender equality and empowered women are catalyst for multiplying development efforts. Investments in gender equality yield the

highest returns on all development investments”. UN Women directly states that “women’s economic equality is good for business” and “when more women work, economies grow”. Women’s participation in socio-economic processes will be key to attaining the developmental status hoped for by Bangladeshi citizens, as without their participation the potential of half of the population remains untapped (Rahman and Bari, 2016)

According to the World Development Report (2012), there are mainly two reasons as to why gender equality matters for development. First, gender equality matters intrinsically, because the ability to live the life of one’s own choosing and be spared from absolute deprivation is a basic human right and should be equal for everyone, independent of whether one is male or female. Second, gender equality matters instrumentally, because greater gender equality contributes to economic efficiency and the achievement of other key development outcomes

The goals of gender equality differ from one country to another, depending on social, cultural and economic contexts. So in the struggle for equality, different countries may set different priorities, ranging from more education of girls, to better maternal health, to equal pay for equal work, to more seats in parliament, to removal of discrimination in employment, to protect against domestic violence, to changes in family law, to having men take more responsibility for family life. Fundamental to all these priorities are the equality of access to means of developing basic human capabilities, the equality of opportunity to participate in all aspects of economic, social and political decision-making and the equality of reward (UNDP, 1995).

The bulk of female labor is concentrated in the rural areas, mostly in agriculture. According to the Labor Force Survey (2015-2016) – 63.1 % percent of women work in agriculture, 16.1% percent are in the service sectors, and 20.8% percent are in industry.

Women’s participation in agriculture has also grown exponentially during the past 10 years. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), women’s participation in that sector has grown 108%, compared with a 2 percent-decline among men over the past decade. More men are abandoning farming in order to earn a livelihood in manufacturing, heavy industry, etc. whereas women are taking over their responsibilities in the farmsteads. However, the most significant contribution of women is in the country’s booming garment sector, where they account for more than 80 percent of the industry’s 4 million workers. Several studies have concluded that the industry’s phenomenal growth over the past 30 years has not only turned the country’s economy around, but it has also opened new horizons for women. Until the early 1980s, most Bangladeshi women were confined to doing household chores. This growing empowerment of women has contributed to the country’s advancement in social indicators like girls’ education, infant and maternal mortality rates. According to official statistics, Bangladeshi women are also contributing to remittance incomes from abroad, a sector long dominated by men. In 1991, for instance, about 2,000 women went aboard annually as migrant workers. Nowadays, their numbers exceed more than 300,000, accounting for 13 percent of the country’s remittance sector, valued at around U.S. \$26 billion. Women also have a large presence in other sectors such as frozen foods, processed leather, handicrafts and tea, which account for the lion’s share of export earnings (Sharif, 2015).

The World Bank (2016a) has identified job creation as the country’s top development priority, a prerequisite to reaching the middle income country status by 2021. It is estimated that 2.1 million jobs need to be created for the growing labor force of which it is imperative to ensure that more women enter the workforce. From 2003 to 2013, 14 million jobs were created. And women in the labor force increased from 9.8 million in 2002/03 to 16.8 million in 2013. Hence the female labor force participation has been gradually increasing but the rate is not as encouraging one when compared to their male counterparts. A significant challenge has been in ensuring that this growth benefits all levels of society and gender.

According to Chakraborty and Vansanthagopal (2015), the recent reclassification of Bangladesh to a lower middle income country (LMIC) has been a highlight in its long voyage towards economic development. But they argue that to become middle income country (MIC), much more development is necessary. They further argue that many LDCs or LMICs have been trying to attract foreign direct investments by exploiting their low-wage advantage. They argue that lack of energy, unskilled manpower, ambiguity in the FDI policy, less co-ordination between the public private partnerships (PPP) etc. make the developmental works of Bangladesh slow. According to them, by exporting only the low value readymade garments, middle income country status cannot be achievable. To make the domestic economy livable, local economy has to create the scope of employment. As the authors argue main challenges of Bangladesh to become a MIC are upgrading existing facilities and diversifying export baskets. To upgrade Bangladesh, focus should be on FDI, export oriented industries, recruiting talents to foreign countries, manufacturing sectors, rural orientation, infrastructure development, better governance, treaty with developed nations and privatization etc. The World Bank group identified job creation as the country’s top development priority, a prerequisite for reaching middle income country status by 2021. From 2016 to 2020, the Bank’s main focus is on three areas namely, accelerating growth, fostering social inclusion and strengthening climate and environmental management (World Bank, 2016a).

The study by Banarjee et al. (2015) argues that to achieve the MIC status by 2021, the country requires a 3.5 percent productivity growth yielding GDP and GDP growth of \$366.1 billion and 12 percent respectively. They also argue that if the present growth rate continues it will require another 10 years (by 2030) to reach the MIC status. Another study by Gimenez et al. (2014) argues that attaining a vision of 2021 with a poverty target of 14 percent requires a GDP growth of at least 8 percent or more than 2 percentage points higher than that observed in recent years. Raihan (2016) states that if Bangladesh is to leap towards a MIC, more investment is needed in the country's social infrastructure, such as education and health. That is, current allocations for education and health expenditure as a percentage of GDP need to be doubled and the efficiency of the public expenditure on health and education needs to be improved.

But these authors/critics left aside one aspect of economic development that is gender equality. Gender equality is a key factor in contributing to economic growth of a nation. Achieving high per capita income cannot be achieved rapidly without active participation of women. Gender inequality is a pervasive feature in many developing countries. Gender inequality holds back growth of individuals, development of countries and the evolution of societies, to the disadvantage of men and women. In a country like Bangladesh, half of the population constitute women most of whom are illiterate. When women are not involved in the workforce, only part of the able workforce is being utilized and thus economic resources are wasted. Gender equality allows for an increase in women in the working sector thereby leading to an expansion of labor force and an increase in economic productivity (http://www.journal.cra.com/article/effect-gender_inequality_economic_nigeria). This paper therefore tries to show that without achieving gender equality, upgrading of Bangladesh to middle income country will be difficult. Studies show that it is not so easy to upgrade from lower middle income status to upper middle income status or high income status as it was from lower income status to lower middle income status (World Bank, 2016b).

WHY GENDER INEQUALITY PERSISTS

Although progress has been made in some areas to achieve gender equality, change has come only slowly or not at all for many women and girls in many dimensions of gender equality. There are gender gaps in economic activity, in earnings, male-female differences in responsibilities and care work, gaps in asset ownership and constraint to women's agency in both public and private spheres. Progress in these areas is difficult to see, despite greater prosperity in many parts of the world. Indeed, many of these gender disparities are evident even among richer countries (World Bank, 2012).

In Bangladesh, although progress has been made in many areas, many of the improved gender indicators mark significant economic disparities.

- Poor women still lack adequate access to reproductive health and enrolment levels of girls in higher education remain low. Furthermore, there is evidence that the tremendous success of government and donor female initiatives has resulted in boys now lagging behind on some educational indicators. However, there is also some evidence that the importance of girls' education is perceived more in terms of better marriage prospects and not job aspirations-----a reflection of poor quality of schools and continuing labor market discrimination.
- Women's employment levels remain low even by South-Asian Standards. Where women are employed, this role is largely seen as supplementary and inferior to that of men. This is because traditional perceptions about the role of women as home-makers persist. In addition early marriage remains common amongst women and some studies have noted the increasing practice of dowry payments in some parts of the country.
- The public safety of women is also a matter of increasing concern. In most cases, women's access to resources and social networks is mediated by men, leaving women no choice other than marriage.
- Virtually all women in Bangladesh are landless; very few women own property under their own name and only a fraction receive their legal share of inheritance (www.gsdc.org/docs/open/hd527-pdf).

RESEARCH METHOD

Data have been taken from various secondary sources like, Statistical Year Books of Bangladesh, Gender Statistics of Bangladesh, World Development Reports and from Bangladesh: Looking Beyond Garments: Employment Diagnostic Study, co-published by ADB and ILO, Regional Office for Labor and the Pacific, 2016. The study is mainly a descriptive study based on bivariate tables. To show the relationship between gender equality and how it will help in further economic development and attainment of middle income status, the paper proceeds as follows:

Firstly, it focuses on the key areas of gender equality where much progress has been made in Bangladesh (life expectancy, fertility and under-5 mortality, primary and secondary education, access to credits); secondly it focuses on the key areas where

there has been very little or slow change (labor force participation rate, segregation in economic activity, gaps in earning, responsibility for household work, political participation and violence against women) and thirdly, policy implications which are needed to ensure that greater gender equality is achieved.

WHERE HAS THERE BEEN MUCH PROGRESS

Life expectancy: Women now outlive men in every region of the world. In Bangladesh, women's life expectancy was 71.5 years whereas that of men was 69.9 in 2013. It is evident from Table 1 that expectation of life for women was higher than that of men by 2.2 percentage points in 2010. In 2013, life expectancy of birth increased for both men and women by 2.7% points from that of 2010. The robust growth over the years considered (2001-2015) with slight decline during 2008-09 and 2009-10 has made possible to attain such achievements of increased life expectancy and declining fertility even in spite of having one of the world's highest population densities.

Reduction in Fertility Rate

Bangladesh has made significant progress over the last two decades in reducing fertility levels from an average of 6.3 in 1975 to 2.46 in 2005 and became 2.12 in 2010. As evident from Table 2, the TFR is higher in rural areas than in urban areas because more women in urban areas have higher education compared to those in rural areas. Education makes women more conscious of their health-care needs, control over their reproductive choices and thus fewer children in the family.

REDUCTION IN MORTALITY RATE

The under-five mortality rate for both girls and boys have declined significantly from 2000 to 2015 with rate lower for girls than for boys (see Table 3). Significant investments in health and population sector as well as extensive policy reform have led to considerable improvements in both health and family planning in recent decades. This study argues that significant increase in GDP growth rate during 2005-06 to 2015 may also have contributed to decline in fertility and mortality. Actually Bangladesh is on track in meeting child mortality of MDGs in three different indicators like under-five mortality rate infant mortality rate and immunization against measles. The under-five mortality rate for girls was 84 per 1000 live births while for boys it was 86 in 2000 and come down to 34 and 39 per 1000 live births for girls and boys respectively in 2015 (see Table 3).

IMPROVEMENTS PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Bangladesh's real progress towards achieving gender parity in primary enrolment rates has been widely recognized. At present it is estimated that at the primary level net enrolments are around 80% with gender gap in enrolments close to parity at a

Table 1: Expectancy of life at birth by sex at the national level (2001-2013)

Year	Women	Men
2001	64.5	64.0
2003	65.4	64.4
2004	65.7	64.4
2005	65.8	64.4
2006	67.8	65.4
2007	67.9	65.5
2010	68.8	66.1
2013	71.5	69.9

Source: BBS, 2012

Table 2: Total fertility rate (TFR) per women by residence

Year	National	Rural	Urban
2000	2.59	2.89	1.68
2005	2.46	2.65	1.87
2010	2.12	2.23	1.72

Source: BBS, 2012

ratio of 52:48 for boys and girls in 2002. Significant progress has also been made in the secondary education sector where approximately 53% of enrolled students are female (KFW, 2006). Although gross enrolment rate at secondary level is more or less the same for boys and girls, the percentage of enrolment is very low, around 50% for girls and 40% for boys (see Table 4 & 5). From Table 5 it is noticed that although dropout rates were higher during 2002-2005 both for girls and boys, this rate declined in 2010 with dropout rate lower for girls than for boys. In large part, this has been achieved through the introduction of Female Secondary School Stipend Program which provide a cash incentive to households to cover a large portion of direct school expenses incurred by girls in grades 6-10. According to the BBS (2012), the significant reduction in both fertility and under-five mortality rates attest to the reforms that have been implemented, particularly the greater emphasis on quality and access of health and family planning service delivery and also investments made in the education sector. Such efforts have led to an increase in GDP growth thus recognizing the fundamental links between GDP growth, health and education outcomes.

ACCESS TO CREDIT BY GRAMEEN BANK

It may be mentioned that Grameen Bank is the only bank that provides credit to womenfolk in larger proportion without collateral compared to other nationalized and private banks. It is observed that as many as 8.33 million loan sanctioned to women compared to 0.28 million to men by GB in 2010. As many as 893,600 microenterprise loans was delivered to women in 2010. and the average amount of loans in 2010 for women was Tk. 27, 738 compared to Tk.36, 142 for men in 2010. The loan amount was used for livestock and fisheries by the highest number of loan women in 2007 but in 2010 it was for trading. In case of men, the highest loans was also used for trading. Research suggests that loans given to women tend to benefit the whole

Table 3: Under-5 mortality rate per 1000 live births by sex and residence (2000-2015)

Year	National		Rural		Urban	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
2000	84	86	89	91	54	56
2005	65	70	68	73	52	60
2010	43	50	43	52	43	44
2011	43	45	44	43	37	41
2012	41	43	42	46	38	36
2013	40	42	41	45	39	30
2014	37	38	40	40	26	34
2015	34	39	35	42	31	33

Source: BBS, 2012 & BBS, 2016

Table 4: Gross enrolment rate for primary school by sex at the national level (2002-2010)

Year	Girls	Boys
2002	104.5	106.8
2004	102.3	104.8
2006	98.6	101.0
2008	97.9	102.6
2010	100.2	102.4

Source: BBS, 2012

Table 5: Gross enrolment rate, completion rate and dropout rate at secondary level by sex at the national level, 2002-2010

Year	Gross enrolment rate (%)		Completion rate (%)		Dropout rate (%)	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
2002	48.16	41.28	19.23	30.87	80.77	69.13
2003	48.48	41.96	13.74	19.53	86.26	80.47
2004	48.41	39.58	13.79	20.12	86.21	79.88
2005	47.17	38.62	16.71	23.46	83.29	76.54
2010	49.44	39.64	46.17	39.47	53.83	60.53

Source: BBS, 2012

family than do loans to men. Having been adopted in one of the UN's Millennium Development Goals, microcredit initiatives have been seen as beneficial for alleviating poverty (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_inequality_in_Bangladesh).

REDUCTION IN POVERTY

A look at the incidence of poverty by sex of head of household reveals that in 2010 poverty incidence of women headed household was much lower than men headed household. The difference was 5.5 percentage points in 2010 compared to 1.8 percentage point in 2000. This is evident from Table 6.

Table 7 shows the poverty incidence of women headed households by level of education. In 2010 the poverty incidence of women headed household with no education was as high as 35.2% compared to only 1.9% for those households with education level SSC+, thus showing that the poverty incidence decreased with the increase in education level. Female education contributes to improvements in children's nutrition, health, reduction in fertility and increase in labor force participation and better quality of human capital for future generations. Also female headed household may alter the composition of household in favor of more education and health. (Hakura et al, 2016; Mitra et al, cited in KFW 2006).

WHERE GENDER INEQUALITY PERSISTS

Labor Force Participation Rate

An important aspect of the labor force in Bangladesh is the notably higher participation of men, compared with women. One notable and positive development is the substantial rise in the female labor force participation (FLFP) rate over time, although the level remains substantially below those in a number of East and Southeast Asian countries (ADB and ILO, 2016). Table 8, below presents the relevant data on male and female labor participation rates from 1991 to 2010.

Table 6: Incidence of poverty by sex of head of household and by residence

Residence	2010		2005		2000	
	Women headed	Men headed	Women headed	Men headed	Women headed	Men headed
National	26.6	32.1	29.5	40.8	47.2	49.0
Rural	29.3	35.9	31.0	44.9	50.6	52.5
Urban	17.5	21.7	24.4	28.7	37.1	35.1

Source: BBS, 2012

Table 7. Incidence of poverty by sex of head of household and by level of education (2010)

Level of education	Women headed	Men headed	Total
Never read	35.2	43.9	42.8
Class I-V	18.4	37.2	35.7
Class VI-IX	13.8	23.6	22.6
SSC/HSC or equivalent	1.9	7.8	7.5
Total	26.7	32.1	31.5

Source: BBS, 2012

Table 8: Male and female labor force participation rates (population age 15 +), 1991-2013 (%)

Year	Female	Male	All
1990-91	14.0	86.2	51.2
1995-96	15.8	87.0	52.0
1999-2000	23.9	84.0	54.9
2002-2003	26.1	87.4	57.3
2006	29.2	86.8	58.5
2010	36.0	82.5	59.3
2013	33.5	81.6	57.1

Source: BBS, 2012 & 2016

It is to be noted from Table 8 that FLFP rate declined during 2010-2013, after increasing continuously for 2 decades. The decline in FLFP participation may be due to increase in female enrolment in education or due to increase in the number of female in household work or both. A careful analysis show that the percentage of female doing household work increased in 2010 to 81.7% from 80.6% in 2005-06 (Table 9) while at the same time percentage of female students increased from 9.6 in 2005-06 to 10.3 in 2010 (Table 9). This is an important issue which deserves special attention.

Tertiary Education is Still Low

The level of education of the labor force is important in the contribution it can make to economic growth. Notable progress has been made, with the share of labor force with no education and primary education declining and this decline continued during 2010-2013 (ADB & ILO, 2016). While in 2000, a much higher proportion of female labor force had either no education or only primary level education, the male-female difference in that regard was all but wiped out by 2010 (Table 10). But the share with tertiary education is still rather low. Likewise, a very small proportion of labor force (only one in a thousand) had technical or vocational qualification in 2010. This is not surprising given the low rate of enrolment in technical and vocational education as a percentage of secondary enrolment---only 2.43% compared with 6.31% in Malaysia and 18.41% in People's Republic of China. Furthermore, the gender differential in labor force with tertiary education remains high despite some narrowing (ADB & ILO, 2016).

Disparity in Earnings of Men and Women

The labor market in Bangladesh is gender segregated with the bulk of womens' work taking place in non-market activities at home or the informal sector. Those in the formal sector (public and private) are generally employed in "female-incentive industries" (e.g., ready-made garments sector, shrimp processing and pharmaceuticals). Additionally upward mobility of female laborers is limited. When in paid employment in both rural and urban areas, they often receive lower wages than men. For example, in urban regions, female wage rate were 50% that of males in 1995-96, declining further to 46% in 1999-2000. In rural regions, the ratio remained constant at 44% over the same period (Ahmed and Maitra, 2010).

Table 9: Working age population by broad economic category and by sex (%)

Economic category	2005-2006			2010			2015-2016		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Population age (15+)	84586	43006	41580	95584	47847	47737	106130	52593	53537
Total labor force	58.5	86.8	29.2	59.3	82.5	36.0	58.5	81.8	35.6
Employed	95.8	96.7	93.0	95.5	96.0	94.3	95.8	93.2	96.9
Unemployed	4.2	3.3	7.0	4.5	4.0	5.7	4.2	6.7	3.1
Not in the labor force	41.5	13.2	7.8	40.7	17.5	64.0	41.5	18.1	64.3
Household Work	68.8	6.2	80.8	67.4	13.9	81.7	-	-	-
Student	18.6	65.4	9.6	19.7	54.6	10.3	-	-	-
Others	12.6	28.4	9.6	12.9	31.5	8.0	-	-	-

Source: BBS (2016), BBS (2012)

Table 10: The percentage of labor force by level of education 1999 and 2010

Level of education	1999			2010		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
No education	48.1	41.5	59.1	40.1	39.9	40.6
Class I-V	25.0	25.7	23.8	22.8	22.9	22.7
Class VI-VIII	11.4	13.4	8.2	14.3	13.8	15.3
Class IX-X	5.2	6.1	3.8	9.0	8.3	10.5
SSC or equivalent	7.1	8.9	4.0	6.2	6.5	5.6
HSC or equivalent				3.7	4.0	3.0
Bachelor or equivalent	3.2	4.5	1.1	2.1	2.5	1.2
Master or equivalent				1.4	1.7	0.8
Medical				0.2	0.2	0.1
Technical/Vocational				0.1	0.2	0.1

Source: BBS, various years; labor force survey, dhaka

There is considerable disparity in men's and women's wage rates in Bangladesh although the principle of equal wages for equal work is guaranteed by law. On average women's wage rates are considerably lower than men with the 2000 LFS showing women's earning to be approximately 58.5% of men's. Furthermore whereas 61% of female salaried workers earn less than 1000 taka per month, only 16% of their male counterparts earn an equivalent amount---confirming entrenched wage-based gender discrimination. But this disparity tends to have reduced during 2002-03 and 2005-06 although disparity is still high among women (15% during 2005-06) than among men (8% during 2005-06) (BBS, 2012).

However, it is interesting to note that the gender gap in earnings is continuously declining with the passage of time although the gap still persists. This is evident from the Table 11.

Table 11 shows that about 4.59 percent of women earn less than 2000 Taka while 1.6 percent of men earn less than 2000 taka. In the high income group, although gender gap persists, this gap is declining. This is evident from the fact that in 2005-06 about 6 percent of salaried women drew income over 10,000 Taka, whereas in 2010 this percentage increased to 17 percent but the there was a higher proportion of men (21.9 %) who drew salary of more than 10,000 taka in 2010. So although there was a continuous increase in the per capita income and economic growth rate over the years 2005-06 to 2015-16 with a slight decline during 2008-09, gender gap in earning still persists.

WOMEN LAG BEHIND MEN IN TERMS ATTAINING HIGHER EDUCATION

From Table 12, it is observed that a high percentage of women (64.8%) worked in occupation like agriculture, forestry and fisheries where income earned is low compared to occupation like professional and technical where percentage of women in 2010 was very low, only 3.2 (this percentage is lower than the percentage in 2005-06 being 4.38%). This is because women lag behind in case of higher education compared to men. According to BBS (2016) the percentage of women in public universities (excluding National Universities) has declined in 2015 to 35.3% from 37% in 2013 whereas the percentage of men in public universities has increased in 2015 to 64.7% from 62.9% in 2013.

LACK IN FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

From Table 13, it can be seen that only 27.7% cases support that women could go outside village alone, 29.9% support that women could go to both health center or hospital while 58.4% did not support that women could go to either place alone. But the percentage of men who supported that women should go outside village (52.9%) or to health center and hospital alone (41.65) increased with the increase in the level of education of women. This indicates that education plays a vital role in raising the voices of women.

Table 11: Wage earning of men and women by residence in 2010

Monthly income (In taka)	National		Urban		Rural	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	female
<1500	0.51	0.90	0.31	0.23	0.67	2.15
1500-1999	1.09	3.69	0.94	3.18	1.21	4.49
10000-12499	21.9	17.0	18.0	15.6	25.1	19.3

Source: BBS, 2012

Table 12: Distribution of employed women 15 & over by major occupation: 1991-2010 (Percentage)

Major Occupation	1990-91	1995-96	1999-2000	2002-03	2003-04	2010
Professional/technical	7.5	7.2	4.4	4.1	4.38	3.2
Administrative/managerial	0.4	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.19	0.6
Clerical workers	1.5	1.7	1.4	1.9	1.27	0.6
Sales workers	2.8	5.9	5.5	2.9	2.08	8.1
Agriculture, forestry & fisheries	47.6	41.7	46.3	58.6	68.33	64.8
Production/transport labor	21.8	27.8	24.2	22.8	16.06	14.0
Service worker	17.5	15.6	17.5	9.7	7.67	8.0

Source: BBS, 2012

Table 13: Women’s freedom of movement by background characteristics, 2004 (Percentage) women who go or who can go outside alone

Background characteristics	Outside the village	To health center or hospital	To both places	To at least one place	To neither place	Number of women
No Education	27.7	29.9	16.0	41.6	58.4	4187
Primary incomplete	26.9	29.3	14.2	42.0	58.0	2176
Primary complete	27.9	29.4	14.7	42.6	57.4	958
Secondary incomplete	34.2	31.3	17.2	48.3	51.7	2457
Secondary complete	52.9	41.6	28.9	65.6	34.4	804

Source: BBS, 2008

“UNPAID FAMILY WORK” NOT ACCOUNTED FOR IN THE GDP AND CLASSIFIED AS OUTSIDE THE LABOR FORCE

Even though more than 16.2 million women are directly involved in different economic sectors, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), there is a large but unknown number women who are outside the labor force, work for almost nothing in taking care of household chores. According to a study jointly published the CPD and Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), a local NGO in 2015, a woman aged 15 or older spends 7.7 hours a day doing unpaid family work, whereas a man of comparable age spends only about 2.5 hours in such daily work. The same paper also found that women who do the household chores contribute 76.8 percent to the GDP but the cost of their labor is not calculated in the national economy. This “unpaid family work” ranges from agriculture to cooking, care-giving, tending domestic animals and keeping poultry (The Daily Observer, 2014). At the national level in 2010, 67.4% of total population who were outside the purview of labor force were engaged in household work. It was higher than 35.1 %in 2002-03. It is important to note that the working age population who were engaged in house hold work (both men and women in urban and rural areas) were higher in 2010 than in 2002-03. It is also alarming to note that proportion of women engaged in household work increased in 2010 (81.7%) compared to those engaged in household work in 2005-2006 (80.6%). See Table 9. Women who do the household chores contribute 76.8 percent to the GDP but the cost of their labor is not calculated in the national economy and such women engaged in such work are classified outside the labor force.

LACK OF FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN GOVERNMENT AND NATIONAL POLITICS

A ten percent quota for women has applied to all government ministries, directorate and autonomous bodies since 1976 and in 2002, 9.7% of all employees were women. However, in applying to all posts, the quota has not been successful in ensuring female representation at senior levels of government with more women occupying junior level posts. According to Human Development Report (2016), in 2015 only 20% of seats in parliament were held by women. According Bangladesh Statistical Year Book, in 2016 about 50.8 percent of women were engaged in occupation like agriculture forestry and fisheries. It is also to be noted that that the participation rate of women as the Chairman in both Union Parishad and Upzilla Parishad is very poor only 0.47% and 0.63% respectively, in 2010. The proportion of women as percent of total members in the cabinet, ranges from 3% to 13%. The highest 13% women was in the cabinet since 2009 (BBS, 2012). This shows that there are both horizontal and vertical segregation of women in case of occupations and therefore this study highlights the fact that despite the achievement of high income level during the years considered women’s relative position in upper positions has not been improved.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence of women is a violation of human rights. Gender-based violence ranges from eve teasing, to stalking, rape, disfiguration, torture and killing. A review of news reports for the period December 2010 to June 2011 reveals the appalling situation endured by countless women in Bangladesh. Violence against women means they are not safe in the street or at home. Girls, adolescents and underage married women suffer extreme forms of violence that result in physical, sexual, psychological and emotional harm. Those who manage to survive suffer stigma, exclusion and are impeded from taking control of their own lives and contribute to their communities. The most recent Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (2007) data show that women in the poorest quintile and those with no education are most vulnerable to violence (UNICEF, 2011)

From the registered data provided by police department, it is revealed that the trend of rape was fluctuating over the years of 2003 was the highest. After 2003, the incidence of rape reduced in 2004, 2005 and 2006, however it increased in 2007. In 2009,

rape case recorded show reducing at 2973 cases but in 2010 and 2011, it started again to increase with the number of incidents 3367 and 3675 cases respectively (BBS, 2012). The rape violence situation is aggravating in recent times. This alarming situation prevented girls to go outside home alone and to participate in economic activity or going to school in 2010-11. The data on proportion of women engaged in household work also supported this fact.

POLICY IMPLICATION

No country in the world can foster economic development without considering the development of women side by side men. The study shows that education has a positive impact on labor market participation and hence increasing educational opportunities could ensure greater labor market enrolment. It is generally understood that enhancing women's economic participation has a positive impact at family, community and country levels. The Government needs to invest more in the education of women at the university levels, offer more vocational training, financial scholarships. Reshaping the Government's labor policies is also required as the study shows that there are barriers which are preventing Bangladeshi women from engaging in the labor market. The government needs to take legal measures for eliminating wage discrimination against women in all sectors as well.

The demographic dividend that Bangladesh is enjoying will continue for the next two decades. To take advantage of this, reforms in terms of education, skills upgrading, training the workforce towards productivity enhancement and efficiency seeking investments needs to be made. To enhance productivity and accelerate the pace of investments, there will be a need for skilled labor force, decent jobs, and decent living wages. Authorities need to ensure the enforcement of trade union rights and a greater voice for workers in economic activities in general and within enterprises in particular.

Policy reforms towards changing the estimation practices of unpaid work done by women needs to be established. This is to ensure that unaccounted for activities which are considered as non-economic activities are reflected in the GDP. However such reforms need to be made with concerted efforts between the Government, economists, statisticians, genders specialists' advocacy groups etc. It has been recommended by the Center for Policy Dialogue that the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics should conduct a comprehensive time use survey to estimate the value of unpaid work done by women so that they can be reflected in the GDP.

Undertaking programs which give access to clean drinking water, natural gas for cooking and child care facilities can reduce the workload of women and more free time. This will provide women with the opportunity to engage in work which will visibly contribute to the economy or for their own personal need.

To address gender-based violence, Government and legal agencies need to ensure that existing human rights laws are enforced. Social protection groups made up of social workers, doctors, religious leaders, teachers, and students to monitor domestic violence in their communities, and help victims access legal channels to settle domestic disputes and seek recourse are also needed.

The Government needs to work alongside with the numerous NGO'S which are involved in improving the status of women in Bangladesh like Grameen Bank, Gonoshasthaya Kendra (People's Health Centre) and Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) etc. Others include CARE international, Oxfam, UNDP, UNICEF, USAID, These organizations are engaged in various activities including distribution of credit to vulnerable women in the rural areas, provision for female education in both urban and rural areas and introduction of primary health care which has direct bearing on the well-being of women. These institutions generally play a role in influencing the policies of the Government of Bangladesh on alleviation of poverty, particularly of women, by providing them with greater opportunities of participating in mainstream economic activities and of promoting their health and education

Ensuring gender equality is imperative so that women play an important role in the economic development of not only for the country as a whole but also for their own lives. Gender equality is to be ensured in terms of economic, social and political equality for women. For this is to happen, collaboration and partnership of government with civil society organizations, the private sector, development partners, the media and all other key stakeholders is necessary. Establishing clear roles and responsibilities of each partner in the promotion of gender equality goals in all areas is needed.

CONCLUSION

From the above analysis it can be seen that Bangladesh has made significant achievements in reducing gender gaps in the field like life expectancy, fertility and child mortality, primary education and to some extent secondary enrolment and in case of

access to credit by Grameen Bank where 90% of borrowers are women. These achievements have minimized the distance from achieving Millennium Development Goals although significant challenges remain to be achieved.

As the study shows significant gender gap still persists in Bangladesh in areas like labor force participation rate, in higher education, in economic activity as well as in earnings, in responsibility for house and care work and in political participation although GDP per capita shows an increasing trend throughout from over the years considered (2005-06 to 2015). For accelerated growth to occur it is essential to ensure the development of women who are engaged in household work by encouraging them to enroll in school colleges and higher educational institutions. As the analysis shows, since violence against women is increasing day by day, law and order should ensure women safety and security. Otherwise it will deter women from working outside their homes.

As Bangladesh has now an ambitious goal of achieving middle income country status by 2021 it will require an accelerated growth which will require an annual GDP growth of 10% -12% in face of significant obstacles. This is not possible without considering active participation of men and women side by side. It is to be noted that one of the demographic features of Bangladesh is the increase in the share of working age population from 58.2% in 2000 to 68.9 in 2013 which applies to both men and women and in rural and urban areas. Therefore it is imperative that we take full advantage of the so-called “demographic dividend” by converting the people of working age into human capital by giving them proper education and utilizing them productively. Overall, gender gaps in economic participation have been shown to result in large GDP losses across countries at all income levels. These losses result from a less efficient allocation of resources due to a restricted talent pool. The road to achieving a middle income country status will be an arduous and difficult task but not impossible.

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