

## ORIGINAL ARTICLES

### The Status of Women: Some Data in Bangladesh

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#### ABSTRACT

Although women constitute almost half of the total population of Bangladesh, they experience adverse situations in terms of socio-economic inequality and gender disparity. They have very limited access to income generating as well as social activities due to number of social, cultural and religious barriers. They are also economically dependent and vulnerable and socially discriminated. Participation of rural women in decision making regarding family matters is very low. They are the most deprived section of the society. In this article an attempt has been taken to focus on the status of women in Bangladesh. Although government has taken many initiatives to ensure the political rights, increase awareness, empowerment and participation for vulnerable and disadvantaged women. Therefore, it can be recommended that government and non-government organisations should work jointly to ensure equal opportunities for both women and men to access into education, health, employment and other facilities.

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#### Key words:

#### Introduction

Bangladesh is one of the least developing countries in the World and Women almost half of the total population of this country (BBS. 2006a). Unfortunately, they have for long remained economically unproductive, or in other words, their contribution in Gross National Product (GNP) remained unacknowledged for a long time. A country can never attain economic sustainability, if it keeps half of its work force unemployed or unproductive. But it is a matter of regret that rural women are economically dependent and vulnerable, educationally backward as well as politically and socially disadvantaged (Sarker and Rahman, 2007). Traditionally, women in Bangladesh have a lower socio-economic status and very limited access to income generating activities due to a number of social, cultural and religious barriers (Ahmed *et al.*, 2011a). Women are not only socially discriminated, but also are subject to threat, exploitation and harassment of all sorts (Sarker and Rahman, 2007). Consequently, they have less opportunity to contribute to their family income (Ahmed *et al.*, 2011b).

#### Objective of the Study:

The objective of this study is to focus on the status of women in Bangladesh. More specifically to identify the situation of women in Bangladesh in socio-economic sections such as education, employment, wage employment and unemployment etc.

#### Materials and methods

The study is basically based on the review of primary and secondary literature including books, journals, annual reports etc. Relevant information is also collected from internet browsing.

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## Results and discussionss

### Socio- economic Status of women in Bangladesh:

Bangladeshi women are playing very important role in both at home and outside but still disparities exist between men and women in education, health, employment and income opportunities, control over assets, personal security and participation in the political process (Hoque and Itohara, 2008). According to a World Bank, (1990), report a Bangladeshi woman's life is molded by the patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal character of the society. Usually women have less independence, "her father has authority over the childhood, her husband has authority over the youth and in the old age her son has authority over her" (Islam *et al.*, 2008). The socio-economic status of women is an important factor affecting the overall development of a country which cannot be fully realized if women, who usually constitute fifty percent of the population, enjoy a subordinate position to men, and their talents remain unexplored. In a society where women are mainly concerned with the domestic affairs and raising children not only the economic development of that society would be retarded but its fertility would also be high subordination of women to men, lack of communication between husband and wife, limited female access to education and employment opportunities have been suggested as obstacles to the diffusion of family planning and reduction in fertility. So the status of women is an important factor affecting the overall development of a country and the total development of Bangladesh will undoubtedly be hampered if the status of women, constituting about fifty percent of the country's population, remains as low as it is today.

### Education Status of Women in Bangladesh:

Education is a social phenomenon that strongly influences on women's control of their own future but low level of female education have been frequently cited in Bangladesh (Islam & Sultana, 2006). Various indicators reveal that the status of women is much lower than of men. The rate of literate particularly of women is very low in Bangladesh; only 41.79 percent of women are literate compared to 50.26 percent of men (BBS, 2006a). After 4 to 5 years of formal education, most girls drop out from the school. The drop-out rate at the primary school for boys and girls is estimated to be 59 and 71 percent respectively (Chowdhury and Nilufar, 1980).

**Table 1:** Women's educational status in Bangladesh 2006

Categories	Percentage	
	Female	Male
Class I – V	57.83	52.19
Class VI – IX	30.48	27.80
S.S.C and H.S.C	10.29	15.84
Degree and above	1.40	4.16
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: BBS, (2006a)

### Women's Employment Status in Bangladesh:

According to labour force survey (LFS) of 2005, the total labour force is 51.7 million of which 39.6 million are male and 12.1 million are female. Employment provides the key link between economic growth and poverty making it the major tool for poverty reduction in Bangladesh. It also considered being one of the most pressing problems in Bangladesh, particularly with the rapid rise in population and low absorptive capacity of the nation. In Bangladesh, about 84.6 million (43.0 million males and 41.6 million females) population belong to the working age. Urban rural distribution of population aged 15 years and above shows that about 42.1 percent are living in urban areas and 40.1 percent in rural areas.

Male and female the population belonging to age group 15-29 years are 39.3 and 41.9 percent respectively. On the other hand, for age group 30-64 years is higher 53.9 for males and 52.0 percent for females.

**Table 2:** Percentage of working age population by broad age group 2005-06

Broad age group	Bangladesh			Urban			Rural		
	Both	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female
Total population (million)	137.3	70.0	67.3	32.4	16.4	16.0	105.0	53.7	51.3
Working age Pop.(15+)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
15-29	40.6	39.3	41.9	42.1	39.1	45.2	40.1	39.4	40.8
30-64	53.0	53.9	52.0	53.4	56.2	50.4	52.8	53.1	52.6
65+	6.4	6.8	6.1	4.5	4.7	4.4	7.1	7.5	6.6

Source: Labour Force Survey, Bangladesh, 2005-06

From the summary of labour force of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS, 2006b) it is found that in 2002-03 total civilian labour force implying total working population capable of participating in the job market was 46.3 million and non-civilian labour force was 34.5 million. In 2005-06 total civilian labour force was 49.5 (employed population 47.4 million and unemployed population 2.1 million) and non-civilian labour force was 35.1 million. In 2002-03 total labour force was 80.8 million and in 2005-06 it has increased at 84.6 million. From the above discussion it appears that the existence and the level of employment in Bangladesh of the significant importance in policy formulation.

**Table 3:** Summary of labour force in Bangladesh, 2002 - 03 and 2005 – 06

Labour force	2002-03	2005-06
Total labour force	80.8	84.6
1.Civillian labour force	46.3	49.5
i) Employed population	44.3	47.4
ii) Unemployed population	2.0	2.1
2. Non-civilian labour force	34.5	35.1

Source: BBS, (2006b)

*Wage employment of women:*

Rural women played a role only in post-harvest processing of field-crops. However, the number of women working as agricultural wage labourers is increasing even though the total number of employed women in agriculture, the dominant sector of the economy, is still small – only 1.2 percent of total agricultural workers World Bank, (1990).

The socio-economic conditions in the country are worsening; rural women in Bangladesh are being forced to join the labour force. As a result of this, cheap sources of labour are increasingly available in some areas, causing lowering of wage rates and increasing competitiveness among rural labourers (McCarthy *et al.*, 1985). The role of female wage labourers, however, has not been given much attention. The reason is that the participation of women in family farm production or domestic work and their participation in wage employment remain invisible (Table 4).

Table 4 reveals that in 1990-91 total female labour force, percent of total labour force and participation rate of female labourers were 20.1 million, at 39.3 percent and 58.0 respectively but in 2002-03 it stood at 10.3 million, 22.2 percent and 26.1 percent respectively. On the other hand the unemployment rate of female labourers was 1.9 and in 2002-03 which increased to 4.9. Thus the quality and quantity of employment has increased and decreased for the female workers.

**Table 4:** Female labour force compositions, 1990-91 and 2002-03

Character	1990-91	1995-96	1999-2000	2002-03
Labour force (million)	20.1	21.3	8.6	10.3
Percent of total labour force	39.3	38.0	21.1	22.2
Participation rate	58.0	50.6	23.9	26.1
Unemployment rate	1.9	2.3	7.8	4.9

Source: BBS, (2006b)

If the participation rate is observed according to crude and refined activity rate by male and female comparatively, it will be seen that the participation rate of female is lower than the male participation rate (Table 5).

The low participation ratio arises from the fact that women are mostly occupied with domestic activities or household work. Household work includes cooking, cleaning and taking care of children (Khan, Salma, 1998; Westergaard, Kirsten, 1983; McCarthy *et al.*, 1978). These evidences reveal that the female participation rate of rural women up and down.

**Table 5:** Labour force participation rate by sex, 1999 – 2000 and 2002 – 03

Type of rate:	1999-2000			2002-03		
	Both	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female
Labour force participation (percent)						
Crude activity rate	42.0	50.2	32.9	34.7	52.7	15.9
Refined activity rate	72.1	87.3	55.9	57.3	87.4	26.1

Source: BBS, 2006b

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) reveals a fantastic phenomenon; the incidence of unemployment is insignificant in the most densely populated country in the world (Table 6). Table 6 shows that the proportion of unemployed labour force is only 4.3 percent in Bangladesh. For urban and rural area the figures are only

5.0 and 4.1 respectively. The distribution of unemployment sex wise reveals that the rates of unemployment of male and female are 4.6 and 6.2 of urban area. The respective figures are 4.0 and 4.4 for rural area. Thus, the rates of unemployment conditions of Bangladesh indicate that the status of urban unemployment is more rigorous than rural unemployment.

**Table 6:** Rate of unemployment by residence and sex, 2002-03

Residence	Both sex	Male	Female
Bangladesh	4.3	4.2	4.9
Urban	5.0	4.6	6.2
Rural	4.1	4.0	4.4

Source: BBS, 2006b

### Conclusion:

From the above discussions, it becomes clear from various data and information of different sectors that women in Bangladesh are economically dependent and vulnerable; socially discrimination, exploitation, harassment, illiteracy and employment opportunities have hampered the total integration of women in the mainstream of development activities in Bangladesh. Although government is taking initiatives to ensure the political rights, increase awareness, empowerment and participation but government have to be more sincere, active and give proper attention to various awareness rising and educational programmes especially on the issues of nutrition, health and sanitation for vulnerable and disadvantaged women in order to increase their awareness level regarding family matters and other socio-economic issues. And also government and non-government organisations should work jointly to ensure equal opportunities for both women and men to access into education, health, employment and other facilities.

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