

Women Empowerment and Sustainable Development

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After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, a tremendous change has come in the life style and socio-economic status of women in this country. Some affirmative actions are also taken by the government to improve the education of the girl children. Special vocational training for women has also been undertaken under the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs. As a whole the status of women has improved.

This is reflected in various social and economic indicators which are generally used for measuring gender equality and women's empowerment. Gender gaps have been removed in case of life expectancy at birth. It is now equal to or higher than men's. Gender gaps have also been closed in case of child mortality and immunization rates. Women's mortality at child birth and fertility rate has also been reduced.

A tremendous economic empowerment has been achieved by the women of Bangladesh with the introduction of apparel industries. It has been found that women are particularly, suitable for working in the Garment industries. Their labor is cheap and their fingers are soft to make particular piece of work like stitch button hole or collar of the shirt. Readymade Apparel exports to Japan has increased to 14.90% to \$ 862.08 million from \$ 572.22 million 2013-2014 financial year. More than 90% of these workers are women.

It is seen that earnings from apparel products to Japan has shot up 5 times in just 5 years. Besides Japan, other western countries are also importing readymade garments from Bangladesh.

Exports to Japan – in million \$.

Source EPB

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434.12		750.27	
	291.07		
FY'11	FY'12	FY'13	FY'14

These achievements in women sector has drawn the attention of global world. Bangladesh will attain Millennium Development Goal (MDG) which also includes goal of gender equality and women's empowerment.

But still now women are the marginalized sector of the country and are victims of violence from their male partners.

They are not even getting their shares of paternal property as their brothers are occupying and enjoying it.

Many NGOs like BRAC, PROSHIKA, DIPTA are working in the field of gender and development. Their aim is to achieve gender equality, establishing human rights and sustainable Development.

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has recently emerged in Bangladesh. It is now understood that, CSR goes beyond philanthropy and compliance. It is about, how corporate sector and big companies will include the community members in the value chain as suppliers. Now the aim of NGOs, who are working in the field, will be to connect these vulnerable and marginalized groups of women to this value chain. They will get access to the market for their different products and thus they will attain sustainability.

Here we can set the example of a girl like Fatima a poor girl in Rampal. (Report- written in the Daily Star, 10th September 2014, Shazia Omor, Advocacy Advisor). Fatima scored A+ in SSC exam but cannot continue her higher education because her parents cannot afford the expenses of her education. Reading the news in paper, a generous person came forward and took the responsibility of continuing her education. But this is only one example. There are thousand of girls in the village area about the age group of 14 to 16 who are vulnerable to early marriage as their parents cannot afford higher education. So finding the data about these girls is not enough, they have to be linked with Corporate Social Responsibility (C.S.R) fund which is available in different banks. What they needs is a livelihood programme that works for the economic empowerment of the poorest, a packages of skills, coaching and assets to 350,000 poor families.

This is not denying the fact that women has achieved a lot but yet they have to go a long way. Gender gaps in primary and secondary level is almost closed but in tertiary and in science and technology the gap is huge. Rates of employment has increased no doubt, but they are mostly working at lower level. Very few women are found in the highest decision making level.

Rural women generally spend 8 hours in average per day in the kitchen and other informal works whereas a man spends only one hour according to a study done by Action Aid Bangladesh and CGST of BRAC University (Centre for gender and social transformation). But knowing this information is not enough. There has to be a method to convert this informal labor into economic labor. This has to be reflected in the GDP as the value product of poor women.

This is true that Bangladesh from 1991 is ruled by two very powerful women leaders coming one after another. But that does not mean that all women are empowered. The presence of women in decision making level is very less, women mostly work in the informal and unskilled sector, So their income is less than that of men. Bangladesh is one of a pioneering countries which has a separate Ministry for women and children. It also introduced quota in civil administration and elected representative institutions.

It can be said that during last four decades women's voice has definitely strengthened. Both Govt. and NGOs are working as a chain agent to empower women. Once women prosper, it means the whole nation prospers.

Violence against Women (VAW) is reported to be very high in Bangladesh. But if these marginalized women are empowered through education and vocational training in diversified income generating activities, then this

violence will cease to exist. They will be self empowered and respected as a earning member of the family. The growth that will be achieved will lead to sustainable development.

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