

# **Women's Empowerment and NGOs Participation: In the Case of Rural Area in Gazipur District of Central Bangladesh**

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Although women constitute half of the world's population, their participation in various activities is not equal to men, even today. The fact is witnessed in developing countries in particular, because of diverse reasons in each country. This study, focusing women's empowerment and non-governmental organization's participation, aims to consider the complex issue in the case of Bangladesh.

This study consists of eight chapters as follows:

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter Two: Women's Empowerment for Sustainable Development in Bangladesh.

Chapter Three: Non-government Organizations (NGOs) in Women's Development

Chapter Four: Literature Review

Chapter Five: Methodology and Instrumentation

Chapter Six: Interpretation and Discussion

Chapter Seven: Analysis of NGO Activities and Major Findings

Chapter Eight: Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter One mainly discusses the background, aims and objectives of the study, chapter summary and limitations of the study.

In Chapter Two, the multi-layered actuality of women's empowerment in Bangladesh, especially for sustainable development is considered in detail. For this purpose, the chapter, after introducing

basic facts about Bangladesh, examines the current situation of women's empowerment in this country, assesses the factors that influence the situation, and comments on necessary strategies and tactics to help women in Bangladesh become more empowered. Through the above analysis, it is pointed out that the women's empowerment in this country is still in the embryonic stage whose reason seems to lie in the socio-cultural norms as well as opposition from their husband's attitude.

In the following Chapter Three, the significance of NGOs in women's development in Bangladesh is discussed. There are several NGOs in Bangladesh as well as in other parts of the world, and although all of them have differences in their organizational structure and working methodology, they share common concepts, philosophy, and goal. This chapter considers four renowned and representative NGOs in Bangladesh; BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), Grameen Bank, ASA (Association for Social Advancement), and Proshika. As shown in the number of the female participants which reach one-third of the female population of this county, there is a close relationship between NGOs and women's activities. In this sense, the emancipation of the women in this country can be certainly said to depend on NGO's further development.

Chapter Four begins to study some feminist

development theories in the development discourse from a historical view. Based on the consideration, the study moves from Women in Development to Gender and Development. This chapter addresses feminist development theory faced the current mainstream development paradigms that dominated development thinking during the post-colonial era. This part of the review places relevance of empowerment within a historical context. It also gives a historical explanation of why the NGO initiatives and approaches to development, which are based on participation and empowerment, are considered so significant in today's development discourse.

Chapter Five discusses methodological issues in relation to the field work implemented in the Gazipur District of Central Bangladesh in August 2009. The participants in this field survey numbered 130 women representatives from different villages in the district. A random sampling method was used for collecting data. The Statistical Package for Social Science was the main tool for data analysis, while one way ANOVA and frequency tables were also used. For the analysis, the above influential factors were selected as independent variables, and total women's empowerment was selected as a dependent variable.

Chapter Six attempts the quantitative analysis of this empirical study in an effort to determine the degree to which women are empowered in Bangladesh. This accomplished by considering five influential factors; women's economic decisionmaking ability, household decisionmaking ability, freedom of mobility, political participation and NGO activity, social awareness. Although there are various factors influencing women's empowerment, according to the responses to the questionnaire, education, economic status, and age of the women were likely to be positively significant in terms of some aspects of empowerment. In addition, husbands were more

likely to consult educated and older women on the decision making issues of purchases, healthcare for their family and their participation in NGO activities.

The following Chapter Seven explains the empowerment process of five rural women because of their remarkable successes. This chapter is a qualitative analysis that interprets and narrates the life experiences of these women to determine whether or not NGO activity has had any impact on their life patterns with respect to their personal awareness, sense of savings, changes in their traditional thinking, household decision-making, sexual division of labor, future planning, and attitudes of the family members and outsiders, etc. On the other hand, this chapter analyzes another five women who could not profit by NGO's loan programs for their empowerment. In the conclusion of this chapter, it is true that a positive and strong push has been provided to the women of Gazipur by NGO activities on their path to empowerment, it is pointed out that there are doubtlessly some for improvement in NGO programs.

In the final Chapter Eight, all major factors of women's empowerment in Bangladesh are highlighted again and major methods of change are summarized. This chapter also draws together significant points from the previous chapters to suggest policymakers and development agencies for the empowerment of women in Bangladesh.

This thesis utilizes both a quantitative and qualitative method. The qualitative method consists of ten case studies. Similar to most case studies, the aim of this thesis is not to generalize, but to provide actual information about the obstacles and opportunities of participation and the possible patterns in patriarchal society. The process of women's empowerment in this thesis can be traced by examining their familial development, through which they also empower themselves. In order to obtain a deeper understanding of this empirical information, the material has been analyzed with

support from theories about women's interests, empowerment and the Bangladesh context.

This thesis also investigates the activities of NGO programs that have sought to empower Bangladeshi women. The main results of the thesis are as follows. Most women face adverse conditions that result in economic inequality and social oppression. It is evident that the cultural constraints of the patriarchal society influence women's empowerment and financial independence. Another significant result of this study is the importance of viewing the individual in every case. Most of the women in this study gave very positive accounts of their NGO participation experiences, such as increased freedom of mobility and the ability to defend themselves. This can be

seen as examples of empowerment and moreover confirm that defining empowerment is a complex issue.

The chapters in this thesis highlight the many different approaches in a logical and rigorous way that can be taken to evaluate women's empowerment. Empowerment methodologies and approaches ranging from participation research and social analysis to popular participation appear to have had some success, as indicated by Bangladeshi NGOs. The extent to which these methodologies can be incorporated into a broader framework of empowerment for development and can be broadened and strengthened is an area that needs to be reconsidered further.