Research Monograph

On

Positive Discrimination In Favor of Women under the Constitution and Other Statutory Provisions Bangladesh Perspective

Research Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of LL.M (1 year) under Sonargaon University

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

To

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Subject: **Submission of the research paper.**

Dear Sir,
It is an honor and privilege to submit this research paper on **"Positive Discrimination In Favor of Women under the Constitution and Other Statutory Provisions Bangladesh Perspective"** I took a great care in preparing this research paper. According to your guidelines, I have been able to effectively and enthusiastically accomplish the report. This report attempts to describe my observations, learning and recommendations based on general reasoning and empirical evidence. I made sincere efforts in reviewing related rules, documents and interviews, and examined germane records for preparation of this report. During the research period, it is customary to work in this field to gather a better understanding of this arena. While preparing the report, I had gained a lot of experience contrary to the limited theoretical knowledge on various aspects.

I have tried my best to put together an objective and comprehensive report. Any shortcomings or fault may arise as my unintentional or clerical mistakes. I will wholeheartedly welcome any clarification and/or suggestion for any review and conception disseminated through this report.

Your active supervision and crafted guidance made it possible for me to prepare this report successfully. I remain available at your convenience to clarify any quarries if necessary.

Sincerely yours

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DECLARATION

I hereby solemnly declare that, the work presented in this Research Monograph entitle **"Positive Discrimination In Favor of Women under the Constitution and Other Statutory Provisions Bangladesh Perspective"** has been carried out by me under supervision of **Md. Abdul Alim, Lecturer,** Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Sonargaon University (SU). Has not been previously submitted to any other institution. The work I have presented does not breach any copy right. Further undertake to identify the university against any loss or damage rising from breach of the forgoing obligation.

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that, the Research Monograph entitled **"Child Rights in Law & Practice: Bangladesh Perspective"** done **Kazi Moshiur Rohman,** ID: LLM 2301028023 in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of LL.M (Master's of Laws) from the Sonargaon University (SU). The Research Monograph has been carried out under my guidance is a record of the bona fide work carried out successfully.

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Abstract

Women's legal rights are one of the most significant determinants of their status. Positive discrimination in favor of women under the constitution and other statutory provisions Bangladesh perspective. This research paper aims to examine the role of women in development indicators in Bangladesh, a country where gender disparities have historically been prevalent. By analyzing various social, economic, and educational indicators, this paper highlights the challenges faced by women in Bangladesh and explores the impact of gender discrimination on their empowerment and participation in development processes. Additionally, it discusses the efforts made by the government and civil society organizations to address these issues and offers recommendations for further improvement.

The shortcomings and ineffectiveness of laws, women's inability to access legal proceedings, the traditional and cultural negative views about women's rights, the absence of an accountable and transparent government, the expensive and time consuming judicial process, the lack of an efficient judiciary, and other socio-ecomic reasons. The core theme of the thesis concentrates on the shortcomings and ineffectiveness of laws, although viewing them within the context of those other factors. To signify the 'ineffectiveness of laws', emphasis is basically placed on the administrative and judicial approaches in the country to achieve the underlying objectives of law concerning women's rights in pertinent areas. Gender discrimination has been a persistent issue globally, impeding the progress of women and hindering the development of societies.

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Chapter-01

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh prohibits any discrimination based on gender, race, sex, caste and religion and guaranteed the right to equality under the different provisions. However, women in Bangladesh represent half of the total population of Bangladesh and at the same time Bangladesh is the home of about three million tribal and indigenous people representing fifty ethnic groups. But the participation of women and other minority groups in the job sector is not satisfactory. Therefore, as part of the fulfilment of the requirement of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against the Women (CEDAW), the signatory states are under obligation to make positive actions for the advancement of women in society.[1]

Gender discrimination is a global issue that persists in various forms and degrees across societies. It impedes the progress of women, restricts their opportunities for development, and hinders the overall socioeconomic growth of nations. Bangladesh, a South Asian country with a population of over 160 million, has faced significant challenges regarding gender disparities. However, the country has also made notable strides in addressing gender discrimination and empowering women in various spheres.

1.2 History

Gender discrimination and the role of women in development indicators have been significant concerns in Bangladesh for several decades. The country's sociocultural context, legal frameworks, and historical factors have contributed to the persistence of gender disparities and the challenges faced by women in various domains.

[1] https://nilsbangladesh.org/positive-discrimination-and-right-to-equality-in-bangladesh/#:~:text=Article%2028%20(4)%20allows%20the,for%20the%20state%20to%20take

- ***Sociocultural Factors:***

Bangladesh has a patriarchal society with deeply ingrained gender norms and stereotypes. Traditional gender roles assign women to domestic and caregiving responsibilities, while men are considered the primary breadwinners and decision-makers. These norms often restrict women's mobility, limit their access to education and employment, and perpetuate gender-based violence and discrimination.

- ***Legal and Policy Frameworks:***

Bangladesh has made efforts to address gender discrimination through legal and policy measures. The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equal rights for all citizens, irrespective of gender. Additionally, laws have been enacted to combat domestic violence, harassment, and discrimination against women. The National Women's Development Policy aims to promote gender equality and empower women in various sectors.

- ***Education and Employment:***

Access to education has improved significantly in Bangladesh, with notable achievements in primary and secondary education enrollment rates for both boys and girls. However, gender disparities persist, particularly in higher education and technical fields. Women also face challenges in obtaining quality education due to social and economic barriers.

In the labor market, women in Bangladesh encounter significant obstacles, including limited job opportunities, wage gaps, and occupational segregation. The informal sector employs a substantial proportion of women, often in low-paying and vulnerable positions, while women's representation in formal sectors and leadership positions remains low.

- ***Development Indicators:***

When examining development indicators in Bangladesh, gender disparities are evident across various domains. Economic indicators reveal significant gaps in income levels, asset ownership, and financial inclusion between men and women. Women's economic participation is often constrained by limited access to credit, land, and entrepreneurial opportunities.

In social indicators, women face challenges related to healthcare, nutrition, and social welfare. Maternal mortality rates, malnutrition among women and children, and limited access to healthcare services contribute to the gender gap in health outcomes. Moreover, social norms and practices, such as child marriage and dowry, continue to perpetuate gender-based violence and discrimination.

- ***Efforts and Progress:***

The government of Bangladesh, along with civil society organizations, has implemented various initiatives to address gender discrimination and promote women's empowerment. These include programs focused on girls' education, women's economic empowerment, access to healthcare, and legal support for survivors of gender-based violence. Efforts have also been made to increase women's political representation through training and capacity-building programs.

Over the years, Bangladesh has witnessed positive changes in women's empowerment and development outcomes. Women's participation in the labor force has increased, and their contributions to the economy have been recognized. Moreover, progress has been made in reducing maternal and child mortality rates, improving access to education, and increasing women's representation in local government bodies.

However, challenges and gaps still persist, and there is a need for sustained efforts to address gender discrimination comprehensively. By focusing on inclusive policies, promoting gender-responsive development strategies, and challenging deep-rooted social norms, Bangladesh can continue to progress toward achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.

1.3 Objective

The primary objective of this research is to examine the role of women in development indicators in Bangladesh and understand the impact of gender discrimination on their empowerment and participation. The research aims to achieve the following specific objectives:

a) Identify the key Positive Discrimination In Favor Of Women under the Constitution of Bangladesh.

b) Analyze the challenges faced by women in each development indicator and the extent of positive women gender disparities.

c) Explore the factors contributing to gender discrimination in Bangladesh, including sociocultural norms, legal frameworks, and historical context.

By achieving these objectives, this research aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by women in Bangladesh and the potential avenues for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. It seeks to inform policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders about the current status, barriers, and opportunities for addressing gender discrimination and improving women's role in development indicators. Ultimately, the research aims to contribute to the formulation of evidence-based policies and interventions that can drive positive change and promote gender equality in Bangladesh.

1.4 Methodology

This study was conducted based on the data analysis on various secondary sources uses, Household Income and Expenditure Survey(HIES), Labor Force Survey(LFS) and other reports conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics(BBS), Bangladesh Demographic Health Survey(BDHS), Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics(BANBEIS) etc. Different statistical reports, relevant research papers, books and many national and international journals have also been reviewed for this study.

Chapter-02

Empowering Women's Workforce

2.1 Addressing Historic Imbalances Equitably:

Positive discrimination also known as affirmative action is generally a process to take special initiatives which are intended to promote more equality by assisting groups of individuals who are experiencing or have experienced entrenched discrimination for them to have equal access to opportunities as the community at large. On the other hand, the right to equality is a guaranteed right under the different national and international Instruments and thus making no discrimination concerning gender, race, caste, sex and religion.[2]

The „positive discrimination"

In Bangladesh's case, the constitutional preference for marginal groups is popularly, perhaps mistakenly, called the 'positive discrimination' system. Discrimination being the antithesis to premises of equality and non-discrimination contained in the country's founding constitutional provisions. Here the term 'positive discrimination' might not reflect the philosophy behind of the two rights-provisioning articles, 28(4) and 29(3).

Positive discrimination conveys a message where a discriminatory treatment is given to a group to balance against their antagonistic counterparts. There are some issues with this articulation though. On the one hand, it might imbue policymakers with a simplistic understanding of why addressing the concerns is marginalised is important. On the other hand, it may invite makeshift policies that serve populist and political advantages rather than objectively addressing the setbacks facing marginalised communities. More importantly, it trivialises the proportionality of action. Let us take two examples.

Until recently, Bangladesh's quota system in public service used to be criticised as a subjective tool. In other words, it lacked a thorough evaluation of the necessity and the proportionality of the policy. The policy ensured the reservation of some 55% jobs in the civil service for certain groups for an indefinite period. However, the policy didn't have a

[2] Art. 27 of the Constitution and Art. 2,7 of UDHR, 2, 26 of ICCPR and 2 of ICESCR

review mechanism. In other words, thus there could be no periodic evaluation of its necessity or impact.

Similar arguments are being made about women's representation in Bangladesh's Parliament. There is no denying that historically women were excluded from the country's political process and, of course, there is a legitimate need for a preference system. However, the methods chosen should be subject to proper scrutiny.

Bangladesh has a gender-based reservation for women in the legislature. The reserved candidates are not directly elected by voters; rather they are appointed by political parties. However, they cannot legislate laws. The impact and the democratic value that the reserved seat members add to the parliamentary process is therefore up for debate. In 1972, the non-amended constitution introduced reserved seats for women members through indirect election for ten years. The system has since continued, albeit with periodic renewals.[3] In reality though, these renewals have essentially been an extension of the same policy.

Consecutive extensions of the reserved seats, however, has not gone uncriticised. On two occasions, the issue went before the Supreme Court. In two cases, first in Dr Ahmed Hussein v. Bangladesh [4] and later in Farida Akter v. Bangladesh, [5] it was argued that indirectly elected seats were undemocratic. In both cases, the Court rejected this argument and held that indirect election was justifiable under article 28(4) of the constitution. In other words, indirect election was a preferential action.

The Supreme Court's verdicts, however, could not silence the critiques. In another case, a bench of the High Court Division of Bangladesh's Supreme Court questioned the indefinite continuation of the policy.[6] This case dealt with women's reserved seats in city corporations. In the verdict, the court expressed its doubts on the constitutionality of the parliamentary

[3] *Renewals were in 1978, 1990, 2004, 2011 and lastly, 2018*

[4] *44 DLR (AD) 109*

[5] *11 MLR (2006) (AD) 237*

[6] *In Shamima Sultana Seema v. Bangladesh, 57 DLR (2005) 201*

reservation. It recognized the need for a system of direct election to generate women's reserved seats.

If the civil service quota and the gender-reserved seats in the parliament are any indication, Bangladesh's successive governments haven't got to grips with the constitutional provisions on affirmative action. Meanwhile a 'reasonable classification' approach to affirmative action might present policymakers with a better tool for affirmative action. As one prominent Bangladeshi judge put it, a preferential classification 'must be founded on an intelligible differentia which distinguishes persons who are grouped together from others left out of the group.'[7]

2.2 Influencing Societal Norms of Profoundly.

Gender discrimination in Bangladesh is deeply influenced by various socio cultural factors that shape the roles, expectations, and treatment of women in society. These factors contribute to the perpetuation of gender disparities and limit women's access to education, employment opportunities, and decision-making power. Some key sociocultural factors that contribute to gender discrimination in Bangladesh are:

- *Patriarchal Social Norms:* Bangladesh is a society with deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, where power and authority are predominantly held by men. These norms prescribe strict gender roles, where men are expected to be the primary breadwinners and decision-makers, while women are confined to domestic roles. This division of labor reinforces gender Discrimination and limits women's agency and autonomy.
- Gender Stereotypes: Gender stereotypes and traditional beliefs further reinforce gender discrimination. Stereotypical expectations of women as caregivers, homemakers, and submissive individuals create barriers to women's participation in public life and perpetuate their marginalization. These stereotypes restrict women's opportunities for education, employment, and leadership positions.

[7] *Justice ATM Afzal put it in Sheikh Abdus Sabur v. Returning. Officer 41 DLR (AD) (1989) 30*

- Early Marriage and Gender-Based Violenc*e:* Child marriage remains a significant concern in Bangladesh, with a high prevalence rate. Early marriage not only limits girls' education but also exposes them to increased risks of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and reproductive health problems. These harmful practices perpetuate gender discrimination and hinder women's empowerment.
- Dowry System: The dowry system, although legally prohibited, still exists in many parts of Bangladesh. This system places a financial burden on the bride's family, reinforcing the perception that women are liabilities. Dowry-related violence and abuse are prevalent, contributing to gender-based discrimination and violence against women.
- Limited Mobility and Social Restrictions: Societal norms impose significant restrictions on women's mobility and interactions outside the home. Women's freedom to move, travel, and access public spaces is often curtailed, limiting their educational and employment opportunities. Social restrictions on women's behavior and dress also reinforce gender discrimination and hinder their empowerment.
- Religious and Cultural Practices: Religious and cultural practices, although diverse in Bangladesh, can sometimes reinforce gender discrimination. Interpretations of religious texts and cultural traditions may restrict women's rights and freedoms, limiting their access to education, employment, and decision-making roles.

Addressing these sociocultural factors is crucial to combating gender discrimination in Bangladesh. Efforts should focus on promoting gender equality, challenging gender stereotypes, raising awareness about women's rights, and engaging religious and community leaders in advocating for women's empowerment. Comprehensive gender-sensitive education and awareness programs are essential to challenge and change sociocultural norms that perpetuate gender Discrimination. Additionally, legal reforms and enforcement of existing laws can play a vital role in combating harmful practices and protecting women's rights.

Overall, addressing sociocultural factors is vital to creating an enabling environment that supports gender equality and women's empowerment in Bangladesh. By challenging and

transforming these norms, Bangladesh can pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable society where women can fully participate and contribute to the country's development.[8]

2.3 Establishing Fair Governance Guidelines

Gender discrimination in Bangladesh is also influenced by the legal and policy framework in place. While the country has taken steps to address gender disparities and promote women's rights, challenges persist in implementing and enforcing these laws. Key aspects of the legal and policy framework related to gender discrimination in Bangladesh include:

- Constitution of Bangladesh: The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equal rights for all citizens, regardless of gender. It prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex and ensures equal opportunity in all spheres of life. It also includes provisions that promote gender equality and prohibit child marriage, forced labor, and trafficking.

- The Women Development Policy: The National Women Development Policy, formulated in 2011, is a significant policy framework aimed at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. It outlines strategies and action plans to address various issues, including education, health, economic empowerment, and violence against women
- Family Law and Personal Status Laws: Bangladesh has separate personal status laws for different religious communities, such as the Muslim Personal Law and the Hindu Marriage Act. These laws govern matters like marriage, divorce, inheritance, and custody. However, challenges persist in ensuring the full implementation of these laws, and there are gaps in protecting women's rights in family-related matters.
- The Dowry Prohibition Act: The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1980 prohibits the giving, taking, or demanding of dowry. It aims to address the harmful practice of dowry, which often leads to violence and abuse against women. However, despite legal provisions, the practice of dowry still persists in some parts of the country.

[8] https://whiteboardmagazine.com/2691/how-bangladesh-can-approach-constitutional-equality/#_ftn5

- Sexual Harassment Prevention Act: The enactment of the Sexual Harassment Prevention Act in 2009 provides legal protection against sexual harassment in workplaces, educational institutions, and public spaces. This act recognizes sexual harassment as a punishable offense and outlines measures for prevention and redressal.

- The Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act: The Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act of 2010 aims to address domestic violence against women and provide legal remedies and protection to survivors. It recognizes various forms of domestic violence, including physical, psychological, and economic abuse, and provides mechanisms for reporting, protection orders, and support services.

While these legal and policy frameworks are essential for addressing gender discrimination, challenges persist in their implementation and enforcement. Factors such as lack of awareness, social norms, inadequate resources, and limited capacity in the justice system contribute to the gaps and shortcomings in ensuring women's rights and combating gender discrimination.

To effectively address gender discrimination, there is a need for improved implementation and enforcement of existing laws, capacity building of law enforcement agencies and the judiciary, and raising awareness among the general public about women's rights. Additionally, regular monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs are necessary to ensure their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

Chapter-03
The Positive Discriminations in Bangladesh

3.1 Transportation Sector.

Positive discrimination measures for women in the transportation sector in Bangladesh are integral to fostering inclusivity, safety, and equal access in their journeys via buses, trains, and air travel. Recognizing the unique challenges faced by women during travel, various initiatives have been implemented to ensure a more supportive and secure environment.

In public buses, specific seating areas may be designated for women, promoting their comfort and safety. This practice not only acknowledges the need for personal space but also aims to reduce instances of harassment, providing women with a more secure and dignified journey. Public awareness campaigns complement these measures, encouraging respect and consideration for female passengers among fellow travelers.

In train travel, efforts to enhance the experience for women often include designated compartments or coaches. This segregation aims to create a more comfortable and secure space for female passengers, particularly during longer journeys. Additionally, transportation authorities may implement policies to address issues such as overcrowding, ensuring that women have adequate space and facilities during their travels.

Air travel, being a crucial mode of transportation, has also seen positive discrimination initiatives. Airports may offer dedicated security lanes or waiting areas for women, prioritizing their safety and convenience. Additionally, onboard policies, such as assistance for female travelers with children or special considerations for pregnant women, contribute to a more accommodating and supportive air travel experience.

Training programs for transportation staff play a pivotal role in implementing positive discrimination effectively. These programs focus on creating awareness about the specific needs and concerns of female passengers. Staff members are trained to respond appropriately to any issues, ensuring that women feel respected and supported throughout their journeys.

To further address the unique challenges faced by women, transportation hubs may feature facilities catering to their needs, such as clean and secure restrooms. These amenities are designed to enhance the overall journey experience, recognizing and accommodating the diverse requirements of female travelers.

While positive discrimination measures have made significant strides in improving women's journey experiences, ongoing evaluation and adaptation are crucial. Continuous feedback mechanisms, public consultations, and collaboration with women's advocacy groups contribute to refining these initiatives, ensuring that they remain effective and responsive to the evolving needs of female passengers.

3.2 Provisions related to the Positive Discrimination in Bangladesh:

Women are categorized as backwards and have been refused admission to the same advantages as men in society and hence positive discrimination is required to elevate their position.[9] However, article 27 of the Constitution provides that all citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to the equal protection of the law. Despite gender equality being guaranteed in state and public life under the Article 27, the constitution of Bangladesh also provides some provisions related to positive discriminations for instance Article 28 (4), 29 (3) (a) and Article 65 (3). Article 28 (4) allows the state to take special measures for the advancement of women, children and other backward groups of the society whereas Article 29 though ensures equality of opportunity in public employment but it has also provided affirmative action which says that there will be no bar for the state to take measures in favour of any disadvantage portion of the society to secure their adequate representation in the service of Republic. Furthermore, by the fifteen amendment of the constitution, the reserved seat for women has been increased to 50 who will be elected by the member of the parliament based on proportional representation in the Parliament through single transferable vote under Article 65(3). Additionally, many special laws were enacted in Bangladesh to provide special rights to women and children- for example: Nari O Shishu Nirjatan Daman Ain, 2000.[10]

[9] Sayeeda Anju, 'A STUDY ON POSITIVE DISCRIMINATION OF WOMEN IN LAWS OF BANGLADESH' (2011) 53(3) Journal of the Indian Law Institute 491

[10] https://nilsbangladesh.org/positive-discrimination-and-right-to-equality-in-bangladesh/#_edn8

3.3 Economic Indicators:

Development indicators provide valuable insights into the progress and performance of a country's economy. In the case of Bangladesh, several key economic indicators shed light on its development trajectory. These indicators include:

- Gross Domestic Product (GDP*):* GDP is a fundamental measure of economic activity within a country. Bangladesh has experienced consistent economic growth in recent years, with a GDP growth rate averaging around 7% annually. This growth has been driven by sectors such as agriculture, industry (including manufacturing and construction), and services.
- Poverty and Income Discrimination: Poverty reduction is a critical development goal for Bangladesh. The country has made significant progress in reducing poverty rates over the past few decades. According to the World Bank, the poverty rate in Bangladesh declined from 44.2% in 1991 to 20.5% in 2019. However, income Discrimination remains a challenge, with a Gini coefficient of 0.32 (as of 2019), indicating moderate income Discrimination.
- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI*):* FDI plays a crucial role in stimulating economic growth, job creation, and technology transfer. Bangladesh has experienced a gradual increase in FDI inflows, particularly in sectors such as textiles and garments, telecommunications, and energy. Government initiatives to improve the investment climate and infrastructure have attracted foreign investors.
- Export Performance: The export sector, particularly the ready-made garments industry, is a major driver of Bangladesh's economy. The country is one of the world's largest exporters of garments, accounting for a significant share of its total exports. Diversification of export products and markets is a priority to sustain export growth and reduce reliance on a single sector.

These economic indicators provide an overview of Bangladesh's progress in terms of economic development. However, it is important to consider the multidimensional nature of development, including social, environmental, and governance aspects, to assess the overall well-being and sustainability of the country's development path.

3.4 Social Indicators

Social indicators play a crucial role in assessing the overall development and well-being of a country's population. In the case of Bangladesh, several key social indicators provide insights into various aspects of social development. These indicators include:

Education: Education is a vital social indicator, reflecting the accessibility and quality of educational opportunities. Bangladesh has made significant progress in increasing access to education, particularly at the primary level. Key indicators include gross enrollment rates, literacy rates, and gender parity in education. Efforts are ongoing to improve access to quality education at all levels and reduce gender disparities in education.

3.5 Educational Indicators

Educational indicators are key measures that reflect the progress and quality of the education system in a country. In the case of Bangladesh, several educational indicators provide insights into the state of education and its impact on development. These indicators include:

- *Gross Enrollment Rate (GER):* The GER measures the total enrollment in a specific level of education (typically primary, secondary, or tertiary) as a percentage of the eligible age group. In Bangladesh, efforts have been made to increase primary school enrollment rates, resulting in significant improvements over the years. However, challenges remain in ensuring universal access to quality education, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels.[11]

3.4 Political Indicators

Political indicators provide insights into the governance and political landscape of a country. In the case of Bangladesh, several key political indicators shed light on the state of democracy, governance, and political participation. These indicators include:

- Political Stability: Political stability is an important indicator of a conducive environment for development. It reflects the degree of social and political harmony, absence of conflict or violence, and the continuity of governance. Bangladesh has experienced periods of political instability in the past, but efforts have been made to strengthen democratic institutions and ensure a more stable political environment.
- Democracy and Governance: Democratic governance indicators assess the extent to which democratic principles, such as free and fair elections, rule of law,

[11] Rahman, R.I. 1990. An analysis of employment and earnings of poor women in Bangladesh, Ph.D. thesis (Canberra, The Australian National University).

transparency, and accountability, are upheld. Bangladesh has a multi-party system, and general elections are held regularly. However, there is a need to further strengthen democratic institutions, enhance transparency, and ensure the effective functioning of checks and balances.

- Human Rights: Human rights indicators assess the protection and promotion of human rights, including civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Bangladesh has made progress in certain areas, such as women's rights, child rights, and access to justice. However, challenges persist in areas such as freedom of expression, media freedom, and addressing human rights violations.

These political indicators provide insights into the governance and political landscape of Bangladesh. Addressing challenges in political stability, democratic governance, political participation, human rights, and corruption is crucial for strengthening democratic institutions, promoting inclusive governance, and achieving sustainable development.[12]

[12] Inequality Matter? Unnayan Onneshan-The Innovators. Available at:http://unnayan.org/reports/health/Achieving_the_MDGs_Targets_in_NutritionDoes_Inequality_Matter.

Chapter-04

Gender Bias Persists

4.1 Income Disparities.

Women face various economic challenges that hinder their full participation and contribution to development. Some of the key economic challenges faced by women include:

- Gender Wage Gap: Women often face wage disparities compared to their male counterparts. The gender wage gap reflects the unequal pay women receive for the same work or work of equal value. This gap limits women's economic empowerment, financial independence, and their ability to invest in their own development.
- Limited Access to Financial Resources*:* Women often have limited access to financial resources, including credit, loans, and financial services. This lack of access hampers their ability to start or expand businesses, invest in education or skills training, and engage in entrepreneurial activities.
- Occupational Segregation: Women tend to be concentrated in certain sectors or occupations, often those that are undervalued and have lower wages. This occupational segregation limits women's access to higher-paying and more lucrative fields, restricting their economic opportunities and advancement.
- Unpaid Work and Care Responsibilities: Women bear a significant burden of unpaid care work, including household chores, childcare, and caring for the elderly or sick family members. This unpaid work is often undervalued and overlooked in economic calculations, leading to women's economic contributions being marginalized.
- Lack of Access to Productive Resources: Women often face limited access to productive resources such as land, property, technology, and agricultural inputs. This restricts their ability to engage in productive activities, agricultural production, and entrepreneurship, hindering their economic potential.[13]

[13] Survey (HIES) 2000, Dhaka: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), Planning Division, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

4.2 Cultural Barriers Hamper Persists.

Women face various social challenges that hinder their full participation and contribution to development. Some of the key social challenges faced by women include:

- Gender-Based Violence: Women experience various forms of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, and human trafficking. These acts of violence not only have a direct impact on women's physical and mental well-being but also limit their mobility, access to education, and economic opportunities.
- Limited Access to Education: Despite progress in increasing girls' access to education, many women still face barriers to education, particularly at higher levels. Factors such as child marriage, cultural norms, poverty, and inadequate infrastructure contribute to limited educational opportunities for women.
- Early Marriage and Childbearing: Child marriage remains a significant challenge in many societies, resulting in early pregnancy and childbirth. Early marriage limits girls' education, exposes them to health risks, and perpetuates cycles of poverty and Discrimination.[14]

Addressing these social challenges requires a comprehensive approach that involves changing societal attitudes and norms, implementing and enforcing laws and policies that protect women's rights, promoting gender equality in education and employment, raising awareness about gender-based violence, and providing support systems for women's empowerment. Creating an enabling environment where women can exercise their rights, participate fully in all aspects of society, and benefit from social development is essential for achieving sustainable and inclusive development.

4.3 Access Inequality Persists

Women face several educational challenges that hinder their participation and advancement in development. Some of the key educational challenges faced by women include:

- Limited Access to Education: In many regions, women face barriers in accessing education, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels. Factors such as poverty,

[14] Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS), 2007. National Institute of Population Research and Training, Mitra and Associate, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

cultural norms, early marriage, and distance to schools contribute to limited access to education for women and girls.

- Gender Disparities in Enrollment*:* Gender disparities persist in enrollment rates, with girls being more likely to be out of school compared to boys. In some areas, traditional gender roles and expectations prioritize household chores and early marriage over education for girls.
- Quality of Education: Women often face challenges in accessing quality education. Factors such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of trained teachers, and outdated curricula affect the quality of education, limiting the learning outcomes and opportunities for women.
- Gender Stereotypes and Biases: Gender stereotypes and biases in educational settings can hinder girls' educational experiences. These biases may manifest in limited expectations, discriminatory treatment, or gender-biased curricula, which can discourage girls from pursuing education or certain fields of study.
- Safety and Security Concerns*:* Safety and security concerns, including sexual harassment and gender-based violence, can negatively impact girls' attendance and retention in schools. Inadequate infrastructure, such as lack of separate sanitation facilities for girls, can also contribute to safety concerns.
- Early Marriage and Pregnancy*:* Early marriage and pregnancy often disrupt girls' education. Girls who marry early are more likely to drop out of school and face challenges in continuing their education due to social and economic pressures associated with marriage and childbearing.[15]
- Lack of Female Teachers and Role Models*:* The scarcity of female teachers and role models in educational settings can limit girls' aspirations and hinder their progress. Having female teachers and role models can inspire girls, provide mentorship, and challenge traditional gender norms.
- *Socioeconomic Constraints:* Economic factors, such as poverty and the cost of education, can pose significant barriers for women's education. The direct costs of

[15] Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS), 1996-1997. National Institute of Population Research and Training, Mitra and Associate, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

schooling, including tuition fees, books, and uniforms, can be unaffordable for many families, leading to lower enrollment and higher dropout rates for girls.

4.4 Gender Disparities Impact Representative.

Women face several political challenges that hinder their full participation and contribution to development. Some of the key political challenges faced by women include:

- Underrepresentation in Political Leadership*:* Women are often underrepresented in political leadership positions, both at the local and national levels. This lack of representation limits their ability to influence decision-making processes and policies that affect their lives and communities.
- Gender Bias and Stereotyping*:* Gender biases and stereotypes continue to shape perceptions of women's leadership capabilities and hinder their political participation. Stereotypes that portray women as weak, emotional, or lacking in leadership skills can undermine their credibility and hinder their chances of holding political office.
- Discriminatory Laws and Practices: Discriminatory laws, policies, and practices can limit women's political rights and participation. Legal barriers such as gender-based eligibility criteria, restrictive political party rules, or discriminatory electoral systems can impede women's access to political positions.
- Violence and Harassment: Women in politics often face threats, violence, and harassment, including physical attacks, verbal abuse, and online harassment. Such violence and intimidation can discourage women from engaging in political activities and deter them from seeking leadership positions.
- Limited Access to Resources and Networks: Women often have limited access to resources and networks necessary for political engagement. This includes access to financial resources for campaigns, networks of political supporters, and mentorship opportunities that can help women navigate the political landscape.
- Sociocultural Barriers*:* Sociocultural norms and expectations can create barriers for women's political participation. Traditional gender roles and cultural expectations may discourage women from entering politics, restrict their mobility, or limit their ability to engage in public life.

Chapter-05

Women Vital Gauge Empowerment Impact.

5.1 Financial Empowerment:

The role of women in economic development indicators in Bangladesh is crucial for the country's overall progress. Women's participation in the economy, access to resources, and economic empowerment contribute to sustainable development and poverty reduction. However, gender disparities and challenges persist in various economic indicators. The role of women in key economic indicators in Bangladesh can be examined as follows:

- Labor Force Participation: Women's participation in the labor force is a significant indicator of their economic engagement. In Bangladesh, women's labor force participation has increased over the years, particularly in the garment and agriculture sectors. Women play a vital role in the country's export-oriented industries, contributing to economic growth and foreign exchange earnings.
- Employment Opportunities: Women in Bangladesh face challenges in accessing decent and formal employment opportunities. While the garment sector has provided employment opportunities for many women, it is associated with low wages, long working hours, and limited job security. Efforts are needed to diversify employment opportunities for women across sectors and promote decent work conditions.[16]
- Gender Wage Gap: Despite women's increasing participation in the labor force, a significant gender wage gap exists in Bangladesh. Women tend to earn less than men for similar work. Factors such as occupational segregation, limited access to higher-paying positions, and discrimination contribute to this wage gap. Addressing these factors is crucial for reducing the gender wage gap and ensuring equal pay for equal work.
- Entrepreneurship and Business Ownership: Women's entrepreneurship and business ownership contribute to economic development and innovation. In Bangladesh, women-owned businesses, particularly in the informal sector, play a vital role in the local economy. However, women face barriers such as limited access to capital, lack

[16] StatisticDivision, Dhaka: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), Planning Division, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh.

of business networks, and social norms that discourage women's entrepreneurship. Supporting women entrepreneurs with training, access to finance, and business development services can enhance their participation and contribution to the economy.

Promoting women's economic empowerment requires a multi-faceted approach. This includes improving access to quality education and skills training, addressing social norms and discriminatory practices, providing financial and technical support for women-owned enterprises, and ensuring equal opportunities for career advancement. Policy interventions should focus on creating an enabling environment that promotes women's entrepreneurship, encourages gender-responsive business practices, and eliminates gender-based discrimination in employment.

5.2 Community Involvement:

The role of women in social development indicators in Bangladesh is instrumental in shaping the overall progress of the country. Women's empowerment and their participation in various social spheres contribute to improved health, education, and social well-being. Examining the role of women in key social indicators in Bangladesh reveals the following:

- Education: Women's education plays a vital role in social development. Over the years, Bangladesh has made significant strides in improving girls' access to education. The enrollment rate of girls in primary and secondary education has increased, narrowing the gender gap. Women's education has a positive impact on reducing poverty, improving maternal and child health, and promoting gender equality.
- Maternal Health: Women's health, particularly maternal health, is a critical social indicator. Bangladesh has made notable progress in reducing maternal mortality rates through increased access to healthcare services and skilled birth attendants. Women's empowerment, education, and access to reproductive healthcare contribute to safer pregnancies and childbirth, thereby improving maternal health outcomes.
- Family Planning and Reproductive Health: Women's ability to access and utilize family planning services is crucial for reproductive health and family well-being. Effective family planning programs empower women to make decisions about their

reproductive health, spacing of pregnancies, and the number of children they have. Access to contraceptives and reproductive health services positively impacts maternal and child health and enables women to participate in social and economic activities.

- Gender-Based Violence: Addressing gender-based violence is essential for social development and women's empowerment. Bangladesh has made efforts to combat violence against women through legislation, awareness campaigns, and support services. Empowering women, promoting gender equality, and addressing social norms that perpetuate violence contribute to creating safer communities and fostering social cohesion.
- Women's Political Participation: Women's participation in political decision-making processes is crucial for social development and good governance. Bangladesh has taken steps to increase women's representation in local government bodies, such as Union Parishads and Upazila Parishads. Women's participation in political leadership enhances their ability to advocate for gender-responsive policies, address social issues, and influence decision-making processes.
- Social Protection Programs: Social protection programs play a vital role in addressing poverty, Discrimination, and social exclusion. Bangladesh has implemented various programs targeting women, such as the social safety net, microfinance, and cash transfer schemes. These initiatives aim to provide financial support, improve access to resources, and enhance social well-being, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized women.

Promoting women's participation in social development requires concerted efforts from multiple stakeholders. These efforts include ensuring equal access to education, healthcare, and social services, addressing gender-based violence, promoting women's political participation, and implementing social protection programs that target women's specific needs. Additionally, addressing cultural and social norms that perpetuate gender Discrimination and discrimination is crucial for achieving sustainable social development.

By empowering women and ensuring their active participation in social development, Bangladesh can foster inclusive and equitable societies, reduce poverty, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).[17]

5.3 Educational Achievement:

The role of women in educational attainment is a crucial aspect of development indicators. Over the past few decades, there has been significant progress in improving women's access to education worldwide. Increased educational opportunities for women have led to numerous positive outcomes, both for individuals and societies as a whole.

- Literacy and Basic Education: Education is the foundation for development, and women's educational attainment plays a key role in achieving sustainable progress. Efforts to improve female literacy rates have resulted in increased basic education opportunities for women and girls. Access to quality education enables women to acquire basic literacy skills, empowering them to participate actively in social, economic, and political spheres.
- Gender Parity in Education: Promoting gender parity in education is crucial for women's development. Gender disparities in education, such as lower enrollment rates and higher dropout rates for girls, have been significant obstacles to women's empowerment. However, progress has been made in closing these gaps, and more girls than ever before are enrolling in schools and completing their education.

5.4: Political Representation:

The role of women in political representation is a critical aspect of development indicators. Political representation refers to the presence and participation of women in political decision-making processes at various levels, including national, regional, and local governments. Increasing women's political representation is essential for achieving gender equality and fostering inclusive and sustainable development. Here are key points regarding the role of women in political representation:

[17] Rahman, R.I. 1990. An analysis of employment and earnings of poor women in Bangladesh, Ph.D. thesis (Canberra, The Australian National University).

- Gender Equality and Women's Rights: Women's political representation is closely linked to gender equality and women's rights. By having a substantial presence in political institutions, women can influence policies, laws, and programs that promote gender equality and address issues affecting women and girls. Women in political positions can advocate for laws combating gender-based violence, promoting reproductive rights, and ensuring equal opportunities for women in all spheres of life.
- Diverse Perspectives and Decision Making: Women bring unique perspectives and experiences to the table, enriching the decision-making processes. When women have a seat at the political table, they can raise issues that are often overlooked or marginalized, such as women's economic empowerment, access to healthcare, education, and social protection. Their presence ensures a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to policy formulation and implementation.
- Role Models and Empowerment: Women in political leadership positions serve as role models for other women and girls, inspiring them to pursue leadership roles and engage in public life. Visible female leaders challenge gender stereotypes, demonstrating that women are capable of assuming positions of power and influence. This empowerment encourages women's active participation in politics, leading to more diverse and representative decision-making bodies.
- Laws and Policies Promoting Gender Equality: Women's political representation has a direct impact on the formulation and implementation of laws and policies that promote gender equality. Women in power can work towards enacting legislation that ensures equal opportunities, promotes women's economic empowerment, tackles discrimination, and supports work-family balance. Their presence amplifies the voices of women in society and influences the policy agenda towards greater gender equality.

5.5 Practice of Positive Discrimination in Bangladesh:

As part of the Article 28 and 29 of the constitution, the government has introduced a quota system soon after the adoption of the Constitution and it has been amended on several

occasions.[18] However, in 2018, the government abolished the quota system in first and second class job of public service after the severe opposition from the students.[19]Although the participation of women in the public service has increased after the adoption of the quota system, the representation of ethnic communities are still insufficient in the public service and hence elimination of quotas in first and second-class government job can be seen as denying applicants from ethnic minorities equal opportunities and, as a result, harming equality of opportunity.[20]Despite the constitutional provisions of the positive discrimination, the method of implementation is not strong enough in Bangladesh. Furthermore, in addition to Article 65 (3), various statutes provide reserved seats for women in City Corporation, Upazilla Parishad and Union Parishad. Similarly, the right to equality was ensured under the constitution and hence no derogation is allowed. It was held by the Appellate Division in the case of *Rabia Basri Irene vs. Bangladesh Biman* that the action of Biman Bangladesh in fixing the different age of retirement for stewards and stewardesses is discriminatory and violation of Article 28 of the constitution.[21] On the other side, in many cases it is believed that women are less efficient compare to their male counterpart and given these prevalent social ideas and patriarchal views are unlikely to alter very soon, just discussing discrimination against women is pointless. We need to take advantage of society's discriminatory tendencies and turn them into a positive growth driver for women; in other words, we need to actively work on positive discrimination of women.[22] Apart from that, we need to recognize women's contributions in the home and establish provisions for

[18] Staff Correspondent, 'Quota circular issued amid protests' *The Daily Star* (Dhaka, October 5, 2018) <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/quota-system-in-bangaldesh-scrapped-officially-1642534> accessed 18 October 2021

[19] Staff Correspondent, 'Quota circular issued amid protests' *The Daily Star* (Dhaka, October 5, 2018) <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/quota-system-in-bangaldesh-scrapped-officially-1642534>

[20] Parban Chakma, 'Why quota reservation is significant for ethnic minorities' *The Daily Star* (Dhaka, August 3, 2021) < https://www.thedailystar.net/law-our-rights/news/why-quota-reservation-significant-ethnic-minorities-2143736>

[21] 55 DLR (AD) (2003) 132

[22] Tasneem Tayeb, 'Positive discrimination needed to protect women's rights' *The Daily Star* (Dhaka, September 3, 2021) < https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/closer-look/news/positive-discrimination-needed-protect-womens-rights-2167126>

monetarily paying them for the activities they provide. We must also provide them with economic empowerment possibilities, such as access to skill development and financial resources so that they can work and become financially self-sufficient and have a say in the family on an equal footing.

Chapter-06

Initiatives to Tackle Gender Bias

6.1 Government Initiatives:

The government of Bangladesh has undertaken various initiatives to address gender discrimination and promote gender equality in the country. Here are some notable government efforts:

- National Women Development Policy: In Bangladesh adopted the National Women Development Policy, which aims to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in all spheres of life. The policy emphasizes women's rights, economic empowerment, political participation, health, education, and social protection.
- Gender-responsive Budgeting: The government has been implementing gender-responsive budgeting to allocate resources towards programs and policies that address gender disparities and promote women's advancement. This approach ensures that gender equality considerations are integrated into the budgetary process.
- Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality (WAGE) Project: The WAGE project, implemented by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, focuses on women's economic empowerment and gender equality. It provides skills training, income-generating activities, and support for women entrepreneurs to enhance their economic opportunities and reduce gender disparities in the workforce.[23]
- Social Safety Nets: The government has implemented various social safety net programs that specifically target women to alleviate poverty and address gender-based vulnerabilities. Programs like the Employment Generation Program for the Poorest, Vulnerable Group Development, and the Maternal Allowance Program provide financial support and social protection to women in need.
- Legal Reforms: The government has introduced several legal reforms to protect women's rights and address gender discrimination. Notable initiatives include the enactment of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, the Prevention

[23] Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS), 1999-2000. National Institute of Population Research and Training, Mitra and Associate, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

of Oppression Against Women and Children Act, and the Acid Control Act. These laws aim to prevent and address various forms of gender-based violence and discrimination.

- Women's Political Participation: The government has taken steps to enhance women's political participation and representation. It has implemented a quota system that reserves a certain percentage of seats in local government bodies for women. The reserved seats provide opportunities for women to participate in decision-making processes at the grassroots level.
- Education and Health Programs: The government has prioritized education and health programs to address gender disparities. Initiatives like the Primary Education Stipend Program and the Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project aim to increase girls' enrollment, reduce dropout rates, and improve the quality of education. In the health sector, programs focus on maternal and child health, family planning, and reproductive health services.

These initiatives reflect the government's commitment to addressing gender discrimination and promoting women's empowerment in Bangladesh. However, challenges remain, and sustained efforts are needed to achieve full gender equality and ensure the effective implementation of these initiatives.

6.2 Civil Society Interventions:

Civil society organizations in Bangladesh play a vital role in addressing gender discrimination and promoting gender equality. They work alongside the government and other stakeholders to advocate for women's rights, provide support services, raise awareness, and empower women. Here are some notable civil society interventions in Bangladesh:

- Women's Rights Advocacy: Civil society organizations actively advocate for women's rights and gender equality through campaigns, lobbying, and policy advocacy. They work to influence policy formulation, legal reforms, and the implementation of gender-responsive programs. These organizations raise awareness about gender discrimination, violence against women, and women's rights violations, striving to create an enabling environment for gender equality.

- Empowerment and Skill-building: Civil society organizations implement programs to empower women economically, socially, and politically. They provide training and capacity-building programs to enhance women's skills, knowledge, and leadership abilities. These initiatives aim to promote women's active participation in decision-making processes, improve their income-earning opportunities, and foster their overall empowerment.
- Gender-based Violence Support Services: Civil society organizations run helplines, shelters, and counseling services to support survivors of gender-based violence. They provide safe spaces, legal aid, and psychosocial support to women and girls who have experienced domestic violence, sexual assault, or other forms of abuse. These organizations also raise awareness about violence against women, challenge social norms that perpetuate it, and advocate for stronger laws and enforcement mechanisms.
- Women's Health and Reproductive Rights: Civil society organizations work to improve women's access to healthcare services and promote their reproductive rights. They provide information and support on reproductive health, family planning, and maternal health. These organizations advocate for policies that prioritize women's health, including access to quality healthcare facilities, skilled healthcare providers, and reproductive rights education.
- Education and Skills Development: Civil society organizations focus on improving girls' access to education and promoting their retention in schools. They provide scholarships, educational materials, and mentorship programs to support girls' education. These organizations also work to address barriers to education, such as child marriage, gender-based violence, and discriminatory social norms that limit girls' educational opportunities.
- Awareness and Social Change Campaigns: Civil society organizations run awareness campaigns to challenge harmful gender norms and promote gender equality. They use media, community engagement, and advocacy to shift societal attitudes and behaviors towards gender discrimination. These campaigns raise awareness about women's rights, encourage community dialogue, and promote positive masculinity to engage men and boys in gender equality efforts.

- Networking and Coalition Building: Civil society organizations collaborate and form alliances to strengthen their advocacy efforts. They work together to amplify their voices, share resources, and coordinate activities to address gender discrimination comprehensively. These networks and coalitions also engage in dialogue with the government, policymakers, and other stakeholders to influence policy and drive systemic change.

The contributions of civil society organizations are crucial in complementing government initiatives and advancing gender equality in Bangladesh. Their grassroots-level engagement, advocacy, and service provision help empower women, challenge gender norms, and drive societal change toward a more equitable and inclusive society.

6.3 International Support:

International support has played a significant role in addressing gender discrimination and promoting gender equality in Bangladesh. Various international organizations, donor agencies, and development partners have collaborated with the government and civil society organizations to implement programs and initiatives focused on women's rights and empowerment. Here are some examples of international support in Bangladesh:

- Funding and Grants: International organizations provide financial support through grants and funding to implement projects and programs that address gender discrimination. These funds are utilized to support initiatives related to women's education, health, economic empowerment, and combating gender-based violence.
- Technical Assistance and Capacity Building: International partners offer technical assistance and capacity-building support to strengthen institutions and organizations working on gender equality in Bangladesh. They provide expertise, training, and guidance to enhance the skills and knowledge of government officials, civil society actors, and other stakeholders engaged in gender-related work.
- Policy Support and Advocacy: International organizations advocate for gender equality and women's rights in Bangladesh by engaging in policy dialogues and influencing policy formulation processes. They provide technical inputs, research findings, and evidence-based recommendations to shape national policies and legal frameworks that promote gender equality.

- Knowledge Sharing and Research: International support includes sharing best practices, research findings, and lessons learned from other countries' experiences in addressing gender discrimination. This knowledge exchange helps inform policies, programs, and interventions in Bangladesh and contributes to evidence-based decision-making.
- Awareness and Social Campaigns: International organizations collaborate with local partners to run awareness campaigns on gender equality, women's rights, and gender-based violence prevention. These campaigns aim to challenge societal norms, raise awareness, and promote positive behavioral change regarding gender discrimination.
- Advocacy for Legal Reforms: International organizations support advocacy efforts for legal reforms related to gender discrimination and women's rights. They work closely with national partners to advocate for laws and policies that protect women's rights, prevent gender-based violence, and promote gender equality.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: International support includes monitoring and evaluation of gender-related programs and initiatives in Bangladesh. This helps assess the effectiveness of interventions, measure progress, and identify areas for improvement. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms contribute to evidence-based decision-making and ensure accountability in achieving gender equality goals.[24]
- Partnership and Collaboration: International organizations collaborate with local stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, and women's groups, to jointly address gender discrimination. These partnerships facilitate coordination, resource mobilization, and knowledge sharing for more effective and sustainable interventions.

The support from international actors has been instrumental in advancing gender equality and addressing gender discrimination in Bangladesh. Their collaboration with national stakeholders helps strengthen efforts, build capacity, and create a conducive environment for sustainable change.[25]

[24] Banbeis report 2010 and World Bank 2010.

[25] Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training BDHS, 2014.

Chapter-07

Recommendations and Conclusion

7.1 Strengthening Legal Frameworks:

Strengthen the legal frameworks in Bangladesh and promote gender equality, here are some recommendations:

- Comprehensive Gender Equality Legislation: Enact comprehensive legislation that explicitly prohibits gender discrimination and promotes gender equality across all spheres of life, including employment, education, health, and access to resources. The law should provide clear definitions of discrimination and outline measures for prevention, protection, and redress.
- Strengthen Laws on Violence Against Women: Enhance laws addressing violence against women, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and harassment. Ensure that these laws are effectively implemented and enforced, providing survivors with accessible legal remedies, protection orders, and support services. Establish specialized courts or dedicated units to handle gender-based violence cases and expedite their resolution.
- Eliminate Child Marriage: Strengthen and enforce laws to eradicate child marriage, which disproportionately affects girls and perpetuates gender Discrimination. Raise the minimum age of marriage for both girls and boys to 18 and ensure strict enforcement. Implement awareness campaigns to change social norms and empower communities to prevent child marriage.
- Gender-sensitive Family Laws: Review and reform family laws to ensure they are gender-sensitive and promote women's rights within family structures. Address issues such as inheritance rights, marital property, divorce, custody, and guardianship in a manner that upholds gender equality and protects women's rights and interests.
- Promote Gender-responsive Employment Laws: Review and amend labor laws to ensure gender equality in the workplace, including equal pay for work of equal value, protection against workplace discrimination, and measures to promote work-life balance. Implement measures to address sexual harassment in the workplace and ensure mechanisms for reporting, investigation, and redress.

- Access to Justice and Legal Aid: Improve access to justice for women by establishing legal aid services that provide free or affordable legal assistance to marginalized women. Increase the number of legal aid centers, train legal professionals on gender-sensitive approaches, and ensure the availability of interpreters to facilitate access to justice for women from diverse backgrounds.
- Strengthen Implementation and Monitoring Mechanisms: Ensure effective implementation of gender equality laws by strengthening institutional mechanisms responsible for their enforcement. Establish monitoring systems to track progress, collect sex-disaggregated data, and assess the impact of legal reforms on gender equality outcomes. Promote transparency and accountability in the justice system to build trust and confidence in the legal process.
- Capacity Building and Sensitization: Conduct capacity-building programs for legal professionals, law enforcement officials, and judiciary on gender equality and women's rights. Sensitize judges, lawyers, and law enforcement agencies to gender biases and stereotypes that may impact decision-making. Promote gender sensitivity training in legal education institutions to foster a more gender-responsive legal profession.

It is important to note that legal reforms alone are not sufficient to achieve gender equality. Complementary efforts, such as raising awareness, addressing cultural norms, and providing support services, are essential for comprehensive change. Therefore, a multi-sectoral approach involving collaboration among government, civil society, and international partners is crucial for effective implementation and sustained progress in strengthening the legal frameworks to promote gender equality in Bangladesh.

Enhancing Access to Education and skill Development:

To enhance access to education and skill development in Bangladesh, particularly for girls and women, the following recommendations can be considered:

- Eliminate Barriers to Education: Take proactive measures to eliminate barriers that hinder girls' access to education, such as child marriage, gender-based violence, and social norms that prioritize boys' education. Implement and enforce laws that ensure compulsory and free primary education for all children, irrespective of gender, and

provide incentives such as scholarships and stipends to encourage girls' enrollment and retention in schools.

- Improve Infrastructure and Resources: Invest in the development and maintenance of schools and educational facilities, particularly in rural and marginalized areas. Ensure schools have adequate infrastructure, safe and inclusive learning environments, and essential resources such as books, materials, and proper sanitation facilities. Promote the use of technology in education to bridge the digital divide and expand access to quality learning resources.
- Quality Education and Teacher Training: Enhance the quality of education by focusing on teacher training and professional development programs. Provide teachers with gender-responsive training to create inclusive and supportive learning environments, address gender biases, and promote gender equality within classrooms. Encourage innovative teaching methods and curriculum reforms that promote critical thinking, creativity, and practical skills development.
- Promote Girls' Education at the Community Level: Engage communities, religious leaders, and parents in promoting girls' education. Conduct awareness campaigns that emphasize the importance of educating girls and challenge discriminatory attitudes and practices. Establish community-based education committees or platforms to ensure community involvement in decision-making and monitoring of educational initiatives.
- Address Gender-specific Barriers: Implement targeted interventions to address gender-specific barriers to education. This includes addressing menstrual hygiene management by providing separate toilets and sanitary facilities in schools, promoting comprehensive sexuality education, and ensuring access to sanitary products. Establish safe transportation systems for girls, especially in rural areas, to alleviate safety concerns during their commute to and from school.
- Skills Development and Vocational Training: Expand opportunities for vocational training and skill development programs, particularly for girls and women. Ensure the availability of diverse vocational training courses that align with market demands and provide skills for sustainable livelihoods. Collaborate with industries and

employers to design training programs that address gender disparities in employment and promote women's economic empowerment.

- Promote STEM Education for Girls: Encourage girls' participation and achievement in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Offer incentives, scholarships, and mentorship programs to inspire and support girls' interest in STEM subjects. Promote gender-balanced representation in STEM-related professions through targeted outreach programs and initiatives.
- Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish robust monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the impact of educational policies and programs on gender equality and access to education. Collect sex-disaggregated data to identify gaps and track progress in girls' enrollment, retention, and educational outcomes. Use this data to inform evidence-based decision-making and allocate resources effectively.

These recommendations aim to create an enabling environment for equitable access to education and skill development, ensuring that girls and women in Bangladesh can fully participate and benefit from educational opportunities. Collaboration among government, civil society organizations, communities, and international partners is crucial to implement and sustain these improvements.

Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment:

Promote women's economic empowerment in Bangladesh, the following recommendations can be considered:

- Equal Access to Employment: Ensure equal access to employment opportunities for women by eliminating gender-based discrimination in recruitment, hiring, and promotion processes. Implement and enforce laws that prohibit gender-based pay gaps and ensure equal pay for work of equal value. Encourage companies to adopt gender-sensitive workplace policies and practices that promote work-life balance and support women's career advancement.
- Skills Development and Entrepreneurship Support: Enhance access to skill development and vocational training programs tailored to the needs of women. Provide training in marketable skills, entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and business management to empower women to start and manage their own businesses.

Offer mentorship and networking opportunities to support women entrepreneurs and enhance their access to markets, finance, and business networks.

- Access to Finance and Credit: Facilitate women's access to financial services, including microcredit, savings, and loans, by promoting gender-responsive financial inclusion policies. Establish and strengthen women-friendly financial institutions and mechanisms that provide affordable and accessible financial services to women entrepreneurs. Provide financial literacy programs to enhance women's financial management skills and decision-making.
- Supportive Business Environment: Create a supportive business environment by reducing regulatory barriers and bureaucratic hurdles that disproportionately affect women. Simplify business registration processes, improve access to business licenses, and facilitate women's participation in public procurement. Establish business incubators and support centers that specifically cater to the needs of women-owned enterprises and provide them with mentoring, training, and networking opportunities.
- Access to Markets and Value Chains: Facilitate women's access to markets and value chains by promoting linkages between women entrepreneurs and larger markets. Support women's participation in trade fairs, exhibitions, and business networking events. Encourage public and private sector procurement policies that prioritize sourcing from women-owned businesses and cooperatives.
- Social Protection and Work Benefits: Strengthen social protection mechanisms for women workers, including maternity leave, childcare support, and flexible work arrangements. Encourage employers to provide family-friendly policies and benefits that support women's participation in the labor force. Implement and enforce laws and policies that protect women from workplace harassment and discrimination.
- Technical and Business Support Services: Establish and strengthen support services for women-owned enterprises, including business development services, mentoring, and access to technology and innovation. Promote partnerships between industry associations, academia, and civil society organizations to provide technical assistance and capacity-building support to women entrepreneurs.

- Gender-responsive Data Collection and Analysis: Improve data collection and analysis on women's economic participation and empowerment to inform evidence-based policymaking and targeted interventions. Collect sex-disaggregated data on employment, income, business ownership, and access to finance. Use this data to identify barriers, monitor progress, and design effective policies and programs that address gender disparities.

These recommendations aim to create an enabling environment for women's economic empowerment in Bangladesh. They require collaboration among government, private sector, civil society, and development partners to implement and monitor the impact of these interventions. By promoting women's economic empowerment, Bangladesh can unlock the full potential of women, contribute to inclusive economic growth, and advance gender equality.

Raising Awareness and Changing Societal Attitudes:

To raise awareness and change societal attitudes in Bangladesh, the following recommendations can be considered:

- Comprehensive Awareness Campaigns: Launch comprehensive awareness campaigns targeting different segments of society, including the general public, community leaders, religious institutions, and educational institutions. These campaigns should focus on promoting gender equality, challenging harmful gender stereotypes, and addressing the root causes of gender discrimination. Use various mediums such as television, radio, social media, and community outreach programs to disseminate messages effectively.
- Education and Curriculum Reforms: Integrate gender equality and women's rights into the national curriculum at all levels of education. Develop age-appropriate educational materials that challenge gender stereotypes, promote respectful relationships, and emphasize the importance of gender equality. Train teachers and educators to foster inclusive and gender-responsive learning environments that encourage critical thinking and challenge discriminatory attitudes.
- Engaging Religious and Community Leaders: Engage religious and community leaders as advocates for gender equality and women's rights. Conduct dialogue

sessions, workshops, and trainings with religious leaders to address interpretations of religious texts that perpetuate gender discrimination. Collaborate with community leaders to promote gender equality in local communities and encourage them to become role models for change.

- Media and Entertainment Industry Engagement: Collaborate with media outlets, filmmakers, and artists to promote positive portrayals of women and challenge gender stereotypes in media and entertainment. Encourage the production and dissemination of content that promotes gender equality, women's empowerment, and respectful relationships. Provide training and sensitization programs for media professionals on gender-sensitive reporting and representation.
- Engaging Men and Boys: Implement programs that actively involve men and boys in promoting gender equality and challenging gender stereotypes. Conduct workshops and campaigns that address issues such as toxic masculinity, violence against women, and unequal power dynamics. Encourage men and boys to become advocates for gender equality in their communities and families.
- Empowering Women's Groups and Civil Society: Strengthen women's organizations and civil society groups working on gender equality and women's rights. Provide them with capacity-building support, resources, and platforms to advocate for change. Foster networking and collaboration among these organizations to amplify their voices and collective impact.

It is important to ensure that these awareness-raising efforts are sustained over time and complemented by comprehensive policy and institutional reforms. Collaboration among government agencies, civil society organizations, religious institutions, media outlets, educational institutions, and international partners is essential to drive societal change and achieve gender equality in Bangladesh.

7.2 Conclusion:

It is the time when the gender balance is most important particularly in the event of Bangladesh since 50% of the population is women who are actively contributing to the country's economy. In addition to that, equal opportunities for women and other ethnic communities also crucial for Bangladesh which will foster the diversity and harmony among the different communities. [26] Therefore, appropriate laws safeguarding against and preventing discrimination are critical for a fair future as suggested by Beth Gaze and Belinda Smith. The practice of positive discrimination still exists in the developed world including the United Kingdom and Canada in different names.[27]

Gender discrimination remains a significant challenge in Bangladesh, affecting various aspects of development indicators and the overall progress of the country. However, women in Bangladesh have made remarkable strides in education, political representation, economic empowerment, and social awareness. Efforts from the government, civil society, and international partners have contributed to positive changes in addressing gender disparities and promoting women's rights.

In terms of political representation, there have been encouraging steps taken to increase women's participation in decision-making processes. Quotas and reserved seats have provided greater opportunities for women in parliament and local government bodies. However, continued efforts are required to overcome cultural barriers, promote women's leadership, and foster an inclusive political environment.

In terms of economic empowerment, initiatives have been undertaken to enhance women's access to employment, entrepreneurship, and financial services. However, persistent gender-based discrimination, limited access to resources, and societal norms continue to hinder women's full participation in the economy. Further action is needed to address these barriers and promote women's economic empowerment.

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[26] Dr. Shahnaz Huda, 'Positive discrimination can ensure gender balance' *The Daily Star* (Dhaka, March 12, 2019) <https://www.thedailystar.net/law-our-rights/law-interview/news/positive-discrimination-can-ensure-gender-balance-1713619> accessed 19 October 2023

[27] Beth Gaze and Belinda Smith, '*Equality and Discrimination Law in Australia: An Introduction*' (Cambridge University Press 2016)

To combat gender discrimination effectively, raising awareness and changing societal attitudes play a crucial role. Efforts to challenge gender stereotypes, promote gender equality in education, engage religious and community leaders, and involve men and boys as allies are vital for creating a more inclusive and equitable society.

While progress has been made, sustained commitment and collaborative efforts are required to overcome the remaining challenges. Strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing access to education and skill development, promoting women's economic empowerment, increasing political representation, and raising awareness are essential for achieving gender equality in Bangladesh. Continued investment in these areas will not only benefit women but also contribute to overall national development and prosperity.

Ultimately, achieving gender equality and addressing gender discrimination in Bangladesh requires a multi-faceted approach that involves the active participation of the government, civil society organizations, the private sector, communities, and individuals. By working together, Bangladesh can create a society where women are empowered, their rights are respected, and they can actively contribute to and benefit from the country's development journey.

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