

## **Driving Jobs Are No Longer Limited to Men in Bangladesh**

### **Ms. Munima SULTANA (Bangladesh)**

Now, driving seats are no longer for men only in Bangladesh. The government's recent policy to train females as professional drivers has brought job opportunities to them in recent years. The government focuses on women aiming to curb a high rate of road accidents which take away the lives of 15 people on average every day in the country. The state-owned Bangladesh Road Transport Corporations (BRTC) and some other national and international organizations have incorporated programs for women into their driving trainings to bring changes to the roads.

In Bangladesh, drivers, who are traditionally dominated by men, are mostly to blame for all kinds of road accidents. The National Accident Research Institute (ARI) estimates the traffic accident rate in Bangladesh is at least 50 times higher than those in Western Europe and North America, based on fatalities per 10,000 registered vehicles.

In light of this, policy makers expect that women will make the situation better as they drive carefully and are less likely to commit traffic violations. The argument behind this is that driving licenses are not provided to right people due to the government's wrong policy, corruption and irregularities in the issuance of driving licenses. Almost all male drivers are very reluctant to learn traffic rules and acquire enough driving skills before holding the steering wheel on the streets. They get their licenses easily in exchange for money due to the system. Giving further training to these drivers would not bring about any prompt change.

In such a situation, the policy makers feel that female drivers will make a difference as they are comparatively safety conscious and hardly commit acts of corruption. The behavioral problems of male drivers such as reckless driving, frequent violation of traffic rules and showing an attitude of arrogance to commuters and road users will also be less common among women.



Women Driver

Since the initiative was launched two years back, the BRTC has trained over 300 women at its driving schools. Among NGOs, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) has offered extensive programs to train 600 women drivers to support the government's efforts to achieve safer roads.

A BRTC trainer said mostly female members of the police, military and para-military forces receive the professional driving training at BRTC training centers. The BRAC, on the other hand, focuses on young girls from rural areas to train as drivers. They use the social and economic background of women as selection criteria from the ground up to help them become self-reliant and socially rehabilitated.

According to a BRAC official, since the BRAC Driving School was launched in May 2012, it has completed the fourth batch graduating 75 females. Though BRTC is yet to recruit any female professional drivers even for its newly launched bus services, the BRAC has succeeded in placing 18 female drivers in the job. Some women also got job opportunities at United Nations agencies and international NGOs.

The BRAC official said, due to a huge gap between the demand for drivers and the number of registered vehicles, they also train the trainers to support the transport sector. They have revised the training program as per international standards and extended the training period from two months to five months, while providing residential facilities for female trainees to help them fully concentrate on the training.

The society is yet to get the results of all these efforts. There are manifold challenges for women in adopting driving as a new profession, since their presence on the roads is not being warmly welcomed and is meeting with resistance from the society and their families. However, the experts are hopeful, recognizing that female drivers are competent by nature and will be warmly welcomed as professional drivers, just like in many other sectors including ready-made garment manufacturing. The trainee drivers are also confident about earning their places on the streets overcoming all kinds of challenges.