

Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Are at the Core in Bangladesh

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Bangladeshi women face barriers and disadvantages in nearly every aspect of their lives, including access to health services, economic opportunities, political participation, and the control of finances. In Bangladesh, women's empowerment is at the core of all programs to increase female participation, reduce gender inequality, and raise awareness about the positive impacts of empowering women and girls throughout society.

To address gender-based violence, development providers are working with the government of Bangladesh to implement the Domestic Violence Prevention and Protection Act of 2010 and train human rights defenders—half of them women—to enforce existing human rights laws, including the Domestic Violence Act. They also support grassroots social protection groups made up of social workers, doctors, religious leaders, teachers, and students to monitor domestic violence in their communities, and help victims' access to legal channels to settle domestic disputes and seek recourse.

Empowering women to participate fully in economic life across all sectors is essential to build stronger economies, achieve internationally agreed goals for development and sustainability, and improve the quality of life for women, men and their communities.

Since the development of women and children is prerequisite to national development, programmes to empower and establish rights of women and children by mainstreaming them in the overall development process of the country have been undertaken with the objectives of ensuring empowerment, stopping violence, preventing trafficking, ensuring safety in workplaces and involving women in socio-economic activities.

Through global networks, it should be ensured that women have a real voice in all institutions of governance, so that they can participate equally with men in public dialogue and decision-making, and also exert influence on decisions that will determine the future of their families and countries.

Women's empowerment through gender equality matters in its own rights, because the ability to live the life of one's own choice and be spared from absolute deprivation is a basic human right to be enjoyed by everyone, whether male or female.

Bangladesh has experienced a large decrease in excess girl mortality during the past two decades by improving access to clean water, sanitation and waste disposal services, and thereby reducing diarrhea and other infectious diseases. Reduction in maternal mortality was also achieved through improved maternal health care.

Credit programmes for poverty reduction have been successful, making rural destitute women self-reliant through credits provided for self-employment, in 473

upazillas (equivalent to counties) of 64 districts. Through the spread of cell phones and the Internet, more women have gained access to information. Microcredit has helped women's economic attainment, bringing financial stability to families. Nowadays, in Bangladesh, restrictions no longer exist for women in terms of career formation in any field they desire. Women's empowerment through professional attainments is not limited any more.

Women have ventured into professions held only by men in the past. Today they excel at any profession, such as scientists and airline pilots. Men's prejudice has been overcome and women's self-adjustment to the workplace has been facilitated along with the changing social order.

Today in Bangladesh, Women's empowerment and gender equality are focused not only as human rights but also as pathway to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Although women's empowerment has been inspired by changing situations, there is a 12% to 16% increase in violence against women in Bangladesh, according to a report. Violence against women is not only a gender issue but also a disgraceful matter that constitutes human rights violation.

With the introduction of modern facilities to the remotest areas, women's empowerment has been growing with time and opportunities provided both by the government and the private sector.

It is commendable that recognition of women's empowerment in Bangladesh has been highlighted internationally, since Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has received a gold medal from Dauphine University of France for progress and success in women empowerment in Bangladesh. The prime minister received an MDGs Award for Bangladesh's outstanding achievement in the reduction of child mortality. She has been awarded the South-South Award under the banner of ICT for the use of information technology for the development of health of women and children.

With the existing female leadership at the highest level of the country, it is important to reach similar situations at all levels. Thus project/programme plans should always have sufficient budget allocated for gender mainstreaming.



Free bicycle distribution for school girls by the local government's empowering women project.



Girls are cheerful and flying with rejoice at the results of secondary school certificate examination.