

Empowerment of Women to Alleviate Poverty through Education in Bangladesh

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Abstract

The empowerment of women has become a commonly used term, indicating the ever-increasing importance of the role that women play to eradicate poverty. In Bangladesh survey revealed that women produce about 45 percent of the people consume, while in Asia the figure is about 50 percent. Despite this fact, however, women rarely receive the recognition they deserve for their work. In developing countries, it is crucially important to shed light on the considerable contribution that rural women are making and assess it properly. Poverty is a most universal concern all over the world and in Bangladesh. Uphold the edification segment for women to play an imperative part for poverty alleviation. Particularly for the pastoral and suburban vicinity where 67 percent of the entire population resides, promoting women's education might perform as a moral fiber to eradicate poverty. Education will increase not only the opportunities for women but also in various aspects as the voice of saying 'no'. The purpose of this study is to explore the opportunities for women which we may use as a parameter of poverty alleviation through women empowerment. This study conducted targeting some districts of Bangladesh and collected information based on the objective of the study. Survey revealed some significant findings about social and cultural barriers to attain education and education could bring more opportunity for women. In Bangladesh, it is crucially important to shed light on the considerable contribution of education which could improve the social status of women.

Keywords: Women, poverty, education, development, empowerment.

Introduction

Women's are almost half of the total populace of Bangladesh. In spite of being half of the total population they had to suffer because of the dominance of patriarchal society and they are not entertained equal opportunity. There are lots of families especially in pastoral areas are

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adjacent to women education and believe that as complete loss. Men are usually the head of the family with the power of doing anything he wills. On the other hand women undergo to men in different stages of life like dominance of father in childhood, of husband in youth and of son in old age. Being secluded to indoor their main duties includes doing household chores, taking care of husband and elders and raising children. As a result women are far more behind than men in every sector of the society. As a consequence of denying equal opportunity women are becoming less involved in financial activity. Census shows that economic activity of women is very lower than men. So the largest number falls under the poverty line are women and the total financial growth of the society is hindering and the goal of poverty alleviation process is progressing very slowly. The feminist activity for the empowerment of women throughout the world for the progress of women education and gender equality has improved the condition in last few years but there are still long way to go. Empowerment of women can be achieved solely by education and educated women can participate in the development of a country. They will contribute in economy by involving them in various economic activities and will be able to revive their rights in their family. Problems affecting women's education need to figure out and mitigate to faster the rate of women's empowerment which will also help to achieve millennium development goals and other plans of government.

Background of the study

Poverty is a fatal problem for most of the developing countries of the world and this is very important as this poor population asserts the financial of an economy of that country. It is explicit that country with less poverty rate will be more prosperous than a high poverty rate country. Bangladesh is a third world developing country with a higher poverty rate. Bangladesh became independent in 1971 when it had national literacy rate of 18 percent while literacy rate among women was 11 percent only (Farid Ahammed, 2003: 2). After that Government of Bangladesh come with a long term plan to improve women education. They involved the local and foreign institutes and agencies for that plan. Government of Bangladesh targeted the primary education to improve at the beginning and thus they also had plan to improve secondary and higher education. At 1990 government made primary education compulsory for all and for that reason attendance of primary education increased a lot. Government provided free education elements (e.g. textbook) among students to create interest. Most primary schools were nationalized by government and NGO's also came into picture with the view of increase both literacy and literacy among women. Government created posts for female teacher to increase female students as an indirect way of development. As a result women education increased from 19.50 percent in 1991 to near about 45.54 percent in 2011 (Census, 2011: 13)

where the rate of literacy among male is 49.82 percent. Total percentage of male and female involved in economic activity are 66.0 and 9.8 respectively and 26 percent of its population live below poverty line of 2\$ per day.

Objective of the study

General objective of this study is to evaluate poverty alleviation by empowerment of women through education. The targeted objectives of the study are: (i) to determine the common barriers that affect women's education, (ii) to determine a relation between women empowerment and poverty alleviation, (iii) to figure out the steps that Government may take to empower women and (iv) to make recommendation for abolishment of determined common barriers.

Conceptual Framework of Women Empowerment to alleviate Poverty

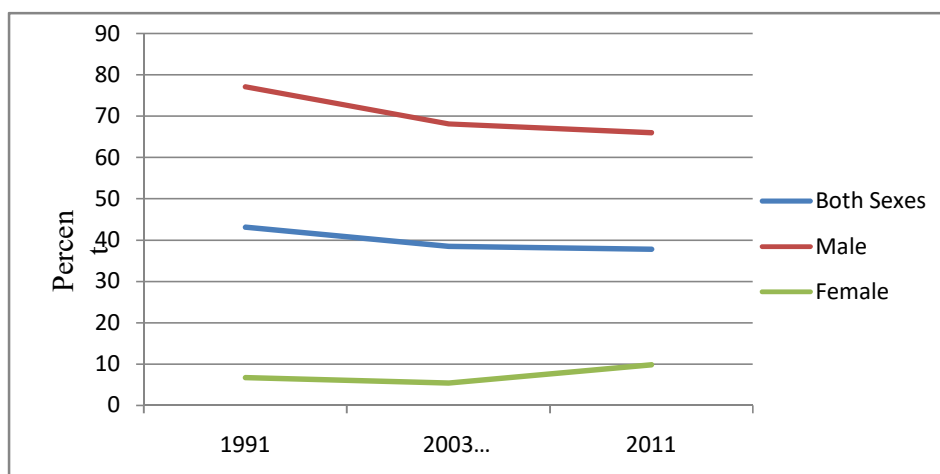
Empowerment of women is a world wise issue. In a women conference in 1985 held at Nairobi brought the concept of women empowerment. Education will play a key role in women empowerment because it will change the way of thinking, make them aware about their rights and helps them to face challenges. Women workers who are educated are in much better position than uneducated or less educated women. So to make Bangladesh a middle income country by 2021 we must account women empowerment. This is only possible when women will educate themselves properly.

Table 1: Population and Housing Census (2011)

Literacy and Education			
Literacy (All ages)			
Indicator s/Variables	2011	2003	1991
National	47.68	38.06	24.90
Male	49.82	40.70	30.00
Female	45.54	35.31	19.50
Rural	44.70	32.98	21.20
Male	46.81	35.43	25.80
Female	42.59	30.42	16.30
Urban	60.19	56.67	40.30
Male	62.59	60.19	46.20
Female	57.83	53.06	33.30
Economic Participation			
Economic Activity Rate (All ages)			
Both Sexes	37.80	38.50	43.10
Male	66.00	68.10	77.10
Female	9.80	5.40	6.70

Though we can see from table 1 a sharp rise in the literacy of women from 1991 (19.50%) to 2003 (35.31%) and in 2011 (45.54%); which has a better growth of 13.02% in every 10 year then men 9.91%. In spite of this they are only 9.80% involved in economic activity against men 66.00%. Literacy rate will never signify the authentic state of education because census identifies those as literate who can only sign or write a simple letter. A person capable of writing his or her name is not suitable for the high competitive job market and now a day job markets also requires minimum level of study. Educated women with higher level of study will always try to find some scope of development of herself as well as her family. Thus she will be able to contribute financially within the family and also in society. From the figure below it is obvious that unless the economic participation of women increases the total economic growth of the country will never increase and poverty alleviation process will be time consuming.

Fig. 1 Economic Participation, Population and Housing Census (2011)



In Bangladesh male child gets more priority in most of the family and female children became the victim of disparity. Even there are lots of family considers women education as pointless as women usually leave fathers home after marriage as ritual and some other thinks as they must have to provide dowry so spending time or money for education is an inclusive failure. For that reason they often get less opportunity for education and they are less in number in job sector in compare to men. They also do not get proper environment in job sector because men are dominating the job sector and facilities are mostly in favor of them. The empowerment has been recognized as the main issue in determination of women's status and national growth in last few years. So increase of facility in every sector will be beneficiary to empower women. Women will be empowered to confront the conventional roles in family and in

society to incorporate in economic activity and decrease the poverty rate. This empowerment process will not only alleviate poverty of the country but also build lot of educated and earning mother. In the long run an educated mother always would want to make her children educated as she got benefit from education and the overall economic growth of the nation will increase. Education not only aware women about their rights but also involve them in financial activity to make them independent as well as eradicate poverty. Poverty is the situation where minimum standard of living hampers for the lack of resources and elements necessary to fulfill basic needs. Poverty is the combination of various processes like politics, society and economics. These social processes interact with each other to exacerbate the damage of poor people's life. When per capita income, energy consumption, life expectation etc. falls below a certain level that can be seen as poverty. Other may see poverty as poor life living style, poor shelter, insufficient food, cloth, missing of proper education, access of land, justice, treatment, position in society and proper access of opportunity. Consumption and income level of a person that is required to fulfill the basic needs falls below a certain threshold is defined as poverty. World Bank defined extreme poverty range where people earn or consume less than \$1.25 per day and moderate poverty is less than \$2. World Bank estimated in 2001 that 1.1 billion people fall in the range of extreme poverty and 2.7 in moderate poverty. In a place where USD is not local currency, the exchange rate should be measured with USD. World Development report (2000/2001) figured out some reason of poverty around the world, those includes natural disaster, instability of politics, social and economic inequality, lack of education, corruption within country and in certain cases war (World Bank, 2001: 34). The reason of poverty in Bangladesh concludes all the reasons indicated in the World development report. Besides all those Bangladesh has great gender disparity which also causes poverty as they are not involved in economic activity. War is a big reason for causing poverty. After the liberation war in 1971, people of Bangladesh had a devastating famine in 1974. But there was an improvement in the poverty level in late 70 times (Azam, 2009: 4).

Table 2 – Rate of Poverty in Bangladesh in various years (Azam, 2009: 5)

Year	National	Urban	Rural	Poverty Gap	Squared Poverty Gap
1983/84	52.3	40.9	53.8	15.0	5.9
1988/89	47.8	35.9	49.7	13.1	4.8
1991/92	49.7	33.6	52.9	14.6	5.6
1995/96	53.1	35.0	56.7	15.5	5.7
2000	49.8	36.6	53.1	13.8	4.8
2005	40.0	28.4	43.8	9.8	3.1

Table 2 shows gradual development of poverty in different years from 1983 to 2005. The population in Bangladesh is mainly rural living as 80 percent lives in rural areas, with 54 percent of them employed in agriculture (World Bank, 2013: 27). These people observe poverty that is caused by natural disasters like flood, droughts, hurricanes etc. Poverty among women is much greater than men in all over the country especially women of rural area and widows. Women education rate was always low in rural areas as they are mostly involved in household chores. Poverty shows its pathetic face to these women when the head male leaves them or dies. If these women were involved in economic activity they could restrain themselves and, could put their part in national economic activity and prove herself as an asset both for family and country's economic growth. Bangladesh Government and International Monetary Fund started sixth five years plan to fulfill the Millennium Development Goal and 'Vision 2021', where they have targeted to reduce poverty to 14 percent within 2021 (IMF, 2013: 16). There they have planned to increase the productivity of population to achieve high economic growth. Within that plan they are also considering increase of labor productivity, creating more job facility in manufacturing and services, increase income from agriculture by increasing productivity, institutional finance support for poor, migrate more workers for remittance, improving women participation in labor force, improving the quality of services for poor, increase access to micro finance, food price stability and assuage climate change effect.

Research Methodology

To find out the role of education to empower women and how this helped to become financially stable or make a good position in the family we conducted personal interviews three districts of Bangladesh within June 2014 to August 2014. Those districts were Narshingdi, Comilla and Chittagong. According to census 2011 these three districts has population like 1,57,40,934 and within three district Narshingdi and Comilla are not much distant from Dhaka which is capital of Bangladesh.

Total participants of the interview were 250 women and conducted according to a previously prepared questionnaire and resulted data were analyzed and grouped to get the findings. The total interview process was conducted in Bengali and style was informal. The participants were chosen by from those three districts by random sampling technique. While choosing the participants no criterions were kept in mind and choosing was without being prejudice to any educational level, economic level and age. Among the participants there was lot of Muslims, Hindus and few were from other religions.

Findings of the study

The participants of the interview were from both rural and urban sector and 42% were from urban and 58% were from rural area. Among them

there were participants of different educational and economical level. Within them there are 12% of women who did not get chance of education and never been in the school. There were 38% of women who went only up to primary school and there were other 28% who managed to continue up to high school. Total numbers of undergraduate and graduate are 20% of total participants. Only 2% of them got the scope of higher study after graduate level. Among them 32% are employed and 68% are non-employed and among educated women who went at least high school 75% were employed and 25% are unemployed.

Table 3: Various findings from the survey

Area of Participants		Education		Employment rate (both educated and uneducated)		Employment rate (attending minimum high school)	
Urban	Rural	Level	Rate				
42%	58%	Uneducated	12%	Employed	32%	Employed	55.2%
		Primary School	38%				
		High School	28%				
		Undergraduate and Graduate	20%	Unemployed	68%	Unemployed	44.8%
		More than Graduation	2%				

Though our intension was to get the answers of the questionnaires, but we also had an eye opening experience while talking to them. We found that there are lots of problem around them.

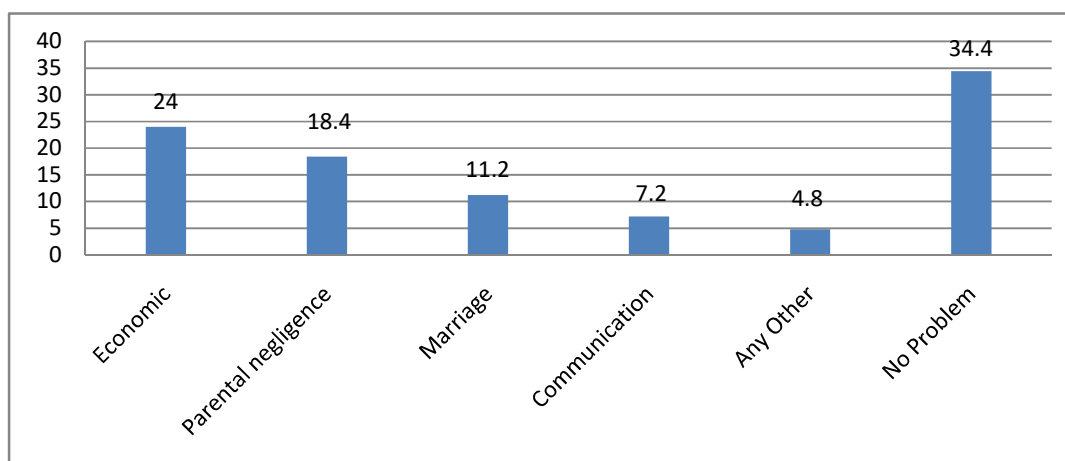
First of all is early marriage which is one of the vital issues that has impact on women education and in early marriage women come under others controls who usually do not feel interest to educate her or she had to leave education from that stage. Because of early marriage parents or husbands withdraw the girl from school and this is rare that once a girl leaves school, she comes back to school. In early marriage parents mistakenly leave their girls to wrong hands and as a result many of them suffer broken marriage and fail to acquire proper education. We found that rural women faces more problem like sexual harassment, local violence etc than urban women. Another thing is educated women also faces less problem than non-educated women. But most of the women are aware of education now a day and want to make their children educated.

We found out in the survey that even in the primary level of education poverty is an important factor. Few of the girls failed to attend school because of poverty and feel extreme interest in education now. Parents think a boy as a future asset but a girl is a burden from the thought that the boy will earn and will provide them shelter. There are some cases where poverty was not the issue rather it was will of parents only. There were some old uneducated women who feel that women education is very

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much necessary and want that her grand child's should get education without any hamper. Few of them mentioned that they failed to get education because of the distance of nearest school or college and because of that their parents denied to send them for feeling of unsecure and as well as it is also costly for their parents to send them in distance school or college. Thus this is realized from the interview that poverty is playing the main role that affecting women education accomplished with early marriage, parents' negligence and their inability to bear the cost of education. Fig. 2 shows various nature of problem from survey.

Fig. 2 Various problems affecting the women education, Source: Field survey



From the consolidated result of the interview and the answer of the questionnaire we figured some interesting outcome like women having education is more in number in job sector. As We already told that there were 32% or 80 women who are doing a job, among them 5 are those who studied even after undergraduate and graduate study, 42 from graduate and undergraduate level, 22 from high school level, 5 from primary school level and 6 from without education.

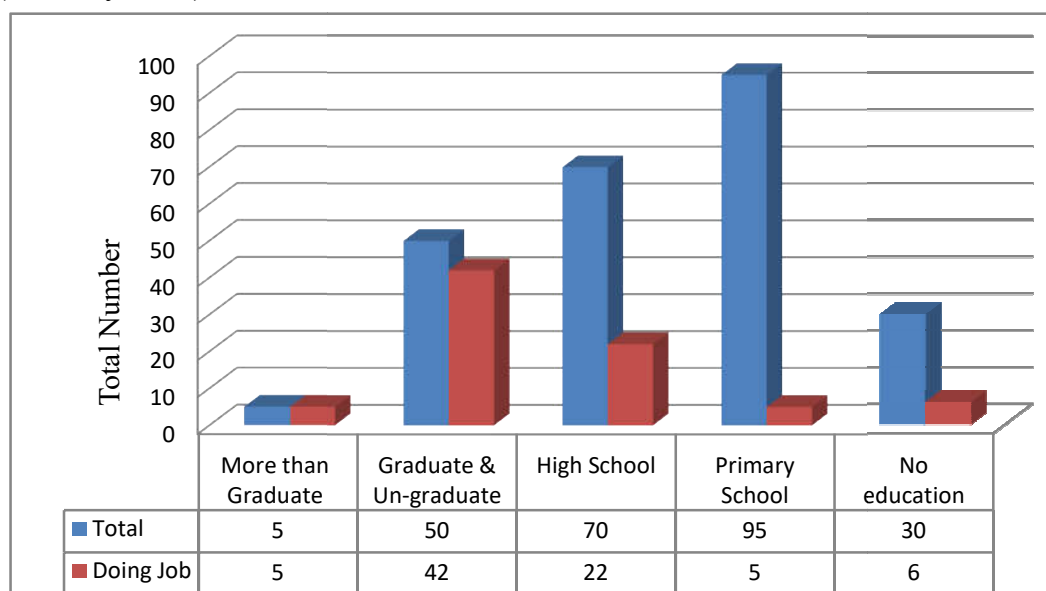
Table 4: Data collected from the survey

Education Level	Total	Doing Job
More than Graduate	5	5
Graduate & Undergraduate	50	42
High School	70	22
Primary School	95	5
Uneducated	30	6

From table 4 we can come to a decision that educated women involves more in job. As more women will involve in education, women will be more empowered and more financial development will occur which will enrich the economic growth of the country. All the educated women expressed that they get advantage to take care of the children and family because of education and they also want that their children specifically

girls will be educated properly so that they will not have to suffer like uneducated women. From the beginning discussion we saw that involvement of women in economic activity is very less. If educated women involve more in job sector than their contribution will boost up the economy and they also influence their children to be educated who are the future of the country. So the empowerment of women through education will play key role in Bangladesh to alleviate poverty.

Fig 3 Compare between educated women and their number of doing job (Primary data)



From the survey we also marked that, though women are more engaged in job sector but there are some other constraints which are also affecting women to become economically sound and financially strong. As Bangladesh has a huge number of populations there is scarcity of job in the market. And there are lots of candidates against each job and for this reason jobs are becoming less paid. Within that, women employees are paid less than men employees and as a result women earn low and save low. As women are less in job sector the environment also not favorable for them which also demoralize to join them in workforce. Beside this, decision for women in a family also taken by senior male member and only after their permission they can start any job. Sometimes the whole or partial earning of women from job is taken by their senior males or husband for the sake of family expense which is a common practice of Bangladesh. For this reason, women fail to become self dependent which impact in the final economic growth negatively.

Recommendations for this study

Though there are lots of plans and proposal from government sector for women education but women empowerment to alleviate poverty need to be highlighted more. Government is trying to increase women

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participation in the workforce but the job environment is still unfavorable for women workers. The other thing is not clear from those proposals that are the implication of education and improvement through it to reduce poverty. Education could play the key role to empower women as well as eradicate poverty. So, Government should bring proper plan for young school leavers, dropouts, unemployed women and regular students by giving them traditional and vocation education. We think the following activities and training will be beneficial to mitigate poverty:

- Making women education free up to university level and provide incentive to regular school attendees
- Short term skill acquisition training
- Micro finance program
- Non Fee-paying program such as fashion designing, beauty parlor course, handicraft course, hair dressing course etc.
- Vocational training such as computer education, mechanical training etc.

Beside this government and other organization should take necessary steps to give opportunity in job sector, make equal remuneration, ensure favorable job environment, give them rights to save their earnings and create some policy to spend their earnings according to their own choice. Increasing awareness regarding these issues mostly in the rural area will be beneficial in long run to concern women about their rights and equality which will help to alleviate poverty of Bangladesh in a constructive way.

Limitation of the study

Bangladesh is a country of 65 districts and we only visited 3 districts. If we could cover some more districts and more rural areas we could get more precise results. We talked with only 250 women by a random selection. Increase in the number of participants would clear the actual scenario of the targeted study. Other thing is by random selection of participants the data acquired from them may show deviation in different level which will also mitigate if we could increase the number of participants.

Concluding Remarks

This study concludes that empowerment of women through education and alleviation of poverty is very much allied to each other. Though it is true that government has come up with some activity to empowerment women but those are very much inadequate. Without proper concern of government, its agencies, NGOs and nationwide awareness of women

themselves this poverty alleviation task by empowerment of women is nothing but a fancy dream. Many projects should be taken into account in every stages of society targeting underprivileged community to figure out the actual circumstances and to bring under light of education. Skill acquisition centers are needed to open nationwide particularly in the rural areas of country for less educated and uneducated women to bring them in the stream of earning. This includes not only support from government and all the agencies throughout the year but also timely arrangement and release of funds to govern them. Proper funding is another very important factor in such development activity as lot development initiative will require lot of funds. We hope that with all this activity the total fundamental growth of the society will be achieved as well as the poverty alleviation process will be successful with broad extent in the following years.

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