

Women's Employment Conditions in Rural Bangladesh: An Analysis

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Abstract

In employment, gender discrimination is rampant in rural Bangladesh. Women are mostly concentrated in the low productivity parts of many sectors of the country. It is clear that women are becoming an increasingly significant part of the labor force in both formal and informal sectors. The study examines the position of women in a process of change resulting in pauperization. This article has sought to analyze the women and employment status, women and labor, women and wage, women and agriculture in rural Bangladesh. In this paper, an attempt has been made to identify the women's conditions which are related to employment status such as self-employment, officers' employee, unpaid home helper, and day labor. This article also discusses the size of women labor force in our economy, women's wage pattern in various sectors, ratio of daily wages and women's contribution to agriculture in Bangladesh. The main theme of this article is women status and gender base employment, labor force and employment size, male and female participation in labor force, growth of labor force, ratio of daily wages and main occupation sector.

Key Words: Women, Employment, labor, Wage, Agriculture

Introduction

In modern Bangladesh, there is no legal restriction on women to take up employment outside villages or home. In this context, economic independence refers to the power to spend one's own income according to her own wishes. A large number of women are unemployed in Bangladesh. Employment in the case of women is encouraged only in certain cases. They are compelled to work especially when there is an economic pressure. Further, Bangladeshi women are discriminated against type of suited employment. As a result, a large number of women are engaged in employment such as teaching, clerical and nursing jobs and the like. This phenomenon is, in fact, a global one. Employment in the case of women leads to economic independence. Employment is, therefore, expected to provide women the power of decision making. It helps them in deciding about certain personal and family matters. Moreover, employment raises the status of women in the family and society as well. Employment opportunities not only create new hopes for women, but also uplift them and their status in the community. The life situation of the women is found different compared with those of men in village areas. This study is concerned with the employment

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status of women and development in the context of rural Bangladesh.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To analyze women's social, economic and demographic background in rural Bangladesh;
2. To assess the gender discrimination in job market and wages in rural Bangladesh;
3. To analyze the customs, practices and beliefs as those are detrimental to women's employment and development.

Methodology of the Study:

This paper is an analytically exploratory study. In this study mainly secondary sources have been used to collect material information and data about the rural women in Bangladesh. In the present study content analysis method is adopted for collecting the socio-economic data of the rural women. Secondary data relevant to the study objectives were collected from various documents which include books, journals, articles, etc.

1.1: Women and Employment Status

In rural Bangladesh, as more women enter the labor force, a number of issues related to their status in the workplace such as wages, working conditions, employer-employee relations and relations with co-workers crop up to be concerned with. Women's participation in the labor force also changes the dynamics within the family and raises awareness of new concerns such as security both at work and outside, living conditions, and access to public resources and different types of services such as health care, education and training. Women face various forms of discrimination in employment. They are engaged mostly in low productivity employment in agricultural and informal sectors. Although they often work harder and for longer hours than those of men, their earnings are significantly lower.^[1] Without proper human development, south Asia will not be able to provide productive employment to its large population.^[2]

Table-1.1: Status and Gender Base Employment-2000 (in percentage)

Employment Status	1999-2000		
	Female & Male	Male	Female
Self-employment	46.7	51.4	26.6
Officer	0.3	0.3	0.0
Employee	16.7	15.8	20.0
Unpaid home helper	12.0	6.4	34.1
Day-Labor	24.3	26.1	19.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Age: 15+, Usual definition.

Source: BBS *Labor Force Survey*, (Dhaka, GOB, various years), p.111.

1.2: Women and Labor

Most people in the rural areas earn their living from agriculture: of those aged 15 and above some 63 percentage work in crop production, fisheries, forestry, livestock or home-based agriculture. Total employment in crop production seems to have changed little over the past few years absorbing 2300 to 2400 million person days. However, production in most major crops, including jute, rice, sugar cane and pulse has stagnated recently- threatening the livelihoods of millions of rural people. New sources of employment are urgently needed in the rural areas, particularly in non-rice and other forms of agriculture.^[3] Women's employment is undervalued for women because when they work outside home they are also underpaid. In the rural areas, for example, men's wages may be 14 to 40 percent higher than women's.^[4] In Bangladesh, out of the 20 million rural women above age 10 in 1974, the census classified 15.5 million as "housewives", and over 3.5 million as "inactive" However, a subsequent national survey, and several detailed micro studies, have assessed the huge workloads that most rural women, in fact, carry in agriculture, animal husbandry and cottage industries.^[5]

Table- 1.2: Labor Force and Employment Size, 1991, 1996 and 2000 (Million)

Year	Labor Force Size(Million)			Employment Size(Million)		
	Women & Men	Male	Female	Women & Men	Male	Female
1991	30.9	26.9	4.0	30.7	26.7	4.0
1993	36.1	30.7	5.4	34.8	29.8	5.0
2000	40.7	32.2	8.5	39.0	31.1	7.9

Age-15+. Usual definition

Source: BBS: *Labor Force Survey* (Dhaka, GOB, Various Years), p. 92.

The size of the total economically active population aged 10 years and above in Bangladesh was reported in the census of 1981 as 23.6 million and the participation rate was 27.1 percent of the total population. Of this, 22.4 million were males and 1.19 million females, constituting 49.9 and 2.8 percent respectively. In rural areas, the respective proportions were 49.2 and only 2.7 percent.^[6] The employment challenge in the rural Bangladesh is not only huge, but it is also highly discriminatory as far as the female half of the population is concerned. Among the women in Bangladesh, rural women have the lowest participation in the formal labor force and employment. The gap between the unemployment rates for men and women also widens with the increase in educational levels. However, in the real sense, the censuses of 1961, 1974 and 1981 were not of much help in monitoring changes over time because of the difference in concepts and definitions. Perhaps, due to the definitional changes we observed a sharp fall in the female employment level from 2.6 million in 1961 to 0.8 million in 1974 which accounts for only 4 percent of the rural females aged 10 years and above. Census documents the number of unemployed female in 1974 as less than 50,000, which is a very negligible number. In other

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words, it means that nearly all of the remaining 96 percent of women (10 years) and above were outside the labor force belonging to the category of house wives (16.7 million) and inactive persons (4.3 million).^[7]

Table- 1.3: Male and Female Participation in Labor Force (%), 1996 and 2000 year

Age (Year)	1995-1996			1999-2000		
	Women & Men	Male	Female	Women & Men	Female	Male
15-19	41.7	61.3	18.0	41.66	55.85	23.35
20-24	43.5	78.8	15.8	47.04	74.01	26.30
25-29	50.2	93.5	16.0	54.22	91.30	27.08
30-34	55.4	78.3	15.8	60.77	95.65	26.51
35-39	59.9	78.4	18.2	63.66	98.23	25.66
40-44	62.3	99.0	17.0	66.58	97.78	26.57
45-49	60.9	98.8	14.3	66.01	97.63	23.42
50-54	57.4	98.0	14.3	60.51	95.76	18.28
55-59	57.9	96.1	14.4	62.38	93.50	18.85
60-64	55.2	88.6	11.4	48.83	81.39	11.11
65+	43.7	70.2	8.4	37.39	56.56	8.99

Age: 15+, Usual definition

Source: BBS: *Labor Force Survey* (Dhaka, GOB, various years), p.61.

According to the census of 1974, the latest reliable census data available, only 5% of women aged 10 years and above were in the labor force, but this does not mean that the remaining 95% were idle. Rural women in Bangladesh are the majority, but they largely remain unrecognized contributors to agriculture and economic activity, though they work very hard. The amount of time rural women spend on various production activities has been found to vary between 10 and 4 hours a day. Some village women are fully employed by others or are self-employed in sectors where the total output is aimed at the market.^[8] A comparison of males and females shows that females in all age group worked more than males. Girls aged 5-9 years worked on average, three- quarter of an hour more daily than boys in the same age group. Females aged 10 year and above worked on average over two hours more per day average over two hours more per day than males. The differential was pronounced in age groups 15-24 years and 35-44 years. Females in these age groups worked on average 2.5 hours more daily than males in the same groups. This indicates that compared to young men (15-24), young women are required to work longer hours. The demand for household work, which is primarily carried out by women, explains such a

differential. In fact, older women aged 55 years and above, work on average two hours more per day than males in the same age group. That is, although with a rise in age both men and women work shorter hours, older women continue to work relatively longer hours than older men.^[9]

The study shows that it is no longer only the destitute women who are forced to seek employment outside home. The greatest number of women outside household employment in the sample villages were married women from households, where there was also a male income-albeit not a very big.^[10] Among the families where the women were engaged in outside household employment, only in one third of the cases were their women consulted as to whether or not they should undertake employment; in two thirds of the cases the decision was made by the husband alone, and only one married women stated that she made such decisions entirely herself.^[11] Improvement in the status of women brings about their equality with men in matters of access to productive assistance, employment opportunities and compensation for work done, and their integration into the development process as equal partners with men should be adopted as purposeful and active policies at the operational level, rather than as superficial function. Detailed procedures and rules of business should be worked out and wherever necessary legal provisions enacted to implement the policies.^[12] According to available statistics from the government of Bangladesh, about 21 million women were in the labor force in 1989. Apart from unpaid family workers (83 percent), self-employment in rural areas and wage employment in urban areas are major economic activities for women. The agricultural sector is the largest employer of women followed by the manufacturing and the service sectors.^[13]

Living conditions have led to a substantial increase in the incidence of disease and crimes in the Metropolitan areas. Until more jobs, safer public transportation and healthier accommodation become available in the metropolitan areas, rural women are in a much better position living and working within their own homes.^[14] Women also play a predominant role in home-based work in the villages of Bangladesh. For the female poor working as laborers, the problem is thus low and deteriorating quality of employment: low wages, irregular work, frequent lack of work and few chances of job advancement. The problem is worse in their case than in the case of men of similar socio-economic background. Policies to improve the quality of employment must tackle a combination of things: not only the wage rate and the duration of employment, but also the regularity and security of the employment, the equipment and facilities that they can work with and are trained to use. Poor women more often find themselves structurally in a worse position than poor men in terms of gaining access to the ways to move into better remunerated, more regular, and better equipped work. Their concentration often perpetuates stagnation in casual/temporary employment.^[15]

However, the female rates varied considerably due to reasons already discussed. In the case of males the potential supply of labor is influenced more by the effects of demographic factors, such as the site and age distribution of the total population, than caused by social and economic development. However, in the case of females and of younger and older males it is believed that socio-

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economic and cultural factors seem to influence the labor force participation rates significantly.^[16]

Most poor peasants in *Jhagrapur* are forced to do their labor. A uniform category of laborer does not exist in the village. Some of them work twelve months a year as laborers, while others do it regularly or occasionally. Most laborers find employment with or in close proximity to their same patrons. The number of migrant laborers in *Jhagrapur* is relatively high. This explains why laborers do not find sufficient employment in agriculture; their rush for alternative occupations creates new problems.^[17]

If a laborer comes with his marginal earnings, he has to share it with the family members who depend on him. After he himself has eaten, not much is left for others. Therefore, his wife, who might have been husking paddy with the *dheki* (a manual husking tool) for half a day, or who might be pregnant, is in even greater troubles, as she gets only what is left over after her husband and children have eaten. To compare these earnings with wages that enable a family to have a more or less balanced diet is irrelevant.^[18] More job opportunities for women would help them to be empowered. If the educated women are not able to enter into the job, they will not be able to use their knowledge gained through education, which will not help them in their empowerment. To keep women in job market more supportive environment such as child-care and transportation facilities should be created. But in unemployment-ridden country like Bangladesh, where most of the women have a very low level of education, employment creation will be difficult, particularly in rural context. In this regard, efforts should be taken to create employment particularly for women through micro-credit and providing vocational training on handicrafts, sewing, poultry and livestock rearing, fishing, vegetable gardening, etc.^[19]

The Bangladeshi employed labor force is estimated at 41.7 million or at 54.6 million using the extended definition and it increased in size by nearly 5 million since 1990-1991. In other words, around one million people enter the Bangladeshi labor force annually. The share of female employment between agriculture and non-farm sector is generating female employment at an increasing rate mainly due to the fact that government and non-government interventions are more concentrated in this sector. The occupational pattern of employed persons and the annual growth rate by major occupation from 1990-1991 to 1995-1996 shows that the growth rate of females employed in the sales occupation is the higher (5.1 percent) among all the major occupations. The second highest growth rate is observed in the case of production labor. While the growth rate of the male labor force has increased steadily (1.7 percent) in agriculture, forest, and fisheries, the trend is negative (-1.1) in case of females.^[20] Women workers in Bangladesh can be characterized as young, and mainly single, although some of them are married, divorced and abandoned. They provide a flexible supply of labor and work in low-paying jobs for long hours both at the work place and at home. In rural areas, 83 percent of the employed women aged 15 years and over were engaged as unpaid helpers (BBS: 1996). This is mainly due to rising labor costs in non-farm activities. Women's

increased participation is increasing in manufacturing and agricultural activities and are mostly concentrated in post-harvesting and livestock rearing, which have relatively lower returns than those of other activities.^[21]

Table- 1.4: Growth of Labor Force, by Sex, 1961-89

Year/source	Male	Female	Total	Female as % of total
1961 Census	16.0	0.9	16.9	5.3
1974 Census	21.0	0.9	21.9	4.1
1981 Census	24.4	1.5	24.9	5.8
1983/84 LFS	26.0	2.5	28.5	8.8
1984/85 LFS	26.8	2.7	29.5	9.2
1985/86 LFS	27.7	3.2	30.9	10.4
1989 LFS	29.8	20.9	50.7	41.2
1961-81	2.1	2.6	2.2	-
1981-86	2.7	17.0	3.7	-
1986-89	2.5	184.0	21.4	-

Source: BBS (1992), *Labor Force Survey- 1989*, p. 35.

A very high percentage, almost 90%, of both male and female respondents, of all social classes perceived the need for women's earning positively. It reflects that above 60% of the respondents approved work outside home and male respondent of low class were most approving (74.3%). There was little variation in the attitude of female respondents of different classes toward working outside. The greatest perceived advantage of women's earning seems to be economic solvency, which is obvious. Only 5% of the respondents regarded mental development and social status as advantages due to the females' earning. The positive attitude toward females' earning is, therefore, mainly due to economic reason and not for respect or positive regards toward females' work. No female respondent of the upper class is seen to perceive improvement of status as an advantage of the female's earning.^[22] Earning opportunities of females are sometimes associated with immoral activities, unapproved exposure and social dishonor by about a ten of the males. However, respondents show a low percentage on these disadvantages.^[23] Village women express their frustration that there is a limited opportunity to work for women. They have some idea about "Food for work" which is for very poor women. For average women, there is simply nothing they can do: most women are underemployed even in the household.^[24]

While unemployment among women is increasing, they are also worst hit during slack period. Unions are almost non-existent among women workers, who, mostly work, as casual laborers, having no legal entitlements.^[25] The labor market operating in Bangladesh is segmented and fragile, where women's status

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is jeopardized by their peer literacy, educational level and skill formation values and attitudes of a sex-segmented society, which prohibit their mobility, both vertically and horizontally and dampen their aspirations.^[26] Employment opportunities in the urban formal sector are very limited in the country. The major industries provide employment to less 2 percent of the labor force. Neither does the urban informal sector hold any significant opportunity in creating a major development in the unemployment situation. Therefore, a vast majority of the labor force, most of which can expect at least seasonal employment in agriculture, does not feel encouraged migrating for jobs to the urban sector. As a result, the rural areas have to bear the burden of this huge labor force.^[27]

Women in rural Bangladesh are conditioned to be socially and economically dependant. Their dependence continues, by turn, first on fathers, then husbands and family or sons. In a prevailing subsistence agricultural economy, they provide unpaid agricultural and household labor. So crucial problems of rural women in Bangladesh are also related to the overall social, economic and cultural conditions of the country.^[28] It is very difficult to discuss employment because the existing ambiguities regarding the definition of employment. Parameters for measuring the employment or the economic activities of men are still debatable.

So these are still more inadequate tools for measuring the employment of women. However, using the term as used in the census reports it is seen that in terms of labor force participation, the percentage of women is very low. In the census reports of Bangladesh, the labor force refers to any civilian labor force. In 1974 the total male labor force was 53 percent and the corresponding percentage for females was 3.5 percent. Considering the population aged 10 years and above, male labor force participation was 19.55 million of which 15.23 was in agriculture and 4.42 million in non-agriculture. The corresponding figures for females were 0.87 million with 0.61 million in agriculture and only 0.26 in non-agriculture.^[29] However, a glance at the occupational status over time shows that males had been "Missing" as agricultural labor with significant dropping in its proportion. On the other hand, the proportion of females as agricultural labor has increased significantly. Should we then say that the females have replaced the "Missing" males in the fields? May be, it is so.^[30]

In fact, as primary occupation, the share of male labor force almost doubled over time. Besides, traditionally a large part of the female labor force had always been involved in non-agricultural activities, such as paddy husking by "dheki", handloom, etc. But, overtime, the roles of those activities have changed. However, not only as primary occupation but also as secondary occupation, non-agricultural activities stole the march. The implications of this structural change in occupation need to be emphasized: over time, rural livelihoods had increasingly been tilting towards non-agriculture. But, the question is: where have the "missing" labor gone?^[31] May be, a part of them went to the non-agricultural labor market as they were lured by higher wages. This appears to be true when male labor force participation as non-agricultural labor went up from about 7 percent to 15 percent. Note that this proportion is close to the "missing" labor from agriculture that we mentioned before. The other part of the

“Missing” labor might have gone to business and service related activities. Another important change to cite is the drastic fall of female labor force in business. It could be that driven by economic hardships in the past, they were forced to take up outside home activities to pursue livelihoods. But, overtime economic hardships relatively eased to pull them back into household works. In this context’ we can especially mention construction works where the share of female labors force is now 8 percent as against 16 percent in 1988. We presume that those who left construction and business have engaged in homestead-based agricultural activities in subsequent periods. And finally, the multiple occupation indexes for males have come down from about 140 to 137 indicating an increase in economic security somewhat. However, remarkable improvements occurred in the case of female labor force with the index falling from 160 to 138. This implies that females could catch up with males over time.^[32]

1.3: Women and Wage

The study confirms earlier findings, that women are segregated to home wage activities consisting of mainly domestic labor and in labor which is less economic in nature. In recent years, several changes are observed that have interesting policy implications. First of all, total burden of work for women has decreased mainly due to education in domestic work. Secondly, women’s participation in non-agricultural activities and in wage employment has declined with a corresponding increase in home-based activities. With the declining importance of agriculture, occupational structure in Bangladesh has become more diversified. However, economic development has affected men and women differently. While men leave agriculture and engage in non-farm activities, women remain within the farm sector. Thirdly, there is a substantial disparity in earnings between men and women in the labor market that may be explained by occupational segregation and low education of women. Male/female earning gap is higher in agriculture than in non-agriculture, and is negatively related to education. Women earn less because they are mainly engaged in agricultural activities that require no education. Our data, however could not explore why earning gap is higher in agriculture: is it due to low productive activities of women or social norms discriminating against female workers? One positive feature in Bangladeshi is that education is associated with lower earnings gap.^[33]

Table-1.5: Ratio of Daily Wage: Male and Female Year 1999- 2000 (Tk)

Sector			$\frac{M}{F}$
	Male	Female	
Agricultural/ Rural	63.0	35.0	1.8
Non-agriculture/urban	85.0	59.0	1.4

Source: BBS *Labor Force Survey* (Dhaka, GOB) 1999-2000, p. 55.

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It is clear that as women are becoming an increasingly significant part of the labor force in both formal and informal sectors, trade unions should become much more effective channel for voicing women's demands and needs in employment. This also calls for a greater role for women's organizations to take up issues governing wages and working conditions as well as to sensitize trade unions in the need to address women as important labor force participants. One of their first priorities should be to advocate for more widely available on-the-job-training for women.

The reasons for the increase in female labor force participation were mainly poverty related. It is found that 90 percent of the female labor force in rural areas came from poor households.^[34] A sectoral distribution of the labor force showed that 65 percent of the total labor force was employed in agriculture, 35 percent in non-agriculture whereas the sub-sector of manufacturing employed about 40 percent of the non-agricultural labor force.

The proportion of female labor in the agriculture sector was 46 percent compared to 54 percent for males but women comprised 64 percent of the manufacturing sector laborer force compared to 36 percent men. Thus of all employed women, 71 percent were involved in the agriculture, 22 percent in manufacturing, and 6 percent in the service sector. The pattern differed significantly for men with 60 percent of male employment being in the agriculture sector, 13 percent in wholesale and retail trade and only 8 percent in manufacturing. Women's share in public sector employment was only 8 percent with only two of the top 410 decision-making positions in the civil service being occupied by women.^[35]

The lack of bargaining power of women is one of the major factors contributing to slow female wage rates. This importance arises out of a low level of education and training, low level of skills, the availability of female surplus labor, and a lack of demand for skills developed in their roles as housewives. Even in situations where there is technically no discrimination in male female wage rates, such as in the public sector, women's employment opportunities are mainly in low-paid jobs with limited possibilities of career advancement which restrict their income earning potentials.^[36]

1.4: Women and Agriculture

In Bangladesh, the share of female contributing family workers is about three times as high as that of males. The very process of women's increased participation in employment has set in motion social and political changes that are improving the bargaining position of women, not only within their households but also within the society and the economy. Participation in economic activity alone cannot say much about the status of women, their welfare or change in them. In what types of occupation they are involved in and

to what status they belong are also crucial indicators of the integration of women in the development process. First of all, we examine the role of agriculture and non-agriculture as sources of employment for women.

Table- 1.6: Main Economic Sector (in Thousands)

Year	Gender	Total	Agriculture	Nonagricultural
1981(census)	Male	22430	14139	8291
	Female	1188	333	855
	Both Sex	23618	14472	1946
1989(LFS)	Male	29386	18251	11135
	Female	20761	18755	2006
		50147	37006	13141
1990(LFS)	Male	30475	16855	13620
	Female	19684	17292	2992
	Both Sex	50159	34147	16012
1981(census) %	Male	100.0	63.0	37.0
	Female	100.0	28.0	72.0
	Both Sex	100.0	61.3	38.7
1989(LFS)%	Male	100.0	62.1	37.9
	Female	100.0	90.3	9.7
	Both Sex	100.0	73.8	26.2
1990(LFS)%	Male	100.0	55.3	44.7
	Female	100.0	87.8	12.2
	Both Sex	100.0	68.1	31.9

Source: a) *Census Report 1981*, BBS; b) *Labor Force Survey, 1989&1990*, BBS, p.61.

The growing importance of non-agriculture would be welcome if it was induced by a pull factor from a flourishing manufacturing sector. But, it does not seem to be revealed by table six. We should also note that a larger percentage of women than men are engaged in non-crop agriculture. It is true that the decline occurs not only for women but also for men, for whom the percentage engaged in agriculture falls by 15 percentage points. We should also stress the fact that the census data on major occupation is not so illuminating because a large percentage of employed women gives "others" as the major occupation (62%) and thus hide the actual occupation of the majority of women. That the occupational breakdown has been inappropriate is also revealed by the fact that "others" also accounts for the second largest percentage for men. We give

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figures from the 1974 and 1980 census because occupational categories in 1981 census are different and not so detailed.^[37]

From the average employment, we find that the small supply of woman in days from the few females workers is not fully utilized. If we allow for 15 days of work from 90 days reference period, out of the 75 days, male unemployment rate for a worker ranges between 30% to 20% between the areas. For female, the percentage of utilized time varies from 38 to 17.^[38]

Table- 1.7: Economic Sector, Gender Base Employment-2000 (as percentage)

Main Sector	Male & Female	Male	Female
Agricultural and Forest	49.2	50.2	45.6
Fishing	1.5	1.6	1.3
Mineral	0.5	0.3	1.3
Processing	9.5	7.4	17.7
Electricity, Gas and Water	0.3	0.3	0.0
Construction	2.8	3.2	1.3
Business	14.4	16.7	6.3
Hotel	1.3	1.6	0.0
Transport & Communication	6.4	7.7	1.3
Finance and Insurance	0.5	0.6	0.0
Public Administration	2.1	2.6	1.3

Source: Rahman, Rushidan Islam, 2005. *The Dynamics of the Labor Market and Employment in Bangladesh: A Focus Gender Dimension*. International Labor Organization (ILO), Geneva, Switzerland, p.24.

Women devote most of their working time to unpaid labor which is seriously undervalued. This is partly because their work is generally at the subsistence level. The picture is no better in the rural areas where, depending on the socio-economic status of the village, men's wages may be 14 to 40 percent higher than women's. The results of this discrimination are most acute for female headed households: the bottom 20 to 20 percent of female headed households are among the poorest in the country compared with men, women tend to spend a higher proportion of their earned income on food, health and housing in rural areas of Bangladesh. Total days of employment and wage, both were lower for women and thus their earnings would be much lower.^[39]

Employment opportunities for women have not kept pace with development in the community, with women from the rural Bangladesh, being particularly disadvantaged. Women, on the whole, continue to have large families and spend

most of their time at home, caring for families while the men leave their home for searching employment. Women are, however, more involved in the traditional but unpaid tasks of community life, such as the education of their children in traditional or religious schools, etc. Women's domestic work and their contribution to the national economy are also not reflected in the computation of the GDP. There are few areas for wage employment in the rural Bangladesh. But where women have greater access to wage employment, in all likelihood, they bear the double burden of work inside and outside the home. Facilities such as child care services that support women's participation in employment are absent.

Conclusion

Women face many forms of discrimination in the employment sector in our country. Women are engaged in low productivity employment in agricultural and informal settings. Although they often work harder and longer hour than men, their earnings are significantly lower in our rural Bangladesh. The size of the total economically active population aged ten years and above in Bangladesh was reported in the census of 1981 as 23.6 million and the participation rate was 27.1% of the total population. Of this, 22.4 million were males and 1.19 million females, constituting 49.9% and 2.8% respectively in rural areas. Gender discrimination is also manifested by the employment status of women. Male /female earning gap is higher in agriculture than in non agricultural sector. It is clear that women are becoming an increasingly significant part of the labor force in both formal and informal sectors. The lack of bargaining power of women is one of the major factors contributing to slow female wage rates. Women devote most of their working time to unpaid labor that is seriously undervalued.

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