

The necessity to create congenial environment to develop women's leadership for social development

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Abstract:

This paper aims at exploring the fact that it is important to create a congenial atmosphere to develop women leaders to alleviate poverty of developing countries. Women better understand sufferings and miseries of women and children in poverty prone societies. Their views, ideas and understanding is necessary to be brought to the light for social development. Women leaders are found carrying out significant role to solve women and children centric problems in third world countries like Bangladesh better than man, because of their knowledge, experience and time-tested problem solving skill. Informal interviews had been conducted to collect primary and secondary data for the study. Generally, women's in our society stays at home to take care of their family. But due to poverty they are extending helping hand to their life-partners or the guardian to run their families by embracing the idea of working to earn money. These days' women in our country are working in garments, factories, doing small businesses, farming, handcrafting etc. Women are doing well at all these sectors and becoming self-sufficient. Women who are doing remarkably well crossing the social barriers are playing important role to the economy of not only their own family but also for their neighborhood by showing the path to earn money with dignity and honesty encouraging others providing disseminating information of informal education, health care, wellbeing and raising awareness on social issues to the women and children.

Introduction:

Man and women both have equal responsibility in family livelihoods, education, health and wellbeing. In fact in today's world, women are playing a very significant role when it comes to livelihood both in developing and developed countries. Their involvement in micro and small enterprise is phenomenal particularly in developing countries. They are doing well in tailoring, handcrafts, domestic animal nurturing and catering etc. Almost every garments factory in Bangladesh the majority of work force are women. If we look across the client bases of the microfinance institutions in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East, 82% of their clients are poor women entrepreneurs (Balogun O L and Yusuf S A 2011, 7: 41-48), where as in Bangladesh more than 95% beneficiaries are women. This provides substantial evidence that women are doing well in small trades in the rural areas of Bangladesh compared to men. Therefore, women's role in micro and small businesses is remarkably seen as a major contributing factor in social and economic development particularly in developing countries. Because of the substantial percentage of women's involvement in the workforce over the past three decades there has been profound transformation of families, society, and the economy as a whole in both rural and urban settings (Luise and Jose 1995, 282p). Since the late 1950s, women's involvement in economic activities have been steadily increasing and aiding remarkably in poverty alleviation. For example, in Africa, women produce 80% of the food and in Asia 60% and in Latin America 40% (Balogun O L and Yusuf S A 2011). Bangladesh, is also a good example of that, where women's involvement in small scale manufacturing is phenomenal. In many cases women are encouraging other women to come forward for work, providing their leadership to inspire and train other women in the society, in both urban and rural setting. They are aiding to build economy side by side. However, it is not easy for a women to become a leader and alleviate poverty with their inspiration due to many challenges. It is important to create congenial environment where women can overcome the challenges and be a leader for poverty alleviation, because women and children are the most sufferers of poverty.

Objectives of the study:

The main objectives of this study are:

- To establish the fact that this is the right time for positive behavioral changes in the society towards women's to take leadership in the society, so that they can contribute to the economic growth with ease.
- To point out facts present in the current scenario
- To illustrate importance women leadership role in alleviating poverty
- To investigate factors effecting women leadership
- To recommend necessary policy matters

Methodology:

- Formal/informal interviews conducted with senior level staff of Muslim Aid – UK Bangladesh field office of Emergency, Microfinance, Health, and Education programme.
- Points taken from National Gender Working Group meeting discussions of INGOs/NGOs in Bangladesh.
- Case studies of INGOs have been analyzed for the study.

Findings and discussions:

Why women leadership is an integral part of social development will become clear in the below findings under three categories. Women leaders are more appropriate than men in developing countries or poverty prone localities due to the fact that mostly women and children are vulnerable in these societies and one woman can understand other women's and children sufferings. Their ideas are worth more than others because of their concept and understanding of negative consequences of oppression against women.

1. Obstacles for women to be a leader in existing society:

Women are isolated and deprived among the poor in rural Bangladesh. Cultural norms are based on asymmetrical assumptions regarding what is appropriate to each sex, where males are given more emphasis from females need and what they are entitled to. Girls gradually learn to accept dependence and deprivation in context to male family members. Often, education for girls is considered irrelevant. Systems of patrilineal descent, patrilocal residence, and *pardah* (a system based on an ideology concerned with secluding and protecting women in order to uphold social standard of modesty and morality) interact to isolate and subordinate women. Girls are forced to marry early or marry without their consent etc. Besides, Muslim majority people in Bangladesh have enormous misconception on liberation of women. Women's in every stage face difficulties to come forward as a leader due to the social stigma.

Moreover - women are facing many barriers in contributing to and benefiting in education and health, they continue with restricted access to services and assets, and they are made worse by legal and regulatory constraints on women's opportunities. As a result, the worldwide progress in development over the last three decades has not been translated into proportional gains for women (Kabeer N, 2001).

2. Why women leaders are more desirous than men's

Kip Tindell, CEO of the Container store group Inc, believes that women possess an innate skill set that caters towards communication, empathy and emotional intelligence—the key pillars of conscious capitalism. Container store group Inc- with close to 70 stores, 6,000 employees and \$782 million in revenue in 2014, Tindell's conscious capitalism mantra has kept business strong since its inception in 1978. Source: <http://www.cnbc.com/2015/06/24/3-reasons-women-make-better-leaders-kip-tindell.html>. In MABFO microfinance programme 99% of beneficiaries are female. Female beneficiaries are taking loan for business doing well and becoming self-reliant, becoming a role model inspiring other women to earn to help support the man to sustain the family and even employing others to work for her. Women entrepreneurs are running *samites* (associations) for women as a leader and becoming very successful in their societies. These women are not only contributing to develop the country's economy but also helping the society to build strong ground for women so they can do many more than just taking care of their families. They are contributing to develop ideas for education of their children, earning as well as creating social awareness on health, hygiene and misconceptions. There are thousands of case studies in support of the mentioned statements. On the other hand men as a leader in these societies are not as much effective than a woman, because they lack in the part of empathy and affection towards women and children. Even there are enormous examples that men leaders are doing injustices to women and

children in their society, by having many marriages and spreading misconceptions about women's rights, women's status in the society, how they should dress etc.

3. Positive impacts in the society of women leaders:

- Women leaders are role model in the society of rural area. They are the inspiration for other women to come forward to earn for their family and take the lead.
- Women are successful in setting justice for women better than men because they understand the sufferings and feels the pain of a woman under oppression in our societies.

Recommendations:

- Create awareness on equality of man and women for working in the society to break the social stigma that women cannot be leaders. Genuine statements from the holy Al-Quran can be used to clear misconceptions among Muslims on suppressing women in our society. For example - Islam gives clear message for establishing genuine and complete equality in man and woman. The Holy Quran states: Allah has created all mankind from a single soul; and from it He created its mate (male & female) [4:1]. It also states that: Mankind, we have created you out of male and female [49:13]. According to the verse of the Quran, it is crystal clear that both man and women has got equal responsibility. Allah Almighty says: the believers, men and women, are close allies to one another, they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong [9:71]. Therefore, in family and social life men and women are not two separate entities rather both are equally responsible for family and socio-economic development. While in the regime of Prophet and Hazrat Omar, the importance of women participation in development and social activities were fully recognized. He had appointed Al-Shifa' bint Abdullah in a highly public position. As an educated woman she had taken leadership of teaching the women to read and write. Hafsa Bint Omar, the Prophet's wife was her student and later she had been appointed as Market Supervisor in Madinah (Al Khayat M H, 2003).
- Support women leaders when they are right. Worldwide experience clearly shows that providing a stronger role for women contributes to economic growth, it improves child survival and overall family health, and it reduces fertility, thus helping to slow population growth rates (Hulme D and Moore K, 2007).
- Increase investment (fund) on women development. Research has shown that investing in women offers the most effective means to improve health, nutrition, hygiene, and educational standards for families and consequently for the whole society (Hulme D and Moore K, 2007). Thus, a special support for women in both financial and non-financial services is essential.
- Ensure training for women for financial literacy, book keeping
- Create opportunity for women to take part in decision making process in family, business and political activities.
- Enhance knowledge of the market and increase access of women in the market
- Generate ideas to help develop women leaders like – low interest bank loan, tax rebate for women, free education for women, free/low cost treatment for women/children, quota in high position for women, child care/day care centers for children of working women
- Create working opportunities in areas where only man rule, like – women drivers, gym for women, etc

5. Conclusion

Both governments and NGOs should generate ideas to create congenial environment for women to come forward to take the lead in the society.

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About Author:

Sharmin Shobnom Joya, has been working in the development sector of Bangladesh for more than a decade. She has been working at Muslim Aid - A UK based international NGO since 2010. Currently, being the Coordinator of Resource Mobilization & Advocacy in Muslim Aid, she is contributing to the development of strategic and annual planning, annual and periodic reporting, documentation, case study writing, organizational due diligence and compliance monitoring, visibility, advocacy campaigning etc. She is representing the organization to the National Gender Working Group. Before, she worked in PRICE and Sisimpur (Sesame Street Bangladesh) Projects of USAID, and Huawei Technologies Ltd. She is well aware about the humanitarian principles, International code of conducts, Core Humanitarian Standards, different protocols, rules and regulations of development field. Her long time working experience in programme implementation, reporting-documentation, resource mobilization, advocacy and Human Resources Management (HRM) have provided her with practical hands-on experience to effectively contribute to the development field. She has completed MSS in Sociology & Anthropology and Professional MBA in HRM.