Socio-Economic Obstacles of Women Empowerment in Rural Bangladesh: A Study on Puthia Upazila of Rajshahi District

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Abstract

Women empowerment is the burning question not only Bangladesh but also all over the world. Precondition of proper social and economic development women empowerment is very much needed. But women are neglected in various sectors in Bangladesh. Only training and educational program can be empowered women properly. It is badly needed women empowerment to sound development. Women empowerment makes sure the development process. The present study mainly deals with the obstacles of women empowerment of Puthia Upazila under the district of Rajshahi. It reveals the real obstacles of women empowerment in the following indicators like; Family restriction, Socio-religious restriction and Socio-economic condition of the women in the study area. After collecting the data, the researcher found that 24% women are having restriction from their family to go to school, 30.40%women are getting victimized by early marriage, 53.60% guardians of the women are illiterate and 20% guardians do not have knowledge about importance of empowerment of women in the study area. The maximum respondents possess land between 01and 02 acres while a few numbers of the respondent (12.00%) possess 06 and above acres of land and 38.40% respondents have surplus income. On the other hand, 61.60% respondents do not have surplus income in the study area.

Keywords: Socio-economic obstacles, Women empowerment, Rajshahi district, Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

Bangladesh is a developing country with the predominant rural settings. Agriculture is the major economy and about 80 percent people live in the rural areas. Identically it is a newly independent country with along colonial and traditional heritage. The women work hard all day long in the domestic sphere and some times outside the home. In some cases, they even undertake assigned works of men in relation to the household division of labor; nevertheless, their labor is generally not recognized by the male members of the family as well as the large society. Therefore, traditional norms and values predominantly govern it overall social and cultural life. Like some third world countries Bangladesh has also patriarchal system in the family as well as in the larger society (Islam, 1977).consequently, the situation of women in such societies is quite worse in comparison to the situation of men. Such disparity between men and women in Bangladesh and many other third world countries papers the attention of scholars and policy makers to investigate the root causes as well as comparative situation analysis to micro and macro levels. Party between men and every sphere is a desirable situation and women empowerment is being conceived and propagated to achieve such goals. Thus the issue of women empowerment is coming to the front line in the development of Bangladesh and other third world countries. Traditional socio-cultural practices circumscribe women's opportunities in education, skill development, employment and participation in the overall development process. Women are also being desired from ideal point of view in the decision making process which is very important in the context balanced development of the country (Islam, 2006).Thus women empowerment becomes the key element in defined the process development in the third world countries. According the UNO is

pressing on women's rights. Women empowerment appears as one of the most pressing issues in the present world (Khan, 2006). The government of Bangladesh has formulated 'National Policy for Advancement of Women' and it has declared women's education as essential for national development (Sultana, 2008). If we think of a balance growth of our country women's empowerment is a must. From this point of view it is very important to study the nature of women in Bangladesh. In this study there will be a try to find out some obstacles of women empowerment in the proposed area. The empowering agencies for women are conceptualized by the category of GOs and NGOs programs. The central purpose of this study is to analyze the impact of women's empowerment in our society. In this context, the study has a broader field to search the obstacles of women empowerment in the aspects of Bangladesh.

2. Statement of the problem

Women empowerment can be considered as the transmission of the values and accumulated knowledge of a society. In this sense it is equivalent to what social scientists term socialization or enculturation. Children the Renaissances Florentines or the middle classes of Manhattan- are born without culture, molding their behavior in the ways of adulthood, and directing them towards their eventual role in the society (Akhter, 2008). The most primitive cultures there is often little formal learning. Little of what one would ordinary call school for classes or teachers; instead, frequently, the entire environment and all activities are viewed as school and classes, and many or all adult act as teachers. As societies grow more complex, however the quantity of knowledge to be passed on the generation to the next becomes more than anyone can know; and hence there must involve more selective and efficient means of cultural transmission. The outcome is formal education– the school and specialist called the teacher (Rahaman, 2007). As society become over more complex and schools become evermore institutionalized, educational experience becomes less directly related to daily life. Less a matter of showing and learning in the contest of the workday world, and more abstracted from practice, more a matter of distilling, telling and learning thing out of context. This concentration of learning in a formal atmosphere allows children to learn far more of their culture than they are able to do by merely observing and imitating. As society gradually attaches more and more importance to education and women empowerment, it also tries to formulate overall objective, content, organization, and strategies of education. Literature becomes laden with advice on the rearing of the younger generation (Satter, 2005). In short; there develop philosophies and theories of education. This study deals with the evaluation of the formal teaching of knowledge and skills in all parts of the world and with the various philosophies that have inspired the resulting diverse system. Women who form almost half of the population in Bangladesh, majority of them are neglected and are denied from their right in every sphere of society (Begum, 2007).The idea of gender equality has emerged base on human rights. Human right is to be seen as pivot measure for any country. Human development report of UNDP shows that third world countries are very much gender-sensitive (Jahangir and Khan, 2009). At present, women empowerment movement plays a vital role all over the world. Plan for Action to women empowerment has been taken in Beijing Conference. Now the slogan 'No development without women' is heard everywhere (Rafiqul, 2009).Thus women education and development becomes synonymous in our country. This study has explored the agencies and factors which play effective role to women empowerment and discuss the nature of obstacles women empowerment in our country. The study highlights the basic education and training of women and ways and means to promote and empower their status in the society.

3. Rationale of the Study

In rural areas of Bangladesh, numbers of women do not get chance to be enrolled at the school and neglected. But those who get chance for enrolment can hardly continue their education due to early marriage which is associated with the socio-economic factors of the women family. So far this issue has reached some researcher's knowledge; there are no sufficient and significant studies on women education regarding dropout of the girl students from the primary as well as the secondary schools too in rural areas of Bangladesh. In this circumstance, this research work is a pioneer one. Consequently, the findings of this study will be able to contribute to the knowledge of planners, policy makers, curriculum planners, and administrators to chalk out an appropriate, meaningful and realistic policy to prevent the early marriage as well as dropout of the girls students from the primary and secondary level

in the rural areas of Bangladesh and which ultimately help to involve them in development program with the mainstream of population.

4. Operational Definitions

4.1 Obstacles

Obstacles mean something that control one's movement and keep him or her apart from progress. In this study obstacles refer to impediments which are responsible for making difficulties in the way of women empowerment.

4.2 Women

Encyclopedia Britannica defines women as; women are the plural form of noun woman. It is a common noun of the opposite sex of male, begetting issues (children). In the present study, by women we mean the adult female population of the country, above 18 years old, having the write to vote and eligible to contest election. They are a large portion of total population and usually deprived of proper education, training and empowerment the national as well as the local level.

4.3 Women Empowerment

Empowerment means giving power and authority and women empowerment we mean giving power and authority to the women. The process of empowerment requires transformation of structure of sub ordinance, control over material and intellectual recourses, gaining decisions, making authority and reduction of gender inequality. This requires that women must recognize their strategic needs, their social position and understand how coercive it is. The women's bargaining capacity, reduce violence against women and make them gain more influence over decision making.

5. Objectives of the Study

Every study has to undertake a plan preparation with some objectives. The objectives of this study are:

  a) To find out the obstacles of women empowerment in rural Bangladesh;

  b) To know the socio-economic condition and decision making power of rural women in Bangladesh;

  c) To know the how education and training play the vital role of women empowerment in rural Bangladesh.

6. Methodology

Social survey method has been adopted to collect basic information of the study. The data have been collected from both the primary and secondary sources. Primary data have been collected from three villages, Varora, Biralda and Nandanpur of Puthia Upazila under the District of Rajshahi through open and close ended questionnaires and interviews of the respondents 125 literate and 125 illiterate women in the study area. In this study, the secondary sources have been included various books, articles, journals, historical accounts, officially published data, research work of other researchers, public

documents and electronic sources. Puthia upazila of Rajshahi District has purposively been selected as a study area for the study. In the context of collecting data for this research, sample has been taken randomly and data have been collected from the respondents through questionnaire. The sample size of the study is 250. After collecting data and information from the study area through questionnaire and interview these have been carefully reviewed, classified, tabulated and analyzed. Collected data have been presented in tables.

7. The Significance of Women Empowerment in Development Process

There is no alternative of women empowerment in the world to establish equality, development and peace. So, education and training have been remarked as total felicitation and base of development for women's social and professional in Nairobi forward looking strategies (NFLS) (Jahanara, 2002). Education is the strongest medium of social activity in creating new dimension of views towards women and in adopting the partnership in different activities and in expressing her thought. If the working opportunity is done by enhancing the rate of women education, the socio-economic condition of that country is possible to increase.

a. Having decision-making power of their own.

b. Having access to information and resoures for taking proper decision.

c. Having a range of option from which you can make choices.

d. Ability to exersise assertivenees in collective decision making.

e. Having positive thinking on the ability to make change.

f. Ability to learn skills for improving their personal or group power.

g. Ability to change other's perceptions by democratic means and

h. Increasing their positive self-image and overcoming stigma.

Besides the mentioned causes, the importance of women empowerment is uppermost in declining the inequality between men and women and the attainment of self dependency of women economically in today's Bangladesh. So, in NFLS, it is proposed that special measure must be adopted to amend women empowerment and to make her with the reality of the developing world. One of the major conditions of socio-economic development is empowerment of women. In the constitution of Bangladesh it has been received specially. About half of the total population is women. To keep the women apart from education and training means to deprive of this huge population from their own right for which the flow of social development is hampered also. As, half of the total population is women, in all the levels of Bangladesh "Education for all" program has been launched to remove poverty, malnutrition and so on (Hussain, 1985). From the remote part, the rate of education, training and empowerment in Bangladesh is low and comparatively it is low for the women. In spite of skipping up the scope of dignity for women, the importance of women education and training can't be ignored in the field of development.

8. Obstacles of Women Empowerment in the Study Area

There are some obstacles of women empowerment in the study area. Women are deprived of getting proper empower mental facilities all over the Bangladesh. In the study area, the researcher has tried to find out the main obstacles of women empowerment. The following obstacles were found against women empowerment.

8.1 Family Restriction

Most of the families in the study area are Muslim. So, it is restricted for the girls to go to school. The table shows the family restriction for the girls students.

Table—8.1: Family Restriction Status in the Study Area

Total respondents	Restricted families	Number of victims	Rate of adolescent from higher studies
250	60(24%)	70	40%

The table shows that 24% family having restriction for the girls to go to school under the study. The rate of victim of family restriction is 40%. So the higher education was threatened by the family restriction.

8.2 Religious Legislation

In the study area some girls are victim of religious legislation as well as social legislation. Some guardians consider that girls do not need higher education. So, women were victimized of social and religious legislation and their study had been stopped. The table below has shown the picture of the religious legislation of the study area.

Table—8.2: Religious Legislation in the Study Area

Total respondents	Number of victim of Religious legislation	Percentage of victim
250	55	17.60

The table shows that 17.60% girls could not achieved higher education for the religious legislation in the study area. Some guardians do not understand the real meaning of the religion. So, they stopped the study of their girls.

8.3 Early Marriage

Early marriage is one of the major obstacles in the study area for women empowerment and education. Guardians think that girls are their burden. So, they always try to marry them. The following table shows the early marriage status of the women in the study area.

Table—8.3: The Status of Early Marriage

Total respondents	No. of victim of early marriage	Percentage of victim
250	75	30.40

The table shows that 30.40% girls are victimized in early marriage in the study area. So, they are deprived of higher education and it has been stopped their education forever for early marriage.

8.4 Illiterate Guardians

The study has found that some guardian are illiterate as well as ignorant and for this reason some guardians are not willing to send their female child to the educational institutions. The following table will depict the painful picture of the situation of illiteracy of the guardians in the study area.

Table—8.4: Status of Illiterate of the Guardians

Total respondents	No. of Illiterate guardians	Percentage of Illiterate guardians
250	134	53.60

The table shows that 53.60% guardians of the women are illiterate. They have no knowledge about the importance of education and no knowledge about the development of women empowerment. So, most of the women remain uneducated in the study area.

8.5 Lack of Social Awareness

Though some NGOs are arranging awareness programs among the guardians, they, in fact, are not getting aware of sending their female children to the educational institutions. They think that women education is not essential. So, for their lack of awareness some women still remain uneducated in the study area. The table shows the lack of awareness of the guardians in the study area.

Table—8.5: Lack of Social Awareness of the Guardians.

Total respondents	No. of guardian who have not awareness of education	Percentage of guardians who have not awareness of education
250	35	14.80

The table shows that 14.80% guardians have no knowledge about the importance of education and empowerment in the study area. They are not aware about the role of their female child in building up the nation or making the country develop. So, for the lack of awareness about the importance of education women in the study area have been deprived of getting higher education.

9. Socio-economic Obstacles of Women Empowerment in the Study Area

Socio-economic condition plays an important role in the expansion of empowerment. The socio-economic conditions of the respondents of the study area have been shown in the following tables.

9.1 Family Structure

The following table reflects the family structure of the women in the study area.

Table-9.1: Family Structure of the Respondents

Family structure	No. of respondents (%)	
Extended	47	18.80
Joint	69	27.60
Nuclear	134	53.60
Total respondents	250	

The table shows that in the study area there are 18.80%, 27.60% and 53.60% families residing in extended, joint and nuclear families. The average rate of nuclear families was found more than the number of joint and extended families in the study area.

9.2 Religious Status

The religious status of the respondents has been shown in the following table.

Table—9.2: Religious Status of the Respondents

Religion	No. of respondents (%)	
Islam	192	76.80
Hindu	39	15.60
Buddhist	00	00
Christian	00	00
Tribal/other	19	7.60
Total respondents	250	100

The table shows that the percentages of Muslim, Hindu and others are 76.80%, 15.60% and 7.60% among the respondents in the study area. The percentage of Muslim was recorded higher than other religions.

9.3 Job Status of the Respondents

The following table shows the job status of the respondents.

Table—9.3: Job status of the respondents.

Total respondents	Having job (%)	Not having job (%)
250(100%)	42(16.80)	208 (83.20)

The table shows that only 16.80% respondents have job but 83.20% respondents did not have any job in the study area.

10. Economic Status of the Respondents in the Study Area

Economic development is the pre-requisite of sorts of development. It is supposed to be considered that women lead their life in economic hardship as they are not engaged in earning activities. They are engaged in doing some household works.

In calculating the economic status of respondents some parameters have been taken into consideration. These are land, farm, pond, garden etc.

10.1 Land Property

Land property of the respondents is given in the following table.

Table—10.1: land Property of the Respondents

Amounts of land (Acres)	No. of respondents (%)	
01—02	108	43.20
03—04	63	25.20
05—06	49	19.60
06—Above	30	12.00
Total respondents	250	(100%)

The table shows that each and every respondent possess at least one acre of land property. The maximum respondents hold the land between 01 and 02 acres, while a few (12.00%) holding 06 and above.

10.2 Income Earning Status

The following table has shown the income-earning status of the respondents.

Table—10.2: Total Income Earnings of the Respondents

Income sources	Average monthly income(TK.)
Salary	1,800
Land and farms	2,000
Gardening	250
Cattle	400
Business	1,200
Total	6,550
Total respondents	250(100%)

The table shows that total monthly average income of the respondents was Tk. 6,550.

10.3 The Expenditure Status of the Respondents

The table shows the average monthly expenditure of the respondents in the study area.

Table—10.3: Expenditure Status of the Respondents.

Heads of the expenditure	Monthly average expenditure(Tk.)
Fooding purpose	4,000
Clothing	3,50
Education	2,000
Health care	600
Others	400
Total	7,350
Total respondents	250 (100%)

The table shows that total monthly average expenditure of respondents was Tk. 7,350. Other heads of expenditure include expenditure in social festival including marriage ceremony, home repairing, recreation, hospitality etc.

10.4 Surplus

The table shows the surplus income of the respondents in the study area.

Table—10.4: Surplus Income of the Respondents (Monthly)

Surplus	Average monthly surplus (%)	
Having surplus	96	38.40
Having no surplus	154	61.60
Total respondents	250	100

The table shows that 38.40% respondents have surplus income. On the other hand, 61.60% respondents do not have surplus income in the study area.

10.5 Surplus Amount of the Respondents

Surplus amount of the respondents is given in the following table.

Table—10.5: Amount of Surplus (Monthly)

Surplus amount (TK.)	No. of respondents (%)	
5,00-1,000	83	33.20
1,001-1,500	44	17.60
1,500-2,000	52	20.80
2001-2500	23	9.20
2501-3 ,000	27	10.80
3001-Above	21	8.40
Total	250	100

The table shows that maximum respondents have surplus between 5, 00 and 1,000 and a few number of respondents 8.40% have Tk. 3,001 surplus in the study area.

11. Result

Conducting the study some obstacles of women empowerment have been found in the study area. There are some causes responsible for women empowerment. In this study it has been found that women are not self independent and able to carry out their study for not being proper conscious of the

importance of education made by of their guardians. Women are neglected in the study area. The enrollment ratio between male and female students is far difference. Dropout rate of the female students is higher than male students in the study area. Only 40% poor female students have the opportunity of getting stipend and training though 95% students do not have ability to manage educational expenses. It should be extended within very short time so that enrollment ratio can be increased. The results of the study show that women education and empowerment in the rural areas is lower then the urban areas. In regard to the role played by women education results show that there are many obstacles in women empowerment such as, shortage of women educational institutions, family restriction, religious legislations, early marriage, illiterate guardians etc. It has been found in the present study that early marriage is one of the major factors for dropping out of the girls from the educational institutions. It burns and destroys the life of girls. As a result many women are depriving of their empowerment process.

12. Some Recommendations of Women Empowerment in Rural Bangladesh

Having discussed the concept obstacles of women empowerment in relation to women a few recommendations may be suggested for improving the lot of women in this respect:

1. Women should be involved in income generating activities.

2. To increase the expenditure of women education and training.

3. To innovate awareness building courses for women.

4. To create practical training facilities for women.

5. To increase women participation in health, education, agriculture, industry and development sectors.

6. To increase the expenditure of women training and education.

7. To ensure the participation of women in local and international forums.

8. To ensure the security of women along with the removal of violence against them.

9. To ensure equal partnership of both male and female in empowerment.

13. Conclusion

In conclusion we can not say that a magnificent success has been achieved in the development sector of Bangladesh through the spread of women education. But the position of women has changed a bit. Comparatively the family obstacles have also lessened. Now-a-days, women are working at industries especially women feel interest gradually by achieving education. It must be noted that, poverty has a positive influence to break down the social obstacles for women and to take part in economic activities in our society. If the women from poor families become income generated, the family will benefit. The real conditions influence social values and norms very much. Necessity can do what statement can't. This necessity is necessary for the progress of women in Bangladesh. So, it seems to be remained static. The participation of women in jobs is attracting. Garment factory that is built with the labor of women has become the main source of foreign currency. Women are contributing their own in the development activities of Bangladesh. For the development of human resource, women empowerment and education has a great role and it has been cleared from the previous discussion. The birth control system has been innovated in the sixties in Bangladesh but it was not hopeful enough due to lack of women awareness. In the context of Bangladesh, half of the total population is women and most of them are not involved in the development activities and they are responsible for conducting the household chores specially rearing children. Because, children are the future of a nation and a child never becomes literate if the mother is not literate. Women can play a vital role not only in the family

level, but also in the national level, if the women are made properly educated and empowered. Through educated a woman can be conscious of her position in the society. So, if development comes through making women community to human resource, women must be made trained and educated.

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