

# Women in smes, politics and corporate bangladesh



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## A New Outlook of Women in SMEs, Politics and Corporate Bangladesh.

### Abstract

In this paper, I will explore the status of women in corporations, politics and various other industries in Bangladesh. In exploring the multitudinous breakthroughs that women have achieved overtime, I will provide empirical examples of their journey to the leadership positions in Bangladesh. I will present the traditional socio-economic and cultural background that create opportunities but also pose several challenges in the daily lives of women from different backgrounds in Bangladesh. In addition, I will provide my own experience on working with women empowerment issues in Bangladesh in my delegation at the UN for the Commission on the Status of Women. The paper will follow a background and examine three key areas of the roles played by women in Bangladesh i) Leadership in small and medium enterprises ii) Political Leadership iii) Corporate Leadership.

### Introduction

Since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, working women have for the past few decades faced challenges that are becoming less and less prevalent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although women in politics, advocacy and the education industry have shown advancement in representation and leadership, much of the corporate world is still majority male dominant. Bangladesh is a muslim majority nation, with cultural diversity and have a male to female sex ratio of 0.91[4]. Given the number of women outnumbering men in the labor market, the labor force participation rate of women remains low; around 60% compared to the male participation rate of 84% according to

<https://assignbuster.com/women-in-smes-politics-and-corporate-bangladesh/>

the World Bank[5]. The gender imbalance in the workforce speak about the lower income-earnings of working women especially in small and medium enterprises. The government has also mendate several new laws to improve the working conditions of women in Bangladesh. In the following paragraphs, I will breakdown the prospects, advancements and challenges that women in SMEs, Politics and Corporations experience in their daily lives.

### Women in small and medium enterprises

Microfinance has been an area of success in a third world nation like Bangladesh in empowering women in business in small and medium enterprises. Since the 1980s, microfinance was coined by Nobel Laureate Mohammed Yunus who established The Grameen Bank to empower women from rural and low income-earning families. There have been long-standing debates as to whether microfinance has been successful in boosting women representation in small and medium business ownership. The environment for small business in Bangladesh is incommodious for women in rural areas due to several economic and management factors of starting small enterprises as well as intra-household problems. My own experience from my interviews with several women entrepreneurs have indicated the same problems on average. A few of the problems that stand out include intra-household earnings decisions made by the man of the house. Women in most rural areas who start-up SMEs are expected to share their income with their husbands despite their lack of support. This is common in extremely impoverished areas where household income needs to be shared by both parents. Women's roles as mothers and wives drives a social stigma that

deters them from pursuing ambitious goals as business leaders in smaller communities in Bangladesh.

In addition to household problems, SMEs demand a pursuable business plan which is a time consuming process and requires expensive capital investments that these aspiring women entrepreneurs cannot afford through microfinance loans. Lack of accessibility in terms of networks and connections to people and organizations are also another reason. Thus most women lacking this expertise find it difficult pursue their goals to become SME entrepreneurs. Through my delegation at the commission on the status of women, I have represented the challenges women entrepreneurs of microenterprises in Bangladesh, who are subjected to these obstacles and more. My goal has been to try and secure resources and opportunities that can be accessible to women entrepreneurs, such as better vocational training resources both online and on the job, sponsorship of their start-ups from bigger organizations and provision of mentorship services. Most of my research shows that these differences arise due to geographical locations; bigger cities compared to villages due to competition and lack of industry information. Furthermore, certain industries are naturally challenging for women entrepreneurs to access since they are male dominant, such as shrimp businesses[6]. Overall, there is a growing number of women entrepreneurs in small and medium sized enterprises in Bangladesh, but some of the traditional challenges are still prevalent and are being addressed overtime.

Women in Politics

Bangladesh has been ranked as the 8<sup>th</sup> in political empowerment of women according to the Global Gender Gap Report in 2012. This is because of the two major political parties that are led by women leaders and the current prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, is the party leader and daughter of the founding father of Bangladesh. Bangladesh has been commended with regards to the number of women representation in the parliament at both the local and the national level. While at an international level Bangladesh has been given the political empowerment status, at the national level we notice a huge difference in the representation of ministers at the prime minister's cabinet. In the 42 cabinet chamber of the prime minister, only three women ministers are assigned ministry leadership positions[7]. Moreover, women ministers are assigned 'feminine' ministries such as education and agriculture, compared to ministries such as finance and trade, considered more "male dominant" 7 .

Political participation has also been influenced by financially influential incumbents who have occupied more important ministries, most of whom are men. The representation is also based on family relations and political networks that are biased towards men at the majority level. Female leadership in political institutions in Bangladesh is also based on a quota system, and The Bangladesh Election Commission has mandated a 33% reservation for women in executive committee positions[8]. Thus there have been significant movements in empowering women in the field of politics, but much of the ongoing debate still shows that political representation of women are biased in terms of incumbent party connections and elite backgrounds rather than qualifications that many educated women bring to

the positions. It is argued that lawmakers are aware of the need for female policy makers in Bangladesh given the number of females outnumbering males and the need to address women's issues at the grassroots level in the nation. In my own experience for instance, my grandmother's position as a member of the parliament in the past has given me exposure to how she addressed women's issues in politics and the steps she took to bring propose amendments to women's career prospects in politics. All these factors are combined, Bangladesh has been known for advancing women empowerment in the government sector, especially in politics compared to any other sectors or industries.

### Women in Corporate Bangladesh

At the corporate level, women leadership is substantially minimal in Bangladesh. The role of women in Bangladesh has been associated as mothers, wives, daughters etc., and thus these expectations drive results in the number of women pursuing careers in demanding executive positions of corporations. Women have traditionally maintained executive positions in small privately-owned businesses such as beauty salons and boutiques that are considered more suited for women from upper middle class families. Moreover, companies have a higher gender-gap although pay-gap has fallen by 31% over the last decade in Bangladesh[9]. Recently, however, women leadership representations in corporations and startups have become more prevalent. Women entrepreneurs are challenging the general status quo of business leadership in tech startups as well other privately owned businesses in areas that are predominantly male owned. A few name sot

mention would be: Samira Zuberi Himika, Sabila Enun and Selima Ahmad[10].

Samira Zuberi is the CEO of the start-up “ Team Engine” which is a “ for profit” social good company working toward empowering SMEs and other socially excluded groups, an idea and cause unique to the traditional Bangladeshi businesses. Sabila Enun’s start-up is a unique tech-startup providing technology solutions to web and mobile platforms which are essential in the flow of clear technical communications. Selima Ahmad, is the president and founder of the Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BWCCI), which promotes initiatives of women in business in Bangladesh. Selima has been a successful businesswoman in the past and thus formed this platform solely to advance the interests of women entrepreneurs. These are a few names to mention, but the number of women entrepreneurs at the more corporate level are also taking initiatives to start their own companies in Bangladesh and break stereotypical outlook on women’s career aspirations.

In conclusion, women leadership and career advancement in Bangladesh has been more prevalent in Politics and other areas in science and research, such as the medical field. Women have earned far more reputation as doctors, teachers, professors, nurses, political leaders than those who take the courage and the risk to have their own startups. In the past women have been discouraged to undertake “ risky” careers because of the amount of time they also have to dedicate to their families compared to men, and also because of the social stigma associated with women’s participation in male dominated fields. This outlook is drastically changing at both the local and <https://assignbuster.com/women-in-smes-politics-and-corporate-bangladesh/>

national level in Bangladesh as I discussed above, and it is being more and more possible with the societal acceptance and examples created by the rising brave and ambitious women in Bangladesh.

## References

---

[4]Source : CIA World Fact Book: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2018.html>

[5]Gender Data Portal, The World Bank : <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/country/bangladesh>

[6]" Where are Bangladesh's Business Women?" The Asia Foundation.

<http://asiafoundation.org/2011/06/08/where-are-bangladeshs-businesswomen/>

[7]Women's empowerment in Bangladesh: a secret of progress. [http://www.risingbd.com/english/Womens\\_empowerment\\_in\\_Bangladesh\\_A\\_secret\\_of\\_progress/11937](http://www.risingbd.com/english/Womens_empowerment_in_Bangladesh_A_secret_of_progress/11937)

[8]" Are Bangladeshi Women Politicians Tokens in the Political Arena?" The

Asia Foundation. <http://asiafoundation.org/2012/06/27/are-bangladeshi-women-politicians-tokens-in-the-political-arena/>

[9]Salma Ahmed, Mark McGillivray, Human Capital, Discrimination, and the

Gender Wage Gap in Bangladesh. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X14003283>

<https://assignbuster.com/women-in-smes-politics-and-corporate-bangladesh/>



[10]Women’s Day Special: Stories of 6 Bangladeshi Women Entrepreneurs who are inspiring change. <http://futurestartup.com/2014/03/08/stories-of-6-bangladeshi-woman-entrepreneurs-inspiring-change/>