

The Glass Ceiling As A Threat to Gender Equality in Bangladesh: Some Empirical Suggestions to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract: In a society, the gender gap exists in every corner and it is more visible in the workplace. So, it is high time to stimulate gender equality in the workplace. In the workplace and home, men and women work together which also have become more similar. However, the glass ceiling delusion toward the women haunts and draws the margin of discrimination that influences their relative salary. This paper aims to show the current Bangladeshi; basically, the working environment of Chittagong City where such a glass ceiling approach threatens the existence of women in the workplace with particular reference to the Chittagong commercial area and finding out the possible ways and means is the motto of this paper. It is focused on the constitutional frameworks and essence of the Sustainable Development Goals to achieve Sustainable Development Goals through constitutional implementation. This paper will show the main reasons that instigate the glass ceiling and the other discrimination by conducting some focused group interviews. It is high time to focus on the family and social protraction to stop the growth of the glass ceiling. Although women have progressed in the business and job sector, they continue to be shut out of the higher-level economic decision-making process to punch the "glass ceiling".

Keywords: *Glass Ceiling; Gender Discrimination; Sustainable development.*

Introduction: Bangladesh is one of the next eleventh emerging economies in the world economy [1]. It has a population of about 162.7 where numbers of females 81.3 million and men are 81.4 million [2]. The male and female ratio is 102.25 males per 100 females [3]. Despite the vast female population, women tend to work in low-skilled jobs due to their relatively poor educational qualification, technical skill, and training, which vary across the country and their diverse cultures [4]. Now it is tough for modern women to adjust to daily hours of work. This has given rise to the so-called 'double burden of being a worker, a career, or a businesswoman in addition to attending to family needs. Currently, women are moving to various jobs, but still, they remain in a stumpy position. This is because, at the end of the day, the family burden lies to her as our male family members are reluctant to take family responsibilities. This paper has tried to present the current barriers of women in high-level jobs and why they can't achieve the top position. In this regard, some primary and secondary data has been used. Those secondary has been collected data from various government and private statistics. But due to the corona pandemic, these are not updated at all. This work is focused on the current position of women in managerial jobs which also mentioned the current position of women in the job sector in Chittagong city.

Fundamentals of Women Empowerment and Gender Equality: Empowerment is an ability to enhance self-confidence and internal strength, which helps to realize human rights. It refers to the increase of multidimensional qualities of individuals relating to spiritual, political, social, educational, and economic strength based on gender issues. Women's empowerment emphasizes women's freedom of choice and power to control their own lives. Without the participation of women in all spheres of life, the state cannot achieve comprehensive sustainable social and economic development [5].

The labour force survey in Bangladesh shows that currently, we have a 63.5 million economically active population where only 20.0 million participated in the direct labour force, and 34.9 million are not part of the economic activities [6]. And the women's unemployment rate in 2020 is now about 6.2%, while male unemployment will increase to 3.4% [7]. These indicators focused on the current women's economic activities in the formal sector.

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On the other hand, Gender equality means the quality or state of being equal that is the first and foremost right of a human being. Women are entitled to live in dignity and freedom from want and fear, where equity implies fair and impartial justice for them [8]. Men and women both are equally important for a society irrespective of gender.

Definition of Sustainable Development Goals: To understand sustainable development, it is to be focused on the world Survey report of 1987. This landmark report of the World Commission on Environment and Development defines Sustainable development as, "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" [9]. The Sustainable Development Goals, officially known as transforming the world, is an intergovernmental set of aspirations to achieve some mission within 2030. On 19 July 2014, the General Assembly of UN forwarded a proposal for the Sustainable Development Goals contained 17 goals with 169 targets covering a broad range of sustainable development issues. These included ending poverty and hunger, improving health and education, making cities more sustainable, combating climate change, and protecting oceans and forests [10].

The Glass Ceiling Approach: The glass ceiling is a concept that refers to the barriers faced by women who attempt or aspire to attain senior positions (as well as higher salary levels) in corporations, government, education, and non-profit organizations.

It also refers to racial and ethnic minorities [11]. The term 'glass ceiling' was initially coined in an article written by Carol Hymowitz and Timothy Schellhardt on 24 March in the 1986th edition of the Wall Street Journal [12]. It refers to the points that keep women from achieving power and success equal to their male colleagues [13]. It is noteworthy that the number of women in lower and mid-level management positions has increased dramatically, while the number of women reaching top management positions or climbing up the organizational ladder has remained relatively small.

It can visualize the constant aspects of the glass ceiling through evidence collected from different secondary sources.

Evidence on the glass ceiling: It can visualize the constant aspects of the glass ceiling through evidence collected from different secondary sources.

Women Participation in the highest position of Civil Service [14]: Women's participation in the job sector is still less than men's participation. It is observed from the Gender statistics from Bangladesh 2018 that in 2014, the sex ratio of women to men was 36.9%. Such proportion was 37.7% in 2015 and 37.1% in 2017. Notably, the women ratio was the highest in departments/directorates (47.4%) and lowest in autonomous bodies/corporations (10.1%) in 2014. In 2015 and 2017, the ratio of women to men was the highest in departments/directorates and the lowest in divisional and deputy commissioners' offices.

Participation of women in Ministries, Directorates, Autonomous Bodies, and Corporations [14]: It is seen from Gender Statistics from Bangladesh 2018 that in ministries/ divisions, the number of Class-1 women Officers was 19.5% in 2014 increased to 20.3% in 2015 and 20.9% in 2017. In ministries/ divisions, the percentage of women Class 2 officers was 17.3% in 2014, 17.4% in 2015, and 17.8% in 2017. In departments/ directorates the percentage of class-1 women officers was 19.8% in 2014, 20.0% in 2015 and 22.3% in 2017. Notably, the percentage of class-2 women officers was more than half compared to Class 1 officers in Department/ Directorates. It was 53.2% in 2014, 54.4% in 2015 and 43.4% in 2017. The percentage of women Class-1 officers in Divisional and Deputy Commissioner's office was 21.8% in 2014, 23.1% in 2015, and 27.0% in 2017. Such percentages for autonomous bodies and corporations was 13.5% in 2014, 14.5% in 2015, and 15.8% in 2017.

Participation of women in police force: According to the Gender Statistics 2018 with reference to police headquarter the percentage of class -1 women officer in police force was 0.1% in 2011, 0.1% in 2012, 0.2% in 2013, 0.2% in 2014, 0.2% in 2015, 0.2% in 2016 and 0.2% in 2017[14]. It is praiseworthy that the number of class-1 women officers had increased in the police force over the years. The percentage of class-2 women officers and other employees had also increased with some variation in some years.

Participation of women as Officers and Staff in Supreme Court (Appellate and High Court Division): According to the BBS report the number of officers in Supreme Court Appellate Division by sex from 2014 to 17 was only 5.3% with no class – 1 or class-2 officer. This percentage was the same for 2015 and 2017, with no class-1 and class -2 officers in the same division. In the Supreme court High Court Division, the percentage of class-1 and class-2 women officers in 2014 were 23.1% and 8.3%, respectively [14]. The percentage of class-1 and class-2 women officers remain the same in 2015 and 2017. The overall rate of women officers in 2015 and 2017 was 12.2%.

Participation of women in Election: The number of women in general seats is a negligible portion of the total number of seats in the third parliament mentioned in the BBS report. Only five women were elected, which come down to 4 in the fourth parliament election. Although the number of women elected in general seats was 8 in the 7th parliament election, the number declined to 7 in the 8th election. That is, women's participation in the parliament election for general seats has fluctuated in different periods. In the 9th parliament election, the total number of elected women was 21, and in the 10th parliament election, it rose to 23. In the first parliament, the number of reserved seats for women was only 15, which was 4.8%. In the 10th parliament, the number of reserved seats for women was 50, and the total number of women in parliament, including general seats, was 73, and the percentage was 20.9% [14].

The Current Condition of Women at Work in Bangladesh: Although experienced improvements in the overall score, Bangladesh is still ranked low, falling below the global average in economic participation and opportunity. According to the report of the Center for Policy Dialogue (CPD), women in Bangladesh are also engaged in low-paid jobs compared to men. According to their official statistics, though average women earn about 94 per cent of what men earn, it varies across sectors. Women are primarily accompanied in informal sectors that comprise the significant share of female employment, about 89 per cent [15]. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2020, in 2017, the total number of employed people in Bangladesh stood at 63.7 million, of which 28.4% or 18.1 million were women, and 71.7% or 45.7 million were males. A report of The Daily Newspaper Dhaka Tribune on their report mentioned that the total workforce was 66.6 million, of which nearly 71% or 47.2 million are male, while only 29.1% are women. Male employment has seen a 25.44% rise, reaching 21.2 million workers, while the industry sector witnessed a 52.11% increase, reaching 10.8 million workers [9].

Bangladesh closed 72.6% of its overall gender gap and obtained 50th position out of 153 countries globally, the WEF said in its report titled 'Global Gender Gap Report 2020' [16]. There are some positive sides also; it is the only country in the world where women have had a longer tenure than men at the helm of the state over the past 50 years. But there are only 8% of women in the cabinet and only 20% in the parliament [17].

Participation of Women in the Higher Positions in Prospects of Chittagong City-Findings and Analysis: As an author, some primary data have been collected from various institutions and organizations within the Chittagong City Corporations for envisaging the present glass ceiling approach and gathered data From 12 multiple institutions and organizations. This data has been collected by questioner survey. Where it is found only 51 female job holders against 229 male colleagues. It was frustrating that, during data collection, no woman is found as chief of her department. It is too mentionable that the number of female service holders is only 2 or 1 in some organizations where the male job holder was 18 to 13. Some barriers are pointed which hinder a female to reach the higher levels of their jobs. Interestingly they are oppressed and have to face bullying in their families as well as in the workplace. Most of the women left the job in Chittagong cities when their carrier is in the pick. They have revealed some family issues also. The discrimination is clear between male and female participation rates in the workplace in Chittagong city.

The Sustainable Development Goals Approaching Women in the Context of Bangladesh: The concept of women's empowerment and career development barriers are the main obstacles to sustainable development which have been increasingly recognized. A mentionable number of international norms and agreements, including principle 20 of the Rio Declaration [18] adopted in 1992. The main objects to adopt this declaration are to ensure the participation of women and make them essential to achieving sustainable development. Later on in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action [19] adopted by the Member States in 1995, governments were called upon to

integrate gender concerns and perspectives into policies and programs for achieving sustainable development. But the government of every country was failed to achieve the target and finally, in 2015, on 25th September, the General Assembly of the UN adopted 17 goals and 169 targets [10] where the following goals are directly related to women empowerment as well as glass ceiling approaches.

Goal 1: Ending poverty and hunger: It is essential to recognize the formal and informal works of the female members of the family to remove poverty from a family and a state. Without their direct participation directly in economic activities and decision making in a family, it is not possible to achieve the goal.

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls: Bangladesh is a fast-growing, economically developing country. It will be tough for us to achieve mainstream advancement without half of the population, which few believe possible only because they are women.

Goal 10: Reducing inequality: Per capita income for men is much higher than that of women causing huge income inequality. Women are frequently discouraged from participating in business, open activities reducing income for them. Most of the garment industry workers are women who are poorly paid compared to their male colleagues only because they are female.

Goal 16: Peace Justice and vital institutions: A strong institutional justice and good governance ensure women's working environment. Where she can raise her voice in contradiction of the injustice towards her. Most of the women cannot make any approaches against the unfairness against her. There must be a complaint cell in every organization and enforcement of law and justice against any harassment of women in the workplace. This justice will also encourage women's participation in the workforce, causing reduced gender inequality.

The government of Bangladesh is trying its level best to achieve these goals. The government has already implemented various policies and regulations to assure participation of women in mainstream works, which are as follows:

Increasing Participation of Women in Education: Participation of women in various decision-making processes is gradually implemented in governmental policies. That's why the government initiated mandatory school, stopped child marriage, scholarship system for women etc. Though the concept of women emerging to us in the current time but the importance of that was understood by the great philosopher Rousseau and Plot at an earlier age. Plato has emphasized the education of boys and girls in his writings which was published during his lifetime (427 BC-347 BC) [20]. Rousseau, another social engineer, has also indicated female education as the pleasure of men [21]. It is believed that educating a woman means educating the whole family. Education is a cornerstone of women's empowerment. An educated woman can benefit the entire society, so the government has incorporated female education policies as primary, secondary, and tertiary.

Some Policies of the Government towards Sustainable Development:

For accelerating female education and participation in the nation's development, the Government of Bangladesh has already taken huge initiatives. Several national and international laws and regulations have been formulated and adopted for gender objectives and gender policies concerning education, equality, women empowerment, and work opportunities to achieve sustainable development goals. Some initiatives of the Bangladesh government are as follows-

National Instruments of Bangladesh Government: Bangladesh government takes various necessary steps in this regards. Some of them are as follows:

Eighth Five-Year Plan (2020-2025): The title of the 8FYP is Promoting Prosperity and Fostering Inclusiveness", which focuses on a pro-poor growth strategy. It is aimed to remove the poverty of women and ensure their participation in the economy as well as the decision making of the family and politics.

National Policy for the Advancement of Women: In 1997 the policy was adopted in the commitments to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in all spheres promoting women equality in areas of education and training, health and nutrition, housing and shelter, politics and administration. And our government is still trying to adopt the policies.

National Action Plan (NAP): Prevention, Participation and Protection are the main objectives of Nap 2021. It aimed to prevent conflict, violent extremism, and gender discrimination, to increase women's meaningful participation in maintaining peace and security, including peace-building and conflict resolution processes, peacekeeping missions, disaster management and response, humanitarian assistance, and the prevention of violent extremism, and to protect women's safety and well-being and to ensure that their needs, priorities and rights.

Our government has also started to take necessary steps to implement this by creating job opportunities for women, establishing tribunals such as Nari o Shisu Nirjaton tribunals, sanctioning loans for the women entrepreneurs, adding them to the military and police force etc.

The Constitutional Provisions Relating to Sustainable Developments: Following it is to be discussed how our Constitution of Bangladesh complies with the provisions of Sustainable Developments:

Free and compulsory education (Article 17) [22]: In our country, education is a state policy. The government is providing free education up to the intermediate level. As the government provides free education, it is an excellent opportunity for our women to groom themselves and make their identification with this entry-level education.

Equality of opportunity (Article 19) [22]: To ensure women's participation at all levels, our Government has already introduced a quota system in all kinds of Government and semi-government jobs in our parliament, which helps women, join in a progressive carrier and participate in the country's mainstream decision-making.

Equality before law (Article 27): Equality refers to the opposite word of discrimination. Our women face discriminatory behavior from their family, friends, and job sector and even in their in-law's houses. The Government of Bangladesh has already taken some initiatives to make them equal before the law. They can enjoy various rights with constitutional protections such as the right to vote, the right to protection from all kinds of violence, property rights, and religion. Muslim women can enjoy the freedom to marriage and divorce at their own will [23]. Several laws also have been implemented by the government to ensure their equal rights. In a recent Judgment, the High Court Division also assured women's rights in guardianship over their children.

Discrimination on the ground of religion (Article 28) [22]: To ensure this constitutional provision Bangladesh government has already taken some initiatives since its independence. It established that free education for women, separate schools, colleges, and even universities have been to make them equal footing of a man. They also enjoy privileges relating to marriage, divorce, adoption, and property with obligations of religion.

Equality of opportunity in public employment (Article 29)[22]: The rate of working women in the labour force and administrative work increases day by day. Women are now participating in the direct election procedure. They are in the privilege of quota system in many jobs as priority such as Primary school teacher jobs [24]. There are also quota systems on all kinds of Government and semi-government jobs to give those privileges.

International Instruments, Related to the Empowerment of Women, Gender Equality and the Glass Ceiling Approaches: To achieve the sustainable goals various states have come to a point and made some International instruments amongst them Bangladesh has also adopted some of them. But still, there are some questions because the Bangladesh government has not fully accepted them, there are some restrictions to some extent which are obstacles to the gender equality and glass ceiling approaches:

The International Convention on Economic, Social & Cultural Rights (1966): Bangladesh acceded to this Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages in 1998 with reservations to Articles 1 and 2, with the reason to conflict with Personal Laws of different religious communities of the country [25]. But we are still aloof to achieve the goals.

The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (1779) (CEDAW): Bangladesh has reservations Articles 2 and 13(a). In September 2000, Bangladesh became the first country to ratify the Optional Protocol to CEDAW, ensuring the implementation of the tools to eradicate discrimination. This reservation is contradictory and makes the state's removal of gender discrimination questionable.[25]

The Declaration on Violence against Women (1993): Bangladesh government adopted this by the Domestic Violence Act 2010.

The Linkage between Sustainable Development, Women's Economic Empowerment and Gender Equality:

Women's economic empowerment lies entirely on sustainable development, but realizing this goal fundamentally in a country depends on learning women's economic, social and fundamental rights. Nowadays, the majority of the worlds deprived are women. Without a fixed income and economically stable conditions, it will be crucial to achieving women's empowerment. When women have equal access to resources and opportunities to participate in decision-making, they become drivers of sustainable development by enchanting environmental, economic, and social action [26]. That is why it is crucial to find the link between gender equality with sustainable development.

Goal 1- Ending poverty and hunger will improve women's economic participation:

Without women's direct participation in the state's economy, it will be impossible for a country to turn into developed countries from developing ones. Our rural community women are still participating in the economy as unpaid labour. It is high time to include them in the mainstream works to meet their family needs and improve their lifestyle.

Goal 5 - Gender equality will ensure their participation in all spare of society: It is impossible to reach the top without a stone unturned. Now it is challenging for the government to make a level playing field for women and remove inequalities from society and ensure women's rights to execute the goals.

Goal 10 - Reducing inequality within and among will ensure their rights in the job sector either in low paid or higher paid jobs: Women's participation in education is growing, but their job sector activities are still undermining their male colleagues. They have to face more competition than that of a man. Silently they are oppressed by inequalities.

Goal 16 - Peace Justice and strong institution will make them more competitive and effective to the job sector: The government must make effective administrative policies and ensuring justice in every division of society. In the absence of accountability and lack of justice in the job sector towards women, the stakeholder's government will not reach the goals accordingly.

The Main Drawbacks of Women behind Success in the Working Sector Focusing Bangladesh:

Society burdens women to bear more responsibilities than a man [27]. A woman who wants to do a job has to prove herself before her in-laws family, friends even her own family. Because everywhere she is under too many pressures. Doing jobs and regular life activities simultaneously makes their ways difficult.

We have very few role models of women amongst us that our society can follow. That's why every female student gives concentration on her upcoming family instead of preparing herself for the job sectors. As a result, these women with insufficient line management knowledge cannot able reach the desire position.

The masculine corporate culture invites inequalities in company policy and programs [28]. Men are not encouraged to take leave for family needs were as a women needs leave and other benefits more than a man which shows her irregularities and less interest and commitments to jobs.

We think only men are perfect for management-level jobs. That is why the office also offers training and other facilities to men only. There is a lack of leadership training programs for women, which is mandatory to reach higher positions of job.

Women's are fixed or categorized with some particular types of jobs such as teacher, doctor, desk jobs etc. No one is ready to accept them in unconventional jobs. A stereotype against women makes them less dimensional. [28]

Inherent gender-biased in the requirement and promotion. So there exists a lack of flexible work solutions and strategies for skilled women

In our countries, we have inadequate laws and policies, as well as our government and society are reluctant to implementation of the existing laws.

Major Policy Options and Initiatives to Increase Women Participation for Sustainable Development: Our societal norms and expectations are the greatest hindrance to women's advancement in the workplace. There are still men out there who believe women should be at home raising children. And from the working women, some feel guilty about not having the time to spend with their children that they would like to have. There is an overwhelming need for increased governmental programs also that grant aid and loans to female students that come from low-income families. And the arrangement of programs, workshops, seminars to improve awareness of parents regarding female education.

To boost up the decision-making capacity should grow up from the family because many women do not have the self-confidence to realize that they can get what they want in life. They have to be self-confident from their family. Creating family awareness to improve the participation of female students in higher education and to participate in the competitive job exams as well [29].

To make the level playing field for women, the Governments can play a critical role by creating economic opportunities, implementing rules, and enforcing United Nations criteria of Sustainable Development. In collaboration with women, the government should develop some rights for the women who hold the organization's highest position and some labour rights. And also draw up a code of conduct that would be applicable and appropriate for the job sector. All organizations should put in place a clear and straightforward complaints procedure and introduce a disciplinary body. The body will get used to overseeing such cases that should be constituted of people who will maintain their neutrality during proceedings. The female members must be assured of total confidentiality.

Implementation of sound job strategies by the private authorities to reduce gender inequality in the world of work. And understand the local priorities and key constraints for women in the workplace to ensure future profits.[29] Some women have no idea of corporate norms. That's why they are unaware of the way they should behave are perceived. Training and other facilities should be increased for them either from the part of the government and the part of the employer.

Assembling significant data and knowledge about the real causes of gaps and major challenges should be identified for resulting evidence-based policy-making which will meet future needs.

Improved safety on the road, public transport, street-lighting and patrolling by police who have undergone special training. Mass media must be sensitized to the specific problems of working women, to which the media appears to contribute with sensationalized coverage.

Conclusion: It can be concluded that achieving sustainable development is unfeasible unless the development policies and frameworks, at the global, regional, national, and local levels, without including an explicit commitment to gender equality with the realization of women's rights and capabilities. This study has attempted to examine the current glass ceiling scenario and factors that make obstacles to women's career advancement in different industries and service sectors in Chittagong city as well as in Bangladesh. Although comprehensive studies have been done on women employees in various professions, hardly any research has been conducted to find the actual effects of the glass ceiling in Bangladesh. The author has tried to identify some factors which are responsible for glass ceiling effects. It has also revealed some aspects which will help women to advance in their career growth.

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