

Women in Bangladesh Civil Service: Present Status and Challenges

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Abstract

Women are an important actor of development in today's world. Any development activity will undoubtedly be hampered if the status of women, constituting about fifty percent of the world population, remains low. Disparity between men and women exists in every sphere of women's lives in most of the countries. Women in Bangladesh are also deprived from enjoying their rights starting from birth. They are not allowed to enjoy basic services like food, health and nutrition and education. The area of employment is not exception. Though the Government of Bangladesh has declared a number of policies and programs to uplift the status of women in the civil service still women are poorly represented here. This study is an attempt to explore the present status of women in the cadre service. At the same time it will try to identify the barriers that impede women access in the service along with prescribing some suggestions to improve present situation so that women could enter the service in greater number. This paper employs both primary and secondary information collected from interview with female officials, recent publications, journals, books, research reports and other documents. Forty-seven junior and mid-ranking women civil servants belonging to the administration, agriculture, audit and accounts, education, family planning and health cadre were being interviewed.

Since independence in 1971, the Government of Bangladesh is striving to achieve development. It is now worldwide recognized that development requires participation and empowerment of all- both men and women. The UN declares its commitment to ensure equality of opportunity for women along with men in all areas of life. As a signatory of all international conferences and treaties on human rights and women, Bangladesh government has initiated several programs and policies to foster equality and equity for women empowerment.

The Government has adopted the National Policy for Women's Advancement (NPWA) in March 1997. The revised version of the policy was declared on March, 2011 which emphasized on administrative empowerment of women and recommended some strategies with the aim of creating employment opportunities for women e.g.

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- Make provisions for contracts and lateral entry to facilitate female access to government service at the higher levels in administrative structure.
- Increase efforts for achieving 30% female population at all levels of decision-making including policy level post.
- Strengthen efforts to employ all educated and uneducated females.
- Raise female quotas and ensure its effective implementation in all spheres.
- Motivate all appointing authorities to follow government quotas and to provide equal facilities for females under the purview of government employment policy.
- Continue the quota system and increase the quota at all levels (GOB, 2011).

The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equality of opportunity in all spheres of life for women through articles 27, 28 (1), 28 (2), 28 (3), 28 (4), 29 (1) & 29 (2). The Constitution not only guarantees equality of opportunity but also recognizes the inevitability of resolving the existing unequal representation by the reservation of quota for women's employment. At the outset the government introduced 10 percent women quota in all categories of vacancies subject to their fulfillment of basic qualifications. In the year 1997, the government issued an official notification by which quota distribution has been reorganized. The order was made obligatory to all government, semi-government and autonomous bodies and different sector corporations in case of direct appointments. Now 10 percent gazetted² posts and 15 percent non-gazetted posts are kept reserved for women in addition to merit, which is applicable in all types of public employment (Khan & Ara, 2005: 916-917).

Table-1: Present Quota Arrangement in Bangladesh Civil Service

Distribution of vacancies	Gazetted Posts (Class I & Class II)	Non Gazetted Posts (Class I & Class II)
Merit	45%	Nil
Freedom Fighters	30%	15%
Women	10%	30%
Tribal	5%	5%
Rest	10%	10%
Ansar and VDP	---	10%

Source: Khan & Ara: 2005

² The term 'gazetted' refers the officers whose appointment, transfer, promotion, posting and so on are published in the official gazette (a periodic official publication of the Government of Bangladesh).

Status of Women in the Civil Service

Bangladesh Civil Service consists of class I, II, III and IV type of employees. Additionally, the service is again divided in two groups: cadre³ and non-cadre. Class I cadre posts are again classified vertically into six ranks: secretary, additional secretary, joint secretary, deputy secretary, senior assistant secretary and assistant secretary in terms of seniority and status (Ahmed 1986: 185). Civil servants appointed by the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) Examination belongs to class I cadre services, but all class I officers are not member of the cadres (Khan 1998: 49). The Public Service Commission (PSC) is responsible to arrange recruitment to the cadre services through open competitive examination known as Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) Examination. Class I cadre service is open to citizens of Bangladesh with age limit between 21 - 30 years having a bachelor degree. The candidates have to sit in the preliminary test following by written test, the viva-voce & finally a psychological test (Khan & Ara, 2005).

Table 2: Class-wise Number of Female Officers & Employees, 2008

Class	Ministry/Division (Secretariat)	Departments/Directorates	Autonomous bodies/Corporations	Total
Class I	400	8746	4449	13595
Class II	279	3445	2338	6062
Class III	342	175963	6070	182383
Class IV	289	18633	2682	21604
Grand Total	1310	206789	15545	223644

Source: Ministry of Public Administration, 2008

Women are entering the civil service since 1971 though the data on women in the civil service depicts a frustrating picture. In 1976 women constituted only 7 percent of the total public service employment and it remained around 8 percent of the total employment strength until 1985 (Khan, 1988: 56). It rose to 11 percent in 2001 (Ministry of Public Administration, GOB: 2002) & in 2007 women constituted 18 percent only (Statistical Pocket Book of Bangladesh, 2008). The number of women holding class I positions in public services is 6.44% only compared to 93.56% men (Mahtab 2007: 147). The statistics show that there is a slow and gradual increase of women's participation in the BCS since 1971 though over 90 percent belongs to class-III and class-IV employees.

3 Cadre services are those services, which are constituted under law with a number of positions or structure and recruitment and promotion rules. There are 28 cadres in Bangladesh Civil Service at present.

There is a slow and gradual rise of women participation in the Bangladesh Civil Service that cannot be taken into account as optimistic. Moreover, women's representation at the higher levels of the civil service, i.e. Secretary, Additional Secretary, Joint Secretary and Deputy Secretary are almost negligible due to lack of adequate seniority. It needs to clarify that vacancies in the top positions of civil service are filled in by promotion from the immediately lower position. With the current ratio of women in these relevant ranks, women in the bureaucracy will keep on to be marginalized in the senior decision-making position in the foreseeable future. In addition, a few women were appointed joint secretaries under president's prerogative; but this number was just a token and they were not posted in any key ministries or divisions ((Mahtab: 2007)).

Table-3: Male-Female in Civil Service (Secretary-Joint Secretary)

Year	Secretary		Additional Secretary		Joint Secretary	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2007	39	0	108	1	346	25
2010	52	2	162	13	395	35
2012	47	2	250	17	549	79
Total	138	4	520	31	1290	139

Source: Ministry of Public Administration, 2007, 2010, & 8th May, 2012

Data on Table-3 indicates that position of women in the top levels of civil service is not fair at all. In 2007 no women was seen at the top most level of bureaucracy as secretary while it rose to only 2 in 2010 and still same in 2012. The picture is more or less same in the next two top levels that are of additional secretary and joint secretary. Male are dominating these top policy making positions in the civil service that explains lack of women voice in policy making decisions. It is not acceptable that women lack expertise to serve these posts. Maybe the reasons lie with the patriarchal social system in Bangladesh for not posting women in these important positions.

Table- 4: Male-Female in Civil Service (Deputy Secretary-Assistant Secretary)

Year	Male		Female		Male	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2007	1309	172	1112	205	926	273
2010	1245	169	1210	268	716	249
2012	1318	177	1205	321	498	171
Total	3872	518	3527	794	2140	693

Source: Ministry of Public Administration, 2007, 2010, & 8th May, 2012

Position of women at the bottom three posts i.e. deputy secretary, senior assistant secretary and assistant secretary does not represents a smart picture on women participation in the service as Table-4 depicts women status as deputy secretary, senior assistant secretary and assistant secretary. Figures in these positions give an impression that women are also marginal here too. Male far outnumbers female in all levels of civil service till today.

Table-5: Number of Selected Men & Women in Civil Service

Name of BCS Exams	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage	Total
26 th BCS Exam	703	66.13	360	33.87	1063
27 th BCS Exam	2417	74.62	822	25.38	3239
28 th BCS Exam	1520	69.41	670	30.59	2190
29 th BCS Exam	1232	71.54	490	28.46	1722
30 th BCS Exam	1623	68.57	744	31.43	2367
Total	7495	70.83	3086	29.17	10581

Source: Annual Report of PSC, 2011

If we examine Table-5, we can see that in all the 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th & the recent 30th BCS Examinations number of selected female candidates in the job at the entry level as assistant secretary are less than half than male counterparts. As data shows average selected percentage of women is only 29.17 in these five BCS Examinations that is only 1/3 of male with 70.83 percent. So it can be summarized that women are poorly represented at all levels of civil service in Bangladesh.

Table-6: Number of Selected Men & Women in Different Cadres

Name of BCS Exams	General Cadre Posts			Professional Cadre Posts		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
5 th BCS Exam 1984	598	74	672	80	7	87
8 th BCS Exam 1986	344	50	394	1,370	242	1612
15 th BCS Exam 1993	271	46	317	373	93	466
18 th BCS Exam 1996	290	66	356	991	192	1183
20 th BCS Exam 1998	379	83	462	1182	364	1546
21 st BCS Exam 2001	311	67	378	725	172	897
22 nd BCS Exam 2001	352	82	434	1466	330	1796
24 th BCS Exam 2002	570	140	710	3123	1232	4355
25 th BCS Exam 2004	405	97	502	1586	576	2162

Source: Karim, 2008

Data of Table-6 indicates that in the general cadre selected women was about 11 percent in 5th BCS and 8% in professional cadres whereas it was respectively about 13% and 15% in general cadres and professional cadres during the 8th BCS. 15 percent women in the general cadres and 20 percent in the professional cadres got selected in the 15th BCS. During the 20th BCS we see 18% and 24% selected women in general and professional cadres. Positions of selected women were 19%, 20%, 19% in general cadres and 18%, 28%, 27% in professional cadres respectively in the 22nd, 24th and 26th BCS. It is mention worthy that women competed in all previous BCS examinations excluding the 12th as this examination was conducted to recruit only male staff in police cadre. Recruitment of females in the police cadre was banned for many years and women had the opportunity to appear in police cadre since the 15th BCS examination in 1993. Until the last decade, women preferred to join educational or health service cadres mostly due to our social traditions (Karim, 2008).

The cadre-wise distribution of men and women as presented on Table-6 gives a bleak picture on women representation in the services. It is found that women participation was highest in the administration cadre followed by the taxation cadre, and family planning cadre. More than half of the female officers in the general cadre are being employed through the female quota system. Under the professional and technical cadres 60 percent female officials were employed in the education cadre. This is followed by the health (general surgeon) cadre. Women participation in other professional cadres is very low, especially, in the sectors relating to engineering and agriculture. Though, it is seen that female participation in technical cadres was higher than in the general cadre, actually there was lower participation in the technical cadre because the education cadre comprise three fifths of the total female officials of the professional and technical cadres (Kashem et. Al., 2002:51). It may be noted here that, majority of the female officials are found in the stereotyped professions i.e., education, health and social service. The reason behind this is that women as well as their family consider these two cadres as less hazardous for women to perform their duties. In other cadres women have started to join just in the 1990s. It was the 20th BCS since when participation of women in the examination and recruitment both has increased significantly. Therefore, it is evident that women are late starters in the civil service (Jahan: 2007). It is clear from Table – 3 & 4 that even in 2009 women are not represented at the upper stairs of the civil service though the position of women at the entrance level (assistant secretary) and at the next level (senior assistant secretary) has increased. It is positive that women are coming forward though the very slow in number; hopefully, this trend will increase with time and lead to gender parity in the service.

Major Bottlenecks to Women Participation in the Civil Service

Inequity between female and male is universal and found almost everywhere both in developed and developing countries though the degree may vary across countries. As a result, women are excluded or poorly represented in social, political, economic, professional and legal aspects comparing with male. In Bangladesh, the state of women is even worse. Men usually perform the role of bread earner and head of the family. Consequently, they try to control every aspect of life of women and keep them subservient. Women have to face discrimination in family and public life simultaneously. The major challenges to women participation in the service in Bangladesh are:

- Lack of appropriate policies and procedures on recruitment, training, deputation & transfer in the service for female staff. The prevalent policies on posting, deputation and transfer of female civil servants in suitable places are merely implemented properly which discourage women to join civil service.
- Superiority complex and negative attitudes of male colleagues towards female officers and assigned them with desk bound jobs hinders in acquiring experiences to deal with critical situations at the field by the lady officers that ultimately creates a negative image of them.
- Lack of suitable working environment including day care centres, separate washroom for female staff; lack of women's hostel facilities & inadequate transport and accommodation in the field stations.
- Lack of proper protection for women as security & abuse and harassment by male is very common in Bangladesh. This is one of the important reasons for not coming to join challenging sectors in the service by women.
- Posting at field offices especially if the work station is in a remote place women feel it difficult to serve there because of family commitment like childcare and other household responsibilities. Non-cooperation of husband and family members also acts as barriers to women in joining or continuing the service.
- Lack of gender sensitive code of conduct, mass awareness advocacy campaign programs specially for working male civil servants in the civil service;
- Lack of access to education facilities and human resources development opportunities in rural areas that creates obstacles for girl students in the rural Bangladesh.

- Male dominated traditional and religious values in society also impede women to utilize their potentialities and talents.
- Lack of sufficient participation of women in the process of formulation, implementation and evaluation of plans, policies, programs and projects specially those concerned with women advancement.
- The examination centers of public service commission are located in major four cities and the advertisement procedures for recruitment have remained much more formal. Thus women living in country side do not have enough information, experience and ability to participate in the recruitment processes.

Conclusion

Women in Bangladesh are discriminated all through their lives. Social customs and traditions, illiteracy and lack of employment opportunities have hampered participation of women in the mainstream of development in Bangladesh. Empowerment of women is vital in Bangladesh as elsewhere in the world. To improve the backward status of women in the public service, Government of Bangladesh has already initiated many programs to ensure the political rights, increase awareness, participation and empowerment of women. But one common problem in Bangladesh is lack of sincerity as existing policies on women's development; employment and empowerment in Bangladesh are not effectively implemented. Government has to be more sincere, active and give proper attention to expedite women participation in the service. The followings suggestions might be taken into consideration to uplift the status of women in Bangladesh civil service.

- Policies on promotion, transfer & deputation should be objective, based on merit and job experience. One of the major problems discouraging women from entering and continuing in the civil service is the separation of women from their families due to transfers. So the provision of transfer for husband and wife in the same place should be implemented effectively.
- To minimize gender differences, allocation of quota for women should be increased to at least 30% at the entry level in the civil service of Bangladesh.
- Attempt should be made by the government to improve the working atmosphere for women as unless there is lack of friendly environment at the work place, women would find it difficult to contribute as expected. Establishing hostels for working women, housing facilities so that women feel secure and can continue their jobs, maintaining

privacy in offices, provision of separate office rooms, rest rooms, and wash rooms for women, day care centers in the work places, availability of transport should be provided.

- Mind-set of men towards women should be changed. Women should be encouraged to join the civil service. Information through media such as radio, T.V. and papers has to be widely disseminated to get response from women candidates in the advertised posts. Programs to bring the attitudinal change in the socio cultural practices have to be lunched through different media to create social awareness.
- Non cooperation of family members is one of the reasons for women not to choose government services as their career. So, family members should cooperate to enable women to pursue a career in the civil service.
- Gender biasness is common in the civil service. Women participation should be ensured in all levels of policy making. The issue of gender and development should be integrated in different training courses to develop consciousness regarding the importance of women's role in society.
- Higher education and technical education need to be made gender responsive with promotion programs especially for the district to address socio culturally disadvantage women at the grass root level.

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