

## WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOR FORCE OF BANGLADESH

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### ABSTRACT

*Women constitute half of the total population. They put near about half portion in the labor force of Bangladesh. The purposes of this study are to explore the nature of women's participations in the labor force of Bangladesh and to project their participation up to the year of 2014. Data and necessary information were taken from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. Results of this study revealed that women's participation rates had been increasing during 1999-2010 with an annual growth rate of 0.80%. On the basis of division, higher participation rates are observed in Rajshahi division where agricultural related works are found to be more practicable economic activity. By considering this fact, arrangements of training and technical education are essential which require more attention to policy makers of the country.*

**Keywords:** *Women labour force; Employed population; Unemployed population; economic activity; Bangladesh.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Women constitute roughly half of the population of the world and thus potentially half of its work forces (BBS & ADB, 2012). But they are often disadvantaged as compared to men in access to employment opportunities and conditions of work; furthermore, many women forego or curtail employment because of family responsibilities (UN, 2010). However, with the improvement of industrialization and modernization of the societies, the net labor force participation rate (LFPR) has continued to increase and the gap between the LFPR for men and women, has been decreasing in all regions during the past ten years (2000-2010) (UN, 2010). But apart from the transition economies (where 91 women are economically active per 100 men) and East Asia (with a proportion of 83

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women per 100 men), all other regions still face a difference of fewer than 80 economically active women per 100 men. In the Middle East and North African region and also in South Asia for every 100 men in the labor force, only around 40 women are economically active (UN, 2010).

Bangladesh is a developing country in South Asian region with more than 150 million people (BBS, 2011) with 64%, in the age range 15+ years. Among this adult population, 59% are economically active (BBS & ADB, 2012) which will constitute 60.3 million (male=37 million, female= 22.79 million) civilian labor force in the country (BILS, 2012). In the Population and Housing Census 2011, it is mentioned that women constitute half in the population composition of Bangladesh. They are more than half (6.97 crore) of population of the country (BPHC, 2011). The country is currently facing a challenge of job creation for the new entrants into the labor force and a great many who are currently underemployed (Titumir, 2013). Moreover, a large number of women are being involved in the non-monetized sectors and in subsistence activities over the country (Rahman, 2013). However, with the passing of time and because of the breakdown of the supportive kinship umbrella and felt emerging demands in some sectors, women's participation in economic activities has been increasing over the years. Due to generate their income along with their family earnings, women are more likely to come out of their traditional works. Sectoral growth of employment and supply push factors are encouraging the participation of women from home-based to Force-oriented activities (Klasen and Pieters, 2012).

In Bangladesh, the policy response to the employment of women has been largely related to the anti-poverty program, social protection initiatives, small livelihoods programs, and micro-credit with less concentration to the manner in which this links to the macro policy framework. Issues of wage discrimination, links to the Forces for rural groups of women and their scaling up have been in the public discourse, but have largely been ignored by the policies. In fact, the employment of women has been viewed from welfare or poverty reduction perspective rather than a core growth issue. It is well known that most of the rural women are economically active but the difficulty as in Bangladesh census has been in devising accurate definitions of economic activities. Most home yard activities are commonly excluded in employment surveys and much of the processing works of crop especially rice are not counted to these surveys (Chowdhury, 2007).

According to United Nations System of National Account (UNSNA) guidelines, women's labor is generally only counted in national accounts if it takes place in the paid workforce, be it in a factory, on a farm, or in an office. If a woman works, but is not paid, then her labor does not count for anything in terms of national measurements of wealth (Efroymsen, 2007). Similarly in Bangladesh, crop processing and all sorts of domestic works like child care, kitchen activities, looking after of livestock etc. by women are not considered as economic activities (Chowdhury, 2007).

In respect to population composition of Bangladesh, according to the Population and Housing Census 2011, it is mentioned that women constitute half of the total population. They are 6.97 crore of population of the country (BBS, 2011). According to Labor Force Survey 2010, 'the number of economically active population (above 15 years) is 5.41 crore, out of which, a labor force of 5.10 crore (male 3.79 crore and female 1.62 crore) is engaged in a number of professions. Though, the number of work force in agriculture has been decreased compared to that of the previous fiscal, agriculture remained the highest (47.30) source of employment (BER, 2013).

### 1.1. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to ascertain the nature of women's participation in the labor force of Bangladesh and to project their participation up to the year of 2014.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Data of this study was collected from different surveys conducted by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) by the year 2002 to 2011. In this paper six divisions have been considered and Rangpur division has not been considered since it was not in existence before 2011. In order to project the growth rates of women laborers in the labor force of Bangladesh, arithmetic growth rate formula have been used and the formula is of the following:

$$P_t = P_o(1 + ry)$$

where,  $P_t$ , number of labor at time  $t$ ;  $P_o$ , initial labor force;  $y$ , number of years between two consecutive BBS surveys; and  $r$ , labor participation.

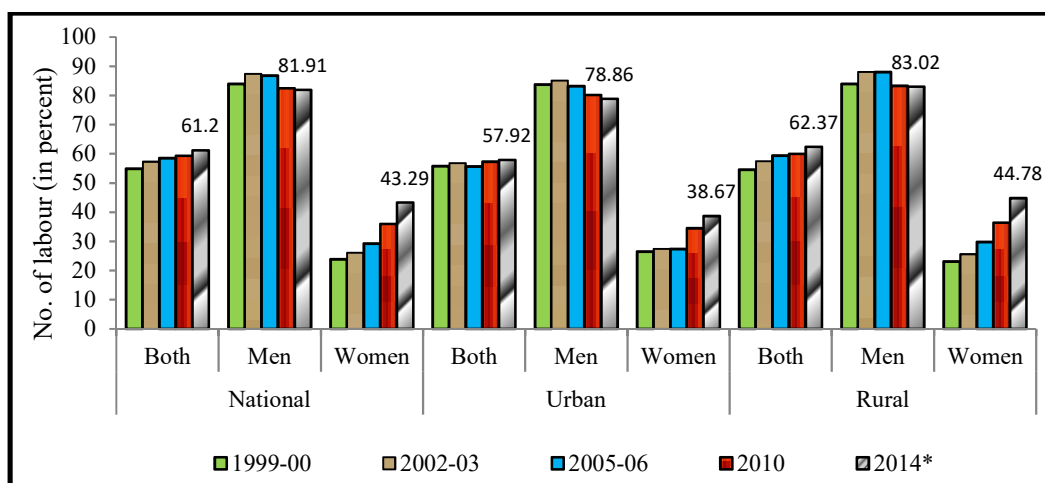
## 3. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

### 3.1. Trends of labor force

Women's participation in the labor force has been experienced a positive significant increase during the period 1999-2000 to 2010 whereas this trend is negative for men (Basak, 2013). The same scenario has experienced at the regional level of Bangladesh. At national level, the annual increase rate for women was found 5.06% compared to -0.18% for men during the period of 1999-2000 to 2010 (Figure 1). For both sex, the participation rate has increased from 54.90% in 1999-2000 to 59.30% in 2010 with an annual rate of increase 0.80%. If the current trend persists, the progress of labor force participation rate might reach at 61.2% for both sexes by the year 2014. Whereas, the progress of labor force participation rate might reach at 43.29% for women and 81.91% for men at the same time period. Progress of women education and advance of technology along with continuous support from mass media helps the women to increase their participation in the labor Force.

At regional level, the labor force participation rate is more in rural area than their urban counterparts for both of men and women. In rural area, during 1999-2000 to 2010 labor

force participation rate were increased from 54.6% (men= 84%, female=23.1%) to 61.8% (men= 83.3%, female=36.4%) with an annual rate of growth 0.90% (men= -0.083, women= 5.75%) (Figure 1). Similar trend were also observed in urban area. During 1999-2000 to 2010, this participation rate has increased from 55.80% (men=83.7%, female=26.5%) to 57.30% (men=80.2%, women=34.5%) with an annual rate of growth 0.27% (men= -0.4%, women= 3.02%). If the current trend persists, the progress of women labor force participation rate might reach at 38.67% in urban area and 44.78% in rural area at the end of 2014. Awareness of women along with the demand of families pushes the more rural women into labor Force to earn more. On the other hand, men labor force participation rate might reach at 79.2% in urban area and 83.1% in rural area at the same time.



**Figure 1:** Labor force participation rate

\*projected

**Source:** BBS, 2002; BBS, 2004; BBS, 2008 and BBS, 2011

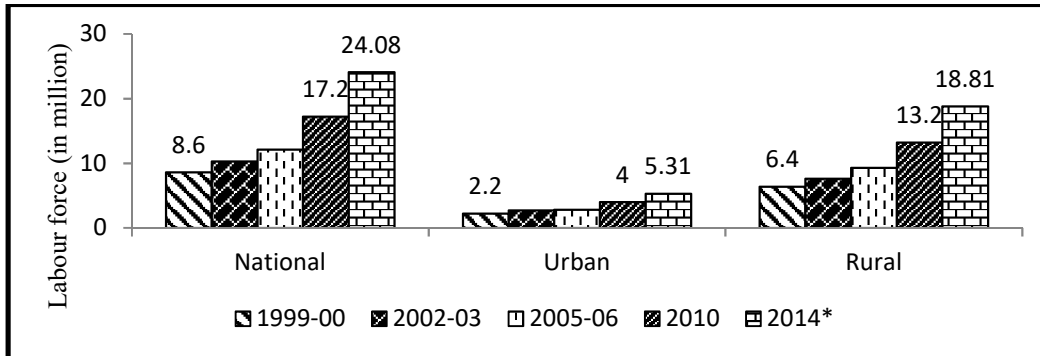
### 3.2 Women in Labor Force

The participation of women in labor force had been increasing with accelerated rate over the years. At the national level, the number of women labor force has increased from 8.6 million in 1999-2000 to 17.2 million in 2010 with an annual rate of increase 10% (Figure 3). If the current trend persists, the participation of women in labor force might reach at 24.08 million by the year 2014.

The women's participation rate in labor force had showed the different trend in rural and urban area and regional basis during the period 1999-2010 and a remarkable progress had been shown in the rural area. The number of women in labor force in rural area had become double (6.4 million-13.2 million) during the period 1999-2010 with annual rate



of increase 10.63%. Similar increasing trend was also observed in the labor force in urban area. During 1999-2010, it was increasing 2.2 million to 4.0 million with an annual rate of increase 8.18%. If the current trend persists, the participation of women in labor force might reach at 5.31 million in urban area and 18.81 million in rural area by the year 2014.

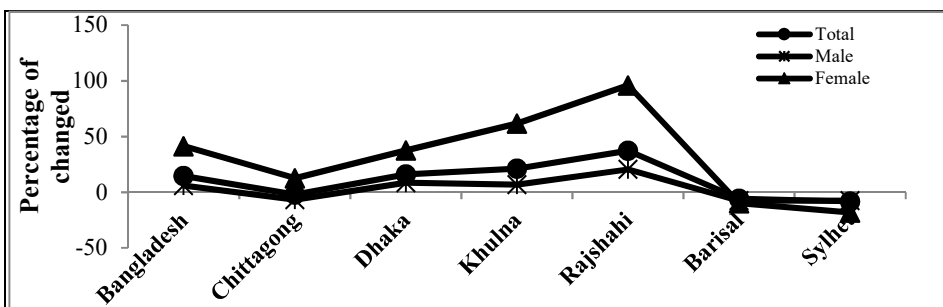


**Figure 2:** Women in Labor Force

\*projected

**Source:** BBS, 2002; BBS, 2004; BBS, 2008 and BBS, 2011

Similar different participation rate had also been observed among the administrative divisions in Bangladesh, since all the divisions are not unique according to the socio-economic conditions (Ali, 2013). Among the six administrative divisions, Dhaka (16.03%), Khulna (21.05%) and Rajshahi (37.17%) showed increasing trend of labor force, whereas Chittagong (2.06%), Barisal (5.70%) and Sylhet (8.33%) showed decreasing trend comparing between 2006 and 2010. The marked change has been found in Rajshahi division.



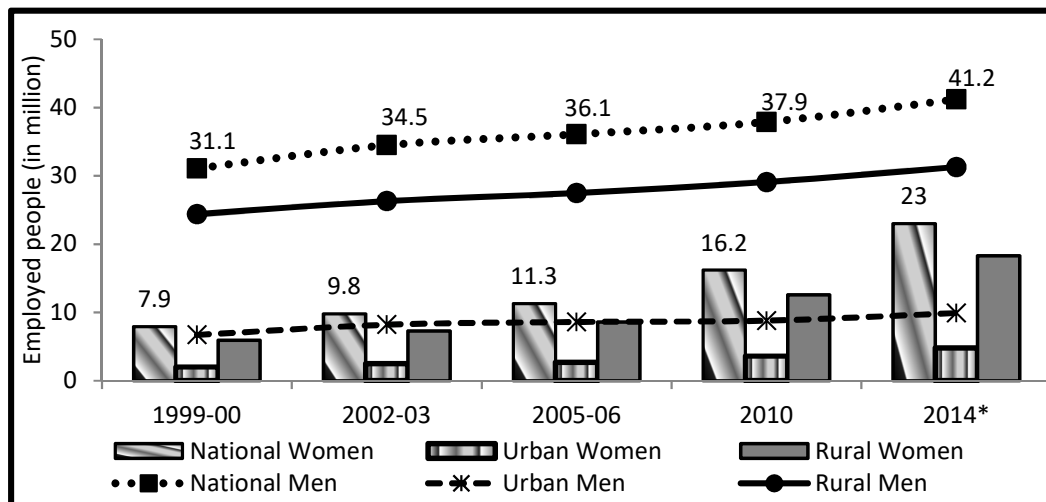
**Figure 3:** Labor Force by Administrative Divisions (Compared to 2006)

**Source:** Basak (2013) based on BBS, 2002; BBS, 2004; BBS, 2008 and BBS, 2011

### 3.3 Trends of Employed Population

Women having a job that pays wage and salary are considered as employed women and this percentage has been continuously increased. Though the number of employed women is lower than their men counterparts; however the rate of their increment is much higher. During 1995-2010, the number of employed women increased from 5.0 million to 16.2 million with an annual rate of increase 14.90%, While, this rate of increase was annually 1.80% for their male counterparts from 29.8 million to 37.9 million in the same time period.

Educational stipend and other programs taken by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and create the working opportunities has work as an energy to improve the women's participation in employment sector (Rahman, 2005) and it has continued in the present decades. Further it has projected that, the employed female and male might increase 23.0 million and 41.2 million respectively by the year 2014 if the current trend persists.



**Figure 4:** Employment Scenarios of Bangladesh

\*projected

Source BBS, 2002; BBS, 2004; BBS, 2008 and BBS, 2011

### 3.4. Trends of Unemployed Population

The people who are presently workless but actively looked for work in the past four weeks and currently available for work are considered as unemployed population. The people who were temporarily laid off and are waiting to be called back are also considered as unemployed. Due to the rapid increasing of population and less working opportunities, the number of unemployed people is increasing though higher participation rate is observed from both men and women labor force. During 1999-2010, the number of employed men population has increased from 1.1 million to 1.6 million with an annual rate of increase 4.54% against 4.29% of their women counterparts from 0.7 million to 1.0 million during the same time period.



Women are still far behind in this man driven society because of social superstitions, conservatism and narrowness. If the current trend continues (between 1995-96 and 2010), the country's unemployed men and women might increase in 1.89 million and 1.17 million respectively by the year 2014.

The numbers of unemployed people also vary on the basis of place of residence. During 1999-2000, about 0.20 million women unemployed were added in the existing 0.20 million unemployed women in urban area. This number was double as compared to the rural area (0.50 million to 0.60 million). Similar trend was also observed in the men unemployed population and an increase about 0.10 million in urban area can be observed. This number was about six times less comparing to the rural area during the same time period (0.70 million to 1.35 million).

**Table 1: Unemployment Scenarios of Bangladesh (in millions)**

Year	National		Urban		Rural	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
1999-2000	0.70	1.10	0.20	0.40	0.50	0.70
2002-2003	0.50	1.50	0.20	0.40	0.30	1.10
2005-2006	0.90	1.20	0.20	0.30	0.70	0.90
2010	1.00	1.60	0.40	0.50	0.60	1.10
2014*	1.17	1.89	0.56	0.55	0.65	1.35

\* projected

**Source:** Bangladesh BBS, 2002; BBS, 2004; BBS, 2008 and BBS, 2011

### 3.5. Women's Participation in Main Economic Activities

Bangladesh is a well known male-dominated society with traditional and religious beliefs that restrict women's mobility and participation in economic and social activities (Bose et al. 2009). They cannot choose their types of job freely and in terms of the nature of jobs and opportunities, they are affected by the traditional and different socio economic factors (Hossain & Bose, 2004). Though this situation is changing with the increase of time, but still now majority of women are available in the some marked jobs (Hossain & Jaim, 2011). Table 2 shows that, the net participation of women in their household work has decreased (1.88%) between 2001 to 2010 years. However, there is an enormous increase in the percentage of women in agricultural sector (27.24%) followed by transport and communication sector (12.0%), industrial sector (10.67%) and business sector (6.0%) during the same period. That means, sector wise growth and supply push factors increased the participation of women from home-based to Force-oriented activities

**Table 2: Main Economic Activities of Women (In millions)**

Year	HH Work	Agriculture	Industrial Sector	Transport and Communication	Business
2001	63.86	4.09	0.60	0.05	0.35
2005	52.86	13.69	1.17	0.04	0.29
2010	51.86	15.23	1.24	0.11	0.56
2014*	47.96	31.82	1.77	0.16	0.69
<b>Rate of Growth</b>	-1.88	27.24	10.67	12.00	6.00

\* projected

**Source:** Researcher's calculation based on BBS, 2011

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Improvement of industrialization and women education has created more working opportunities for them than the previous time. As a result, large numbers of women are engaged in the labor force that would boost up the productivity of the country. Also with the impact of modernization, women are seeking the work in unrecognized sector and contribute to the country's development. Moreover, by adopting a number of strategies like expansion of large scale manufacturing industries, rapid growth of small and medium enterprises, widening micro credit based and targeted employment generation programs, especially for the poor in both the rural and urban areas to provide employment of women highly contribute to increase of the net employment participation of women that will contribute to the betterment of Bangladesh. Considering these fact, arrangement of training and technical education should be provided in an emergency basis to improve their net participation.

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