

Women in Business: A Study on the Development of Women Entrepreneurship in Bangladesh

Shituma Zaman*

Women are leaving the corporate world and choosing to form their own companies at a tremendous rate due to varying factors. Women entrepreneurship development is a challenging phenomenon in Bangladesh as women are lagged behind (economically and socially) compared to men. So, it has become important to analyze several factors and issues in support of and against women entrepreneurship. This paper addresses current obstacles women of Bangladesh face when starting their own company, myths commonly associated with women entrepreneurs, and the social barriers imposed upon women in the male dominated entrepreneurial world. The social problems, education, barriers and the effects of these matters on women related business have been addressed here. This paper concluded with several factors and barriers associated with the women entrepreneurship which highlights implications for women entrepreneurs need and opportunity.

Field of Research: Entrepreneurship

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship of women has a tremendous potential in empowering women and transforming society. However, this potential remains largely untapped, with less than 10 per cent of the entrepreneurs in South Asian countries being women.

Studies have shown that a host of barriers prevent women from realizing their full potential as entrepreneurs, where they could make significant contribution to society. The motivation behind the study is to find out the way to overcome the barriers for women entrepreneurship in Bangladesh. Government Can set several program for new Women entrepreneur. Entrepreneurship by definition implies being in control of one's life and activities. It is precisely this independence that many societies have denied women (Vishwanathan, 2001). UN Women informs that "women perform 66 percent of the world's work, produce 50 percent of the food, but earn 10 percent of the income and own 1 percent of the property."

Women in Bangladesh now becoming entrepreneurs, bucking the trend of consumer led small scale rural business, increasingly running developmental businesses requiring professional skills such marketing, sales and product development. It provides employment for about 40 percent of the total labor force and it seems to have managed to feed 130 million people of the country.

*Ms. Shituma Zaman, Lecturer, School of Business, University of Information Technology and Sciences, GA-37/1 Progoti Sarani, Baridhara J-Block, Dhaka 1212, Bangladesh. e-mail:shituma@dhaka.net, Contact: 01726652277

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Education, one of the most vital points which make women sincere about their economical freedom, their stability and their importance at society. Rising above cultural stigma, increasingly women in Bangladesh are becoming entrepreneurs, bucking the trend of consumer led small scale rural business, increasingly running developmental businesses requiring professional skills such marketing, sales and product development.

Although several studies have been conducted on this issue, the intention of the paper is to review the most important factors, initiatives and experiences in developing women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. In light of different issues identified in the literature review sections, issues pertaining to women entrepreneurship in general and in SMEs, in particular, have been reviewed for the paper.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The study has been conducted to discover the factors which create barriers, influence or inspire in becoming entrepreneurs. The study has been conducted on the Bangladeshi women who become entrepreneurs and businessperson based on various intangible as well as tangible factors.

The objectives of this paper are:

- a. To examine the factors those influence the development of entrepreneurship among women in Bangladesh;
- b. To identify the factors those discourage or create barriers to women becoming entrepreneurs in the context of Bangladesh;
- c. To find out the ways to overcome the barriers in the development of entrepreneurship for women in Bangladesh.

1.2 Structure of the Paper

This paper is divided into six parts. Part one, "Introduction". This part shown that a host of barriers prevent women from realizing their full potential as entrepreneurs. Part two, "Literature review" has been discuss about the types, factors which influencing women entrepreneur, the status of women employment. Part three, "Methodology" explain the research design. Part four, "Findings and outcomes" discuss about the barrier of women entrepreneur and the way of outcome from the barriers. This part also discuss about the factors which are influencing the development of women entrepreneurship in Bangladesh. Part five is, "Conclusion" where concludes the research result In addition the research can be used by researchers, government, nongovernment organization, civil society to formulate effective policies that motivate women to become entrepreneurs. Part six, "References" provide the lists of full bibliographical details and their journal titles.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Women Entrepreneurs

The concept of entrepreneurship has a wide range of meaning. It has been debated among scholars, educators, researchers and policy makers since early 1700s when it was established. It is an elusive concept (McQuaid 2002). As the expectations of different stakeholders are different, their views regarding enterprise, entrepreneurship and small business are also different. Therefore, there is no clear-cut definition of these terms. Rosa (1992) argued that the vagueness of enterprise has been to the advantage of both government and academics in the 1990s in their attempts in the UK to change the national culture. Katz (1991b) commented over this debate that small business is sub-set of entrepreneurship, while others argue that small business commencement is an integral part of entrepreneurship. Kearney (1996) defined that enterprise is the capacity and willingness to initiate and manage creative action in response to opportunities or changes, wherever, they appear, in an attempt to achieve outcomes of added value.

A woman entrepreneur is defined as a woman who has alone or with one or more partners started or inherited a business, and is eager to take financial, administrative, and social risks and responsibilities, and participate in the day-to-day management activities (UNDP, 2004). Garga and Bagga (2009) defined women entrepreneurship as the women or a group of women who initiate, organize and operate a business enterprise. Robert D. Hisrich and Candida Brush in 1984, have reported that the women entrepreneur is not an “average” woman and that she has problems not encountered by her male peers.

2.2 Business of Women Entrepreneurs

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises of Bangladesh are a heterogeneous group of agricultural and industrial subsectors. MSME includes crops, fisheries, livestock and poultry, rural non-farm, agro processing farms, handlooms and handicrafts, wood and steel furniture, cartwheels, footwear, plastic products, textile dyeing and block printing (manual), computer software and information technology, silk weaving, small grocery stores, etc. This sub-sector is facing acute problem of finance towards smooth growth. According to Chowdhury and Raihan (2001) survey report, about 50% of MSMEs have no access to formal source of finance. Only 35.79% of MSMEs are enjoying unrestricted access to the formal credit. The rest (13.68%) of them have restricted access to the formal credit. Bank credit is used by small percentage of entrepreneurs and provides financing of generally less than 20% of their total outlay (Raihan, 2001). Realizing the importance of MSME sector, Bangladesh Bank encourages financial intermediaries to provide financial support to MSMEs.

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Table 1: Contribution of women owners in GDP of Bangladesh (Daniels 2003)

Particulars	Total contribution to GDP (in million Tk.)	Per cent of total contribution
Agriculture	4993.71	18
Fishing	94.28	3
Manufacturing	1397.36	50
Construction	75.38	0
Wholesale, retail trade	4227.38	15
Hotels, restaurants	2370.61	8
Transport, storage and communications	327.72	1
Real estate, renting and business activities, education	514.19	2
Health and social work	338.15	1
Other services	308.54	1
Total	14309.17	100

2.2.1 Types of Enterprises

The types of enterprises operated by women found were of the following categories: (1) Traditional; (2) Non-tradition; (3) Household or Family Trade; (4) Labour intensive; (5) Export oriented; (6) Industries with modern technology.

Women Entrepreneurs in the non-formal sector are usually involved in manufacturing, agricultural activities and service oriented activities. In the rural areas, the majority of the entrepreneurs were members of the NGOs and other grassroots organisations, who had started income through these three types of activities from the loans received. These women were self-employed and worked as (1) Skilled artisans or self-employed producers; (2) Women traders or Vendors; (3) Whole-sale Suppliers; (4) Women as partners in Business; (5) Women as share-holder in Business; (6) Women in Family Trade Enterprises; (7) Women as Shop owners; (8) Women as Employers of production units (Chowdhury 2001).

2.3 Factors Influencing Women Entrepreneurs of Bangladesh

The emergence of women entrepreneurs in a society depends mainly on economic, social, religious, cultural and psychological factors (Habib, et. al., 2005). The prominent factors are age of female owned business, family commitments, lesser access to capital, different education levels, prior experience of business and attitude towards risk. According to Jesselyn (2004), developing countries should also tap the potential of women entrepreneurs.

In fact, women entrepreneurship development is a challenging phenomenon in Bangladesh as women are lagged behind (economically and socially) compared to men (Haque and Itohara, 2009; Rahman, 2009). Generally, women are more victimized as because of their illiteracy, unawareness, unorganized, powerless or less political representation, deprivation, rigid social customs, religious constrains and injustice by their counter partners particularly in rural areas (Hossain and Rahman, 1999; Chowdhury, 2000; Afrin et al., 2008; Tambunan, 2009). They potentially have been restrained from creating level playing field in nation development process. For instance, the net employment rate for female and male is 93 and 96%, respectively while self-employment rate is only 16% for female and 50% for male. Women earned income (women US\$830 and men US\$1633) is about half compared to their counter partners (BBS, 2009).

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2.4 Women Employment Status in Bangladesh

The entrepreneurship status of the population shows that out of 46.8% self-employed citizen, women make only 8.3%. The situation is, however, a little better in urban Bangladesh. In urban area, nearly 15.4% of the 36.7% self-employed people are women. In rural area, it is only 7.4% of 47.6%. Most of the women are unpaid family helpers, 83.2% in rural area and 42.9% in urban area. A part of the poor women works also as day labourer. On national level, it is 5.7%, in urban area 6.2% and in rural area 5.6%. This shows that industrial development in Bangladesh is unable to absorb even the cheapest part of the labour force the women labour. Previously, women's enterprises were confined in sectors that were dominated by traditional gender role, such as food and beverage, beauty parlour, health, education, webbing, tailoring and wholesale and retail apparel trade. But the situation is improving slowly; today women are also in occupations, which were solely controlled by the male before. Now, some of them possess top management post in private and public sector enterprises, sit in the most important policy making bodies of the country, are entrepreneurs and own enterprises. Women are now seen also as owners and managers of cold storage, shipping lines, advertising firms, travel agencies, interior decoration, engineering workshops and even garment industries, etc. (BBS 1996).

Although the previous studies on women entrepreneurship did focus on several issues and factors, this paper has taken a step to identify and explain the most important issues for women from the perspective of Bangladesh.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This paper is based on secondary data, primarily through literature review and targeted interviews with the key informants from cross-section of people and experts. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method has been applied to collect information on working women's situation where three interview session was conducted. In addition, case study method is used to collect in-depth information on this issue. The data are fairly consistent and reliable, although there are some discrepancies between government and non-government sources. The emphasis has been given on qualitative analysis but some quantitative data has been used to supplement the qualitative analysis.

4. Findings and Outcomes

4.1 Barriers to Women Entrepreneurship of Bangladesh

4.1.1 Inadequate Starting Capital

Inadequate starting capital is one of the main problems for the women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. Generally, women start their business with limited capital accumulated from family savings and the relatives and other sources.

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4.1.2 Higher Bank Loan

In Bangladesh, bank charges around 13% for SMEs loans and 10% for women entrepreneurs which is higher compared to neighbouring countries (India charges 5 to 7%), thus making it difficult for the sustainability of SMEs in a competitive global market. Unfortunately, they do not have enough fixed capital to put as collateral or a guarantor to get a small loan from the bank.

Table 2: Distribution of ownership by gender of owner within SMEs.

Particulars	Percent of all SMEs	Average no. of workers	Percent of SME employment
Women	6	2.3	2
Men	94	15.5	96
Co-ownership by men	1	7.6	1
Total	100	5.2	100

Source: Daniels (2003)

4.1.3 Lack of Market Information

Lack of market information is also one of the major problems of women entrepreneurs. They lack of information on where, what price and when the product should be sold. They do not know how to get domestic, as well as export market access. Even they lack knowledge of using market promotion activities.

4.1.4 Traditional Technology and Poor Technical Knowhow

Woman entrepreneurs generally use local technologies to produce goods but these are not productive enough to fulfil market demand, produce quality/ beautiful products to compete with the international products available in the local market. As a result, SME entrepreneurs are losing their livelihood due to poor technical know-how.

4.1.5 Previous Experience

More than half the female respondents and 25 per cent of the male respondents have no previous work experience. Having no working experience is more prevalent among females who live in rural areas, work in the food-processing sector, are illiterate, or have only a primary education.

4.1.6 Lack of General Education and Practical Business Education

Apparently these tasks do not need particular knowledge and families perceive girl's education as a waste of time (Pasqua, 2001). In a study, Niemann and Romero, (2000) noted that girls are expected to marry and have a family, and it is commonly believed that a university degree will not help to find a bridegroom. Lack of business or managerial experience may also differentially constrain women's access to finance, an effect exacerbated by men's broader social and business networks (Carter et al., 2003; Carter and Shaw, 2006; Manolova et al., 2006; Heilbrunn, 2004). In fact, it has been suggested that educated women are often seen as a threat to the traditional male authority. Most importantly, the culture increase women's discrimination through their early marriage.

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4.1.7 Complicated Bureaucratic Procedures

Starting a manufacturing plant needs a series of license, registrations and clearances. Completing all these formality is not so easy, for female as well as male entrepreneurs, and every desk needs bribe for proper passing on of the file (Abdin, 2010).

4.1.8 Limited SME Support Centres

Recently, banks and financial institutions opened SME branch or support centres to give advice to the potential entrepreneurs on preparing project proposal, formulating marketing strategy, designing products, upgrading products quality for the SMEs. But this is not enough considering the growing need. A few consulting firms are providing consultation services but with high charges. There should have more SME support centres

4.1.9 Social Factors, Preferences, and Values

Women's family obligations often bar them from becoming successful entrepreneurs in both developed and developing nations. In contemporary Bangladesh, the socio-cultural values and norms has a strong influence on the issue of women discriminations. It is well established that in Bangladesh women or girl are everyday targets of discrimination within their household (Jahan, 1994; White, 1992; Zaman, 1996; Zaman, 1999). Similarly, Warren-Smith and Jackson (2004) comment that, "systems of finance and advice are also firmly oriented towards [men], leaving women to face a range of barriers when engaging with self-employment". There is, therefore, a general feeling that women may be disadvantaged in their ability to raise start-up finance (Schwartz, 1976; Carter and Cannon, 1992; Johnson and Storey, 1993; Koper, 1993; Van Auken et al., 1993; Carter and Rosa, 1998).

4.1.10 Cultural Barriers and Healthy Workplace Environment

Culture has been seen as a barrier to the self-confident and autonomous economic activities of women in Bangladesh. Likewise, structural barriers such as lack of marketable skills, time and ability to travel, land and assets, education, and position as primary family providers all compounded to the problem of entrepreneurship among women. The cultural values of Bangladeshi culture affect the workplace environment as if women do not belong there.

4.1.11 Property Rights for Entrepreneurship

The property right and inheriting rights on property is also a vital factor which limits the chance of funding capital for women. White (1992) who conducted a study on one village of Bangladesh had found that out of 40 women only 4 received their share of their inheritance. Women's right to property is not equal to that of men, which limits their ability to fund inherited share of capital. In combination with the general laws of the country, Muslim Personal Laws govern significant matters, such as property rights, marriage, divorce and fundamental rights (Ahmed & Chaudhury, 1980; Zaman, 1999). Furthermore, in the name of local custom and culture, women are discriminated in their actual right and its practice (Zaman, 1999). In result, these discriminations show up as barriers to the women starting up or carrying out an enterprise.

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4.1.12 Social Barriers

Because Bangladesh is a patriarchal society, women face an unceasing struggle for equality—both public and private. Abdul Alim states, “within the household and beyond it, men exercise control over women’s labor, their sexuality, their choice of spouse, their access to labor and other markets, and their income and assets through local decision-making and legal bodies”.

4.1.13 Lack of Recognition from the Society

From the societal aspect, lack of recognition from the society before success, makes it hard for women entrepreneurs to retain their motivation. Also in most conservative families, the idea of women doing business is not well accepted.

4.1.14 Male-Dominated Competitive Environment

Male middlemen suppliers, contractors and exporters dominate the industry and take advantage of women's isolation in the home and lack of access to credit, supplies and knowledge about the economy of their work. Women observing "purdah"(seclusion) often find it hard to visit banks, purchase their inputs or raw materials or market their product in public settings where they would have to deal with men. Rural women do not generally own physical assets that can be used as collateral for loans, as assets are usually in the names of their male relatives.

4.1.15 Non-Availability of Labour and Facilities

Moreover, non-availability of efficient or skilled labour, absence of marketing facilities for women and the absence of proper sales centre are some of the major obstacles to smooth transactions in business. Home-based workers lack access to inputs and services like credit, input supplies, markets and new technology that could increase their productivity.

4.1.16 Lack of Management Experience, and Production Skill

The lack of management experience and production skill is yet another major constraint facing the women population. Many rural women have the confidence to do something, but they often do not know how to act on it, because most rural women lack the education and basic training required for many jobs. When rural women wish to do something by themselves, they face numerous problems, such as the lack of knowledge about funding capital, resources, business ideas, knowledge about the marketing process, and cooperation from their family members and society.

4.1.17 Workloads

Entrepreneurial women are expected to handle a majority of traditional domestic roles—even if they are married. This tends to create a double-workload for woman entrepreneurs. Most of the working women and entrepreneurs work twice as much as a male person. After managing workloads at the job place, they must manage the workloads at home, which bring stressful outcomes in the business or the development of entrepreneurship.

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4.1.18 Capacity Building

Even if women obtain the resources to start a business, they often lack the tools—such as marketing, production and design, finance, bookkeeping, and e-commerce—to maintain and grow their business. Most of the time women in Bangladesh do not gain the necessary skills or technological advancement for capacity building in business. The basic reason is lack of social and personal supports and extra work load at home for households.

4.2 Overcoming the Barriers for Women Entrepreneurship in Bangladesh

The following ways can be taken to overcome the barriers women entrepreneurs face:

- a. By implementing the National Women Development Policy Properly
- b. By providing help by the Family members to women to enter and run business
- c. By taking precautions to budget their time effectively, and creating an adequate and manageable business plan by which to conduct their work, as they have lots of workload.
- d. *By having willingness* to work extra hard, remains dedicated, and never give up on their commitment to making their business work.
- e. By Establishing Education system that should have some mechanism to change social attitudes towards women.
- f. By Maintaining a quota for women entrepreneurs in the project undertaken by respective ministries and making sure that this quota is maintained properly
- g. By Getting *support from Government*
- h. By Getting Institutional Support for Financial matters
- i. By Receiving Highest priority in getting loan application
- j. By Arranging Training programs for the women entrepreneurs
- k. Providing Lower loan margin which is, at present, higher than the male entrepreneurs.
- l. Setting several programs to Encourage women entrepreneurship
- m. By providing forum for local women entrepreneurs where they can discuss, debate, identify and resolve issues pertinent to promoting their business interest.
- n. By highlighting solutions to the problems faced by women entrepreneurs in first establishing and then expanding their business interests.
- o. By creating a network linking women entrepreneurs all over Bangladesh so that they can solve their problems by mutual interaction and assistance.
- p. By equipping women entrepreneurs with required skills.

4.3 Factors Influencing the Development of Women Entrepreneurship in Bangladesh

4.3.1 Recognition

One of the key factors for the development of women entrepreneurship in Bangladesh is recognition (Saleh 1995). When the activities performed by the family members or by the neighbours, rural women feel encouraged to do it. Therefore, whatever the rural women do must be first recognized by their husbands and then by the family members and others. The types of family in the rural areas have impact on the development of rural women entrepreneurship. Study shows that rural women coming from a nuclear family become more entrepreneurial than joint family (Surti and Sarupia, 1983). The

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level of family liability can attribute the reason. This family has less liability than the joint family. However, lack of economic socioeconomic backwardness of the family, lack of family and community support, ignorance of opportunities, lack of motivation in initiating new projects, shyness and inhibition to involve with economic activities, preference for traditional occupations, etc. is the factors that inhibit the promotion of grass roots entrepreneurship development among rural women (Rao, 1991).

4.3.2 Family Occupation, Support and Resistance

The family environment influences the creation of entrepreneurial enterprises. Female entrepreneurs who receive support and cooperation from their families are likely to be more successful. Important factors include the occupations of the entrepreneur's spouse and father, and the reactions of family and friends to the decision to go into business. Few entrepreneurs have experienced hostile reactions or resistance from their family. Having decided to establish an enterprise, 88 per cent of female entrepreneurs report having met no resistance from spouse, friends, or children. However, any resistance which some female entrepreneurs did encounter came from their husbands. About three-quarters of female entrepreneurs, as compared to 42 per cent of male entrepreneurs, have been encouraged by friends.

4.3.3 Entrepreneurial Experience

Even before creating their own enterprise, male entrepreneurs often have more practical experience, not only within the family but also through contacts with professionals. Women have more difficulty gaining access to the world of work. Only a minority succeed in obtaining a job in the formal sector, and few succeed in the informal sector. In many cases, the creation of a micro-enterprise seems to represent the only possibility for women to engage in economic activity.

4.3.4 Changing Trend in Women Entrepreneurs

Women of today are in several ways different from the women of past years. Women entrepreneurs tend to be motivated by the need to provide security to their families and by their family circumstances. Modernisation of the work-place, introduction of new technology for increased production, increase of workers, along with the increase in the purchasing power upgrades her status both socially and economically. Increased self-confidence through participation in trade and generation of income had blessed most of these women with a home and a prosperous future. (Chowdhury 2001).

4.3.5 Regulative Factors

Regulative factors refer to different rules of the Government that facilitates women entrepreneurship development in rural Bangladesh. Regulation requires relatively clear demands, effective supervision and significant sanctions. Beyond this it also matters whether the mechanisms employed are mostly those of power involving obligation of authority where the coercive agent is viewed as a legitimate agent of control or whether they rely on the use of inducements (Scott, 2001).

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4.3.6 Independence and Keeping Thyself Busy

Independence and keeping thyself busy is the factor for the development of women entrepreneurship in Bangladesh. The right of doing something independently can keep them busy, and career and family security. Studies show that the independence of the rural women and the urge to be kept busy can make them entrepreneurial which has positive and significant effect on the women entrepreneurship development in the rural areas of Bangladesh.

4.3.7 Women and Business Opportunity

Women have been discriminated against in the male dominated society. As the numbers of female small business owners have grown, they have also been able to establish powerful support networks in a relatively short time. Now women are very active. They do their own businesses, which can a small business or a company.

4.3.8 Business Networks

Although men's greater breadth and depth of experience in the world of work brings them many important conduits of information and resources, women's small business activity, even more than men's, is likely to be connected to other parts of life. Because women enter entrepreneurship with deficits linked to their social position, network ties may be even more important for them (Brush et al. 2004; Moore and Buttner 1997). A typical structural argument is that because women work fewer hours in their businesses than men, they have smaller, less diverse networks. Running a home-based business, which is more common for women than for men could also limit connections to important network resources.

4.3.9 Organizations

A number of ministries and government and non-government organizations are working for the economic and social development of women. The Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs; the Ministry of Industries; the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives, and the Ministry of Youth are mainly policy-making bodies, but sometimes also act directly through projects. Various public sector agencies, meanwhile, are implementing programmes relating to self-employment and income-generating activities among women and to the promotion of SCI industries.

4.3.10 Government Training Support Programmes

In keeping with government policy of integrating women into the mainstream of economic development, various new projects have been undertaken in recent years. As women are among the poorest of the poor, most of these projects target poor and destitute women, promoting self-employment through income-generating activities. As part of this approach, most of these projects include training programmes and credit components. Given the nature of the training provided and the size of the credit extended, however, these projects will promote self-employment opportunities mainly in the informal sector, rather than real entrepreneurship development in formal small enterprises.

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4.3.11 Role of UN Agencies, Donors, INGOs, and NGOs

A number of UN Agencies, donors, INGOs, and NGOs are engaged in poverty alleviation and women's development programmes in Bangladesh. Some of these activities target both women and men, while others are aimed specifically at women. Around 600 are registered under the NGO Affairs Bureau, while the rest come under the Social Welfare Department (although a number of the latter are currently not in operation). Among those operating, a large number are involved in poverty alleviation for women through promotion of income-generating activities and creation of self-employment opportunities. They provide varying proportions of skill development training programmes, credit support, and other assistance. The clients of most include both women and men, but the majority of Grameen Bank and BRAC beneficiaries are women.

5. Conclusion

Bangladesh is now developing country and the population of this country is near about 20 corers. Although women make up half of the population, their participation in various activities is not the same as men's even today. Without the participation of women in the development process, society as a whole cannot be said to develop sufficiently. The outcome of the study clearly explains the most common barriers, women face in Bangladesh while doing business, the strategies to overcome those barriers, and other important factors influencing women entrepreneurs. The study concluded that if the family support, experience, education system, production skills can be improved, it is possible to change the trend of women entrepreneurship in Bangladesh. This change can be a big effect on our economy. They fight back against the odds, be it natural disaster or personal calamities- and eventually some see the triumphant face of victory. The outcome of this paper can be used by researchers, government, non-governmental organizations, civil society, and local community to formulate effective policies that motivate women to become entrepreneurs. This will have a positive effect on women participation on the economic development of Bangladesh.

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