**Position paper**

Committee – UNCSW (United nations commission on the status of women)

Country – Bangladesh

Agenda- Empowering women through Entrepreneurship

Bangladesh is it developing country situated in South Asian region. The Global Gender Gap Index (GGI) is 0.621 which secured third position among South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries .It is well recognized that poverty and gender discrimination cannot be mitigated without active participation of women in the economic mainstream. Women can be involved entrepreneurship or business activities where they can directly contribute to their family and the economy. In fact, women entrepreneurship development is a challenging phenomenon in Bangladesh as women are lagged behind (economically and socially) compared to men. 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 . 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 is about half compared to their counter partners .

Women entrepreneurs have improved their living conditions and earned more respect in the family and the society (Braun, 2011). The progress has been attained due to government policy supports and involvement of financial institutions (governmental and non-governmental institutions) along with other support services. Bangladesh Bank (central bank of Bangladesh) issues policy guideline for scheduled banks to give priority to women while disbursing Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) credit. Meanwhile, good number of NGO-MFIs offers microfinance services to the women involving actively in micro, small and medium enterprises.

A survey found that a woman first established business in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) in 1954. Although women first established enterprises in the mid-fifties, most woman-owned enterprises were developed after the independence of Bangladesh was declared in 1971. A sample survey found that 14 enterprises were established between 1976-1980, 24 during 1981-1985, 43 during 1986-1990, 85 enterprises were established during 1991-95, 195 during 1996-2000 and 78 between 2006 and 2009. After 2000, Bangladeshi people observed a different scenario in the case of women’s involvement in small business: nearly 50% of enterprises established in between 2000 to 2010 were owned by women (SMEF, 2009) . Another recent report revealed that, from 1996 to 2005, about two-thirds of the women entrepreneurs surveyed started their business (BWCCI, 2008: 8). This trend is not only increasing from the previous level in Bangladesh, but it is also comparatively better than in some countries of the South Asia region .This evidence indicates that women’s visibility in the economic sector is increasing despite the existing challenges.

POLICIES BY BANGLADESH

Industrial Policy 2010.

The Government of Bangladesh has considered women's empowerment as one of the principles of governance and so women's contribution in economic development has received paramount interest. The State's Industrial Policy 2010

Institutional Support for Business Women

Policy only gives guidance to the implementing agencies and actors to take necessary actions for achieving the ultimate target. Without translating the policy's goals into actions, it cannot bring about any result for the target group. To what extent the policy framework of Bangladesh is supportive for businesswomen depends on the implementation of these polices. It can be argued that different government policies have heightened awareness of the issues of women's entrepreneurship development in Bangladesh. In this paper policy implementation will be measured by the actions taken by government and non-government organizations.

SME Policy 2005

The SME policy focused on capacity development of women entrepreneurs in the SME sector to promote their activities to translate women’s endeavours in business as successful initiatives. The SME Policy of the Government also promoted bringing other women into business and motivating them to involve themselves in economic activities. This would empower themselves along with the society, in a broader perspective (Cited in, SMEF and MIDA, 2009).

Business Associations

In any country, more specifically in a developing or underdeveloped country, networking bodies or trade organizations play a vital role in improving bargaining capacity and business networking, which help women entrepreneurs by creating an enabling environment for doing business. A research finding showed that only 58% women entrepreneurs are members of formal trade bodies. Among the respondents (42%) who did not have any membership in any formal trade body, 32.5% mentioned that they were not well aware about trade bodies available in their localities and 15% mentioned that they well-informed about the trade bodies but the process to get membership seemed to them too complicated (BWCCI 2008 : 33).

Focal Point for Women's Entrepreneurship Development

The Small & Medium Enterprise Foundation (SMEF) has been working as an independent centre of excellence, created and generously-financed by the Government of Bangladesh, since July 17, 2007. The SME Foundation is providing different types of support to help the SME entrepreneurs, including the women entrepreneurs. To create an enabling environment for SMEs, this foundation has implemented a policy advocacy program, access to information and finance, a business support service and access to technology. Furthermore, special activities for women entrepreneurs have been undertaken by SMEF (2008-2009):

A number of issues have been found after conducting the FGDs and KIIs to discuss as the challenging factors which are creating obstacles to the enhancement of the entrepreneurship development of women in the country. It reveals that women in Bangladesh are still vulnerable to initiate their business on their own and once they started it seems quite difficult to continue their business with success.

**CONCLUSION**

Women entrepreneurship is not only a source of income generation but also a way of achieving economic independence. Women that are involved in enterprise are better off compared to those that are not. Realizing the importance of women entrepreneurship, Bangladesh government has taken several initiatives to encourage women getting involved in various micro, small and medium enterprises. Meanwhile, banks, financial institutions and MFIs have also given importance to developing women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. These financial intermediaries provide credits to MSMEs sector particularly the women entrepreneurs, in line with Bangladesh Bank guidelines. However, there is a greater lack of integration among various supportive organizations and lack of communal efforts to have sustainable benefits. The remaining challenges are lack of collateral free loans, traditional technology, skilled and trained manpower, training and educational institutions, and infrastructure and utility services and so on. Hence, there should have rights policy adjustment, their proper implementation and others necessary initiatives will pave the way for the emergence and development to women entrepreneurs’ development in Bangladesh. These actions will not only contribute significantly to national economy but will economically and socio-culturally empower women assisting in their gender role liberalization.