



KHAN FOUNDATION

In Special Consultative Status with the Economic & Social Council of the United Nations

Report No

**THREE DAY WORKSHOP
ON**

GENDER EQUALITY : A GLOBAL CHALLENGE

Jointly organized by
***KHAN FOUNDATION* & BRITISH HIGH COMMISSION**
DHAKA SHERATON HOTEL
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Preface

Khan Foundation was formed more than a decade ago primarily being motivated by the basic concept of "Democracy for development vis-a-vis development for democracy" espoused by the Foundation starting from national and international levels down to various grass root level action programmes at the remotest of our villages. The vision of the Khan Foundation for the next millennium is firm but yet quite flexible. It would like to see a future Bangladesh where liberal democracy flourishes and sustains along with the growth of Economic Development, where basic human rights and dignity are honored, where the millions of downtrodden Bangladeshis no longer suffer under the yoke of poverty, rather adapt to a lifestyle which is simple, yet not impoverished, which is peaceful, yet not extravagant and which is decent yet not too materialistic.

Khan Foundation programmes are conducted in an inter-disciplinary approach, through its various activities in the areas of democracy and development like strengthening of local government and cultivating bonds of friendship between Parliaments across the party lines, empowerment of women, realization of children's rights, reproductive health rights, as well as advocacy/mobilization efforts through training and reforms exercise.



***Bird's Eye View of the Democracy Auditorium of Khan Foundation
Located at the heart of the Capital City of Dhaka***

With the conviction that democracy and development cannot be sustained without the empowerment of women who are the backbone of society, Khan Foundation initiated in 1993 a nation-wide training project entitled "Effective Involvement of Elected Women Members (EWM) in the Local Government Structure". This project is a unique combination of good governance, decentralization, gender equality (economic and political empowerment of women), the capacity building of the local level representatives. The foundation believes that the Union Parishads being the lowest tier of the local Government must be made stronger. In order to build the capacity of the Union Parishad members and chairmen, trainings have no other alternatives. If the UP members and chairmen are being trained on good governance and gender issues then they would become instrumental in establishing democracy and guaranteeing gender equality. Specially the women members, leaders and chairmen should be trained so that they can perform their duties properly along with equip themselves to contest from the general seats. The EWM project is specially designed for that purpose. Till date, it has provided training to over 20,000 local level elected women and members. The workshop is just a continuation of the process. The participants came to know of the following issues by attending the workshop:

- How to make women capable and skilled in the field of politics.
- How to lobby for an issue or interest.

- How to remove the obstacles from the political sphere for women.
- How to maintain relationship with all the stakeholders etc.

Khan Foundation not only emphasizes on providing training to the local level women leaders, members and chairmen but it also exerts its level best efforts for empowering women politicians at the national level through policy advocacy, training and dialogues with the Parliamentarians, leaders, bureaucrats, professionals and civil society to build up capacity. KF also organizes several brainstorming with prolific public figure about good governance and gender equality. It is a relentless promoter of women participating in the National Election from the general seats. Women would join the parliament via direct election; this has been the vision of the foundation from its very inception.

British High Commission is a like minded organization which also works for the political empowerment of women. British High Commission has been trying its very best to politically empower the women through participatory training programs. That is why, in continuation to that program, in this noble approach British High Commission has extended its hand of all out co-operation. Without their co-operation, co-organizing the workshop would not have been made possible.

Advocate Rokhsana Khondker
Executive Director

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INTRODUCTION

Women constitute almost half of the total population but have been denied of their access to each and every empowering sphere of life. Since time immemorial, it has rather become customary if not mandatory that women would have to sacrifice their claim from everything whenever the occasion calls for it. But now a day the grave situation is improving. The women folk are now setting their firm and confident footsteps at every walk of life. Politics is no different. But like any other incumbents, women are facing the inertia as a new entrant into this aspect of activities. Owing to different social, religious and cultural impediments, women have historically been politically and economically marginalized and effectively precluded from participating in political life. This problem is reflected in the under-representation of women in the leadership of governing institutions and political parties.

Bangladesh has achieved its precious independence after profuse bloodsheds for months. After almost 33 years of independence, women still have frugal and limited access to politics. During the first 30 years, 10% of the total seats of the parliaments used to be occupied by women MPs through indirect election by the Electoral College. But this was not the proper way to ensure effective participation of women in the parliaments. As a result of this, the eligible women were deprived of their right to represent the people. This in a way also made the people, as a whole, under-represented in the parliament which was detrimental to the interest of the nation. This 10% reservation continued for about 30 years. Presently the government has passed the legislation that the reserved seats for women will be increased from 10% to 15% of the total 300 seats (that is 45 in number).

The reserved seats provisions for women were formulated in 1972 when the first constitution of the country was written about 33 years ago. Back then, this was the demand of time to ensure the participation of women in the national parliament. This system seemed to be plausible as the country was newly liberated and political parties feared that women would not win against their male counterparts if they were nominated to contest from general seats. This provision was a temporary feature and would continue for the next five years. After that period was over, the number of the seats was increased along with the enhancement of time period to 10 years. This has continued till date but failed to increase the participation of women in the national parliament. They still play ornamental role in the reserved seats. The evaluation of the past elections show that the political parties do not nominate women leaders to contest from the general seats with the male counterparts because the parties fear that they would fail. This is the height of injustice in the sense that the parties have not nominated them so that they could participate in the general elections. The parties confine them to the reserved seats only showing a nude disclosure of gender disparity. Ever since, independence this system has not improved women participation in the national parliament rather than secluded them by converting them into mere paper tigers. So, the present legislation of reserving 45 seats for women is not proper to ensure women participation. This has also been practiced at the local level but the women members and chairmen are being discriminated and mocked at by the male members and chairmen. The elected women representatives are not being treated in equality with their male counterparts even though their work area is thrice as bigger than that of a male. So, the foundation believes in giving a certain percentage of nomination to women by every political party.

In order to make the women capable to contest directly from their constituencies, Khan Foundation and British High Commission together took the noble step to equip the women members, leaders and chairmen with necessary mettle through three day long workshops conducted by the Commissioner of the National Commission for women, UK on political empowerment of women, Ms. Mandana Hendessi

BACKGROUND OF KHAN FOUNDATION

Khan Foundation aims at poverty alleviation and productive employment generation through advocacy and training to promote the cause of 'Democracy for development and development for democracy'. Khan Foundation was established more than a decade ago. Towards these objectives, Khan Foundation is indeed facilitating rural women's, and all the local level elected members' access to local politics monitoring, providing novel credit facilities for disadvantaged women as well as supporting international and national dialogues on sustainable development involving public representatives, academicians, professionals, civil society leaders and administrators.

It rapidly earned reputation as one of the few private voluntary development organizations (PVDOs) in Bangladesh able to link different levels of government with various civil society groups from the level of academicians to the grass roots in its efforts to sustain the democratic process and achieve social and economic development goals. The Foundation is now respected as a dynamic PVDO working towards achieving good governance, poverty alleviation and as an active advocate for women and children's rights and development.

Khan Foundation's conviction is- without these basic premises, any development effort or even the democracy exercise itself would become futile and non-sustainable. Khan Foundation also believes that its hard work has already paid off. Its different activities and studies reveals that there are thousands of beneficiaries who have access to a better quality of life and more secure and brighter future by virtue of Khan Foundation's work. In implementing any activity the foundation gives major emphasis on the people centered approach and facilitate the empowerment of the underprivileged at all levels.

The situation of political empowerment of women is grave in the context of our country. After almost 33 years of independence, women still have frugal and limited access to politics. During the first 30 years, 10% of the total seats of the parliaments used to be occupied by women MPs through indirect election by the Electoral College. But this was not the proper way to ensure effective participation of women in the parliaments. As a result of this, the eligible women were deprived of their right to represent the people. This in a way also made the people, as a whole, under-represented in the parliament which was detrimental to the interest of the nation. This 10% reservation continued for about 30 years. Presently the government has passed the legislation that the reserved seats for women will be increased from 10% to 15% of the total 300 seats (that is 45 in number).

With the conviction that democracy and development cannot be sustained without the empowerment of women who are the backbone of society, Khan Foundation initiated in 1995 a nationwide training project entitled "Effective Involvement of Elected Women Members (EWM) in the Local Government Structure". The aim of this project was to create strong and competent local bodies by ensuring effective participation of EWMs at all levels of administration governance and in the process to promote good governance at the grass-root level. Several activities were undertaken like one-day workshops, in-depth trainings, publications, monitoring cells and forum to implement the following objectives:

- To increase EWMs awareness of their rights and responsibilities as members of the UP.
- To reinforce the leadership skills and confidence of UP members so that they take part in decision making and development activities.
- To facilitate and build partnership and co-operation among female and male members of the UP.

The foundation believes that if women politicians cannot be empowered from the very grass roots level, then we cannot have proper women representation at the parliament. With this view in mind, they have trained about 20,000 women local level representatives so far. Utilizing the training, the women are now enlightened. They are aware of their roles and responsibilities. The women members have become confident and are now more motivated to interact with relevant people and authorities. These are the rare qualities which are nurtured by Khan Foundation through the trainings provided to them. The women members become confident and are now more motivated to interact with relevant people and authorities

So, the association of Khan Foundation and enabling women members has a strong bondage having a profound background. It is the very urge to make the women members more aware of their duties and responsibilities and democratize their process of being elected; Khan Foundation and British High Commission have undertaken the mammoth job of training the elected representatives.

THE WORKSHOP

The workshop titled, “Gender Equality: A Global Challenge” commenced on the 29th of November 2004 co-organized by Khan Foundation and British High Commission. Famous and noted international consultant and the Commissioner of the National Commission for women, UK on political empowerment of women, Ms. Mandana Hendessi conducted the workshop. Ms. Hendessi’s visit to Bangladesh aims at,

- Strengthening partnership between women’s organizations in Bangladesh and those in the UK
- Building capacity and foster better understanding of women’s political empowerment in Bangladesh
- Helping devise a strategy for promoting women’s political empowerment in Bangladesh and their greater participation in national and international social policy.

Objectives of the Workshop

The main objectives of the workshop was

- To ensure closer and stronger partnership between women’s organizations in Bangladesh and those in the UK with the aim of fostering mutual support, cross-fertilization and joint working on shared goals.
- To enhance the knowledge and awareness of the importance of women’s political empowerment and of their greater participation in national social policy in Bangladesh.
- To increase the awareness of models of a national umbrella organization to represent women’s interest in national and international social policy as a key in promoting women’s political empowerment.
- To augment awareness of the role of international forums and international instruments and how they can be effectively utilize to take forward the issues of political empowerment for women in Bangladesh.
- To devise a realistic, viable and sustainable strategy and plan of action for promoting women’s political empowerment in Bangladesh. For example, forming a commission for the women to uphold and promote women related issues.

Goals of the Workshop

The goal of the workshop is to ensure and promote gender equality and political empowerment of women.

Activities of the Workshop

The activities of the workshop constituted of providing training on several issues women in decision-making, political empowerment of women and violence against women

Duration

29 November to 1 December 2004.

DAY-1

The first day of the workshop titled, “Gender Equality: A Global Challenge” started off with immense enthusiasm and interest on the parts of the participants and the facilitator, Ms. Mandana Hendessi, Commissioner of the National Commission for women, UK. She flew all the way from England just to educate the chairmen and members, ie; the local level representatives at the grass roots level of Bangladesh about several issued pertaining to gender equality, violence against women and political empowerment of women.

All the participants were registered upon arrival.

The day commenced by the introductory remarks rendered by the Executive Director of Khan Foundation, Ms. Rokhsana Khondker.

Advocate Rokhsana Khondker

Executive Director, Khan Foundation

Chairperson, Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum & Shoishab Bangladesh.

She cordially welcomed all the participants and the honorable guests to the workshop. Then she explained the objectives of the workshop which are the following:

- To ensure closer and stronger partnership between women’s organizations in Bangladesh and those in the UK with the aim of fostering mutual support, cross-fertilization and joint working on shared goals.



Advocate Rokhsana Khondker is delivering her valuable speech

- To enhance the knowledge and awareness of the importance of women’s political empowerment and of their greater participation in national social policy in Bangladesh.

- To increase the awareness of models of a national umbrella organization to represent women's interest in national and international social policy as a key in promoting women's political empowerment.
- To augment awareness of the role of international forums and international instruments and how they can be effectively utilize to take forward the issues of political empowerment for women in Bangladesh.
- To devise a realistic, viable and sustainable strategy and plan of action for promoting women's political empowerment in Bangladesh. For example, forming a commission for the women to uphold and promote women related issues.

She stated that half of the population of the world is constituted by women, therefore, development is unthinkable if we leave this half of the populace underdeveloped. She opined that the economic solvency and emancipation of women rests on the shoulder of us; we, ourselves have to work in the favor of women from which ever position we are in right now. We have to integrate ourselves with the development of women, she said. She hoped that the reasons for the backwardness of women would be discussed in the workshop. Not only that, the workshop would also try to resolve the problems faced by women in day to day life and also try to figure out how they can establish a position for themselves in the world's perspective. Then she explained the topics which would be discussed in the following days, they were:

- Violence against women.
- Political empowerment of women
- Formation of a national commission for women.

Ms. Mandana Hendessi, then started off her presentation with a little introductory speech.

Ms. Mandana Hendessi

National Commissioner
National Commission for Women, England.

She thanked everyone for being present. She said that it is a privilege and honor to be invited to such a workshop. For that she thanked the British High Commission and Khan Foundation.

She said that she had brought the greetings of British women with her. She explained that her commission works as an advisor to the British Government. She had been trying her level best to find out how the women of the whole world could be well established, how she can help in it and devoted her life for the cause. In continuation to that noble aim, she had now come to visit Bangladesh and enlighten the local level representatives about gender issues. The topics of the workshop would include gender equality issues, enhancement of awareness and all the women related issues that had been discussed in different international conferences so far.

According to her, gender equality is the key to future peace and harmony, now the appropriate term should be gender inequality owing to the skewed representation of male at every sphere. In her presentation she had tried to show how women are getting lesser benefits at every walk of life.

In the presentation, Ms. Hendessi pinpointed several astonishing yet bitter facts about the standing of women in the modern world.



Ms. Mandana Hendessi, National Commissioner, National Commission for Women, England is delivering her speech and the her Left to right Dr. Nusrat Ameen Dept of Law, University of Dhaka, Barrister Moudud Ahmed, Minister, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Advocate Rokhsana Khondker, Executive Director, Khan Foundation & Chairperson, Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum and Shoishab Bangladesh, Mr Anwar Chowdhury, High Commissioner, British High Commission in Dhaka

Economic Perspective

Purchasing Power

- Only 1% of the world's assets are in the name of women.
- Men in the Arab states have 3.5 times the purchasing power of their female counterparts.
- 70% of people in abject poverty, living on less than \$1 per day are women.
- In Silicon Valley, for every 100 shares owned by a man, only one share is owned by a woman.

Women in the Workforce

- Among the developed countries, in France only 9% of the workforce and in the Netherlands 20% of the workforce are female administrators and managers.
- Among the developing countries, in Ecuador and Bahamas, 33% of the workforce is comprised of women administrators and managers.

Women as Decision Makers

The higher we climb in the administrative echelon, the lesser is the number of women, like:

- There are only 5 women chief executives in the Fortune 500 corporations , the most valuable publicly owned companies in the US. These include the CEOs of Xerox, Spherion, Hewlett-Packard, Golden West Financial and Avon Products.
- In Silicon Valley, for every 100 shares of stock options owned by a man, only one share is owned by a woman.

Political Empowerment of Women:

Women in Parliament:

1945 (26)	1965 (94)	1995 (176)
3% women MPS 2.2% women Senators	8.1% women MPs 9.3% women Senators	11.6% women MPS 9.4% women Senators

The record world average was reached in 1988 with 14.8% women MPs. The discussion shows over 30 years of span, political involvement of women has increased by a meager 3%.

Women as Heads of States

- Up till December 2003, out of over 180 countries, only 12 are headed by women.
- Bangladesh, the Philippines. New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Peru, Finland, Ireland Sao Tome and Principe, San Mariano, Panama and Latvia are headed by women. The Muslim countries are in a better position with respect to women head of the States.

Other Women leaders

- 5 Vice Presidents: Palau, The Dominican Republic, Taiwan, Gambia and Costa Rica.
- 4 Governor generals: New Zealand, The Bahamas, Canada and St. Lucia.
- Major Opposition leaders: Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Germany and New Zealand.

Women Ministers

- Only 7% of the world's cabinet ministers are women.
- They remain concentrated in social areas (14%) , public affairs (3.4%) and the executive (3.9%).

The United Nations:

- Only 9 ambassadors are women. Most of them are from the developing countries like, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Lichtenstein, Somalia and Turkmenistan.
- Women hold only 9% of the top managerial jobs and 21% of senior management positions, though 48% of the junior professional civil service posts.

Universal Suffrage:

- In the 21st Century, some countries still do not have universal suffrage. Among them are: Saudi Arabia, Brunei Darussalam, Kuwait, Sultanate of Oman and UAE.
- Latest countries to grant women suffrage are: Switzerland (1971), Iraq (1980), Namibia (1989) and Kazakhstan(1994).



A part of participants

Ratification of CEDAW

- Countries which have not ratified are:
- USA the only industrialized country.
- Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sultanate of Oman, Syria and UAE.

World Successes:

Gender Parity in Parliament

- Rwanda (49%), Welsh Assembly (50%)
- Sweden (45%)
- Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Holland and Germany, Argentina, Costa Rica, South Africa and Mozambique (30% goal reached).
- 13 African countries have higher proportions of women MPs than the UK (18%), US (12%), France (11.8%) and Japan (10%).
- Qatar is the first Gulf State to have a woman cabinet minister.

Example: 1 (Reserved seats)

- 45 reserved seats in Bangladesh.
- 10% in Morocco, post elections, the number of the women in parliament is an Arab world record of 35.
- In India 33% of seats at the local Government level are reserved for women.
- In Tanzania 20% of national and 25% of local Government level seats are reserved for women.

But the reserved seats for women are not appropriate. It has its limitations. So, other strategies might be adopted like implementation legislations.

Example: 2 (Legislated and Voluntary quotas)

- In France, 50% of the party nominees have to be women.
- In SA, 50% of the nominees for local elections have to be women.
- In Norway, the LP in 1993 introduced 40% quota for women.
- In Sweden, the Social Democratic Party introduced the Zebra Principle of listing one woman on every second line.

Then Ms. Hendessi presented her presentation on the political empowerment of women. According to her, this is a pre-requisite for gender equality.

Definitions of Political Empowerment (What is understood by political empowerment)

- To ensure that women of all walks of life have a sustainable stake in political life.
- To ensure that women's rights and issues are central and integral to civil society.
- To ensure that women's rights and issues are integral to Government's decision-making and their interests are adequately represented in the political arena.

Necessity of Political Empowerment

- Women make up at least half of the population, therefore, they are undeniably the backbone of the family and society.

- Women are the care-givers and educators.
- Social and economic progress of a nation rests on the advancement of its women.

So, if they are not politically empowered, then no development of the society is supposed to occur.

The Mechanism for Attaining Political Empowerment

- Political representation of rights.
- Capacity building programs at the grass roots level.
- Public education and generation of mass awareness.
- Monitoring
- Leadership skills training.

A National Commission for Women(A Voice for Women)

A national commission for women builds up a prodigious voice on behalf of women. It should be guided by some values like:

- Promote gender equality.
- Act independently, impartially and with integrity
- Be accessible to all
- Promote women's rights and issues across Government.



A part of Group discussion

Principles of the Commission

- Selflessness
- Gender equality
- Integrity
- Objectivity
- Accountability
- Impartiality
- Transparency
- Openness
- Honesty
- Portrayal of the problems in an unbiased manner
- Leadership

International Conventions and Instruments (Protecting Women's Rights Worldwide)

CEDAW- Women's Bill of Rights

- CEDAW and its Optional Protocol remain the only international treaties devoted to the rights of women. There have been significant advances in women's rights in the last 25 years since CEDAW was adopted in 1979.
- Specific obligations on governments on ensuring that women do not face discrimination and exploitation in work, education, health care, legal and constitutional rights, public life, social and economic benefits, access to services and resources.
- Government report on CEDAW; ie, Government would present a report after every four years.

Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

- Action to protect and promote the human rights of women and girl child.
- Action to eradicate the persistent burden of poverty on women.
- Action to eliminate all forms of violence against women.
- Action to promote economic autonomy.
- Action to ensure equal access to education and health services.
- Action to encourage an equitable sharing of family responsibilities.

In this context that Ms. Hendessi described her recent visit to Narshingi, where the spontaneous and numerous presence of girls at the school astonished her in a pleasant way.

UN Security Council Resolution 1325

The resolution was adopted in the year 2000. It advocates the participation of women in all spheres of peace-building and reconstruction in post-conflict. It also recommends action on part of Governments to ensure women's active participation.

After her lucid presentation, Ms. Rokhsana Khondker thanked Ms. Hendessi and opened the floor to invite queries or comments on the presentation.

Open Discussion

- There is a National Commission for Women's Development (NCWD) already existent on women's issues. The Prime Minister chairs this commission. But due to her limitation of time the meetings are not being held on a regular interval.
- There is a huge gap in the Beijing Declaration regarding gender gap.
- There should be a proper mechanism to transmit gender related information in the remotest corners of Bangladesh, i.e; the villages.
- The rate of dropout among the girls in education sector is 25%. Only 5% girls receive higher education. It is difficult to establish women empowerment if only this 5% is established in the position of higher officials.
- War and conflicts are a part and parcel of the developing countries now a day and the innocent victims are mostly the women and the children. This is an issue to ponder on.
- The PRSP (Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper), which is on the way of its preparation on January 2005, must be inclusive of gender and children issues, otherwise, development cannot be achieved.
- The constitution do not take care of the social security issues properly. So, the PRSP should take care of it and include necessary mechanisms.
- Women are constantly under pressure while attending professional activities.
- On receiving micro credit a woman needs the permission of the men of her family. At the grass-roots level the micro-credit received by a woman is often appropriated or used by man/husband/son. The middle class is the most left alone segment who not only suffers from assistance but also lack of opportunities.
- Women have frugal or brisk access to the direct election system. They must be provided with equal opportunities if they are capable enough to prove their mettle.
- Several jargons often create misunderstanding and sometimes provoke antagonism. Instead of using the word "Women Empowerment" we could use "Women Progression" to avoid such misunderstanding.
- Women have to work together with men.
- The punishment for oppression against women or murder is life imprisonment or capital punishment. The law should be equal for all and everyone should be under the jurisdiction of the law. Responding to that Ms. Khondker said that any criminal act is punishable and law persists for every facets of criminal activities. But there are some special laws to uphold the interest of women in general. Several conferences also now acclaim the equal participation of men and women.
- Gender inequality is rooted at the family from the very inception of a child.

- Women are the worst enemy of themselves because they do not believe in what they preach.
- Women's rights have to be established. For that they need to be unified and achieve different kind of skills for their economic and social emancipation and survival.
- The reserved seats pose a very sad scenario for women. This should be changed. Even only 5 women are given nominations from the general seats then at least one of them will pass. So, we must be given that opportunity.
- There are many rights reserved for women in the constitution but they lose their significance due to ill implementation like land right, inheritance right or gender equality right. So, the reality has to be assessed along with the constitution.
- The National Parliament could not make the women politicians established even through the reserved seats in the past three years. This situation is inevitable when men are the policy makers.
- Women are assured of their rights in the constitution. But they, themselves have to establish their rights and for that they have to be apt and efficient.
- Superstition and fundamentalism have to be removed. Men and women are complementary to each other in their roles as social renovators. So, achievement of equality is a must.
- Women are free to participate in election from any part of the country like their male counterparts but provided they are credible enough for the job. So, education, training are necessary to achieve that skill.
- In the Nikahnama, the previous marital status of the girl has to be provided. Same should be applicable for men.
- In the dawn of civilization, it was the women who took the leadership which led to matriarchal society. In the process, through the evolution of the society the table has now turned against women. The reasons for that need to be addressed.
- Women are being used as commodities in the media commercials. The obscene posters and cinema stigmatizing women by pin pointing them in a vulgar way are at the root of crimes. Answering to that Ms. Kamrunnisa Hasan, a noted BTV producer said that women are coming into the profession of modeling and acting. That is why they are being hired for the job. So, it is applicable for the boys. It is a question of social point of view. We worship beauty. The important thing is our self contentment. Ms. Khondker opined since women are coming at the media to a large extent so the media has a role in presenting them in a good and healthy way.
- If a woman falls victim to any crime then she always is highlighted in the media which is detrimental to her future life. The criminals are never that pin pointed in the media. This should be pondered on.
- Though the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition are women in our country but we should not judge the political empowerment of women from that point of view. This is only an eye-wash used by the patriarchal society. For true political empowerment of women, they have to be better educated, there are no alternatives.
- Workshops like this should also happen at the district level.

Ms. Khondker opined that Bangladesh has gone a long way in women education like Narshingdi. Though there are lack of opportunities for better education for girls at

other areas of the country but the situation is vastly changing. Girls' enrolment at the schools has increased inspite of the dropouts.

- The CEDAW declaration is not being implemented properly in our country. Our society is such that the birth of a son is still greeted with Azan while the birth of a daughter is blasphemed. So, the awareness has to be increased for establishing the rights of women.
- The Government should learn lessons from the position of women in the developed countries.
- The women have to be made aware to participate in the decision making process.
- Women participation is brisk at every level of the society There is only one female cabinet minister which is unfortunate. Africa is in a better position. One day, we can be like Africa, a participant hoped.

Ms. Hendessi thanked all for their invaluable opinions and in-depth discussion. She said that we discriminate among male and female from the very inception. This needs to be changed. Every policy has its strengths and weaknesses and obviously the reserves seats have some merits and demerits. The strengths should be taken out and stressed upon of the policy and the weaknesses should be removed. There are other ways of political empowerment of women. Whether women should receive higher education or not is a family related problem. Families do not want that, they very much think of getting their daughters married off. Since, they would stay with their husbands so any investments on them are seen as sunk costs. Thankfully the situation is improving in the Muslim World. In Iran, women are receiving vocational trainings at the grass-roots level. Government has taken several positive steps irrespective of the hurdles. So, women are participating in higher education more than before. There are some universities where only female can join. Thus the families are also assured of the safety of the girls. This is a huge step in female education. At the end, she assured that they would be discussing about many things in this span of three days. She thinks there is lack of proper policy in Bangladesh. She hoped that out of the workshop some strategies would be developed to narrow down the gap between men and women.

Inaugural Session

Advocate Rokhsana Khondker

Executive Director, Khan Foundation

Chairperson, Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum & Shaishab Bangladesh.

In her speech she welcomed all the participants in the workshop. According to her gender equality is a challenge. The ICPD+10 is eminent so these kinds of workshops hold special pertinence in that context. There is gender equality in the constitution and all are entitled to enjoy equal rights but the bitter reality is far different. Women are being discriminated and looked down upon everywhere in the world irrespective of the development status of a nation. Several international conferences have been held all over the world like the ICPD, Beijing Conference, Social Summit etc. without yield much results. She hoped that the workshop would discuss upon the problems and come out with some solutions if not all. Women's rights are not established because they do not have access in the decision making process. So, women have to empowered enough to integrate themselves in the policy and decision making procedures. Women have taken a left foot in the political sphere all over the world. She expressed her hope that the political empowerment of women would be discussed upon in the next day and also the participants would learn how the National Commission for Women, UK, is working in establishing their rights.

Ms. Hedessi then presented a detailed presentation on Violence Against Women from the Global perspective.

Violence against Women (A Worldwide Human Rights Catastrophe)

Definition

The United Nations Declaration on Elimination of VAW, para 1, defines VAW as “ any act of gender-biased violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”

Violence Against Women Includes

- All forms of violence in the family.
- All forms of violence in the community.
- Gender based violence perpetrated or condoned by the state or by “state actors” and armed groups in conflicts.



A part of Group discussion of Participants

Prevalence

- Atleast one out of every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime usually the abuser is a family member or a known person.

- Domestic Violence is the major cause of death and disability for women between the age of 16 and 44 years of age.
- 70% of female murder victims are killed by their male partners.

Roots of Violence

- Discrimination which denies women equality with men in all areas of life.
- Violence is both rooted in discrimination and serves to reinforce discrimination, preventing women from exercising their rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men.

UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women

- “A manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women which led to domination over and discrimination against women by men”.
- “Violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men”.

Causal Factors

- Poverty
- Economic and Political Marginalization
- Control of women's sexuality
- Violence in conflicts
- Vulnerability

Human Rights Framework

- Violence against women is a violation of human rights.
- Human rights are universal.
- Human rights are indivisible.
- Human rights can not be taken away.
- Human rights are interdependent.

UN Special Rapporteur

- Receive information on violations.
- Investigate each claim.
- Communicate with Governments.
- Attend conferences and seminars.
- Visit countries.
- Prepare reports and recommend action.

Organizing for Change:

- Making rights matter.
- Naming violations.
- Raising awareness.
- Engaging human rights mechanism.
- Harnessing community responsibility.
- Civil sanctions.
- Legal Actions.

Ms. Kathryn B. Ward

Visiting Professor and Senior Fulbright Fellow
The Millennium University, Dhaka.

She greeted everyone and said that she has visited Bangladesh many a time before. Bangladesh is known to her and according to her there are some distinction of Bangladesh with other South-Asian country. She expressed her satisfaction in the fact that women are taking up jobs in many formal sectors like army, police, teaching etc. But still women are vulnerable; she stated the case of Rahela in this context. She invited Khan Foundation to work in reducing violence against women in the villages.

Mr Anwar Chowdhury

His Excellency
British High Commissioner
Dhaka.

Firstly he expressed his gratitude for getting invited into such an enlightening workshop. He also welcomed the facilitator Ms. Hendessi and Rokhsana Khondker of Khan Foundation, the co-organizer.

He explained the reasons for interest of the High Commission regarding this issue. One of them would be the maintain the long-lasting friendship and partnership between his country and Bangladesh. The other reasons would be to promote a more effective running of democratic institutions and to establish greater consensus on key national challenges, including development, law and order, economic reform and governance. As part of this the UK always has always encouraged the full participation in the democratic process of all sections of society, including women, he added. According to him the focus of the workshop should be on how to mobilize the women's effort in Bangladesh under one umbrella group and to check whether that is a viable option or not.

In Britain steps have been taken to increase the number of women in decision making bodies. Patricia Hewitt, the British Secretary of State for Trade and Industry stated that, "It is vital that women are properly represented in all the democratic bodies in our country. Women offer a range of different experiences and bring different voices to policy debates". The UK Government is committed to working towards gender equality throughout the society, including in political life, he ensured. Women are currently under-represented in the majority of the UK's elected bodies and they wish to see this change, he added.



Mr Anwar Chowdhury, British High Commissioner in Dhaka is delivering his valuable speech

He stated that the UK never believed in making positive actions compulsory in order to increase the number of women elected. It is for the political parties to decide for themselves whether they wish to increase the number of women candidates standing for election for their party and if so then how to achieve this boosting up. The Government has also legislated that the party is at the liberty to use positive measures for the purpose.

According to him, representation also plays an important role. It is important for the decision makers to play effective role models to be truly representative of their electors. At the end he termed the women of Bangladesh to be “untapped resources” and empowering them is not just a matter of social justice but good economics that is good for women and good for Bangladesh-even the dimmest of men should be able to see this, he opined.

CHIEF GUEST

Barrister Moudud Ahmed

Honorable Minister

Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs,
Bangladesh.

He greeted everyone and said that no legislation has been passed in Bangladesh that would generate disparity among man and woman. Disparity lies more or less in terms of social and political rights of women. A social revolution is needed to resolve all the problems. Now, women are more eager to establish their rights, so the women empowerment has achieved a high pace now a day. But it has to be made even more



Chief Guest Barrister Moudud Ahmed, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Bangladesh is delivering his valuable speech

dynamic and agile. The constitution provides equal right to man and woman. To eliminate discrimination against women, the Government has put much stress on female education. There is an implicit women revolution going on in the country. But voice and muscle are needed to add to this. The other countries of the world have gone a long way in this respect. Bangladesh has deep respect in every declaration ensuring women's rights. Participation of women has increased in the local government bodies all across the country. They have played a vital role in the socio-economic development process of the country. Women are assured of the right of participating in the direct elections from the general seats by the constitution from any part of the country. In addition to that, women have to opportunity to represent themselves in the national parliament through the reserved seats. He thinks that this would boost up female leadership. He opined that if someone accuses Bangladesh of being fundamental and orthodox then one should see that both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition are females. There are opportunities for women to participate in the army and police force, he added. Lastly he gave an amazing statistics that in the last election 87% women utilized their right for votes.

At the end, he again thanked everyone for their patient listening.

Violence Against Women: Bangladesh Perspective Dr. Nusrat Ameen

Associate Professor

Department of Law, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

This session chiefly constituted of Nusrat Ameen's dissertation on violence against women in the context of Bangladesh from the legal perspective. Nusrat Ameen presented her paper titling "Violence against women in Bangladesh: A legal perspective". She discussed various facets of violence and presented some case studies on violence against women. She cited about her fieldwork and questioned the current method of estimating the number of domestic violence based on reported incidents since the society

tends to view the crime against women as “*not uncommon or unusual behavior*” (Commonwealth Secretariat: May 1987). She also questions society's camouflaging role to label the crime as “personal matter”. Cataloguing different forms of violence against women i.e. murder of women, wife abuse, acid burn, rape, rape in a marriage, rape in custody, fatwa related violence, trafficking, kidnapping, abduction, wrongful detention, police violence, domestic and so forth she also pointed out the prevalent patriarchal attitude towards women.

The weakness of law, she added, lies in the fact that “*both substantive and procedural law is not gender neutral*”. The laws governing women's private lives are discriminatory. They also discriminate against women of the same community against men, for example, women have either delegated right of divorce or that the court has to be satisfied on their behalf that the husband should release them of the marriage contract. They do the same between women from different communities too, for example, a Hindu woman does not have the right to divorce in Bangladesh. She regretted the fact that no specific law on wife abuse exists and due to plurality of the law, a man can get away with raping his wife or committing adultery. She presented a shocking fact that almost 70% of the violence against women occurs at home at the hands of the husbands. She scrutinized further the relevant laws i.e. the Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act, 1933 meant for curbing prostitution but in reality, she opined, “*prostitution and immoral trafficking are two sides of the same coin*”. She discussed about The Children Act, 1974 aiming to provide protection for children fails because of the improper implementation. Criminal law as a relief for women in Bangladesh in the penal code (act XIV of 1860) e.g. kidnapping or abduction, wrongful detention, wrongful restraint or confinement, slavery or forced labour causing miscarriage etc. hurt, criminal force /assault etc. were also included in her dissertation. She further threw light on the drawbacks and loopholes of criminal laws relating to physical harm, the criminal offences relating to marriage and criminal law on sexual harassment. She also points out the dearth of adequate and effective civil law provisions to which victims of violence and wife abuse can resort. Divorce, polygamy, non-maintenance, child marriage are the several of the facets that women of this country has long been subjected to. She suggested prohibiting polygamy in Bangladesh like Turkey. Her informative account of violence against women also dealt with the special laws to prevent violence against women e.g. Dowry Prohibition Act, 1980; Cruelty to Women Ordinance 1983; Repression Against Women and Children Act 1995; Women and Children Act 2000; Women and Children Repression Prevention 2003; Acid Crime Prevention Act 2002; Acid Control Act 2002.

In her dissertation, she also questioned the authenticity and reliability of existing laws and acts that more often fail to provide legal support and ensure protection and safety for women. She discussed several legal phenomena, loopholes in existing laws meant for protecting women, administrative corruption, disparity of property inheritance, lack of divorce, lack of reforms in Hindu law and more broadly the lack of implementation of the law.

Though there persists law against trafficking of women but it is a regret that it has not been successfully implemented, she expressed her grief about that. Women are taken under safe custody but there true safety over there is a debatable concern. Women are being forced into adolescent marriages by providing forge certificate of age. Protection must be provided to the wives who have faced violence by their husbands otherwise they would not depose against them, she opined. The traumatic court procedure during the trial is also a matter of blasphemy for the violated women, so they think they better restrain from obtaining legal help. So, special tribunal and speedy justice are required specially in the rape cases.

Recommendations

- Preventive measures should be ensured to check violence against women.
- Domestic violence should be recognized as an offence by law reform/enacting law.
- Protection must be ensured for maintenance and prevention of further abuse, i.e; separate stay. Moreover, support services must be provided to the victims of the violence, including refuges, specially trained health workers, rehabilitation programs for victims and counseling for both victim and abusers and co-relation between different service providing agencies.
- Training of the public officials.
- Collection of statistics and research (national census).
- Gender sensitization projects directed at the media and education.
- Effective complaints procedures against abusers where necessary and civil remedies (compensation, divorce) to the victims.
- Education and employment opportunities for women.
- Training and employment opportunities for women.

Open Discussion:

- The equality of women, ensured by the constitution should also be brought about in the socio-economic aspect of the country.
- The pluralism of the law regarding the age for eligibility of marriage should be resolved.
- The situation of women even in the developed world is not satisfactory. Only education can liberate them like it had happened in England.
- Polygamy of men, especially those who take wives from the country and settles abroad must be dealt with impunity.
- Wage discrimination and frugality between men and women should be considered by the concerned authority. Specially the payment of women in the tea sector is very low.

Mr. Anwar Chowdhury, Honorable British High Commissioner, thanked everyone for the comments and responded to their queries.

- The UK preserves the rights of all irrespective of color, creed, caste and ethical belief. There is about 2 million muslims living in the UK and amongst them the percentage of rich Sylheti muslims is significant. There are polygamy the percentage is low and sometimes remain indictable because the wives are not ready to co-operate with legal bodies.
- British High Commission carry outs several activities like Khan Foundation to promote gender equality.
- Regarding tea gardens and wage discrimination, he said that the British Companies know about the policies of Bangladesh. They pay 50% tax. But the issues discussed here should be discerned.
- He extended his all out support in eliminating gender discrimination and violence against women reiterating that he would always remain a faithful ally of Khan Foundation in this noble venture.

Advocate Rokhsana Khondker thanked all the participants and the guests for attending the workshop and hoped that a strategic paper would be mechanized from this very workshop to promote gender equality. This would obviously be provided to the Government for its approval. At last, she requested everyone to attend the workshop the next day and declared the closure.

DAY-2

Advocate Rokhsana Khondker,

Executive Director, Khan Foundation

Chairperson, Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum & Shoishab Bangladesh.

She foremostly greeted and welcomed everyone to the workshop. She reiterated that women could not be made politically empowered unless they have proper access to decision making procedure. She stated that the bill for the reserved seats in the parliament for women had been passed the previous day. The fact that how significant is this step for the proper political empowerment of women would be discussed that day. The next day, the participants would discuss on how to integrate the Government into the proposed National Commission for women to establish the rights of women, she added. India, Pakistan and Nepal have such commissions that work as advisory bodies to the Government and provide suggestions to the respective Government about the gender aspects of several policy initiatives. She hoped that the participants would shed light on how this could be done in the context of our country.

Then Ms. Nazmunnesa Mahtab Ph.D. discussed lucidly about the political empowerment of women.

Professor Nazmunnesa Mahtab, Ph.D,

Chairperson, Department of women studies

University of Dhaka.

She took off with her informative presentation by terming “Gender Equality” and “Women’s Empowerment” as two of the most pervasive themes in development. She accepted the world wide discrimination against women and also shed some light of hope by stating that Third World Feminist Group, notably DAWN had fixed two long term goals, namely; freedom and empowerment. Freedom implies freedom of choices, freedom over their lives within and outside home and removal of all sorts of inequality and oppression by better establishing law and order. But to achieve this goal, power is essential, she opined, in terms of internal strength, determination of one’s choices of life and influence the direction of social change. Then she provided various definitions of “Empowerment” as per different prolific economic figures. But the most appropriate one was given by Srilatha Baltiwala. According to her, empowerment has replaced some terms, they are, poverty alleviation and welfare and community participation. However, the definition of empowerment raised a number of concepts associated with the terms. The concepts are the followings:

- Power
- Domination
- Control
- Access
- Confidence
- Assertiveness
- Decision Making
- Choice

“Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation to decision making, power and control and to transformative action (Karl: 1995)”, she summarized.

As Ms. Mahtab continued, she discussed several dimensions of empowerment that are cognitive empowerment, psychological empowerment, economic empowerment and political empowerment.

While discussing situation of women in governance in South Asia, she disclosed an astonishing fact that only 7% of the parliamentary seats are occupied by women. Women occupying top positions in different government hierarchy are also frugal.

The two most important bills of rights establishing women’s rights as human rights are:

- CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women.
- The Beijing Platform for Action adopted in 1995.

In the context of Bangladesh several things need to be addressed, for example the poverty of the country, culture of the female subordinate, weak political institutions, social and political factors. Political rights and participation of women are constitutional rights of every Bangladeshi woman. She appreciated the step of adopting a National Policy for Women which was declared by the former Prime Minister on March 8 1997. The main aim of the policy was to establish equality between men and women, establish women as human beings and ensure empowerment of women in the fields of politics, administration and the economy. According to Dr. Mahtab Women’s right to vote is very crucial because it is the building block for women’s legislative representation. It can be regarded as the first requirement for women to have access to any form of exercising political rights.

Late on, she presented some charts showing women representation at the National Parliament, Local Government, Ministries, the cabinet etc. In the light of the discussion she presented the following recommendations:

- Increase in the number of seats.
- Discontinuation of the present system of indirect election for the women members in the reserved seats.
- Provision of direct election to the reserved seats.
- Political parties to nominate at least 10% of the women for the parliament.

However, there are no alternatives to awareness raising and education, training for the political empowerment of women, as they are the corner stones.

Ms. Mandana Hendessi

National Commissioner

National Commission for Women, England

She welcomed everyone to the second day of the workshop. She also thanked Ms. Nazmunnesa for the beautiful and very informative presentation. She expressed her deepest grief in the fact that the participation of women in the higher echelon of the administration is really low. The higher we look in the hierarchy the lower is the participation of women. In the developing countries women are coming forward in a slow and steady pace but the situation is not so with the developed countries. Almost half of the world population is women. So, parity is a must. She unanimously agreed with Ms.

Nazmunnesa that the position of women in the world's perspective is really very pathetic. So, we seriously need to consider empowerment of women.

One of the way could be a higher representation of women in the national parliament and for that reserved seats could be a mechanism. Though it has its merits and demerits. She stressed on the fact that there are other strategies for empowerment of women other than reserved seats.

In 1993 women's rights were regarded as a secluded issue and not a general concern. Only after 1993, women's rights were regarded as human rights, which is a regrettable matter. Rights for women should be made a concern for the civil societies as well.



Advocate Rokhsana Khondker, Executive Director, Khan Foundation and Chairperson, Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum & Shoishab Bargladesh and Ms. Mandana Hendessi, National Commissioner, National Commission for Women, England are surrounded by the Participants

The Government should have a gender cell (women related cell) in every ministry. In many cases, women are oppressed and violated by Government officials, co-workers, police and the army. Everyone should be made aware of the fact and necessary steps should be taken, she stressed.

The health care for women is an important issue and measures are required to ensure proper health care for the.

All women should be made politically stable. Then she explained the necessity of women's empowerment and a national commission for women.

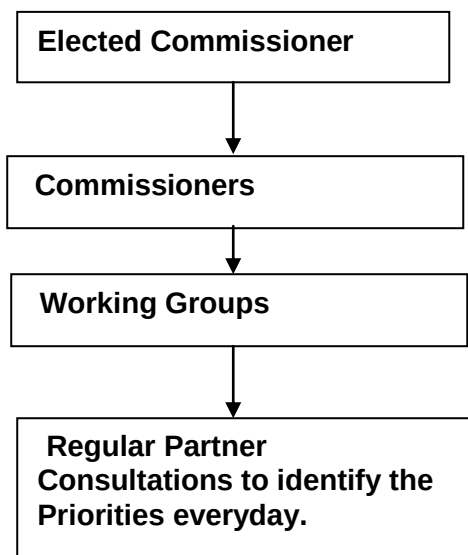
Why empowerment of women is necessary

- Almost half of the population of any country is women. Sometimes it is more than 50%. Like in Iraq women constitutes almost 60% of the population. So, their empowerment is necessary.
- A woman is the backbone of a family.
- A woman takes care of the whole family.
- Socio-economic status of any family lies on a woman.

Why formation of the National Commission for Women is necessary

- To uphold gender equality.
- The socio-economic background or ancestral history of a woman is not needed. We have to remember that she is a woman that is all.
- Only one principle would prevail, that is equality.
- It would be impartial.
- It should be accessible by any woman in need.
- It should have branches across the whole country.
- It would complement the government by providing different gender related information and analyze the gender aspect of the policies.
- It would act as an advisory body to the Government.

Structure of the Commission:



Panel Discussants

Dr. Salahudding Aminuzzaman

Professor, Department of Development Studies
University of Dhaka.

He thanked everyone present in the workshop. He also thanked Khan Foundation and the British High Commission for inviting him over here. According to him to ensure participation of women, men must be integrated into the process as well which is a mandatory condition. The situation of women is bad across the world being characterized by several problems and reservations. We are fortunate to have a woman Prime Minister and a woman Leader of the Opposition. But we should not be smirking over the fact because those who surround them are man, he opined.

He pointed out to a crucial fact that women empowerment does not necessitate breaking up of families. One should remember that families are at the root of a society and if women begin to neglect their families after being empowered then the very root of the society would be destroyed. In the West breaking up of families is a major problem. Now, they are stressing on the importance of family life. He made himself clear about the fact that family is not an impediment for empowerment rather could play a supportive role. To have a respectful life, there is not alternative to the institution named family.

We see various examples of political empowerment of women today, he continued, but the empowerment from every aspect needs to be considered more. We need to change our mindset firstly, he reiterated. The parents need to be made more aware and also the women leaders need to fathom this.

Women empowerment is not anything else. It is just an interrelated factor. The problems of women are vast in the West too. There are some places in the modern western world where women do not have the provisions for maternity leaves. But on the contrary, we have them, he explained his satisfaction over it.

All the sectors and ministries of the Government should have a women related cell rather being secluded into an entirely separate department.

Regarding the forming of the Commission, he opined that we have the tendency of evading the problems after forming a commission. So, we also have to think about the appropriateness of the commission in establishing women's rights.

He again thanked all and took everybody's leave.

Ms. Sohela Nazneen

Assistant Professor
Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka.

She greeted everyone and said that many lip services have been provided for the political empowerment of women very few objectives have been achieved so far. The chauvinistic patriarchal social system is at the root of the failure. But the women also have to think about empowering themselves and work together in achieving the objective.

We also have to think about why the participation of women at the local level government is higher than that in the national parliament. We also have to think about how to change the non-cooperative behavior of men towards this, she opined. In addition to that we also have to think about how to network the interests of women, she suggested.

Regarding the forming of the commission, she stated that how far impartial the commission would be in the context of Bangladesh is ambiguous. She questioned the impartiality of the commission if the tasks would be executed by the respective Minister or the ministry. She also pointed out to the fact that the result of the consultation crucially lies on the nature of the problem which are different from different perspective.

The women must make themselves able to voice their demand prodigiously and channel them to the proper authority. Otherwise development in the truest sense could not be achieved.

At last, she again thanked everyone.

Then the facilitator, Ms Rokhsana Khondker opened the floor. The participants asked many questions which were answered by Ms. Hendessi.

Question and Answer session

Question: Are all the members of the Commission are women in the UK? Is the Commission permanent?

Answer: All the member are female. The commission is a permanent one because unlike Bangladesh the number of NGOs in the UK is very limited. But things are different with Bangladesh. What should be the guiding principles of the commission must be determined by women themselves. In the begging the commission in the UK was like a community meeting. The sophisticated while female used to the members. First they just used to discuss the prices of the commodities amongst themselves. Women representatives from all the corners of the country were absent. Later on, the women representatives from all the provinces of the country started to renovate the commission and made it a general one. They suggest whom to consult with if any woman is facing a problem. Since the commission is constituted of numerous women representatives so, the commission is quite a known name in the UK.

Question: When was the commission formed in the UK? Are there such commissions in any other country of the world? Could this commission be formed by Government initiative? What is the structure for payment?

Answer: The commission in the UK started in 1965. All the workers provide voluntary services. There is no salary but transportation allowances are there.

Question: Funding is necessary at the grass-roots level. How can this be ensured?

Answer: The funding could be generated by membership fees. Even an incentive structure is being suggested in the UK for the workers.

Question: How is the commission helping those in their empowerment who have been elected?

Answer: In the UK the commission helps them in several ways. The elected women face several problems after they start to work in the particular areas. The commission helps them in this respect.

There is a Union Parishad (UP) Gazette, which is not being followed all the time. Same is applicable for the Government officials. There are some rules involved while arresting a UP member, which are not followed here. The commission could ensure that the principles would be followed.

Question: What should be done to form such a commission?

Answer: The formation of the commission is dependant on the participants. They would determine the mechanism in the group session. The outcome would be provided to the Government.

Question: How to realize the duties and responsibilities of a UP woman member?

Answer: In the UP, men members always overshadow female members but the women who are at a very high position in the bureaucratic or administrative hierarchy should be followed.

Question: What many members do they have in the UK? Are they politically neutral? If a commission as such is formed in Bangladesh then who would be the members?

Answer: When the commission was formed in the UK in 1965, women used to gather and chat over many things. They did not discuss any issues in particular. Later on the commission took a democratic form and now have a membership of 400. Any politically impartial person would be made a member.

Recommendations:

- All the problems should be resolved based on gender equality. That would ensure the political empowerment of women.
- The commission should be free of any government influence.
- The members of the commission could be volunteers or the commission may follow any incentive structure.
- Establishment of women's rights is sort of a disaster management, so there has to be voluntary services as well.

After that session the participants were divided into five groups and asked to write down their suggestions on five different issues regarding the formation of the commission.

Group Work

Group: 1

Who would be the assistants and the members of the proposed Commission?

- Educated, experienced and aware women should be the members of the commission.
- No local or national level elected representative could be made a member or assistant of the commission.
- Only the politically neutral and independent individuals or organizations could be made the members or assistants of the commission. No person actively involved into politics should be made a member or an assistant.
- Women who work for the women at the grass-roots level having profound experience in the field of establishing women rights are the most eligible to pass on as members.
- The women and men members should be in proportion from the lowest to the highest level of hierarchy of the commission.

Group: 2**What should be the responsibilities of the Commissioner of the proposed commission?**

- Certifying citizenship, providing testimonials and attesting all sorts of identification card.
- Involving him/her into different development activities.
- Preventing violence against women, polygamy, adolescent marriage, dowry, acid crimes, women and children trafficking.
- Resolving the local disputes in the village courts, taking preliminary actions and prevent any disturbance.
- Building different roads, culvert, bridges and maintaining them.
- Helping the educational institutions in carrying out their duties by involving him or her into the member committee.
- Making provisions for compensations by the perpetrators of different crimes to the victims.

Group: 3**What should be the role of the Commissioner of the proposed Commission for women?**

- Inspiring the women from the grass-roots level to the highest one for concerned issues.
- Integrating women folk from all walks of life to establish their rights.
- Increasing awareness in the favor of women rights at the family level.
- Taking steps to change the male dominating attitude of the society after detailed research.
- Ensuring education for girls at all levels.
- Devising out different strategies with the government in respective issues after exchanging dialogues with the members of the commission.
- Taking up on different activities for the sake of better education, health services etc.
- Improving the law and order situation of the country and making it congenial to the public interest.
- Providing financial help in different development activities in health and education.
- Establishing the political rights of women.
- Trying for increasing political awareness.
- Increasing awareness against superstition and fundamentalism.
- Trying to eradicate all sorts of social, domestic and political violence.
- Ensuring the safe mobility of women.
- Integrating the men in establishing rights of women.
- Increasing awareness against polygamy, adolescent marriage, dowry etc.
- Exerting efforts to make women self-independent.

Group: 4

What should be the process adopted while electing for a Commissioner of the proposed Commission?

- He/She must be a graduate at least.
- He/She must be 30 to 45 years of age.
- He/She should be a politically neutral personality.
- He/She must have leadership qualities.
- He/She must be associated with different social development related activities.
- He/She must be able to integrate different professionals with him.
- He/She must be patient and stoic.
- He/She must have a good character.
- He/She must be responsible.
- He/She must be experienced.
- He/She must be a popular personality.
- He/She must be committed and diligent.

Group: 5

What should be the relationship of the proposed commission with the already existing National Commission for Women's Development (NCWD)?

- Both the commissions would have complementary roles.
- The commission could work as an adviser in political empowerment of women.
- The commission should be completely independent and politically neutral while undertaking any decision.
- The commission should extend its sphere of activities to the grass-roots level.
- The commission should always consider the suggestions of NCWD.

Open Discussion

Ms. Rokhsana Khondker opened the floor after the group work. The participants expressed several suggestions, there are:

- Representation from all the professionals namely doctor, engineers, lawyers, NGO workers must be there in the commission.
- Representatives from all the districts must be there.
- Those individuals or organizations that believe in the freedom of women should be made members.
- There should be an executive body whose member would be 11 in number.
- There should be the provision of a sub-committee if necessary.
- While electing a commissioner, there should be a steering committee of 5 to 7 people. They would collect the members. The members would then elect the commissioner.

- The steering committee should be formed after discussing with the Government. There should be no Government official in the steering committee but they could play the role of election observers.
- Any prolific women leaders or public figure could be made members. Those people would be made members through whom the commission could operate properly.
- The members should believe in changing for the better.

The participants unanimously asked Ms. Rokhsana Khondker to carry out the duties of forming the commission and selecting the members of the steering committee.

Regarding the confusion about funding, Ms. Hendessi stated that in the UK the fund comes from the Government though the commission works independently. In our country, we could think of raising funds ourselves, could be in the form of membership fees, be it monthly or annually. The UK could do the follow-up. The Government has formed the NCWD though the ambit of its activities is limited. Donation is equally disagreeable because in that case the commission would be obliged to listen to that person. Same goes for the Government donation.

In the end, the facilitator thanked all and called it a day.

Day-3

Advocate Rokhsana Khondker

Executive Director, Khan Foundation

Chairperson, Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum & Shoishab Bangladesh.

She welcomed everyone to the closure of the three day-long workshop. She offered her gratitude to the British High Commission for extending their hand of support. According to her poverty is the main impediment standing in the way of the development of women. Their male counterpart subjects them to several oppression and violence. So, the women issues have constituted the burning topics in several national and international conferences. Though several steps have been initiated from the public and private sectors, but several problems still stand in the way. Women have been guaranteed all equality rights by the constitution but in vain. For political emancipation, they have to be integrated into the decision making process.

Regarding the reserved seats for women she said that, after the independence of Bangladesh, there were 15 reserved seats for women for the next 5 years. Later on the number of reserved seats were increased from 15 to 30 for the following 10 years. In 1990, the women organizations staged movements for direct election for women but instead the government increased the reserved seats scenario for another 10 years more. Since 1996, women have been participating in the UP general election but they are politically on a back seat.

She took the instance of the Chief guest of this session and said that if she could get elected from a general seat than so could all of us being a woman. If women are provided with proper opportunities with respect to education and training, than they could also prove their mettle and make themselves apt to participate in a general direct election like the male counterpart.

So, the political parties should provide nominations to women to contest for general seats though direct election, she suggested. In the UP, a woman is responsible for 3 wards but they do not have adequate facilities to perform their duties properly.

She hoped that, when the time has come to form a commission for women to voice their demand, honorable minister would help them and provide invaluable suggestions.

Ms. Mandana Hendessi

National Commissioner

National Commission for Women, England.

Ms. Hendessi thanked everyone for inviting her and thanked everyone for a thought provoking discussion on forming a national commission for women.

Ms. Mandana Hendessi incorporated all the issues and challenges facing women's political empowerment in Bangladesh as per the group discussions of the participants in the previous day. She presented all the recommendations regarding the forming of a National Commission for Women, which represents the interests of women in national decision-making.

The Characteristics of the Commission:

Commission's guiding values:

- It will promote gender equality and women's empowerment in all spheres of social, economic and political life.
- It will act independently, impartially and with integrity.
- It will be accessible to all women.
- It will promote women's rights and issues across Government.
- It will work transparently and inclusively.
- Its membership will reflect the diversity of Bangladeshi people.

Commission's Membership

- The commission will have a network of member organizations and individuals who work on women's rights and issues across Bangladesh representing all 64 districts. Its members will reflect the diversity of rural and urban areas and the issues and interests of women from all walks of life.

Role of the commission

- To act as an official advisory body on women's rights and issues to Bangladesh Government.
- To be independent of Government and of political parties.
- To act as an umbrella group for all civil society groups and organizations promoting women's interests across Government.
- To facilitate the involvement of women and civil society groups representing women's interests and promoting gender equality in national decision making and to act as a bridge between Government and civil society organizations.
- To monitor and comment on Government policies and make appropriate interventions and recommendations promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.
- To work collaboratively with the National Council for Women's Development (NCWD) and produce CEDAW alternative report.

Structure of the commission

- The work of the commission will be overseen by the board of commissioners numbering between 10-15 members and headed by a chairperson, all to be elected by the membership.
- As a preliminary measure, a steering committee will be established to outreach, build networks and constituencies, recruit members, set up nomination and election process and build the infrastructure of the commission.
- The commission should be legislated.

Work priorities for the commission

- Public education to change the mindset of people in respect of the role of women in the family and society and to raise awareness of the importance of gender equality and equity in all spheres of social life.
- Capacity-building to raise women's self-esteem and encourage them to be independent and self reliant.
- Promote girls' and women's participation in education at all levels.
- Promote women's economic autonomy.
- Increase women's social and political awareness.
- Raise awareness about issues of violence against women and promote safety and protection of vulnerable women in the family, the community and in society.
- Promote the eradication of polygamy.
- Promote the eradication of adolescent marriage.

Criteria for the selection of commissioners

- Must have awareness of gender issues.
- Must be committed to gender equality.
- Must have leadership qualities.
- Must have experience of work in social development.
- Must be a good communicator and team player.
- Must be industrious and hard working.
- Must be sincere and have an open approach to work.
- Must have an approachable personality.
- Must be at least 30 years of age and educated up to degree level.

Ms Milie Sengupta

Representative

The British High Commission

She exclaimed her pleasure for being present at the closing ceremony. She explained that this kind of workshop is specially pertinent since we have face some bitter global facts about women empowerment everyday. Women globally hold only 1% of the world's asset and only 9% of the top managerial jobs. She re-provided the information provided by Ms. Mandana Hendessi in the earlier sessions to remind us of the gruesome situation we are in right now.

She thanked Mandana for providing the training and enlightening us on how the commission could be built in the context of Bangladesh. She re-assured that the UK still has some way to go in the political emancipation of women. She expressed her full confidence in the on-going partnership of the two countries.

She expressed in deep grief that in developing countries like Bangladesh, poor socio-economic status makes political empowerment of women even more important. She again thanked Ms. Rokhsana Khondker and Ms. Hendessi for organizing such an enlightening workshop.

SPECIAL GUEST

Mr. Md. Moortuza Hossain Munshi

Secretary

Ministry of Women and Children Affairs

Government of Bangladesh

He greeted everyone. Then she gave a brief discussion of what kind of activities the Government of Bangladesh is carrying out for the betterment of women. He described the activities of MOWCA, adoption of National Action Plan (NAP) , activities of NCWD, WID focal point mechanism in different ministries, departments, district and UP level etc. He also gave a brief discussion of how they are involved into the planning and implementation of the programs.

He thanked all and hoped that with the guidance of Ms. Haque the ministry would be able to undertake more focused, specific and target oriented projects to maximize its limited resources for optimal utilization.

CHIEF GUEST

Khurshid Zahan Haque

Honorable Minister

Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWCA)

People's Republic of Bangladesh.

In the beginning of her speech, she welcomed everyone and greeted all. She begun her speech by saying that understanding women issues and mainstreaming women in the development process is the priority concern of all modern day global and regional initiatives. Later on, she explained how women have been oppressed for centuries. But thankfully, some steps have been taken to restore the lost glory and rights of women. The workshop is one of that sort.

She explained how President Ziaur Rahman took initiatives to establish the rights of women by creating proper infrastructure. She thanked Ms. Hendessi because her discussions would be specially helpful in forming a commission for women in our country. She informed that in Bangladesh we also have separate ministry form woen and also National Council for women's development headed by the PM. At present, the Government has made education for girls up to the 12th grade free and also cash stipend has been provided to them to avoid drop outs from classes. Government also adopted its National Action Plan (NAP) for Women's advancement: Implementation of the Beijing platform for Action, through an elaborate consultative process. She also described several activities undertaken by MOWCA for the development of women. The main roles and the responsibilities of MOWCA are:



The Chief Guest of the Closing Session Khurshid Zahan Haque, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, People's Republic of Bangladesh is delivering her valuable speech and her left Advocate Rokhsana Khondker, Executive Director, Khan Foundation and Chairperson, Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum & Shoishab Bargladesh and her right Mr. Md. Moortuza Hossain Munshi, Secretary, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs Government of Bangladesh.

- Policy formulation and implementation.
- Planning, implementation and monitoring of projects.
- Providing legal aids.
- Providing guidance to other ministries for enhancing the status of women and children in the society.
- Providing assistance to implement government commitments expressed in international forums towards improving status of women and children.
- Co-ordinate and guide field-level activities.
- Assist children to flourish their cultural creativity.

The ministry has also undertaken several income generating and self-employment related activities to eradicate poverty and for the sake of empowerment of women. At present the ministry is observing 28 programs for poverty alleviation, micro credit, gender

mainstreaming, policy advocacy and capacity building. So, they are coming out of the carapace of home.

Women must organize themselves to establish their rights in a patriarchal society like ours.

She appreciated the fact that globally the situation is improving. Now, women have better access to health services, education, employment etc. Their life expectancy at birth has increased, maternal mortality, morbidity have declined. Women are more participating in the labor force. Women are increasingly entering into the Government services by a recruitment quota.

Now, under the reserved seats provision, women would represent not only from the 45 reserved seats but they are also entitled to contest from the 300 general seats as well, she reiterated. For the political empowerment women have to contest from the general seats with men. Women have to get out of the sphere of influence of the men who surround them and stand in the way of the independent standing of women constantly.

In spite of the steps taken by the Government, women still fall victims for several discriminations and violence. Specially the garment workers would suffer tremendously after the abolishment of Multi-Fiber Agreement in 2005.

In the end she requested all the donors and development assistants to help us fighting those challenges and establish gender equality in the truest form.

After the speech of the chief guest, the participants presented their opinion and suggestions in the open discussion.

Open Discussion

- Steps should be taken to nominate the women to contest from the general seats.
- The participants opined that many commissions are there but as they are scattered, as a result, they do not have a voice. What is needed is an umbrella organization under which all the organizations would come and prodigiously voice their demands and necessities.
- Women are ready to take part in the general election if nominated.
- The participants suggested that process of selection of the reserves seats must be transparent. There should be district based women nominees. Honest and apt women leaders should be nominated to contest in the general seats.
- The Prime Minister and Leader of the oppositions take part in the election from many seats and get elected. Later on, after keeping one, the rest are given out to male candidates. Measures should be taken to keep them for women candidates.

Later on, Honorable minister provided her comments.

- Any political party nominates whomever it thinks is able to win the election. So, in order to get a nomination, the women must make themselves eligible for the purpose that is they have to ensure the parties that they can win.
- Steps have been taken to increase the number of seats in the parliament.

- Women themselves must realize what is the yardstick for qualifying as an MP.
- All the political parties adopt to their political beliefs and doctrine of thoughts. But for the very interest of women, we must forget the political differences among ourselves.
- There is no provision for nominating women according to district. Any eligible woman would get a nomination. So, there is not district quota discrepancy.
- We have to exert our unified and concerted efforts for the development of women in the era of national parliament.

In the end, Advocate Rokhsana Khondker said that we have to work very hard to establish our rights. Many of us, she continued, present in the workshop would represent in the national parliament through reserved seats. She requested those to promote the issue of forming the national commission for women in the parliament. She asked for everyone's association then declared the closure of the three day long workshop.