

Women Entrepreneurs in Bangladesh- Challenges and Determining Factors

TANIA AFROZE*
MD.KASHRUL ALAM**
ELIZA AKTHER***
NAHID SULTANA JUI****

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to find out the major challenges that hinder smooth operation of women entrepreneurs of Bangladesh. It also finds the reasons behind the success of the women entrepreneurship. Both primary and secondary data have been used to conduct the study. The questionnaire included questions about economic problems, family related issues, social constraints and other limitations faced by women entrepreneurs and the reasons behind their success. Women involved in various small and medium enterprises take on the challenge to work in a male-dominated society, competitive and complex economic and business environment. However, the identified challenges are inadequate capital, sales promotion, getting permission to start-up a business, gender discrimination, illiteracy and lack of knowledge among women, non-availability of training program and technical support, lack of managerial experience, in some cases young people make ill talk about the enterprise and so on. Personal qualities such as hard work and perseverance, management skills and marketing skills, support provided by their spouses or family are the main reasons behind the success of the women entrepreneurs. The level of participation of women in mainstream economic activities remains insufficient and the percentage of women in business is still much below than that of their male counterparts.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Women entrepreneur, economic problems, Bangladesh.

1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has been regarded as one of the important determinants of industrial growth both in the developed and in the developing countries. Despite its importance for the economy, the emergence of women entrepreneurship is a new phenomenon all over the world. Women entrepreneurs have become important players in the entrepreneurial landscape (Pages, 2005). Although the number is still small as compared to businesses owned by men, this is encouraging as it shows that women no longer adhere

* Associate Professor, Business Administration Discipline, Khulna University, Khulna. email-taniafroze@gmail.com.

** Associate Professor, Business Administration Discipline, Khulna University, Khulna. Email-khashru74@yahoo.co.in

*** Lecturer, Department of Business Administration, Northern University Bangladesh. Khulna Campus.email-eliza.akther@yahoo.com.

**** Independent Researcher, Khulna, email-nahidsultanajui@yahoo.com.

to the stereotype that only men can be income-earners in the family. Though women have to perform a lot of household activities including reproductive chores, such as childcare and doing housework, they can find success through their own businesses.

Many countries have made substantial progress and achievement by involving women in economic activities specifically in entrepreneurship. In Bangladesh the magnitude and momentum of women's involvement in economic activities is still very low. From 1990s, Bangladesh along with other developing nations has started to place attention on women entrepreneurship. Many countries have made substantial progress and achievement by involving women in economic activities specifically in entrepreneurship. Women make about 50% of the total population indicating the opportunity of socio economic development through their proper utilization. To attain poverty free goal and millennium development goal is impossible without incorporating women in income generating activities. But in Bangladesh enhancing women participation in business development is a great national challenge because of gender inequality.

Differences and inequalities between women and men still exist in Bangladesh. Though a large number of women works in informal sector, their contribution is not recognized in the society. They have to face a variety of obstacles for improving their skills and enhancing their productivity. These include lack of start-up capital for business, lack of education, employee related problem, limited mobility leading to poor access to market, information, technology and finance.

Though there have been limitations, obstacles and road blocks faced by these women in the past, society have begun to accept that women entrepreneurs do contribute greatly to a country's economy. Women have now become aware of their socio-economic rights and have ventured to avail the opportunities and take challenge to develop themselves in business activities. As such, it is no longer unexpected to see women heading their own companies and being successful at the same time. The general outlook has changed so much that women who manage family with careers are looked upon as capable and competent to handle business independently.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims to review the position of women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh and identify their success and problems in business, including the family and social constraints. And there are also some specific objectives such as:

- to provide a business profile of the women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh;
- to examine the socio-economic problems faced by Bangladeshi women to run their businesses;
- to examine the reasons for their success.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Oxford Dictionary defines entrepreneur as – person who undertakes an enterprise with chances of profit or loss. “The word *entrepreneur* has taken from the French verb *enterprendre* that means *to undertake*” (Desai, 1999). According to New Encyclopedia Britannica, entrepreneur is an individual who bears the risk of operating business in the face of uncertainty about the future conditions. It can also be defined as “One who undertakes a commercial enterprise and who is an organizational creator and innovator” (Gartner, 1990; Gartner *et al.*, 2004). Schumpeter (1934) described entrepreneur as the innovator who introduces something new into an economy and Kirzner (1997) stressed the fact that the entrepreneur is the decision maker in a particular cultural context, who commands a range of behaviors that exploit these opportunities.

Bangladesh is still a developing country, but she is rich in human resource. In Bangladesh women constitute slightly less than half of the population. The majority of them are underprivileged, under nourished, illiterate and poor. According to the 2010 labor force survey (LFS), the labor force of Bangladesh was estimated at 54.1 million, more than 16 million being women. There are not enough employment opportunities for women. Therefore, economic activities, through self-employment have become essential for potential working women. As a matter of fact, women entrepreneurship or “women in business” is a very recent phenomenon in Bangladesh. Although women are taking to entrepreneurship in many challenging fields, their activities in Bangladesh are not that extensive. In spite of fewer opportunities, many women have succeeded in business, but they are still very small in number. Begum (1993) stated that before 1985, Bangladesh had very few women entrepreneurs. Another study also shows that the number of women entrepreneurs is around 3000, representing only 2% of the total entrepreneurs in the country, although women constitute about 50% of the population (Ahmed, 2003). In fact women entrepreneurship started developing in Bangladesh after the liberation.

Women entrepreneurs face peculiar challenges in an attempt to achieve success (Hatcher *et al.*, 2007) and women in less developed countries face much more barriers to formal economic participation than those in developed countries (Allen *et al.*; 2008). Women face unique obstacles in starting and growing their firms such as lack of skill or training, limited access to capital or credit, lack of savings and social networks, and limited choice of industry (Akanji, 2006; Ibru, 2009; Lakwo, 2007; Martin, 1999; Ojo, 2009)

Another key struggle for women business-owners is related to balancing family issues. Work-family conflict results from inter-role conflict caused by incompatible or conflicting pressures from work and family domains, including job-family role strain, work-family interference, and work-nonwork role conflict (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1996). Women are more likely to have

primary domestic responsibility and to have interrupted careers (Aldrich et al., 1989; Gould and Parzen, 1990), which create work-family conflict. Seeking balance in work-family has been established as a significant factor in women's decision to start a business (Chaganti, 1986; Holmquist and Sundin, 1988), although women business owners still appear to experience much greater conflict than men in managing family and work life (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1996).

Unequal access to education restricts women from acquiring even functional levels of literacy required to learn skills. In terms of skill development, women are impeded by their lack of mobility, low literacy levels and prejudiced attitudes towards women. (Kumari *et.al*, 2010).

A primary and continuing obstacle faced by women appears to be difficulty in securing capital funding for new business ventures (Buttner and Rosen, 1992; Canadian Federation, 1995; NFWBO, 1992). Riding and Swift (1990) concluded financial conditions for women business owners were less favorable than for men: women more often had to pay higher interest rates, find more collateral, and provide a spouse's co-signature. Strauss (2000) claims that by 1994-95 in North America, statistics made it clear that women were starting 40% of businesses and were still receiving only 3-4% of venture capital funds.

In term of the factors contributing to success of entrepreneurs in business are varied. According to Yusuf (1995) the most critical factors contributing to business success consist of good management skills, access to financing, personal qualities, and satisfactory government support. Ambition, self-confidence and high level of energy have also been recognized as vital entrepreneurial characteristics (Idris and Mahmood, 2003).

The potential of endurance and patience have been proved to be a requirement for achieving steady growth in business. To maintain a steady business growth, an entrepreneur must be patient. Patience as a virtue is peculiar mostly to women. Women's ability to endure helps them to relate to people effectively (Scott, 1986).

Fisher (1999) has found that communication skill is one of the most important personal qualities that makes women unique and can prove very important to become successful entrepreneur. According to him, many women tend to be better than their male counterparts at articulating their ideas and expressing themselves verbally.

Huck and McEwen (1991) studied in Jamaican business owners reported that business owners in Jamaica considered that the marketing factor is the most critical ingredient for the success of a business. Family's emotional or instrumental supports are one of the crucial success factors for women

entrepreneurs. Lee and Choo (2001) studied work-family conflict in Singapore found that family members and others support can reduce the conflict of women entrepreneurs. Furthermore, owning business by female without interfering by family would have greater success in their business. Moreover, the women careers depend on the decision of their spouses rather than the other way around (Fernandez, 1981).

4. METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research was conducted to fulfill the main purpose of this research. A questionnaire was prepared consisting of a number of questions regarding the purpose of the study. Questionnaire included economic problem (problem in getting money to start-up a business, inadequate capital), family related problem (seek permission to start-up a business, facing problem of having children), social problem (facing gender discrimination, illiteracy and lack of knowledge among women), other problems (availability of training program, lack of managerial experience) faced by women entrepreneurs and the reasons behind their success. For deriving the result likert scale (five points) was used in the questionnaire where the abbreviations used are SA for Strongly Agree, A for Agree, I for Indifferent, D for Disagree and SD for Strongly Disagree starting from 5 to 1.

The study was conducted in southern part of Bangladesh. Khulna City and its surrounding areas (Batiaghata, Kayer Bazar, Phultala) are chosen randomly as sites of data collection. So the population of the study was all the women entrepreneurs in Khulna City and its surrounding areas. The survey was conducted among 35 women entrepreneurs as sample unit from Khulna Metropolitan area and its surrounding areas. But the convenient sampling method was used to select the individual woman entrepreneur. The choice of the sample size is based on the works of Das (2000-2001); Kumari et.al, (2010); Roy (2012). Three respondents did not give complete answer of the questionnaire. So, 32 respondents were selected for final analysis.

A set of questionnaires was asked among the women entrepreneurs for collecting data about the socio-economic problems faced by them and the reasons behind their success. Face to face interview was conducted to collect the relevant data from the respondents. Each interview took length of 20- 25 minutes. This field survey was conducted during June to July, 2013.

5. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Business profile of Women Entrepreneurs

TABLE 1
TYPES OF BUSINESS BY WOMEN ENTREPRENEUR

Types of Business	Percentage (percent)
Handicrafts	13
Parlor	12
Boutique House	6
Cloth Business	6
Grocery and Stationery	19
Agro-based Business	16
Others	28

Source: Own survey (June-July 2013)

As shown in Table 1, women entrepreneurs in Khulna and its surroundings areas are not only engaged in traditional female businesses (like tailoring, beauty parlor, boutique house, handicrafts etc.) but also a remarkable portion of women entrepreneurs are engaged in businesses traditionally run by men. Indeed, a larger portion of the women entrepreneurs (19 percent) are engaged in grocery and stationery, which is followed by agro-based business (16 percent). On the other hand, 13 percent of the women are engaged in handicrafts in Khulna. Very few of the women entrepreneurs are engaged in clothing businesses (6 percent).

Among the businesses it shows that the women entrepreneurs have full-time employees 5 or less than 5 (81 percent) and 6 to 10 (19 percent). This shows that the enterprises run by women are mainly small or medium in size.

TABLE 2
INITIAL INVESTMENT BY WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Initial Investment (in taka)	Percentage (percent)
Below 1,00,000	47
1,00,001 to 200,000	28
2,00,001 to 4,00,000	13
4,00,001 to 6,00,000	6
06,00,001 to 8,00,000	3
Above 8,00,000	3

Source: Own survey (June-July 2013)

Among the women entrepreneurs surveyed 47 percent started their business by initial investment of less than Tk. 1.00 lac (=Tk.100,000/-) which is followed by 28 percent of investment Tk. 1.00 lac- 2.00 lac, 13 percent by Tk. 2.00 lac-4.00 lac, 6 percent by Tk. 4.00 lac-6.00 lac, 3 percent both by Tk. 6.00 lac-8.00 lac and above Tk. 8.00 lac (Table 3 above). So it

can be said that either most the entrepreneurs were not willing to take risk by investing big amounts or they had financial constraints when starting their business. All the business enterprises were proprietorship and there was no joint venture entrepreneur.

TABLE 3
SOURCES OF FUNDS

Sources of funds	Percentage (percent)
Own Savings	60
NGO Loan	6
Bank loan	6
Selling of Property	3
From Relatives	3
From Husband	19
From Parents	3

Source: Own survey (June-July 2013)

Fund is very important to start any business either small or big. For women entrepreneur fund is more crucial role player. It is found that most of the women entrepreneurs (60 percent) initially invest from their own savings followed by from informal loan such as from their husbands (19percent) or other family members. It was found that women's own saving for investment was small in amount. In most of the cases the initial investment was below Tk. 1.00 lac. Only a negligible portion invested more than Tk. 1.00 lac initially from their personal savings. However, very few of them invested initially via formal loans such as from banks or NGOs (Figure 4). So it is found that the formal sector is not contributing much in expanding women entrepreneurship in Khulna city and its surrounding areas.

TABLE 4
DURATION OF BUSINESS

Duration of business (years)	Percentage (percent)
< 1	22
1 – 3	41
4 – 6	25
7 – 9	6
10 – 12	3
12+	3
Total	100

Source: Own survey (June-July 2013)

It was observed that the women's involvement in their businesses was of different lengths. Among the respondents 25 percent have continued

their business for 4-6 years, 41 percent for 1-3 years, 3 percent for 10-12 years, 22 percent for less than a year, 6 percent for 7-9 years. So it can be easily opined that among women entrepreneurs most of them are middle-of-the-way in experiences and those who have more experiences are very few in numbers among the respondents.

Women Entrepreneurs and Challenges Faced

Economic Types

Getting money to start-up a business

The study shows (See Table-2 in Appendix) that maximum number (50 percent) of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement though a remarkable portion of the respondents (28 percent) disagreed with the statement. The mean value (3.28) indicates that the respondents were facing problem in getting money to start up a business. The standard deviation (1.22) indicates that the observations are not widely scattered about the mean.

Inadequate Capital

It can be seen (See Table-3 in Appendix) that most of the respondents (60percent) agree with the inadequate capital. The mean value (3.47) indicates that the respondents are suffering with their capital of the business.

Family- Related Types

Seek permission to start-up a business

In Bangladeshi society many women have to seek permission from their counterparts at every step of their life. This study provides a scenario (See Table-4 in Appendix) that is not exception from the tradition. As can be seen from table 8 that most of the respondents had to seek permission from either their husband or parents (mean value is 3.66). The data shows that around 66 percent of the respondents had to seek permission to start-up their business. The table also shows that only 16 percent of the respondents had not to seek permission to start-up their business.

Having children

Women's family obligations also bar them from becoming successful entrepreneurs in both developed and developing nations. "Having primary responsibility for children, home and older dependent family members, few women can devote all their time and energies to their business. It can be seen (See Table-5 in Appendix) that presence of children is a problem for the entrepreneurs. 56 percent of the respondents took presence of children as a problem to continue their business where as around 31 percent of the respondents are not. The standard deviation reveals that the observations are not widely scattered about the mean.

Social Types

Another challenge that women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh face is discrimination. Even when women entrepreneurs do approach banks for financing, they tend to face discrimination. Bank officials tend to ignore them in meetings and prefer speaking to their husbands or male business partners. The fact that banks engage in gender bias prevents many women from even approaching them. Some women get so discouraged that they do not bother to seek bank financing and turn instead to informal savings groups.

Facing Gender Discrimination

More than half of the respondents (18 out of 32) responded positively to the above statement. The mean value (3.44) indicates (See Table-6 in Appendix) that women entrepreneurs are facing gender discrimination problem for continuing their business. It varies from case to case. The standard deviation indicates that the observations are close to the mean and the observations are reliable.

From the perspective of regulatory provisions, most of the women entrepreneurs are not aware of trade license, tax and VAT. Most of them lack capacity to maintain accounts, bookkeeping and other necessary documents. As a result, women entrepreneurs, particularly rural women do not enjoy institutional facilities offered by various public and private agencies at the local level. In some cases women entrepreneurs have to pay more than the usual toll demand for availing the above mentioned facilities.

Since the adult literacy rate (15 years and above) of females in Bangladesh is low, it is natural that women entrepreneurs would not be highly qualified or educated. But education is necessary today for business development.

Illiteracy and lack of knowledge among women

Our study figured out that half of the respondent's response positively to the statement. The mean value (3.25) suggests (See Table-6 in Appendix) that illiteracy and lack of knowledge among women is a problem. But once start a business they can acquire knowledge from practical experience and become successful by using their talents. The low standard deviation of the data indicates that the value is located close to the mean.

Other Types

Training program helps to gather knowledge to the overall business process thus they can manage their business more smoothly. But in Bangladesh women entrepreneurs are getting inadequate training facilities.

Availability of training program

The mean value (3.53) of the Table indicates (See Table-7 in Appendix) that availability of training program can help to develop their business more strongly. Availability of technical support is an aid for the better management of the business. Actually technical support is a competitive edge over the rivals. Still Bangladesh is lagging behind in the use of technology this scenario is reflected in the study as well. Our study found that if the entrepreneurs get adequate technical support they can run their business more smoothly. The lower standard deviation reveals that the observations are not widely scattered about the mean.

Lack of Managerial Experience

Managerial experience helps an entrepreneur to start-up or manage the business in an organized way. The mean value (3.19) of the Table (See Table-8 in Appendix) also supports that managerial experience is required to run the business more fruitfully.

Reasons behind Success of Women Entrepreneurs

TABLE 5
REASONS BEHIND THE SUCCESS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Reasons	Frequency	Percent
Hard work	12	38
Management/marketing skills	6	19
Spousal support/family support	4	12
Perseverance/determination	3	10
Quality/variety of products	3	9
Communication skill	2	6
Other	2	6
Total	32	100

Source: Own survey (June-July 2013)

The study also looked at the reasons for success of these women entrepreneurs. The most common reason given found to be personal qualities such as hard work and perseverance (38 percent and 10 percent) respectively. Management skills and marketing skills were also mentioned by some women. A significant number of women also credited their success to the support provided by their spouses or family. Product related factors such as providing a quality product and variety of products offered were the most frequently stated reasons for success.

Women entrepreneurship plays a vital role in economic development. Women entrepreneurship is not only a source of income generation but also a way of achieving economic independence. Women who are involved in enterprise are better off compared to those who are not. Main objective of the

study was to determine problems faced by women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh. Applying questionnaire survey, the study found various economic, social, family related problems. Among the problems inadequate capital, sales promotion, seek permission to start-up a business, gender discrimination, illiteracy and lack of knowledge among women, availability of training program and technical support, lack of managerial experience were identified as major challenges that women entrepreneurs faced at starting entrepreneurship as means of self-employment. Among the reasons behind the success the study found that personal attributes such as hard work, business characteristics like management skill and marketing skill and support from spouse or other family members also play significant role to become successful entrepreneurs.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Entrepreneurship plays a vital role in economic development and industrial growth of a country. Whereas the nearly fifty percent of total population is female, so it is obviously necessary to develop the women entrepreneurship for the achievement of economic development of the nation. Bangladesh is in such position and the growth of women entrepreneurship has grown significantly for some couple of years. The women entrepreneurs face many problems as financial or credit facility, training facility, marketing problems, social security problem and attitude toward women of their family and society also create problems to develop themselves as entrepreneur. Our government has adopted some policies regarding women entrepreneurship development but due to administrative complication all these policies may fail at the time of implication. In Bangladesh, now women are becoming educated and interested about establishing their own business according to the study. So rules and policy formation should support the women entrepreneurs so that they can develop themselves and can perform. It will lead to the development of country's sustainable economic growth as well as make contribution towards the women entrepreneurs' family.

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APPENDIXES

TABLE 1
PROBLEM IN GETTING MONEY TO START-UP A BUSINESS

Options	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
SA	16	3.28	1.22
A	34		
I	22		
D	19		
SD	9		
Total	100		

TABLE 2
INADEQUATE CAPITAL

Options	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
SA	16	3.47	1.14
A	44		
I	20		
D	16		
SD	6		
Total	100		

TABLE 3
GETTING PERMISSION TO START-UP A BUSINESS

Options	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
SA	19	3.66	1.04
A	47		
I	18		
D	13		
SD	3		
Total	100		

TABLE 4
FACING PROBLEM DUE TO HAVING CHILDREN

Options	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
SA	16	3.28	1.30
A	40		
I	13		
D	19		
SD	12		
Total	100		

TABLE 5
FACING GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Options	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
SA	22	3.44	1.22
A	34		
I	13		
D	28		
SD	3		
Total	100		

TABLE 6
ILLITERACY AND LACK OF KNOWLEDGE AMONG WOMEN

Options	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
SA	13	3.25	1.19
A	37		
I	22		
D	19		
SD	9		
Total	100		

TABLE 7
NON-AVAILABILITY OF TRAINING PROGRAM

Options	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
SA	19	3.53	1.14
A	41		
I	12		
D	22		
SD	6		
Total	100		

TABLE 8
LACK OF MANAGERIAL EXPERIENCE

Options	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
SA	13	3.19	1.14
A	34		
I	16		
D	31		
SD	6		
Total	100		

Footnote: Abbreviations: SA means 'Strongly Agree'=5, A means 'Agree'=4, I means 'Indifferent'=3, D means 'Disagree'=2, SD means 'Strongly Disagree'=1