

Women at Leadership Positions in Bangladesh Civil Service

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INTRODUCTION

Civil service is an integral part of the central administration in a country that carries the policies of the government. A critical mass of women in the civil service, specifically in the top decision-making positions, is important to ensure gender parity, in addition, to guarantee women's perspectives to policy and other discussions (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2014). The Government of Bangladesh is trying to ensure gender parity in the civil service through several programs and policies. The ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the UN Conferences on Women, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966); the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); the Declaration on Violence Against Women (1993); the Vienna Declaration and the Program of Action of the World Conference on Human Rights (1993) shows the intention of government to ensure the right and privileges of women in society (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics [BBS], 2013). The country is running by a female Prime Minister and female Opposition Leader since 1991. The Speaker of the parliament is also a woman. The number of female Member of the Parliament (MP) has increased over time. However, women are grossly under-represented in top decision-making positions in the civil service.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Several scholarships on women's participation in the Bangladesh Civil Service are available. For example, Sultana and Ferdous (2017) have conducted a study to examine the status of women in leadership positions in the civil service of Bangladesh. They have found that although the number of women in the service has increased, their participation in the leadership positions does not reflect gender parity.

Mahtab (2014) has examined the position of Bangladeshi women in the civil service. She claims that the participation of women in the civil service is not satisfactory because of several barriers like negative treatment and attitudes of men towards women and institutional constraints that affect their career advancement. Kabir (2013) in her study on women's participation in South Asia's (Bangladesh, India & Pakistan) civil services finds that despite constitutional provisions for ensuring gender equality in all sectors, the status of women in administration, specifically, in the central decision-making arena, remains marginal due to different organizational, social, cultural and political factors.

Bilkis (2012) in a study on the motivation and de-motivation of female civil servants serving the Bangladesh Civil Service administration cadre claims that job security, job characteristics and family are the major motivating factors to join and continue in the service for women. In addition, she has

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identified a few de-motivating factors like the issue of transfer, particularly in remote areas, absence of separate toilet facility and daycare service, negative attitudes of male colleagues, delay or uncertainty in promotion, lack of market-based salary and dual duties in the office and home. She has further claimed that the situation is gradually improving with time.

Jahan (2010) has conducted a study focusing on the barriers that women civil servants deal with while working at the field level. The study finds dual responsibility of the job and family, insufficient housing facilities, lack of security, unpleasant working environment, and negative attitude of the community, colleagues and the authority as major impediments to women civil servants at the field. Likewise, Karim (2008) claims that class I female civil servants in the civil service of Bangladesh are under-represented in the service as a result of different structural, institutional, and operational factors.

Jahan (2007) asserts that women are far behind men in policy formulation positions. She finds posting in remote areas; family responsibilities; lack of childcare facilities in office; non-cooperation of male colleagues and family members; absence of appropriate and supportive environment in the workplace; superiority complexes and negative attitudes of male colleagues; lack of security and consequences of social backwardness as hindrances to their participation in the service.

All these studies claim that women are under-represented in the decision-making positions of the service. Women's equal participation and leadership in the decision-making process are fundamental because of its individual and societal implications. At the individual level, women are in a disadvantaged position with respect to men concerning career development due to occupational seclusion. At the societal level, prohibiting women from accessing the leadership positions of the professional hierarchy raises questions on social justice. In addition, a vast reservoir of human resources remains underutilized (Russell, Watson, McCoy, Grotti, & Kenny, 2017). A minimum of 30 per cent of women in leadership positions is considered essential to ensure women's interests to be fully considered and properly addressed. In addition, the increased representation of women in public service is necessary for truly inclusive development and democratic governance (UNDP, 2014). So far, there is a lack of study to assess the current trend of female representation at leadership positions in the civil service of Bangladesh.

In order to promote greater gender equality in the civil service, it is essential to identify the barriers that prevent women from reaching the top positions within services. This study is expected to fill the gap in the literature of women leaders in the service. It is mention-worthy that stepping of women in the mainstream civil service is recent, has started since 1982. Therefore, they are lagging behind men. In this background, this study will try to explore the status of women in leadership positions in the service. Furthermore, the study aims to identify the barriers that hinder their advancement to the top decision-making positions. Besides, it suggests some recommendations, which might be advantageous to improve their position in the civil service of Bangladesh.

METHODOLOGY

Data for the study was collected mostly through desk research i.e. examining and reviewing published and unpublished documents, books, journals, circulars, reports, publications, and newspaper articles on women and civil service. Therefore, the maximum data was secondary in nature. In addition, the internet was a source of data collection. Moreover, a few information was also gathered by informal discussions with seven mid-level female civil servants of Bangladesh; therefore, data collected through this way was small in quantity.

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