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Bangladesh Network Operators Group provides enhanced training workshops and conferences, with the World Bank aiding women entrepreneurs and professionals financially. Furthermore, government projects like the 'She Power Project' starting from 2018 under the ICT division and WiFi Program trained and provided internships and jobs to thousands. Moreover, there are countless workshops and training seminars held across the country to ensure women's participation in ICT.

Despite all the empowering platforms available, a certain degree of obstacles persists. "If I had one word to describe it, it would be 'prejudice'", said Mitrasree Deb, an IT consultant at Fujitsu Research Institute, Tokyo. She added, "Even in this era, people are full of judgement and even though we ignore it most times, it lingers as an underlying reason for being overly self-conscious as an individual. These can greatly affect mental health and overall personal and career growth in the long

run if you let it get to you." Criticism and judgements entailing common questions like "Won't this job be tough for you as a woman?" from people all around sometimes become overwhelming regardless of how much you ignore the noise. Moreover, male dominance still persists to a certain degree as the addition of women professionals in IT is still a newly circulated phenomenon. The issue of the gender pay gap is an unfortunate reality in certain places with employment often being influenced by your gender.

It is true however that all advancements come with overcoming hardships and that's exactly what women have been doing successfully throughout the years, inspiring more and more young ones along the way. "The main solution was confidence and patience. As soon as I started to believe in myself, I started to enjoy my job. There were instances of lingering criticism. However, the support from my family and environment at the office helped me greatly", said Supriya Imon Swati, Principal Officer at the IT Division of

Dhaka Bank Limited. Newcomers should keep in mind that curiosity goes a long way and learning new things every day aid in their career advancement greatly. Moreover, there are hundreds of real-life success stories around us and taking inspiration from these female role models act as effective motivators in the long run. While there are years of internalised and blatant patriarchy to fight, it is important to believe in yourself rather than in the noise of what people perceive your capabilities to be.

To summarise, with the emergence of women empowerment organisations and the right kind of shift towards a more open, equal and inclusive work environment in general, the future shows promise. Even though the current scenario shows a ratio of female to male personnel holding senior positions to

still be quite less, the increasing number of female students in ICT and STEM (science, engineering, technology, and mathematics) act as proponents of an emerging even ratio ahead. Hence, with the right kind of guidance and suitable environment, women can continue to change history through increased participation in IT with their hard work and determination, thereby becoming invaluable gems of the impending Fourth Industrial Revolution ahead.

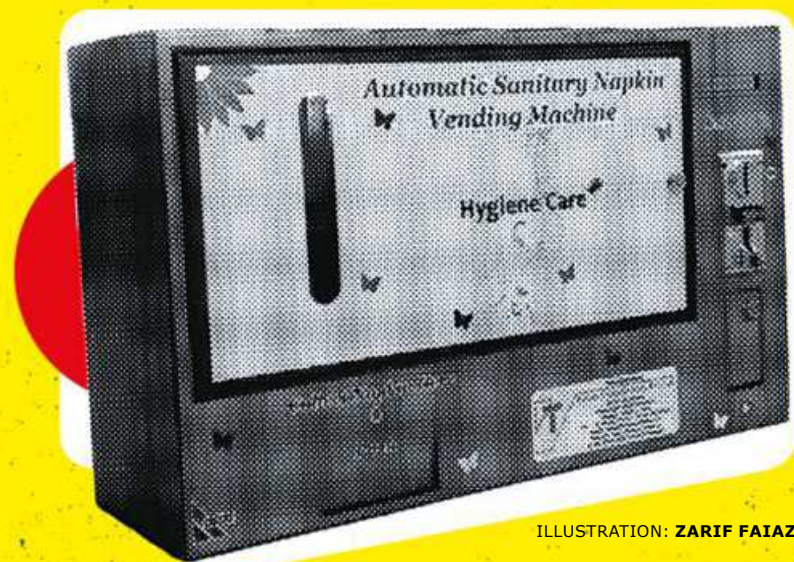


ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

# Importance of sanitary pad vending machines

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On 25th February 2020, the Scottish Parliament passed a bill to provide free sanitary products to women of all ages. With Scotland as the forerunner in the race to eradicate "period poverty", it is high time for other countries to follow suit. Bangladesh tried to step up its game by installing sanitary pad vending machines in some public and private universities, but it is a necessity across all educational institutes and workplaces.

Girls hit puberty at different ages and there is no crystal ball to help foresee their first period. Schools having vending machines will help panic-stricken young girls manoeuvre through their first underworld blood bath. There is enough pressure of studies in college, so tracking one's menstrual cycle and packing a pad is an added hassle. Having pads readily

available in college means one less thing to stress about. Furthermore, in a somewhat conservative society like ours, where most people have not yet come to terms with a bleeding vagina, a girl carrying a pad to the washroom may be subjected to taunts.

University students spend a lengthy period (pun intended) of time on campus. A menstruating woman staying 6-8 hours on campus has to change her pad a few times to avoid getting Reproductive Tract Infection (RTI). She may not be carrying multiple, and her friends may not have spare pads either, posing the need for a vending machine.

Fortunately, ACI Group had installed Vending Machines providing Freedom sanitary pads at BDT 10/-, around Dhaka University campus in December 2019. Nowsheen Kamal,

a 3rd-year student of IBA, has been a frequent user of the one placed at the TSC washroom at Dhaka University, and she considers it a blessing during emergencies. She opines, "These vending machines are a lot like water filters. Not everyone carries water/pad, but it is a basic need". However, complaints arose over the poor maintenance of these vending machines. Nusha and Holy, students of the Arts Faculty of the same university, tried to get a pad but the machine repeatedly rejected their money.

Earlier in 2019, Bangladesh University of Professionals also installed Sanitary Pad Vending Machines. Zerida Rahman, a fresher of International Relations of the university confides, "I've stopped buying pads from the store, and rely on this instead because it is

convenient and the quality is good." However, she wishes that it cost less than BDT 15/- per pad.

Workplaces are no exception, because it is unfeasible to run to the pharmacy amidst a corporate meeting, and there may not be pharmacies nearby. Not everyone has a regular cycle; one may not know when the uterus will wreak havoc and stain the revolving chair. For the garment factories, these vending machines are a must, because over 80% of the workforce is women.

It goes on without saying that efficient vending machines providing pads at cheap or for free will be a game-changer for females stepping out of their homes while on their periods. If there are vending machines to combat junk food cravings, there should be one to combat bloody panties, period.