In the context of CEDAW, essentially a Women's Bill of Rights to be adopted universally, how has Bangladesh fared? The government despite being a signatory to CEDAW continues to hold reservations on Article 2 and article 16 (1). These two provisions deal with comprehensive legislative changes and equality in marriage and divorce. But the biggest blow to the women's movement has been the surreptitious changing of the National Policy for Women's Advancement (NPWA) by members of the then government in 2004.



Dr. Faustina Pereira, member and Policy Advisor, Ain O Shalish Kendra (ASK).

The (NPWA), formulated in 1997, was a product of extensive consultation with many women's groups and human rights and civil society representatives. It drew upon the Beijing Platform for Action and the hard fought achievements of the Bangladeshi women's movement of over 30 years. In 2004, critical changes to the NPWA were made by Government, without the knowledge of women's rights groups, civil society or even a discussion in Parliament. The 'revised' policy was signed and sealed by the Cabinet and reveal a conspiracy to curtail and even abolish certain crucial rights for women that would effectively take them back a

Specific Changes Made to the NPWA 2004

Art 7 NPWA1997 Ensure women's **equal rights** in formulation and implementation of economic policy (trade policy, currency policy, tax policy etc). NPWA 2004 Ensure women's **constitutional rights** in formulation and implementation of economic policy (trade policy, currency policy, tax policy etc). NPWA 1997 Provide equal opportunity and **partnership/share** to women in property, employment, market and business. NPWA 2004 Provide equal opportunity ... to women in employment, market and business.

Art 7.2 NPWA 1997 Provide full and equal opportunity and control over right to land, earned property...**inheritance, property**, credit, technology, which are essential for women's economic empowerment; and enact necessary new laws to put these rights into practice NPWA 2004 Provide full and equal opportunity and control over earned property...which are essential for women's economic empowerment; and enact necessary new laws to put these rights into practice.

Art 7.3 NPWA 1997 Take all out initiatives for **employment** of both educated and illiterate **sections** of **women labour force.** NPWA 2004 Take all out initiatives for appropriate employment of both educated and illiterate classes of women.

Art 7.4 NPWA 1997 Introduce, expand and develop support services e.g. child care, child daycare centers at workplaces, housing, healthcare and entertainment facilities for **elderly**, helpless and disabled women for ensuring their participation in economic activities and development process. NPWA 2004 Introduce, expand and develop support services e.g. child care, child daycare centers at workplaces, housing, healthcare and entertainment facilities for helpless and disabled women for ensuring their participation in economic activities and development process.

Art8 NPWA 1997 Motivate non-government institutions including women's organisations to carry out campaign programmes for inspiring women's active participation in politics. Take initiative for holding **direct election in increased reserved seats** in the National Parliament after completion of the current term in 2001. NPWA 2004 Take effective measures including increasing reserved seats to ensure more participation of women in the National Parliament.

Art9 NPWA 1997 Appoint women in high positions including Bangladesh high commissions, university grants commission, planning commission and judiciary. **NPWA 2004 Deleted NPWA 1997 Take all out initiatives to appoint women in 30 percent posts** at all levels of decision-making including policy-making process to ensure their **equal and full participation**, based on recommendations of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. NPWA 2004 **Take initiatives to gradually increase the existing quota** at all levels of decision-making including policy-making process to ensure their **more participation**, based on recommendations of the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

Art 12 NPWA 1997 **Encourage and provide equal opportunities** to women in agriculture, fisheries, livestock rearing and forestry. NPWA 2004 **Encourage and give priority** to women in agriculture, fisheries, livestock rearing and forestry

Source: Dr. Hameeda Hossain and Dr. Faustina Pereira, Ain O Shalish Kendra.