

Women's participation in the job market



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WOMEN'S participation in the labour force has increased manifolds over time in Bangladesh. Compared to 4 percent in 1974, female participation in the labour force has increased to 35.6 percent in 2016. This change is much faster than the growth of male labour force participation which increased to 81.9 percent in 2016 from 80.4 percent in 1974. Interestingly, labour force participation among rural women is much higher (37.6 percent) than urban women (30.8 percent). Not only in the export oriented readymade garments sector but in many non-traditional and emerging sectors, such as hotels and restaurants, transportation, real estate services, telecommunications, banking and insurance sectors, women's participation is increasing. This is due to the fact that with increased access to higher education, the prospect for getting into high valued job market has expanded for women in Bangladesh. However, as a late comer to such services, the number of female participants is still low in these sectors. Moreover, the progress has not been uniform in all sectors. There is also discordance within the sector. Not many women are seen at the managerial and senior positions of organisations. Under-representation of women in decision making jobs is due to a mix of economic, social and cultural situations. The number of educated women has

increased over time; the rate of highly educated women is not large as yet compared to men. Statistics show that at the secondary level women's educational attainment is higher than men. For example, the share of female students is 33.8 percent as opposed to 32.4 percent for male student at the primary level. At the secondary level female comprise 53.5 percent while male comprise 46.9 percent of total students at this level. However, it starts to decline afterwards. At the higher secondary level, only 8.9 percent are female students compared to 12.1 percent male students at that level. Moreover, only 4 percent female have tertiary level education compared to 8.2 percent in case of male. The unemployment rate is much higher for women- 6.8 percent of women are unemployed while 3 percent of men are unemployed. The educated unemployment is more prevalent in case of women than men. Women are also engaged in low paid jobs compared to men. According to official statistics, though on average women earn about 94 percent of what men earn, it varies across sectors. The low share of women's incomes compared to men's on average is partly due to women's involvement in the informal sector to a greater extent. Informal sector comprises the major share of female employment which is about 89 percent. However, this does not nullify the fact that women workers receive substantially low wages compared to men in similar jobs. Job mobility is also very low among women. In the RMG factories most female are engaged as production workers and only a few as supervisors.



Several factors act as barriers for higher participation of women in the labour force. Lack of infrastructure, for example, lack of transport, toilet, child care facility and overall security hinder them to take part in the job market. Early marriage is another factor that does not allow girls to continue with their studies and enter the work force. Recent reports show that the number of early marriage is on the rise. It has increased from 52 percent in 2011 to 59 percent at present whereas this has reduced in most countries in the world. This is alarming not only because it will reduce women's participation in the labour force but it can also increase violence. Findings of several studies have reinforced such correlation. Technological upgradation in many sectors has taken away more jobs from women than from men. For example, the largest sector for female employment is the RMG factories where female participation was almost 80 percent of all RMG workers. Unfortunately, female participation in this sector has now decelerated to about 61 percent, thanks to the automation in the sector,

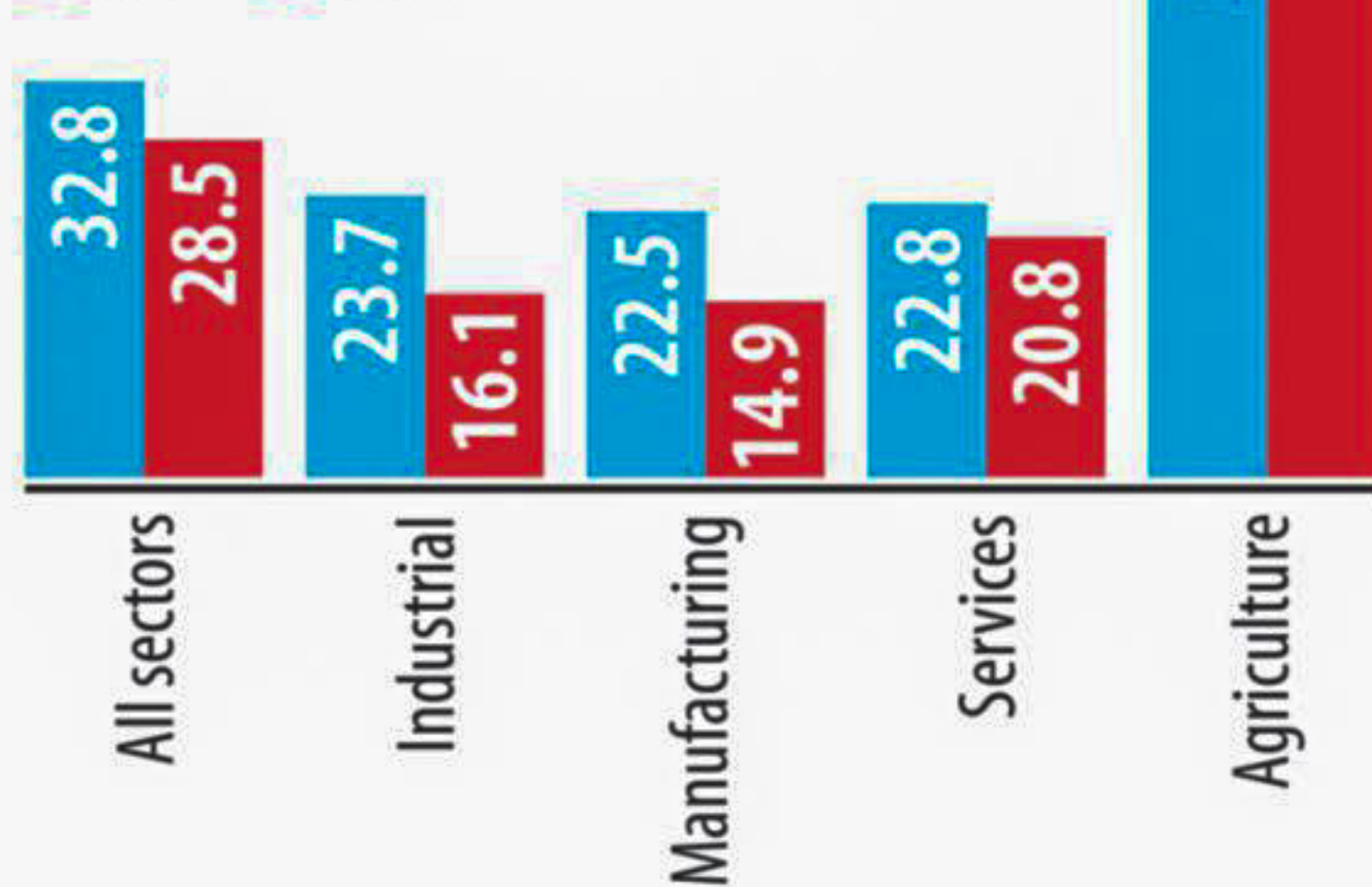
according to a recent Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) survey. Social factors play an important role in case of educated female job seekers as well. Because of the reproductive role, many women are forced to choose between motherhood and careers. A large number of promising young university graduates enter the job market. But the enthusiasm starts to decline over time due to family responsibilities. This mid-way exodus of female employees reduces the number of potential women in senior positions. When they are ready to get back to the job market their skills become outdated. Some choose to be self-employed through small businesses whilst many cannot due to lack of capital and information. Those who continue to pursue their careers juggle between home and work in an attempt to make a balance. Societal mindset has to be changed to bring more women in the job market. Be it at the workplace or at home, the recognition of women's capabilities is something the society finds hard to accept. Female students outperform male students at universities. But this is

reversal at workplace. It is not only about the structural predicaments they have, but also about values and cultures. There is a glass ceiling for professional women. They feel it irrespective of their positions and institutional affiliations. Thus, they try to work harder than men to advance their careers and reach leadership positions. The need of work and family life balance is a critical issue that needs to be addressed. Wherever possible, through flexible working arrangements female employees can be retained. Gender sensitivity among men is critical towards enhancing opportunities for women in organizations. The structural problems of bringing more women in the job market can be overcome through right type of policies, environments and attitudes at workplaces. For the larger section of female workforce, higher education, appropriate training and skills development, as well as use of technology are critical for entering into and continuing in the job market. The writer is the Executive Director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

FEMALE EMPLOYEES

(in % of total employment)

■ 2013 ■ 2016



Source: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS).

It's time to value women's unpaid work

Women spend three times more time doing unpaid work than men in Bangladesh, according to a study

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
THE socio-economic conditions of women in Bangladesh have improved significantly over the years. Progress is evident in education, health and empowerment, which is an indication of women's increasing participation in the workforce. Even the country's top political posts—prime minister, speaker of parliament and opposition leader—are held by women. Around a dozen women are in the top tier of bureaucracy. Also, the readymade garment industry plays a key role in economically uplifting a large cohort

Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) in December 2015 found that only 3.25 percent of employed women work in the public sector and 8.25 percent in the private sector. The remaining 89.5 percent are employed in the informal sector, with varying and often unpredictable earning patterns. "Many of them work without compensation," said the report. Unpaid work of women in Bangladesh comes in many forms, such as childcare and care for the elderly, sick and disabled in the household and volunteer work in the community as well. Domestic labour and care-giving

GDP through a gender lens. The study was conducted among 5,670 households in 64 districts with a population coverage of 25,266. The study found that time spent on non-system of national accounts (SNA) activities by a female member of a household is about three times higher than that of a male household member. Secondly, the study estimated that the value of women's unpaid household work (non-SNA activities) was equivalent to nearly 77 percent of Bangladesh's GDP in 2013-14. "We are not advocating for inclusion of women into the GDP calculation system. But we want to see a

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of poor and vulnerable women in Bangladesh. Yet, the contribution of women in official estimation of GDP is much lower than that of men due to their engagement in the informal sector where there is no monetary remuneration. According to International Labour Organisation (ILO), worldwide women account for about one-third of the workforce in the informal sector. But in Bangladesh the rate is much higher than the world average. A joint study report published by the Centre for Policy Dialogue and

have value and create social capital, which would add substantially to the GDP of a country if they were valued appropriately. But the country's national accounting system does not include such unpaid work, which is performed mainly by women, in its calculation of GDP or GNI. This results in underestimation of women's contribution to the national economy and their actual worth within the family and in the economy remains unrecognised, unremunerated and unappreciated. In view of the above, CPD and MJF undertook the study to measure the

satellite account that will show women's contribution in the economy," said Dr Fahmida Khatun, executive director of CPD. According to World Bank, increasing labour force participation of women to 45 percent by 2020 from 34 percent now will help Bangladesh enhance its GDP by one percentage point. Zahid Hussain, lead economist of the WB's Dhaka office, said barriers to women's labour force participation are asymmetric household responsibility, human capital deficiency and open discrimination.

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