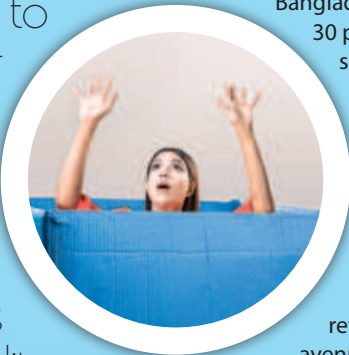


#PERSPECTIVE

Positive discrimination to create a gender balanced society

We all want to live in a world where people, irrespective of gender, have equal opportunities to channel their talents. A place where everyone has access to privileges like quality education, freedom to utilise the gained knowledge and shine on their own rights.



Unfortunate as it may be, we still do not live in such a world. Gender equality is a far cry under most circumstances, but we are working together in our society to eradicate discrimination at all levels.

According to reports published in 2020, female participation in the Bangladesh workforce stood at 30 percent. While there are sectors where the women employees are higher in number, the RMG sector for instance, the percentage of women in mid-level and top management positions drop significantly. The same is also true for retail, hospitality, and other avenues where the proverbial 'glass ceiling' is an everyday reality for the women now taking an active role in the labour market.

Women comprise 50 percent of the population, which means that a company that does not encourage enough female participation at all levels of the hierarchy are missing out on the capabilities of a wider talent pool. Men and women experience the world differently and their perspectives differ. Having a gender balanced team can ensure that when it comes to problem solving, one can tap in on resources generated from different life experiences.

Gender inclusion at a wider level is not only a commendable social goal, but research also shows that it makes good sense too as a demographically diverse

workforce can improve the financial growth of any organisation.

The subject of 'positive discrimination' — which refers to a form of discrimination that favours someone by treating them differently in a positive way — has been much talked about recently due to various reasons. While most agree that it is a necessary tool in creating a just workforce, others disagree, and with plausible reasons, that this is often unfair to deserving candidates. One can argue that by favouring someone by treating them differently, even in a positive way, is still 'discrimination'. In a society where the struggle is to maintain fair play, a new form of prejudice is the last thing we need.

But, the fact that women are still lagging behind in society, gives us valid reasons to promote their presence in the workplace in higher numbers at all levels of the hierarchy. This does not mean that qualified male co-workers should be deprived of opportunities when it comes to matters of promotions; the administration must strike a balance where no employee is mistreated, but

at the same time, making sure that a gender equal

environment prevails in the workplace.

The first step towards achieving that goal would be to start at the recruiting process. Women should get the opportunity to show their capabilities and not be judged based on their gender. Organisations and businesses should proactively work towards closing in on the gender gap in the recruitment process, which can help build a more gender-equal workforce in the future.

The next important action would be to groom all employees so that they can reach the pinnacle of their potentials. This will create an atmosphere where multiple candidates become qualified over time for a said position. To create such an atmosphere at the workplace will not be an easy task, but for the sake of our future it must be done.

The fact that one feels compelled to exercise positive discrimination at the workplace to create a gender balance speaks volumes for the disparity that exists in society. It is well understood that this norm cannot go on forever. Steps must be taken at all levels that soon, the day comes when there will be no need for positive discrimination, and a gender balance will be a natural consequence of our day to day activities.

By Mannan Mashhur Zarif
 Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed

