

Women’s empowerment and equality in the DIGITAL SPACE

In conversation with Sajjad Hasib, Chief Marketing Officer, Grameenphone

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INTERVIEWED BY SHAHRIAR RAHMAN

Gender equality and the empowerment of women are essential cornerstones of a just and thriving society. Beyond being a fundamental human right, they profoundly impact the modern workplace. Studies emphasise that promoting gender equality yields economic benefits, enhances productivity, and fosters sustainable development.

The Daily Star recently had a conversation with Sajjad Hasib, Chief Marketing Officer at Grameenphone on gender equality, the empowerment of women, and how these factors influence the telecom industry. Key snippets of the conversation are given below.

Grameenphone’s journey started around 26 years ago through the Village Phone Program. Looking back, how has the company progressed women empowerment over the years?



Our first customer was Laili Begum, to whom we delivered the Polli Phone. Since then, the principle of social empowerment has remained an integral component of our overall vision. Since our inception, we have aimed to foster employment opportunities for women in rural areas.

In the contemporary landscape, our trajectory is marked by a dynamic and accelerated pace of advancement. Having transitioned from conventional voice communications to cutting-edge 4G and 5G technologies, we are committed to the empowerment of women. Our efforts are centred around bridging the digital divide and engendering equitable work environments.

You will be happy to learn about the thriving state of F-commerce in Bangladesh, which boasts over 300,000 Facebook pages. Notably, a majority of 70% is under the stewardship of women. This entrepreneurial cohort operates across diverse geographic regions, giving rise to a robust ecosystem where delivery and logistical services assume importance. The



transformative influence of these women-led enterprises extends to the socioeconomic landscape, significantly amplifying the country’s economic growth.

You have been working for Grameenphone for more than 17 years. Over the period of time, how have you seen Grameenphone deal with empowerment and equality?

Grameenphone’s transformative journey continues as our efforts to empower women persist. Our gender diversity ratio grew from 11% five years ago to now exceeding 19%. Notably, our female staff operates nationwide, even in remote districts. Recognising societal limitations for working women, we’ve provided accommodations and transport at district levels, ensuring secure grassroots work environments.

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We recently heard that Grameenphone is working in 2,000 unions to empower women. Can you tell us a bit about this initiative?

Our initiative, named ‘Internet Er Duniya Shobar’, aligns with this year’s International Women’s Day theme, ‘DigitALL’, which aims to integrate marginalised women into the digital space. This initiative, operating

at the grassroots level, seeks to expedite women’s digital inclusion by educating them nationwide, unveiling the boundless potential of the internet.

Engaging women from rural and semi-rural areas across 2000 unions, we’re facilitating courtyard dialogues to enlighten them about how the Internet can improve their lives and unlock new horizons. These sessions will focus on dispelling taboos and stereotypes surrounding women’s technological use, drawing from real-life examples and connecting participants with inspiring women who exemplify the potential and necessity of women’s digital integration.

What role can the private, public and development sector play in ensuring women’s equality and empowerment?

I believe that we all need to work together to ensure that women are sufficiently empowered in the workplace. We are trying to encourage women to come forward with their success stories and are using the technological solutions at our disposal to enhance their experience. We believe that working with different stakeholders will help us as a community to bring easy solutions for empowering women in the workplace.

We are also working with Meta in a campaign called Boost Up, where around 300 small and medium female business owners participated in in-depth discussions and helped them by providing a specific budget on their Facebook accounts to boost their businesses.

Transcribed by Tanzid Samad Choudhury

JOBS SPOTLIGHT

1. BRAC-Aarong
- Deputy Product Manager, Retail
Deadline: 2 September



Eligibility:
 - ⦿ Bachelors, preferably in Statistics/ Finance
 - ⦿ Must have experience in product category management and retail operation
 - ⦿ Needs to have knowledge of inventory management, supply chain management, and yearly budget preparation

Minimum experience: 3 years
Apply through BRAC-Aarong’s official LinkedIn page.
2. World Health Organization (WHO) - Executive Assistant, Data Management
Deadline: 5 September



Eligibility:
 - ⦿ Bachelors in Data Management, Statistics, Economics, Computer Science, Mathematics, or related fields
 - ⦿ Must have professional experience in data management, and knowledge of GIS maps and reports, MS Access, SQL, Epi-Info, etc.
 - ⦿ Specialised training in IVD, information management systems, or relevant discipline is desirable

Minimum experience: 3 years
Apply through WHO’s official LinkedIn page or the Careers section on their website.
3. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Bangladesh - Programme Associate, Nature, Climate & Energy
Deadline: 4 September



Eligibility:
 - ⦿ Bachelors in Environmental Science/ Studies, Environmental Engineering, Climate Change, Natural Resource Management, etc.
 - ⦿ Must have professional experience in projects/programmes and research-related activities in the environment, climate change, and development sector
 - ⦿ Needs to have knowledge in preparing quality reports, budgeting, maintaining documents, progress monitoring, organising workshops, seminars, training, etc.

Minimum experience: 4 years
Apply through the Careers section of UNDP Bangladesh’s official website.



The imperative of upskilling: navigating the future of work

In an era marked by rapid technological advancements and seismic shifts in the global economy, the modern workplace is undergoing a transformation that is nothing short of revolutionary. Gone are the days when a single skill set could carry one through a lifetime of employment. Today, adaptability, agility and continuous learning are not just buzzwords; they are imperatives for survival.

The rising tide of skill demand

According to recent data, the demand for skills has surged by 25% since 2015 and is projected to double by 2027. This isn’t merely a trend; it’s a tidal wave that threatens to leave behind those who don’t adapt. Businesses are recognising this urgency,

Upskilling is not a mere trend but a critical organisational strategy for employee retention, agility and resilience. The focus has expanded from purely technical skills to a more holistic skill set that includes soft skills like creative thinking and resilience. In a world where the only constant is change, the ability to adapt and learn is the most valuable asset one can have.



aligning their learning and development programmes with overarching strategic goals. The message is clear: upskilling is not an option; it’s a necessity.

Tech sector takes the lead

In the technology sector, where change is the only constant, 81% of managers find upskilling to be effective. The focus areas include software modernisation, artificial intelligence and machine learning, and cyber security. These are not just skills for the tech-savvy; they are becoming essential literacy for the entire workforce.

Learning amid

uncertainty

The pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital technologies, leading to a 49% increase in technical learning hours year-over-year. A staggering 58% of the workforce had to reshape their skills to adapt to this new digital landscape. Amid this uncertainty, 52% of employees value learning tech skills, while 39% find that their managers are proactive in skill development.

The role of innovative technologies

Companies are not merely relying on traditional training programmes. The adoption of microlearning, Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR)

simulations, and personalised learning paths are making skill acquisition more interactive, effective and tailored to individual needs.

Employee retention and the human element

While technical skills are crucial, the human element remains irreplaceable. Almost 70% of employees considered major career changes in 2022, but 94% would stay longer in companies that invest in their development. The core skills for 2023 and beyond include not just technical acumen but also analytical and creative thinking, resilience and motivation.

The strategic alignment

The most forward-thinking companies are integrating their upskilling initiatives into their broader business strategies. This alignment is not just beneficial for the organisation but also for the employees, who find that their newly acquired skills have real-world applications that make their roles more fulfilling and secure.

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As we navigate the complex and dynamic landscape of today’s work environment, the question is not whether we can afford to invest in upskilling. The real question is, can we afford not to?