

Why women must be empowered



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PHOTO:
ANISUR RAHMAN

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Bangladesh, with its population of 170 million, holds immense potential for women to drive innovation, productivity, and economic growth. As almost 50 percent of the population comprises women, their active participation in various sectors can significantly shape the nation's future trajectory. Recent data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics reveals a notable rise in female-led households, reflecting the increasing leadership role women are taking in society. This shift highlights their potential as key contributors to sustainable economic development.

Women in Bangladesh are making significant strides in leadership across a wide range of sectors, including government, non-governmental organisations, and industries. Their influence is expanding beyond traditional roles, with an increasing presence in the economic and business spheres. This progress is particularly evident in the growing number of women entrepreneurs and leaders in key sectors such as the ready-made garment (RMG) industry, agriculture, fisheries, handicrafts, fashion, and the digital economy. From e-commerce platforms to corporate boardrooms, women are not only contributing to but also reshaping the nation's economic landscape. Their active participation highlights the vital role they play in fostering sustainable and inclusive development, positioning women as key drivers of Bangladesh's future growth.

As a woman entrepreneur, I have

had the privilege of working alongside many remarkable women who are boldly venturing into diverse SMEs, including handicrafts, e-commerce, food processing, beauty, and tech startups. Together, we have participated in numerous training initiatives organised by business support groups and international NGOs. These programmes have provided invaluable opportunities, ranging from export readiness training and sponsoring international trade participation to practical workshops on how to successfully manage small businesses. Through these initiatives, I have seen firsthand how they bring key stakeholders together, fostering

a collaborative approach that drives the growth of women-owned businesses in Bangladesh. The focus on capacity building and the efforts to create inclusive networks have been truly commendable, laying the foundation for the growth of women-led enterprises. However, despite these promising developments, a significant challenge remains—the prevalence of informal businesses in the SME sector. Most local businesses, especially those run by women, operate within the informal economy.

Without formal structures, many



ILLUSTRATION: ANWAR SOHEI

- » Women in Bangladesh are increasingly driving innovation and economic growth, particularly through leadership roles in sectors like agriculture, RMG, and the digital economy.
- » Despite progress, challenges such as the prevalence of informal businesses and unregulated markets continue to hinder the success of women-led enterprises.
- » A transparent, data-driven system is essential to overcoming barriers like fluctuating material costs and supply chain disruptions that affect women entrepreneurs.
- » The rise of unregulated e-commerce platforms poses significant challenges for legally compliant women-led businesses, necessitating regulatory reform.
- » To unlock Bangladesh's economic potential, targeted support for women entrepreneurs through policy changes and infrastructure improvements is crucial for sustainable growth.

practices such as overpricing and poor-quality supplies. These challenges limit our ability to secure long-term contracts, fulfil large orders, or scale operations effectively.

A data-driven, transparent, and accountable system is crucial to overcoming these obstacles and establishing structured, women-owned businesses. Reliable data on market trends, raw material pricing, and supply chain dynamics can empower women entrepreneurs to make informed decisions, plan better, and mitigate risks. Transparency in supply chains and marketplaces ensures fair pricing, eliminates exploitative practices, and builds trust between stakeholders. Moreover, an accountable system that monitors and regulates market practices fosters a level playing field, enabling women entrepreneurs to operate competitively and confidently. To truly support women-led businesses, targeted solutions such as collective procurement, building strong supplier relationships, advocating for market regulation, leveraging digital platforms, and introducing supportive government policies must incorporate these principles. By addressing these systemic issues with data-driven and transparent frameworks, women-led businesses can thrive, driving greater economic inclusion and sustainable growth in Bangladesh.

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women-led businesses in Bangladesh face significant challenges in participating in larger supply chains, both domestically and internationally. Fluctuating costs of material resources, inconsistent supply chains, and unregulated markets are some of the key hurdles. The unpredictable prices of raw materials and irregular availability disrupt production schedules and inflate costs, making it difficult to remain competitive. Additionally, unregulated markets lack transparency, exposing women entrepreneurs to exploitative



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