

Country Summary Report on Qualitative Data: Bangladesh

Number of qualitative interviews analyzed: 20 (Twenty)

INTRODUCTION:

In the context of any developing country, status of girls and women is often measured as in terms of their education, legal rights, economic independency, empowerment as well as the roles they play in their families and society. The status of girls and women implies a comparison with the status of boys and men, and is therefore a significant reflection of the gender equality in any society. Over the past few decades, girls and women in Bangladesh have made tremendous progress towards the achievement of education, better job prospects, and over all social and political empowerment despite having many challenges and resistance from the patriarchal society. These gains and achievements as well as changes and increased opportunities for girls and women particularly in relation to higher education and paid employments were reflected in the interviews conducted by the Research Assistants of the Asian University for Women's 'The impact of changes in Employment and Education Opportunities for Women in Gender Relations in the Family' project funded by the Ford Foundation. Based on the qualitative data from the interviews, following **changes, opportunities, and new challenges** have been identified in the context of Bangladesh:

CHANGES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

Dissatisfied parents with new vision for their children:

It is indeed good to see that many primary and secondary respondents in those interviews, particularly the parents are not satisfied with their current educational qualifications. They are now in a position to realize the importance of having education and they do not want to repeat the same occurrence in the case of their sons and daughters. It was not possible for their families or their parents to keep continuing the studies given the poor economic situations or reluctance. The respondents in the interviews were much enthusiastic in expressing their interests to let their daughters continue their studies at any cost. Indeed this change in the mindsets of the parents is crucial in the ways of ensuring education for girls and women in Bangladesh. They also think, educated parents can teach their sons and daughters up to certain level of education without having assistance from private tutors. Educated parents can also make sure that their children are progressing well in their education. Even some of the parents who responded in the interviews expressed their interest to restart their education with the programmes offered by Bangladesh Open University (*Pahima H1S1, Pahima H2P, Pahima H6P, Pahima H2S, Rakib H6S1, Pahima H7P, Pahima H9S1, Mandy H1P*). Two particular quotes from two interviews can be highlighted here. *"As I had not much chances to continue my studies, I am now very much motivated to let my son and daughter in continuing their studies"* (*Pahima H1S1*). Another mother recalls her past memories ...

"I was desperately looking to continue my studies but couldn't because of my early marriage. Now I realize the importance of higher education in my life, I wish I could have completed my education and contribute to my family with my income from my job!"
(Pahima H2P)

Usage of ICT in Every Day life:

Using mobile phones has become a daily need of most of the households in Bangladesh. They find using mobile phone is very important in contacting with relatives living away and get connected with others. Another new dimension of using mobile phone is the mobile banking service in order to send and receive money on different occasions and it is widely accepted by many women in Bangladesh. Television channels have also guided many families in creating awareness about government laws and policies related to women's empowerment and their wellbeing. (Pahima H2P, Pahima H1S1, Rakib H6S1). However, some respondents in the interviews expressed their concerns over unrestrained usage of internet and cell phone by their children as sometimes they are found using social networking sites and watching offensive movies neglecting their studies. Some of them do not sleep properly at night and they are kind of addicted to technologies, mobile phones and using social networking sites which are hampering their education and further career progression (Rakib H2S2, Pahima H7P).

Understanding the importance of Girls' education:

It has been found from almost all the interviews, the parents in particular are interested to focus on the education both for their sons and daughters equally and they think that this is very important to change the overall situations of women's position in Bangladesh (Pahima H2S1, Pahima H9S1, Mandy H6S1). An educated girl or woman can establish herself in the society and share the family burden with other family members. Education is not only essential for securing a good job but also to come out as a good human being (Rakib H2S2). There are off course, a lot of contributions from different government programmes i.e. *free education for girls and women, stipends* in order to motivate parents to send their daughters in schools in most cases. Respondents in most cases have also been able to understand the fact that an educated woman can take many crucial decisions in her life (Pahima H1P). The most important decision is to make sure that her children are having education and progressing towards a better future. Some parents are looking forward to see their daughter as doctors or engineers once they are done with their studies (Rakib H2S2). However, there are some disadvantages too in letting the girls and women to go for higher education. Often they grow older and it causes problems in fixing marriage in the context of Bangladeshi society. (Pahima H1S1). One mother echoes...

'Change is happening. When I was a student of 9th grade, my parents were desperately looking to fix my marriage. But now I am not thinking same for my daughter' (Pahima H9S1)

Another respondent expressed her opinions...

'Well obviously, yes educated parents, quality of the education of the parents and their attitude towards education matters, and basically the society that we live in, it is important for women to be educated, and specially now a days since the cost of living is very high, both parents have to be income earners, so that is why women need education' (Mandy H6P).

Referring the importance of education for girls and women, one respondent said...

'In this age, having education and doing job are kind of pressing needs for girls and women. I don't support the idea of keeping our girls and women within the domestic spheres without providing them education and job' (Mandy H1P).

In responding to the question of describing the situation of girls' education, one primary respondent told.....

'The situation is not like the past days. It has been improved much as both the girls and boys are treated equally by their parents. May be the situation is not that much improved in rural areas compare to the same in the urban areas. But the government is trying to motivate the parents to send their daughters to schools in many ways' (Adnan_Mandy H8P).

More girls and women are heading for higher education:

It was evident from the interviews of Bangladesh that the girls and women are now availing more opportunities for higher education. Earlier, they used to enroll themselves till the education levels in schools, now they are enrolling for higher education at the college level and many of them are also studying at university level of education (*Pahima H1P*). This finding was echoed in almost all the primary and secondary interviews of the research study. The respondents repeatedly recognized the change in the context of their acquaintances within their families and the society as a whole. Providing education to girls and women has become a social acceptance in Bangladesh.

Increased awareness levels of girls and women:

As the girls and women in Bangladesh are getting education and they are in touch with different ICT equipments, they are now much aware of many rights and entitlements in their lives compare to the earlier times. Many primary and secondary respondents are now aware of their property rights and inheritance of land from their parents. (*Pahima H1S1, Pahima H1P*). But still some of them think that it is the husband who can determine the property rights of women (*Pahima H2P*). Women in particular are also aware of receiving advices and services for family planning from different government and non-governmental organizations based in their local areas. (*Pahima H1S, Pahima H2P, Rakib H6S1*). They are also aware about different NGOs and government Banks who can provide them capital and training in order to initiate small scale business.

Religion is no longer a barrier for girls and women:

Many families in Bangladesh are strictly guided by their religions. Often these families are also influenced by their neighbors in the case of sending out their daughters for education and job.

Some of them think that letting their girls to go out of home is the violation of practicing *purdah* in Islam and it should not be allowed in the framework of religious beliefs and instructions. However, one important thing is understood by the parents that there is no restriction in Islam to acquire knowledge and go out of home for doing job. This understanding is really important to clear the myths and cultures of keeping girls and women inside their home in the name of religion (*Pahima H1S1, Pahima H1P*). But not all the parents are following the teachings of their religion in the case of ensuring education for their children. One quote is important from one of the interviews.

'Our society even doesn't follow what religion permits for our girls and women' (Pahima H2S1)

Overall societal change:

The society is changing in terms of the roles and responsibilities for men and women. Girls and women are also having changes in their respective lives. They are contributing to their families and for the society as well. In some cases, they are more contributing than male in some families. And the most important thing is that the perceptions and attitudes of men towards women are also changing. Now men are more liberal than before and they are cooperating women in completing education and accepting employments. They are also sharing domestic responsibilities and helping the working women to ease their double burden (*Adnan_Mandy H8P*).

DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES:

Difficulties in securing and managing jobs:

Despite having good educational qualifications and being a competent candidate, many women in Bangladesh cannot secure a good job. This particular challenge for Bangladeshi women has been reflected in many interviews. Women are now educated but they are not in a position to avail paid employment because of many reasons. Sometimes, paying bribe or having influential personalities is kind of prerequisite to become successful in securing a good job (*Pahima H1S1*). Another tendency is that some families are well off and they are not required to depend on the earning of their daughters or daughters-in-law to maintain their families. Hence the families remain reluctant to give permission for having paid employment out of their domestic spheres. Again some families consider working of women out of their homes is not socially acceptable and they cannot allow such works for their girls and women. (*Pahima H6P*). Some respondents of the interviews, believe that the men's responsibility is go out of home to earn livelihoods for the family and women's responsibility is to maintain household's works and take care of other family members(*Pahima H1S1*). Despite the numbers of educated girls and women in Bangladesh are increasing, their presence in the formal job sector is still very minimal as most of them have to struggle to manage their household responsibilities and accepting formal employment may create problems in their families (*Rakib H2S2, Pahima H7S1, Adnan Mandy H8P*)

Stereotyped thinking of selecting professions for women:

In most cases, teaching profession is proposed by the respondents for girls and women after completing their education. They think that this particular job is suitable for girls and women in commensurate to their domestic roles and responsibilities. Even some of the respondents supported the professions for women which are based at home. Engaging girls and women in handicrafts making or tailoring can be such examples where they are not required to go out of home frequently like other conventional professions. (*Pahima H1P, Pahima H2P, Rakib H2S2, Pahima H2S1, Pahima H7P, Mandy H6P*). Even some women also go for both positive and negatives aspects of accepting paid employments by the women in Bangladesh. One of the women said...

'There are both positive and negative aspects to it. Positive aspects are the, if it is, if we are talking about a mother, she knows what is going on outside the, outside in the world and therefore she can give better teachings to their, to the children in the home, and also sometimes if the mother is full time outside children don't get adequate maternal care and all, so that's a problem, that's a negative side' (Mandy H6P).

Security for girls and women is a big concern:

Violence against women is a pervasive problem in Bangladesh and presents a huge threat to the security of girls and women. Along with the domestic violence, most parents are concerned about the security of their daughters out of their homes while they are attending schools and doing jobs. Particularly, 'Eve teasing' or street harassment is very common in the context of Bangladesh and creating problems for girls and women as some parents consider keeping their daughters inside the home rather than sending them to schools (*Pahima H1P, Pahima H2P, Rakib H2S2, Pahima H9S, Mandy H6S1*). Despite being educated or supporting the cause of providing education to their daughters, some parents still consider that going out of their homes are not safe for their daughters (*Adnan_Mandy H8P*).

CONCLUSION:

Girls and women in Bangladesh are still lagged behind in the male dominated society. However, they are advancing compare to the earlier periods and experiencing increased opportunities for higher education and paid employments. It is well documented from the literatures of empowerment that the empowerment of women is associated with mobility. Increased opportunities of higher education for girls and women are enabling them to go out of their domestic spheres. Engaging in formal employment sectors and contributing to the families with own income, they are also transmitting the notion of empowerment to their daughters and it is creating an impact on the wider section of the society. Concerted efforts are required to raise awareness and educate on gender equality at all levels of society – from grassroots initiatives to governmental policies. Men should be sensitized to realize the real benefits of gender equality in the society.