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Case Studies: Using New Communication Technologies
To Improve The Status Of Women

By

Lippi Dhuni
CASE STUDIES : USING NEW COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES TO IMPROVE THE STATUS OF WOMEN

The modern civilization is the result of discovery of new technologies and its use. While the entire world is enjoying the fruits of this technologies and has reached the top of development, the third world country Bangladesh is far away from development. Under the total development the life of Bangladeshi women presents a dismal picture. Women being half of the population their role is that of a house wife and mother. The village women are more neglected. Deprivation of women in Bangladesh is much more deeper and pathetic.

Under the perspective of Bangladesh I have the pleasure to discuss the position of women and presenting some statistics for information to all assembled here.

In a recently published report on the 6th Manpower Development Programme of the United Nations Development Programme it has been said -" the rural women of Bangladesh work at least ten times more than men." It has been mentioned in the report that in the past years though there has been a little development particularly in the field of women there has been no depth of miseries. As for example out of 1000 delivery cases 600 mothers die at the time of delivery, which is double the average statistics in the developing countries. About 4/5th of the pregnant women suffer from anemia. In the administrative and management posts only 05% are women. In that report deprivation of women in Bangladesh is much more deeper and pathetic.

At present the number of men are more than women. The average life of women is less than that of men. The rate of adult literacy among women is half of men. Admission to schools is much fewer for girls than that of boys. The rate of dropout is much more for girls. The death rate of male babies of 1 month to 12 months is higher than that of female babies. But the death rate of female babies of 1 year to 4 years is higher than that of male babies. Women take 12% to 16% less calorie and protein than men.

At present the female students in the University is 23%. In Medical colleges and Engineering colleges the female students are only 29% and 09% respectively. There are only a few female students in the technical and Vocational Institutes. It is only 05%. In agriculture and other professional institutes only 14% are women. Only 03% of total educational institutions is reserved for women. In the primary level 56% of schools are for girls, in Secondary level it is 20% and in the field of Higher Secondary Education it is 10%.

In Govt. statistics of 1991 half of the labour power was women. Although women's participation in household activities has been counted in it but its economic value has not been counted in the national income. In the production activities carried on at the home
level women also participate mainly as unpaid workers. But it has no definite account. Moreover, works in the informal sector like small and cottage industry, construction and other household work women have a remarkable participation but it has not been reflected in the national income.

In the statistics it is seen that particularly in the out of season times a women's weekly income is only 42% of a man's. The rate of the wages for women is almost half of a man's. 43% women and 08% men earn only less than TK.100/= per week. Only 08% wages of manufacturing sector are women. In the formal sectors the difference of wages between men and women is about 49 %. There is no definite minimum wage rate for women working in the industries, neither bonus nor leave. There is no child care facilities, cafeteria and medical facilities for female workers. Facility for toilet, fire extinction and sanitation is not at all sufficient. Female employees often become victims of sexual oppression by the employers, local musclemen and co-workers i.e. men. The women employed in garments industry have no right to form trade unions.

At present the average life span of a woman (55.4) is less than that of a man (56.4). The death rate of female babies below 1 year is 61 per thousand and of male babies 68. And the death rate of male children from 1 year to 5 years is 11 and female 14 per thousand a year. Five years' old female children get 16% less, female children from 5 to 14 years old 11% less and grown up women 29% less of calories than those of the males. Female children suffer three times more malnutrition than male children. The death rate from severe malnutrition is 45% more incase of women than that of man. 85% women of Bangladesh suffer from iron and protein deficiency.

There had been violence to women in all ages. But it increased alarmingly in the eighties, and a great anxiety over this issue was noticed at both national and international levels.

Violence to women originated in Bangladesh from the supermacy of men and backwardness of women and related dominance of men over women. The position of women is determined by social prejudices and cultural superstition. So very often women face the problem of polygamy, divorce, demand for dowry of their husband and become victim of male violence. The oppressions from which the women of Bangladesh suffer at present can be divided into four categories-(1) Family oppression, (2) Oppression in their field of employment, (3) trafiking to other countries and (4) Compulsory prostitution and sexual oppression.

Though laws have been passed in Bangladesh to save women from various oppressions but as there is no proper enforcement of these laws they have become useless. Due to lack of education and knowledge about resources and awareness women can have no benifit from these laws. Family violence has not yet been considered a
crime. There has been no centre for the settlement of rape cases. There has been no rule on gender basis which can remove social, economic and political injustices. Violence can be completely eradicated.

Banchte Shekha, with its long experience and educative materials, has been trying to solve the problems of women by going deep and adopting various strategies. It has been involving poor and illiterate women in works which they can easily catch up and do. Banchte Shekha works for creating consciousness, motivating women, teaching them law safe guarding their rights and for this purpose posters, leaflets and songs are used. Besides these it has a storng and useful media called Participatory Video. It helps creating consciousness, helps preparing grounds for discussion to identify problems among women and encourages them to participate in discussions, finding out solutions through these women. While played back the women who participated in a discussions see them in pictures and get encouragement and bring confidence in them and help others to be a contributory agent.

Participatory Video plays two roles namely (1) Video production and (2) Video playback. Videos are produced and used by keeping in mind the target population.

In Bangladesh mass communication medias like newspaper, Radio, television etc. do not cover the entire population. 80% of the population live in villages and they are mostly poor and illiterate. News papers rarely reach villages and very few people read it. Similarly few people have television. A good percentage of people have radios but they use it mainly for recreation purposes. Problem solving stories and how a man changed his luck and improved his condition are rarely discussed in details in all this medias. More neglected are the women. Their problems and how their position can be developed and conditions improved get little coverage. Banchte Shekha can't claim to have covered the whole of Bangladesh but it can boast of doing a lot in bringing women in problem solving discussions together, help them to participate to find out ways and means to improve their socio-economic conditions and enhancing consciousness and creativity.

Purposes of making and using videos are as follows:

(i) Upholding the real picture of society free from artificialities.
(ii) Making realistic and factural cassettes on all the on going projects of Banchte Shekha.
(iii) Preparing training materials through combining pictures and speeches related to the topics.
(iv) Using Videos as an instrument of controlling crimes and helping to establish justice and order in the society.
(v) Using it as media of educative recreation.
(vi) Preserving sudden and real happening and incidents as evidence.
Preparing cassettes based on life.
Identifying elements hindering the way of development evidences.
Helping women to organise and form groups.
Creating competition among common people for development works and making modern and improved Technology available so that they can solve their problems through united efforts.

Examples of benefits derived from using new and improved technologies by seeing videos:

1. Selina, a group member of Banchte Shekha took loan to buy a traditional coir machine to make coir ropes to earn her livelihood. She bought the coir machine, made coir and ropes by hand and sold it in the market. It was not profitable rather time and labour consuming. Video acquainted her with modern coir and rope making machine. She bought the machine and started producing coir ropes. Since it took less time and good quality ropes were produced she could sell it in suitable price and she was not only able to run her family with income from the new machine but was able to save.

2. Sakhina a deserted woman was passing her days for 15/16 years with hardship. She associated herself with a Banchte Shekha group and received training on fish cultivation and started fish cultivation. This did not bring her much money to maintain her family. She once saw fish hatchery project activities in video and was encouraged to start a hatchery. She took loans from Banchte Shekha and herself started hatchery, produced fingerlings and sold those. Within a short time she got a good market of fingerlings and earned money which not only helped maintaining her family rather gave her savings. Now-a-days she earns thousands of money through sale of fingerlings and maintaining a happy family. The improved technology she got from seeing video.

3. Manowara was passing bad days with her husband and two sons. She joined a group of Banchte Shekha and received training on apiculture. Earlier she had no idea about bee keeping. She saw improved processes of apiculture through Banchte Shekha's Video and started bee keeping earnestly. This brought her money to run the family. Now she earns sufficient money from honey sale and maintains a happy family.

4. In rural Bangladesh most of the families use leaves, branches of trees, jute sticks etc for cooking food and for all other purposes. Jarina had to work hard to collect fire materials for her family of 9 members. She had mainly to rely on tree leaves and jute sticks and as these were not always properly sunned it caused so much so smoking that she suffered badly from eye-sore.
She came in touch of a Banchte Shekha group member and joined the group. Once Banchte Shekha's Video unit showed Video on smokless Oven. The oven was prepared in such a way that it did not cause suffering to a cooking woman. Jarina was delighted to see it. With the help of a group member she prepared a smokeless oven in her kitchen and all her over troubles vanished.