

## Status of Female Labour Force Participation in Bangladesh: Trend and Factors

*M.P. Moon*

Department of Rural Development,  
Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural University, Gazipur-1706, Bangladesh

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**Abstract:** Female labor force participation is an important driver of growth and development. During the early stage of growth of Bangladesh, there is a relationship between economic growth and women's employment which implies a decline in female labor force participation. The purpose of this study is to know about the status of women's participation in the labor force of Bangladesh. There has been an increase in female labour force participation alongside the acceleration in economic growth. Bangladesh has witnessed a substantial increase in female employment in rural and urban areas. If Bangladesh can raise the participation of women in labour force, it would play a pivotal role in driving the GDP growth. Participation of women in workforce would take the country forward in attaining higher GDP growth in line with achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. This growing women empowerment is also evident in the fact that Bangladesh has the third highest number of female lawmakers among the SAARC countries. To overcome all the barriers, women's access to education and skill training, land and services of various government institutions must be needed for the improvement of women's employment.

**Key words:** SDG • LFPR • Women empowerment • Female labor • Bangladesh

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### INTRODUCTION

Women join the workforce in developing countries as a coping mechanism in response to shocks. The participation of women is the outcome of various macro and individual factors. Access to quality education (beyond secondary) is critical to improve employment outcomes for women [1]. As women occupy half of the population, so potentially half of its workforces [2]. Women's contribution to agriculture, which is considered as unpaid family labor, is grossly underestimated. In fact, if unpaid work were included, the figures for female employment in agriculture would be even higher [3]. As industrialization and modernization is increasing day by day, thus the gap between the labor force participation rate of men and women is decreasing during the last 10 years (2000-2010) [4]. Bangladesh is a developing country consists of more than 150 million people [5] where 64%, in the age range 15+ years and 59% are economically active [2] Population and Housing Census 2011 showed that women constitute half in the population composition of Bangladesh. The size of the female labour force in Bangladesh increased at a significantly more rapid

rate than that of men from 2015-16 to 2016-17 fiscal year. According to a report from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the size of female labour force increased by 4.6%, while the male labour force increased by 1%. The total labour force increased by 1.4 million (2.3%). Furthermore, one million employment opportunities were created for Bangladeshi's abroad, leading to a total 3.7 million new employment opportunities. The number of contributing unpaid family workers decreased sharply, by 18.6%, in the 2016-17 fiscal year and the highest proportion in formal employment were highly educated. Labour under-utilization decreased by 7.5%, with the majority of workers being in the RMG sector [6]. As patriarchal family structure presents in Bangladesh, so there are many restrictions about women's mobility and their socio-economic participation [7]. They have not given any opportunities by which they can choose their jobs freely and they are affected by so many socio-economic factors. Now the situation is changing but majority of the female are seen in some marked jobs [8]. If we compared of our number of workforce in agriculture with the previous fiscal year, then we find agriculture has the highest source of employment. Here

the specific objective of this paper is to find out the female labor participation and factors that driving women's engagement in different sectors in Bangladesh.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to estimate the trends of female labor participation at the national level I have used Secondary data which were collected from Labor Force Surveys (LFS) 2013, 2015-2016 conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) in 1990-1991, 1995-96, 1999-2000, 2002-2003 & 2006 and by surveying published and unpublished reports of several government and non-government organizations such as Household Income & expenditure survey, newspapers, Journals and Articles etc. Tabular and Graphical analyses were done with the collected data in order to achieve the objectives of the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

**Changes in Female Force Participation Rates (LFPR):** Recently the several of Gender and female labour market in Bangladesh have given the most attention. Labour Force Participation Rate will be presented in this section. Kabeer [9] (2012) tried to show the role of social factors which has some influences in the female labour market. The period between 1999-2000 to 2010, women's labour force participation has been a significant increase but men's trend of labor force participation is negative [10]. This section examines male and female labor force participation where data on female and male LFPR (Figure 1) shows that female LFPR went through a continuous rise during 1991 to 2015-2016 while male LFPR has decreased from 87.4 per cent 81.7 per cent. Bridges *et al.* [11] explores some factors which influence the link between severity of poverty and probability of women's labour force participation.

During the latest sub-period, that is 2006 to 2015-2016, female LFPR increased by 10 percentage points, from 26.1 to 35.6 per cent. The recent rise in the female LFPR (2006 to 2015-2016) to some extent has been due to the initial low value of FLFPR. It was 16 per cent in 1996 when many of the developing countries of Asia had FLFPR above 40 per cent.

Women's labour force participation had been increasing. During the period of 1995-1996, the female labour force participation rate had showed a tremendous progress in the rural and urban area. Table 2 shows changes of LFPR of men and women in urban and rural locations. In the past, FLFPR in the rural area has

continuously increased since 1995-1996 to 2015-2016. The FLFPR was same in the year of 2002-2003 & 2005-2006. It increased up to 2010 then it decreased in 2015-2016 which is 32.9. In contrast, LFPR of men increased till 2003-2003 which is 85.1 and then it declined at 81.7 in 2015-2016. Percentage of total population participated in labor force is almost equal in rural and urban area [12].

Table 1 shows that female unemployment rate decreased since 2006 to 2010 then it increased at 7.3 which is very high then due to several NGO's activities (where women are their main target) female unemployment rate decreased till 2015-2016. Similarly, male unemployment rate also decreasing till 2010 then it rapidly decreased at 1.3 in 2015-2016.

The people who are now workless but they are available for work then we considered them as unemployed population. As population is rapidly increasing, unemployed population is also increasing but we found the male and female participation rate is higher than the men. Since labor force participants include both employed and unemployed persons, LFPR and its changes over time will depend on both components. Data on employed population and unemployed population in Bangladesh have been presented in Table 2. Country having high population growth like Bangladesh, informal sector tends to absorb most of the growth in labor force [13].

**Female LFPR and hours of work:** The recent rise in the participation rate of women in the labor force in Bangladesh brings another question to the forefront: the increasing participation of women through the route of families' farm activities is likely to be associated with low working hours per week. This would mean that their average contribution to production would be on the decline. Average hours worked has been examined (Table 3). Hours of work increased during 2010 to 2011 and then decreased.

In Bangladesh, women account for most unpaid work and when women are employed in paid work, they are overrepresented in the informal sector and among the poor. While growth and stability are necessary to give women the opportunities they need, women's participation in the labour market is also a part of the growth and stability equation. Restrictions on women's rights to inherit properties and social impediments to freely pursue a profession are strongly associated with large gender gaps in labour force participation. Figure 3 shows that unpaid family worker (male) has declined continuously but in case of female it increased upto 2013 then declined.

**LFPR (PER CENT) FOR AGE 15 & ABOVE POPULATION**

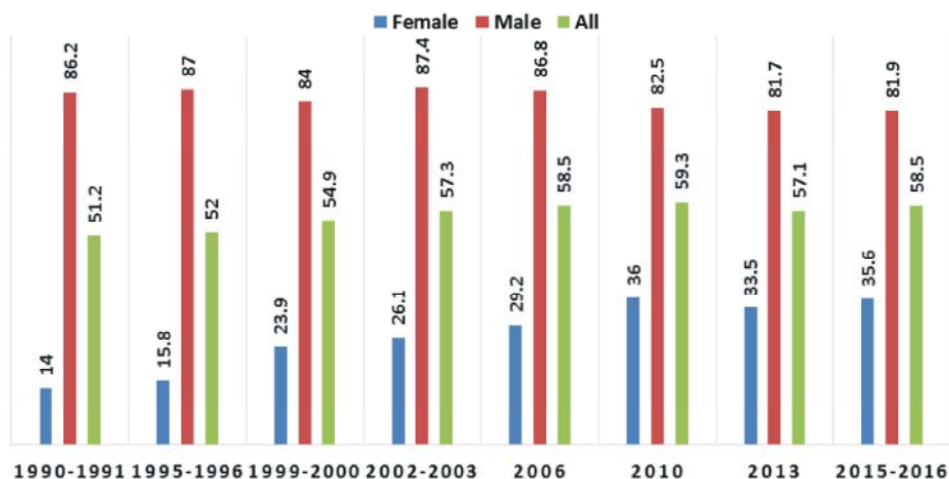


Fig. 1: Changes of female and male LFPR in Bangladesh, 1990 to 2016

Source: LFS (1990-1991, 1995-1996, 1999-2000, 2002-2003, 2006, 2010, 2013, 2015-2016)

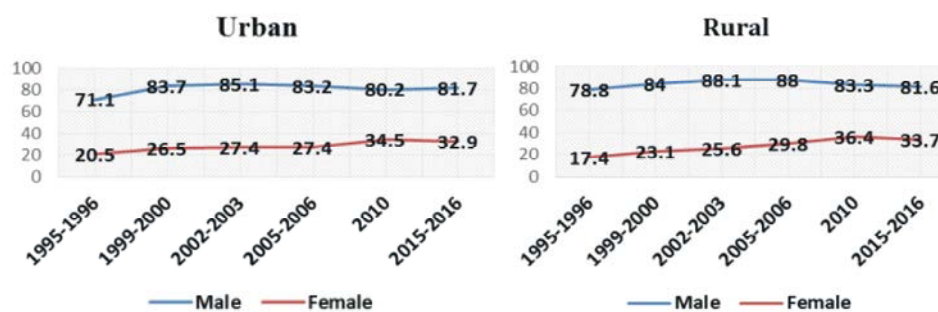


Fig. 2: LFPR of men and women in urban and rural locations

Source: LFS (1995-1996, 1999-2000, 2002-2003, 2005-2006, 2010, 2015-2016)

Table 1: Male and Female Unemployment rates

Year	Sex	Unemployment rate (%)
2006	Female	7.0
	Male	3.4
2010	Female	5.8
	Male	4.1
2013	Female	7.3
	Male	3.0
2015-2016	Female	1.3
	Male	1.3

Source: BBS (2010), LFS (2010, 2013, 2015-2016)

Table 2: Employed and unemployed Population

Employed Population	2002-2003	2005-2006	2010	2013	2015-16
Male	34.5	36.1	37.9	41.2	41.8
Female	9.8	11.3	16.2	16.8	17.8
Total	44.3	47.4	54.1	58.1	59.5
Unemployed Population					
Male	1.5	1.2	1.6	1.28	1.3
Female	0.5	0.9	1.0	1.31	1.3
Total	2.0	2.1	2.6	2.59	2.6

Source: LFS (2002-2003, 2005-2006, 2010, 2013, 2015-2016)

Table 3: Weekly Hours worked

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013
Male	45.8	46.5	46.0	45.3
Female	44.1	44.6	44.3	43.3

Source: Report on labour Force Survey, 2013

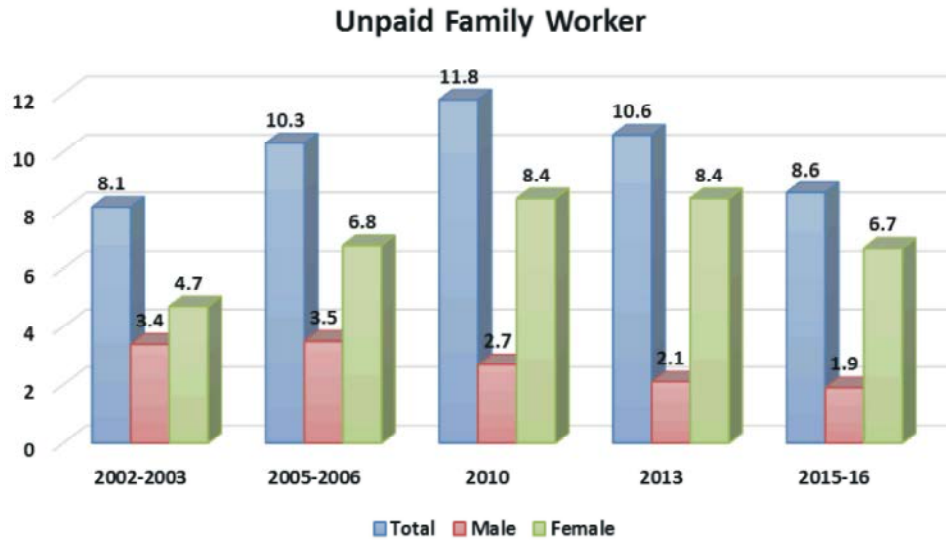


Fig. 3: Unpaid Family Worker  
Source: LFS (2002-2003, 2005-2006, 2010, 2013, 2015-2016)

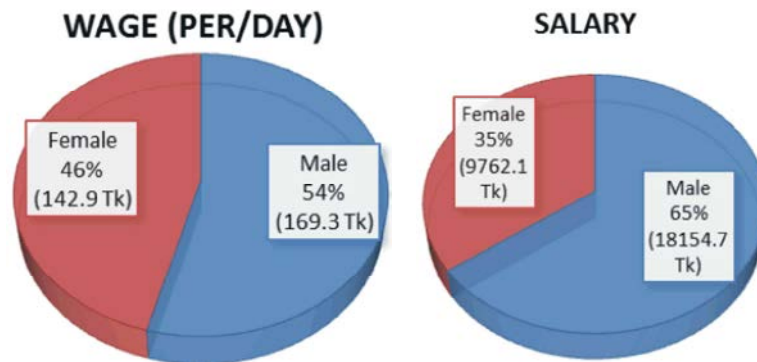


Fig. 4: Wage and Salary for men and women, 2010  
Source: HIES, 2010

Now women are involved with several payable wages and their salary is continuously increasing. As the working part of men is higher than the women but the rate of the women's increment is much higher than the men. Still, the rate is higher than the South Asian average of 35 percent. Figure 4 shows that the wage of male is 169.3 Tk (54%) per day while female is 142.9 Tk (46%) only and the salary is 18154.7 Tk (male) and 9762.1 Tk (female), respectively. Bangladesh is ahead of India, where women account for 27 percent of the total labor force and Pakistan, whose female labor participation rate is 25 percent. Nepal has the highest female labor participation

rate of 80 percent, according to the World Bank. Klasen and Pieters [14] examined that, in India the urban women who engaged with the employment paid low wages because of lower education.

This growing women empowerment is also evident in the fact that Bangladesh has the third highest number of female lawmakers among the SAARC countries. Labor force participation rate is the proportion of the population aged 15 and older that is economically active. Bangladesh's high female labor force participation is fuelled by employment in rural agricultural areas and certain specific sectors such as garment industries [15].

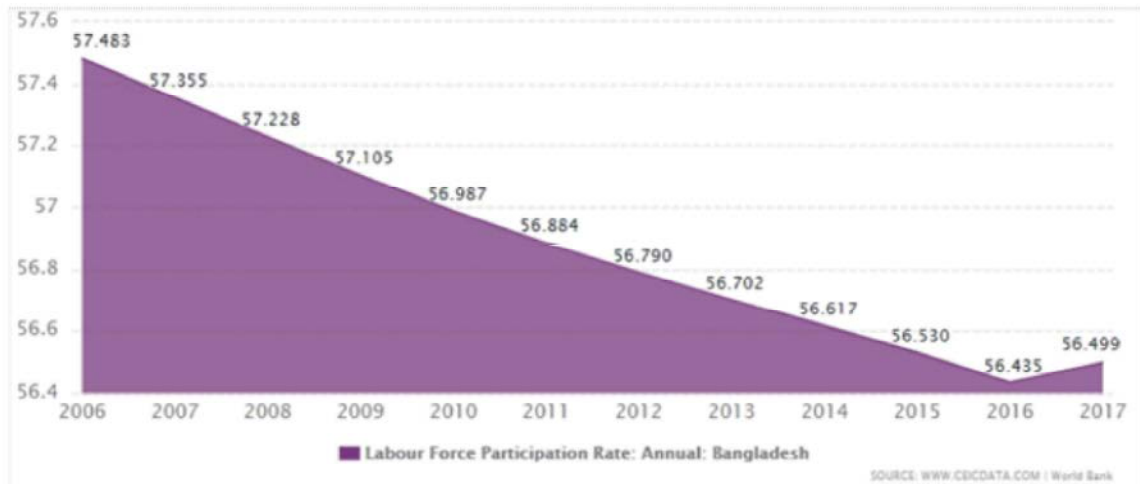


Fig. 5: Total labour force participation rate of WB, 2006-2017

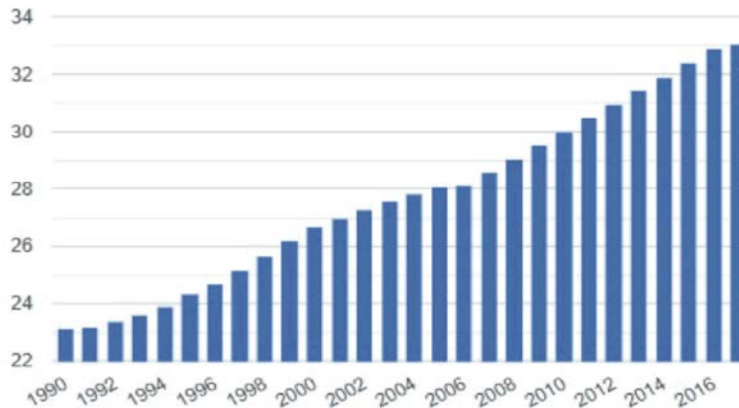


Fig. 6: Female labour force participation in Bangladesh of WB, 1990-2016

Amin [16] found that Bangladesh is now having the better payment of home-based economic activities which increased the female labour force participation. As the women’s participation in the employment sector is increasing thus they are outnumbered in the employment sector of men. In 2011, ADB and ILO found some gender disparities due to social and cultural norms [17]. Rahman [18] found that in 2006, women’s wage was 66% of male wage and in 2010; it increased to 84% in Bangladesh.

Due to male nominated society, the outside employment opportunities are very limited. Women labours are engaged in rice milling, weaving, handicraft etc. Several NGO’s are now providing employment for impoverished rural women, but their scope is very limited. Now women are collectively engaged with many activities such as poultry, livestock, vegetable production etc by taking lease land or pond [19].

Female labour force participation rate: Figure 5 shows that total labour force participation increased in 2006 (57.483) and it continuously decreased up to 2016 (56.435). In 2017, it’s slightly increased (56.799). For that indicator, The World Bank provides data for Bangladesh from 1990 to 2017. The average value for Bangladesh during that period was 27.71 percent with a minimum of 23.11 percent in 1990 and a maximum of 33.04 percent in 2017 (Figure 6). The female labor force participation rate is the percent of the female population ages 15 and older who are economically active. That includes the employed people as well as the unemployed people. Table 4 shows that in 2002-2003, male labour Force Participation rate was 87.4 and its continuously decreased upto 2013 (81.7) and later in 2015-16 the rate is slightly increased (81.9). But we found that the female Force Participation rate is continuously increased from 2002-2003 (26.1) to 2015-16 (35.9).

Table 4: Female Labour Force Participation rate

	2002-2003	2005-2006	2010	2013	2015-16
Total	57.3	58.5	59.3	57.1	58.5
Male	87.4	86.8	82.5	81.7	81.9
Female	26.1	29.2	36.0	33.5	35.9

Source: LFS (2002-2003, 2005-2006, 2010, 2013, 2015-2016)

### Factors Driving Women's Engagement in Different Sectors in Bangladesh:

There is a factor that is generally agreed upon in international law: Equal rights and the inherent human dignity of women and men. International human rights instruments also affirm that women's rights, their empowerment, full participation in the decision-making process and access to power and resources are fundamental - not only for the fulfillment of their moral, ethical, spiritual and intellectual needs - but also for the achievement of equality and development within every society. Some factors those are responsible for increasing women's engagement in different sectors. These are:

- Education, skills developing and training;
- Access to quality, decent paid work;
- Address unpaid care and work burdens;
- Access to property, assets and financial services;
- Collective action and leadership;
- And social protection

Fundamentally, the mindset of both men and women will need to become much more gender-blind. Rapid growth of the female labour force was a sign of women empowerment. Quantity of skilled labour needed to be increased if Bangladesh wanted to be seen as a developed country. Country has now moved more into the industrial sector rather than the agricultural sector. Bangladesh is now like other developing countries of the world such as China, India and Malaysia [15]. Within the developing world, gender equality, more often than not, is affected due to shortcomings in the way governance is carried out. In this regard, one could identify the following drivers as causes of women disempowerment: (a) Regressive and discriminatory socio-cultural mindset that restrict women and girl's access to opportunities; (b) gender insensitive under-investment in social sectors of health and education; (c) asymmetry in awareness and access to information; (d) exclusion and non-participatory planning, decision-making and resource allocation; (e) violence against women. In this regard, there is also a need for all developing countries to recognize the potential contribution of those associated with civil society, media, human rights institutions and other non-governmental organizations in fulfilling objectives related to the empowerment of women.

## CONCLUSION

Bangladesh will need to break the barriers that prevent women from participating in the labour market or entering the organized business sectors as entrepreneurs. The barriers are both formal such as discriminatory inheritance laws and informal such as unwritten social norms restricting female participation in activities traditionally considered to be the exclusive domain of men. The number of employment opportunities created in the country over the last fiscal year stood at 2.7 million. Furthermore, 1 million employment opportunities were created for Bangladeshi's abroad, leading to a total 3.7 million new employment opportunities. The number of contributing unpaid family workers decreased sharply, by 18.6%, in the 2016-17 fiscal years and the highest proportion in formal employment were highly educated. Labor under-utilization decreased by 7.5%, with the majority of workers being in the RMG sector. Now Bangladesh has a significant increase in the female employment in the readymade garment sector. The study shows that in Bangladesh, economic growth is rising with the increase of female labour force participation.

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