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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A SHORT PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS

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#### Abstract

In recent years it is seen that the government is so conscious about our women's main-streaming and development to improve the overall condition of the women in Bangladesh. Government and non-governmental organizations have taken various steps on women empowerment. Despite this, in a pragmatic sense, the empowerment of women is still an illusion of reality. For remaining so many imperceptible barriers and changing variables, the words related to women's empowerment become a pseudo statement. Today the empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of the 21<sup>st</sup> century since the empowerment of women is essentially a process of upliftment of the economic and socio-political status of women and this way the dream of gender democracy came to be true. We all agree that through ensuring gender democracy by women empowerment, we will form a world where men and women will have equal opportunities to live which ensures to ascertain sustainable development and economic growth that is the goal of SDG. So this paper concludes that the necessity of women empowerment to overcome the vulnerable condition of women and is intended to find out the imperceptible barriers of women empowerment. And finally, this article draws some initiatives on how to ensure women empowerment pragmatically in every step of living by eradicating those barriers.

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#### Introduction:-

Women constitute about fifty percent of the country's population. The total development of Bangladesh will undoubtedly be hampered if the empowerment status of women will not be increased. So there is no way to deny that women-society has a vital role to move the country forward and ensure the real development of the country.

While women have made significant contributions to keep the wheels of our society and economy moving, their recognition is not matched by the main reason for discrimination between men and women in society and the state. So not only development, need women empowerment. Empowering women is a reflection of gender equity. That's why one of the goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to achieve gender equality and empower all women. The Sustainable Development Goals aim to eliminate the world from hunger and poverty as well as eliminate all forms of inequalities and discrimination.

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Women empowerment is quite a well-known concept around the globe. Empowerment of women is a process by which women gain power and control their own lives and acquire the ability to make decisions and strategic choices. There is continued inequality and vulnerability of women in all sectors. Empowerment is needed to remove the vulnerable conditions in all spheres of life. Now it is the perfect time to ensure the full and effective participation of women in the workplace and equal opportunity for leadership – this is the pragmatic way to empower women.

**The most observable feature of the term empowerment is that it contains the word power and the term empowerment is closely connected with power:**

**Power:**

At the core of the empowerment is power. According to Srilatha Batliwala, “Power can be defined as control over resources, ideology, and self, exercised in social, economic, and political context among individuals and groups. Resources include physical, human, and financial resources. Control over ideology is the ability to determine beliefs values attitude etc., control over self is having thinking power, self-image, self-confidence, and articulation. Those who have control over all these resources, ideology, and self will have power. The extent of power depends on how much and how many kinds of resources they have access to and control over. This gives decision-making power also” (Hemalatha, 2004). Jo Rowland (1997) has identified four different forms of power;

Power over- control or influence over others, instrumentation or domination,

Power to-generative or productive power, which creates new possibilities and actions without domination,

Power with- a sense of the whole being greater than the sum of the individual, especially when a group tackles problems together and

Power from within- the spiritual strength and uniqueness that resides in each one of us and makes us truly human. Its basis is in self-acceptance and self-respect which extend, in turn, respect for and acceptance of others as equals.

**Empowerment:**

Empowerment particularly referred to collective action by the oppressed and deprived to overcome the obstacles of structural inequality which have previously put them in a disadvantaged position.

In Technical Words, we can define empowerment as a women's ability to understand, articulate, and seek solutions for one's problems. This includes the right to take decisions, independence to do what she likes, have control over their income, increased status within the family and community, and the ability to articulate their issues publicly. (United Nations, 1996-1997)

**Women Empowerment:**

Empowerment means freedom of women and the establishment of rights, especially in all fields. Their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home. Power is control-control over the material, human, intellectual property. Empowerment of women means that at every level of society there will be a healthy environment where women will become independent and human dignity in their glory; establish control over the material, human and intellectual resources. And their ability to influence the direction of social change to create more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

Women empowerment is the process in which women elaborate and recreate what it is that they can be, do, and accomplish in circumstances that they previously were denied. (Kabeer Naila, 2005). Empowerment is defined in many ways, however, when talking about women’s empowerment, empowerment means accepting and allowing people (women) who are on the outside of the decision-making process into it. This puts a strong emphasis on participation in political structures and formal decision-making and, in the economic sphere, on the ability to obtain an income that enables participation in economic decision-making (Rahman, 2013). Women empowerment is all about equipping and allowing women to make life-determining decisions through the different problems in society (Bayeh, Endalcachew, and January 2016).

**Objectives:-**

1. The general objectives of this study are to understand the economic, political, and social empowerment of women and to understand what challenges all are facing.

2. Identify the barriers to empowerment of women in different categories and identify possible ways to overcome these barriers.
3. Undertake activities that help to bring about attitudinal and other changes for the effective participation of women from all levels of society.
4. To ensure a fully autonomous environment through women empowerment and to find how this attempt leads to future sustainable development.

### **Research Method:-**

The study bridges with quantitative and qualitative methods of research based on primary data which is obtained through first-hand investigation and secondary data are collected from various research papers, journals, and books to meet its objective. A survey was conducted with a questionnaire to gather information from respondents. Most of the questions were close-ended questions in multiple-choice formats and very few questions are open-ended. Latter the survey result was analyzed from multifaceted perspectives.

### **Literature Review:-**

Empowerment has become one of the most elastic of international development's many buzzwords (Batliwala, 2007; Cornwall and Eade, 2011). Women's empowerment is widely recognized as a global policy objective (UN General Assembly 2015) and a key component of strategies to promote health and combat poverty worldwide (World Bank 2012; Every Women Every Child 2017). In the past 10 years, the goal of women's empowerment has received serious attention, as well as funding by donors and international agencies (Unterhalter, 2007; Mosedale, 2005; Malhotra et al., 2002; Papart et al., 2002; Oxaal and Baden, 1997). Naila Kabeer's (1989) interpretation: Kabeer interprets it as a redial transformation of power relations between women and men 'so that women have greater power over their own lives and men have less over women's lives'. Kabeer (1994) has provided another dynamic account of empowerment. She regards empowerment as a concept with theoretical and practical potential that merits being more than an empty slogan. There is strong evidence that women's equality works as an influencer of economic growth. If women have employment and livelihoods, family poverty decreases, and human resources and affordability increase in the family range (Naila Kabir 2012). The prevailing notion that most of the Bangladeshi women are in an isolated position at the border of the house because the screen does not exactly reflect reality. She shows that women who actually pay very little foot outside the house but they also market their products through male relatives, neighbors, and housekeepers. Besides they also make significant exchanges of goods and services in the village and relatives in other ways (White 1992). Other studies have shown that the various functions of women are not yet properly recognized and evaluated by society and the state (Naher and Hasan 2015; Huq 2013; Mahmud and Tasneem 2011). In this case, the trend is seen not only socially, but also in the state practice policy. In this case, for example, the Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh (BBS 2011) shows that women who are involved in domestic work alone were never included in the government labor force. This makes a significant portion of women's labor disappear according to government estimates. However, women themselves do not see housework as an economic activity (Mahmud and Tasneem 2011). Another study found that (Efroymson; Ahmed and Ruma 2013) women in Bangladesh, many work sixteen hours a day. They do a large part of the housework, as well as many who work outside the house for extra income. And the basket of women in the village is much larger than the city in terms of the work. In this study, both men and women have been shown to take on the importance of domestic work. However, the full economic value of the work has not been fully realized by either party.

This study tries to find out the new shapes of women empowerment and tries to rethink the pragmatic concept of women empowerment.

### **Analysis:-**

#### **Women in Bangladesh:**

Women in Bangladesh are in many ways inferior to and dependent on men from early childhood. When the girl reaches puberty her marriage will soon be arranged and the family will pay the husband's family a dowry to marry off their daughter to him. The girl will thereafter pursue the rules of Purdah and live under seclusion. Women that can obtain Purdah strictly show high social status. Only very poor women have to go outside to work (Hartman and Boyce, 1998). Women's sexual and reproductive health and rights are affected by inequality and widespread gender-based violence. For example, 14 percent of maternal mortality is a direct cause of gender-based violence (SIDA 2019). Even if the constitution promotes equal rights to women, women still suffer from discrimination and violence that occurs in the home, at the workplace, and on the society levels as well (Ministry of Women and Children

Affairs, 2008). The women in rural Bangladesh are hard working. Foremost, they perform heavy household work throughout the days. Women's contribution to the family income is not recognized to the same extent as men's, but they are however involved in many activities, such as post-harvest activities, farming, fuel gathering, rice husking, making, and selling handicrafts, and rearing domestic animals (Islam, undated). Although women's work is hard and time-consuming, such work does not provide them equal status to men. A woman seldom earns money on her own, but is financially dependent on her father, then husband and thereafter her son for economic scrutiny (Hartman and Boyce1998).

#### **Gender and Development:**

The development has also become engendered, beginning with the emphasis on women's participation in the development program to then focus on gender creating the framework of Gender And Development (GAD) in the 1980s. GAD came to address gender as a social construction and stress the importance of changing social and political power distributions among men and women to combat inequality. GAD came to emphasize heterogeneity among women, shift focus from needs to rights, and integrated men and masculinities into GAD. Wilkins (Hemer, et al., 2005) also writes that one has become more aware of gender dynamics within development processes during the past decades. She states that to give women equal opportunities to participate in development processes previously directed to men, it is important to be aware of patriarchal and power systems in which the development process is implemented. The third development goal of the World Bank is to "promote gender equity and empower women as a central component to its overall mission to reduce poverty and stimulate economic growth" (World Bank, undated).

#### **Finding of the Research:**

The main focus is to discuss the major findings of the research. Findings will be discussed per the real objectives of the research.

#### **Impediments: Socio-Economic and Socio-Religious:**

The socio-economic obstacles are very hard to overcome in developing countries because they limit access to education, work, and full social life. One of the main hindrances begins with gender discrimination to socio-economic practices that relegates women to the background or give them a second place in every opportunity life can offer in education, empowerment, and social inclusion.

One of the major obstacles to women's empowerment in Bangladesh is the anti-women campaign of extreme fanatics. There are some taboos in every society and every religion. The group of people is tired of expressing its gloom about women and sects in mosques, religious schools but never continues to speak out against the continued violence against women and minorities in the country and it is the regular picture of our society. All world religions today maintain male social dominance within societal structures (Young, 1987). Also, religious norms and prejudices reflect patriarchal values, which are characteristic of all societies of the world religions (Seguino, 2011). The role of God, or a creator of religion, is always taken by a male, and the woman is primarily valued as a mother, especially as a mother to a son. Her place is in the household, less so at religious ceremonies or in public positions. The real status of a woman in religion is more complicated, however, as in some religions, certain women have acquired significant posts (Holm, 1994). Some religious traditions can contribute to the formation of gender inequalities and inferior the role of women in society.

It was asked whether the respondents are facing a religious problem or not, the highest about 48% of respondents disagreed and about 33% of respondents strongly agreed with our statement.

<b>Facing religious malpractices</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Strongly Agreed	13	32.5
Disagreed	19	47.5
Neutral	8	20
Total	40	100

**Figure 1:-** Percentage of religious resistance.  
(The data was collected by the researcher)

#### **The present situation of Literacy Rate:**

The total population of Bangladesh =163.05 million

Male person = 50.58% and Female person = 49.42%

**Source: World Population Prospects (2019 Revision)**

Almost 36% of female persons are working on total Females and 64 % of females are unemployed. According to UNESCO, an adult literacy rate of 72.89%.while the male literacy rate is 75.7%, for females is 70.09%.

**Educational attainment of the population aged 25 and older by sex:-**

Indicator	Gender	Findings
At least completed primary education	Women	51.7
	Men	60.9
At least completed lower secondary	Women	36.9
	Men	46.0
At least completed upper secondary	Women	23.9
	Men	34.0
At least completed post-secondary	Women	10.0
	Men	18.0
At least completed bachelor or equivalent	Women	5.5
	Men	11.5
At least completed master’s or equivalent	Women	2.2
	Men	4.7
Doctoral or equivalent	Women	0.1
	Men	0.2

**Figure 2:-** Educational attainment of the population.

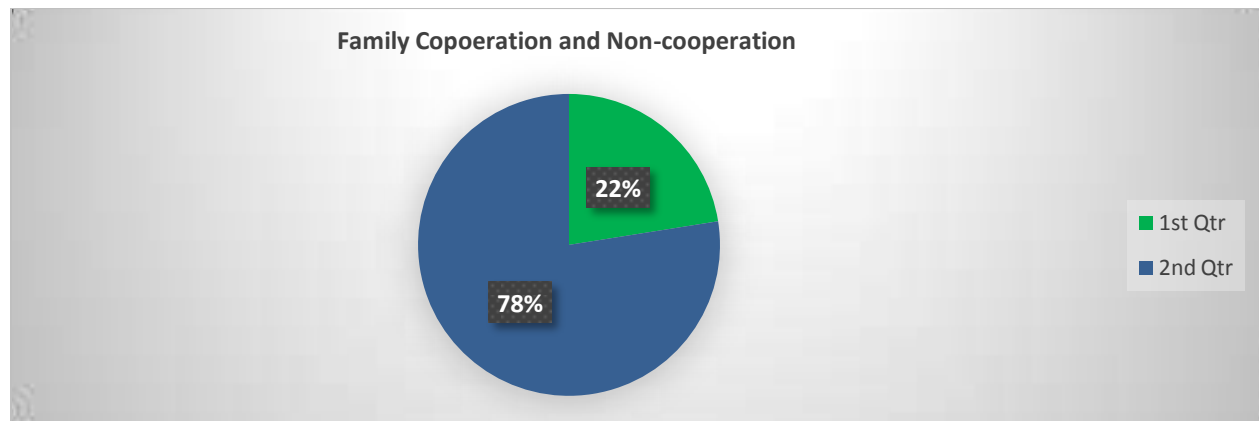
**Source:** Gender Statistics of Bangladesh

<http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=161#>

as on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2019 at 11.50 am

**Family cooperation and non-cooperation to enter into a job:**

Even today, most of the families consider women as a burden and want to marry off their daughter as early as possible before finishing their education. Many of them try to continue their education after marriage by hook or by crook but not so many could succeed. Families are not aware of their women's opportunity to get a job. For working women, they have to manage two major duties, one is family maintaining and second is job performing, and it is tough for a woman at a time.

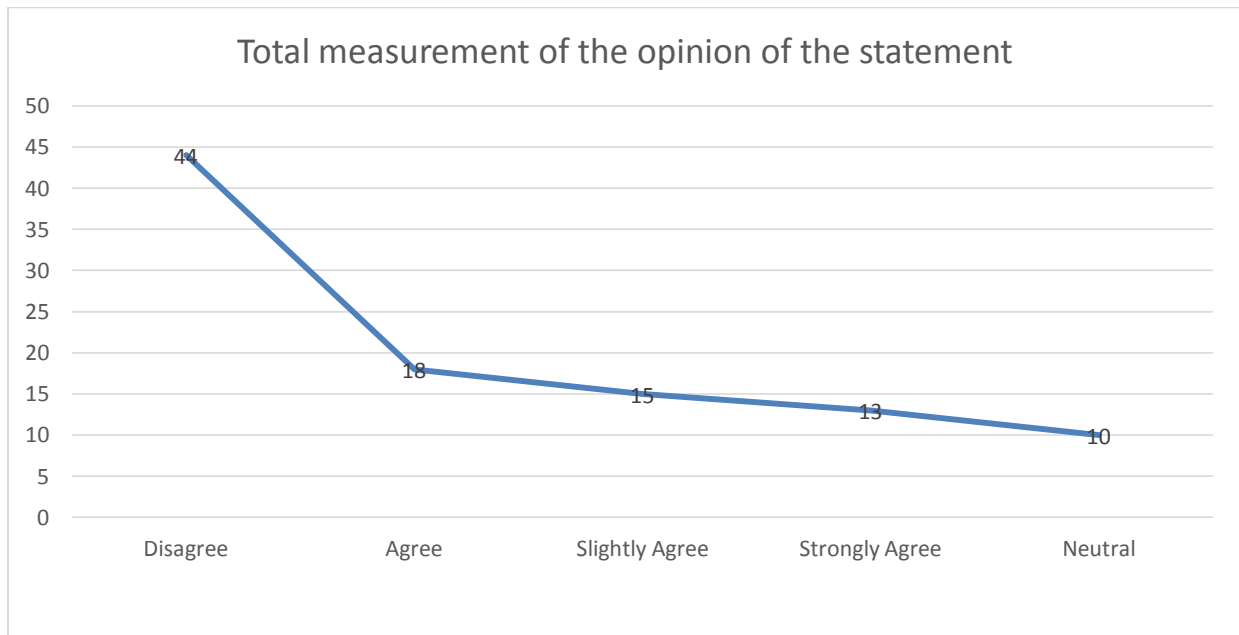


**Figure 3:-** Percentage of Family Corporation and non-cooperation to enter into the job  
The data was collected by the researcher.

About 80% of respondents have acknowledged that they have got co-operation from their family members to enter into the job and about 20% of women have confessed that they didn't get any support from their family. And among 80% of the respondents about 16% completed their education after marriage and got the support to enter into a job. So it is clear that the trend of facing family problem is decreasing that is a positive sign of our women.

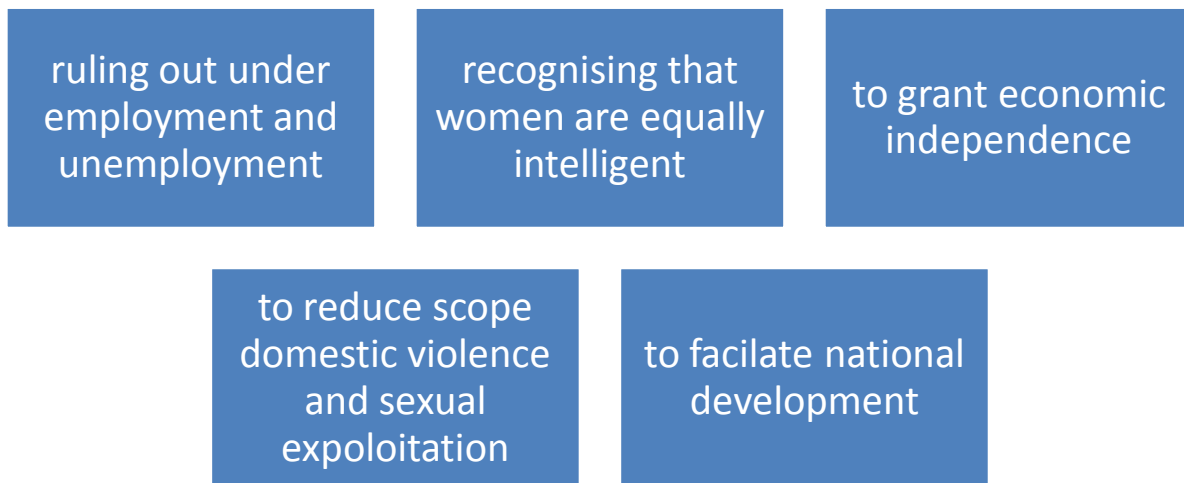
**Social acceptance of working women:**

In our society women are desirable to do household doings and that's why society cannot accept the working women easily. It is found that the highest 44% of respondents disagreed and 18% of respondents agreed with this statement that society cannot accept working women easily. Though the acceptance rate of working women is increasing although fallacies remain.



**Figure 4:-** Measurement of the statement on “Society cannot accept working women easily” (Data is collected by the researcher).

Now the question is why women empowerment is crucial today?



**Figure 5:-** To promote the overall development of society.

**How to improve women's empowerment?**

If we want to change this picture of our regular living then we need to take steps for empowering the ecosystem that leads to a girl's eventual success in life.

The family, her school, and the community at large also play a very crucial role. So it is important for us to also work with these people, to empower the entire ecosystem around her, to explain to them the importance of education, to explain to them why they should educate their girl child and send her for higher education. So that they ultimately act as a catalyst rather than hindrances in her power to succeed.

**Family:**

The role of the family in empowering women is very important. Families make decisions on how many children to have, whether to send children to work or to school and how much effort and money to put into their education. Instead of considering the only boy in the family as a shelter for old age, both boys and girls are given equal opportunity for education, work, and other areas, but the girl child can also be the guardian of the aging parent.

**Community:**

To empower one woman in the community, she will pull along with her sister, cousins, neighbor's and take them along with her in her journey of breaking the cycle of ignorance and poverty.

**Educational institutions:**

Education and training for women's empowerment need to reverse the values and beliefs which have been inculcated within the conventional school system.

**Co-operation (Men and Women):**

Lasting empowerment for women requires a more serious effort to understand change among men who are unabated to their lives. Women in different circumstances like job opportunity, sexual, moral, and physical violence. So, when they don't understand or accept gender equity policy no women's empowerment would exist. It is the matter that involves both men and women. We need to teach our boys from a young age to view women not as competitors but rather as people with whom they can work together to achieve greater impact. The full participation and partnership of both women and men are required in productive and reproductive life, including shared responsibilities for the care and nurturing of children and maintenance of the household.

The contribution of a man in the empowerment of women as a father, as a brother, as a husband, as a son, as a friend, as a colleague cannot be undermined. It is important to sensitize men that they have to become the support structures that break those pseudotypes' gender roles to speculate the process of women's success.

**Steps Taken by Govt.:**

The present government has undertaken various steps to ensure gender equality and women's and children's development and is working on implementation. The present government is committed to attaining the Sustainable Development Goal of gender equity and empowering women as well as implementing the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Among the various achievements of the present government in the empowerment of women are:

1. Bangladesh is one of the few countries of the world that has women as prime minister, parliament speaker, and cabinet ministers.
2. National policy for women's development has been adopted by Bangladeshi govt. that has increased the number of women elected to parliament to 20%.
3. Several High Court and Appellate Division Judges and District Judge are women.
4. One of two elected Vice-Chairman must be a woman at the Upazila level.
5. Many women are appointed in the Armed Forces (Army, Navy & Air Force), police forces, and different cadre services.
6. Vice-Chancellor of Jahangir Nagar University and Chittagong University and Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University are women.
7. 60% of women's quota is reserved for Primary School Teachers.
8. Established Asian Women University and 4 polytechnic Institutes for Women.
9. In 34 districts 3 months long training is organized for the women on Information Technology.

10. Another initiative was taken by Govt. is the Village Court Act which aims to strive to increase the women representation in Village Court Panels.
11. Searching Joyeeta (victorious) in five categories initiated to award-successful women throughout the country.

In the fiscal year 2019-20, the budget for Taka 1 lakh 61 thousand 247 crores has been presented which is 23 thousand 505 crores more than the previous fiscal year. And 30.82 percent of the total budget and 5.56 percent of GDP. Also, if the National Women's Development Policy 2011 is noticed, it calls for the implementation of economic, social, political, administrative, educational, professional, and legal and health rights for women, which can help to ensure women's empowerment.

The rights of women in the Constitution is bellowed here, The constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh is supposed to ensure women's rights. Article 19(3) of the Constitution states that "the state shall ensure the right of women to participate in all areas of national life". Again in Article 27, "women shall have the right to equality of law, women will have equal rights over men." Article 28(1, 2, 3, 4) shall have the same rights for all. In the case of politics, in Article 65(3) of the parliament, it is said to reserve 50 seats for women.

Although the Constitution states that women have enough rights, they have not yet got their full rights in real life.

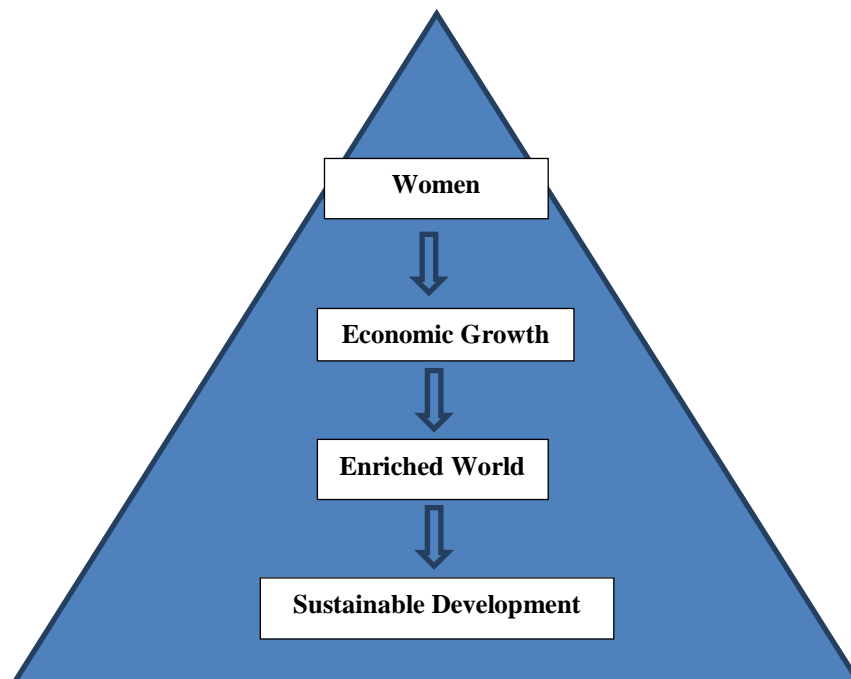
#### **Needs More Steps to Extend Empowerment:**

1. To take law full steps to ensure their women empowerment
2. To expand education and training
3. To build capacity and skills development
4. To achieve economic solvency and to get equal phase in their fathers' property
5. To create a gender-sensitive environment in the workplace and to create gender awareness through media
6. To improve women's health condition
7. To establish the Day-Care Centre for babies
8. To raise consciousness and create self-help groups.

According to the constitution and women's development policy, the rights that are enforced by law enforcement must be ensured.

#### **Social Change after Empowerment:**

**Figure 6:-** Ultimate social benefit through women empowerment.





When girls get educated and empowered the result is going to establish this fact which shows the triangle. For example, due to the death of a certain person who is the only working person in a family, the entire family enters into a world of poverty and there is no doubt the family pass through a lot of trouble. But if a particular woman is employed or service holder than it's easy to overcome the trouble. Another fact is the Economic growth in a family. If husband and wife both of them working together, ultimately the economic growth of the particular family will increase. When there are more and more women being empowered, more families being benefited, and this way the world is going to become a much better place and more equitable environment to live in. Realize their (Women) highest potentials and through investing their potentials, we ultimately lead to maybe improving their participation in their local economies which leads to higher rates of contributing fully the same time fight poverty, inequity, gender disparity. So through empowered women to lead to growing economies and with growing economies and empowered women it ultimately leads to a more enriched world which is a more equitable and healthy environment. Through the entire process, we attain ultimately sustainable development.

#### **Future Sustainable Development:**

“There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women” Kofi Annan Sustainable development Goals have six goals. The fifth goal of Sustainable development Goals is gender equity. To achieve sustainable development, gender equity needs to be brought at all levels of society. Equity between men and women is a precondition for sustainable people-centered development. The perceptions, interests, needs, and priorities of both women and men must be taken into consideration not only as a matter of social justice but because they are necessary to enrich the development process (OSAGI 2001). Gender equity is a key factor for sustainable economic growth, social development, and environmental sustainability. In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) made important provisions for the recognition of women’s contributions and their full participation in sustainable development. UNDP focusses on gender equality and women's empowerment because they are a pathway to achieving the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development. According to the contribution from Lyla Mehta and Melissa Leach, “Not just victims, women have been and can be central actors in pathways to sustainability and green transformation.”

#### **Conclusion:-**

Women empowerment is the most concerning issue for all the developing and underdeveloped countries in the world and we can say it's a complex process and having multiple dimensions. In women's empowerment approach it needs gender empowerment. The basic spirit of the War of Liberation was to build a non-discriminatory society and this is also reflected in the constitution of Bangladesh. But even in that year, we are failed to create a non-discriminatory society and it is necessary to rethink gender democracy which is very crucial for both men and women through eradicating the man-made prisms. Meanwhile, to achieve the sustainable development goals by 2030, it must show success in achieving its number one goal (gender equity and empowerment of all women and adolescents). Hopefully, we will take care of our national and international commitments. But at this stage, it is very crucial to create an environment for utilizing the acquired abilities, skills, and strengths. Therefore hostile environment in all fields, including legal, social, political, has to be made in a favorable environment. For the betterment of the country, we should provide the congenial environment for women's employment which would speedier the wheel of the economy of our country. Only then we can expect meaningful progress in the empowerment of women.

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