

# The outlook of Women Empowerment: A Comparative Study on Rural and Urban Women in Rajshahi District of Bangladesh

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**Abstract:** *The demographic distribution of Bangladesh implies around an equal male-female ratio. Bangladesh has been graduated from least developed to a developing country since 2018. It has been observed that the rural women are less benefited than the urban women if any development occurs in Bangladesh. The main objective of our study is to find out the comparative women empowerment scenario in urban and rural regions of Rajshahi district in Bangladesh. To analyze the women empowerment status, we use a unique well-structured questionnaire to collect information from the urban and rural women who are between (40-80) age group. We use both descriptive and econometric statistics. The multi-variable linear regression models have been used to describe social and economic endorsement of 200 women, one half is from rural area and other half was from urban area and the data set has been analyzed through two multiple regression models, the decision making on social perspective and purchasing power on economic factors. We get significant results for very few variables, such as decision making and governance, pocket money and purchasing capacity have both positive and significant relations in both rural and urban areas. On the other hand, freedom of movement, resource ownership and income contributions are only significant for villages. In our descriptive analysis, there is 5 % more women in village can take household expenditure decision than the women living in cities. We get 30 % women in rural areas having the freedom of movement facility whatever only 18 % urban women enjoy it. Finally, the paper suggests some policies which can attain the women empowerment for our national development.*

**Keywords:** Socio-Economic Condition, Women Empowerment, Decision Making, Income Contribution

## 1. Introduction

The demographic distribution of Bangladesh implies around an equal male-female ratio. According to the World data Atlas in 2015, the males for 100 females were 101.86. Undoubtedly, women folk is an important part for the socio-economic development of Bangladesh. Although there is significant changes comparing to the recent past, a large proportion of women is lag behind from the privileges of the development programs. The reason for the backwardness is very straight forward. The general conception of women is dependencies to others. As a girl child is born in an unwelcome world, male child is treated as the blessing for the family, there is very little to think about girls after their birth and even after ages they do not imagine a life without the contribution of the counterparts (male members in a family). This scenario is anticipated much more vulnerable when we ask about decision making for social and economic purposes, financial empowerment, health status etc. This story was a very representative feature of our women society in the recent past. In our paper, the researchers try to find out a present condition of women empowerment in Bangladesh by having primary data from Rajshahi district. The data set composes both rural and urban information regarding women status in different socio-economic and political variables. These variables are described through the descriptive and empirical statistics. The results of our approaches illustrate various significant features of women participation in national building in Bangladesh. In addition, the motto of the study is to find out either there is any regional discrimination or not regarding urban and rural

women empowerment. The study has been designed in three major parts, such as a brief description of previous literatures, data and method, after that we discuss the results of our analysis. Finally, some distinctive policy suggestions have been approached.

## 2. Objectives and Research Questions

The main objective of our study is to find out the comparative women empowerment scenario in urban and rural regions of Bangladesh. The study also tried to find out the factors influencing socio economic differentiation of the women in both regions as general objectives. Finally we postulated the following research question with considering our objectives.

- Does women empowerment occur in the both parts of the country simultaneously?
- What are the indications admitting female participation in the development process?
- How much they have the access in decision making in economic, political and social segment comparing to the past?
- Finally, are urban women having better prevalence than rural women?

## 3. Literature Review

Women empowerment in Bangladesh has been discussed since the birth of Bangladesh as the women folk had a supreme sacrifice and contribution to the liberation war in

1971. Since then, this inevitable part of our society is working for national building through their participations in social, cultural and economic life. So it is always being very interesting part to be researched out. A plenty of research studies has been undertaken for the development of women through the empowerment policy throughout the world. To begin with internationally recognition on women empowerment, UNDP (1994) defined empowerment is a highly powerful and revolutionary techniques of ownership feelings and this paper emphasized fund for making women powerful in the way of life. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru (1951) explained the role of women to framework a nation where it starts from the origin (village). He truly opines "When women moves forward, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves". Islam (2014) added that non-government organization (NGO) played significant role in increasing women's empowerment in Bangladesh but it has still limitations to the expansion throughout the all parts of the nations. Islam & Dogra (2011) compares the regional context of three Asian countries, i.e. Bangladesh, China and Vietnam to identify the factors contributing to women empowerment. To explore the factors related to Bangladesh are education, government, NGO, and donor agencies.

According to Hashemi, Schuler & Riley (1996) explored that both Grameen Bank and Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee induced credit among rural women in Bangladesh and these programs successfully stimulated women empowerment in the rural areas of Bangladesh. HultBerg (2008) study added that mobile phone and village pay phone from Garment telecom assigned better communication among the women whenever they needed to communicate with people in rural Bangladesh. Paul, Sarkar & Naznin (2016) used household decision making index and explored that urban women are relatively more empowered than that of rural women. Eck (2014) studied on economic empowerment of rural women in Bangladesh and how the social system hinders the economic privilege of women in rural areas.

## 4. Data and Research Methodology

To analyze the women empowerment status, we use a unique well-structured questionnaire to collect information from the urban and rural women who are between (45-80) age group. After collecting the data, we use statistical techniques to make a comparison between the two groups. We use both descriptive and econometric statistics to have a clear picture about the women empowerment in Bangladesh. In case of descriptive analysis through central values, and tables. re represented to show the women empowerment scenarios. On the other hand, multi-variable linear regression models have been used to describe social and economic endorsement of these women. To have our analysis, the STATA software has been used. The data set composes a total number of 200 survey reports, among them half respondent is from urban and another half is from rural areas of Rajshahi district. Besides, our primary data, we used several journal papers, Bangladesh Economic Review and World Bank Report etc. as the secondary sources. The cross sectional data is collected between July to October in 2018. Each interview partook around 30 minutes.

### 4.1 Data

In our research we collect the data from Rajshahi district; we select two villages from this area purposively. After that, to a have a comparison we select Rajshahi City Corporation as our urban sample. From both rural and urban places, we randomly choose 100 respondents from each area of our study. We prepare a well structured questionnaire to have our survey. Each interview was conducted by the researchers which took around 30 minutes. The time frame of data collection was undertaken from July to October, 2018.

As our basic discussion was based on primary data, we also study some other secondary data sources as well, such as previous published literatures and journal articles, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in Bangladesh.

### 4.2 Descriptions of the Variables

**Table 1:** Description of the variables

Variable Name	Variable Level	Nature of Variable	Measurement
Decision making	Decision making	Dependent	Dummy (1= yes, 0=no) rural mean=0.32, urban mean=0.48
governance	governance	Independent	Dummy (1=yes, 0=no) rural mean=0.17, urban mean=0.32
House_exp_decision	Household expenditure decision	Independent	*Dummy (1=self decision, 0=depends on husband or son), rural mean=0.19, urban mean= 0.14
politics	politics	Independent	Dummy (1=active participation, 0=no participation) rural mean= 0.04, urban mean=0.11)
Freedom of movement	Freedom of movement	Independent	**Dummy (1=yes, 0=no) rural mean= 0.30, urban mean=0.18)
Self right	Self right	Independent	Dummy (1=yes, 0=no) rural mean= 0.10, urban mean=0.33)
Purchasing Capacity	Purchasing Capacity	Dependent	Dummy (1=yes, 0=no) rural mean= 0.27, urban mean=0.50)
Resource ownership of land	Resource ownership of land	Independent	Dummy (1=yes, 0=no) rural mean= 0.27, urban mean=0.57)
Financial Account	Financial Account	Independent	Dummy (1=yes, 0=no) rural mean= 0.08, urban mean=0.31)
Pocket Money	Pocket Money	Independent	Quantitative (real numbers in taka) rural mean=305, urban mean=878
Income Contribution	Income Contribution	Independent	Quantitative (real numbers in taka) rural contribution (0-2000 taka, contribute 29%), urban contribution (0-5000taka, contribute 48%)
Willing outside job	Willing outside job	Independent	Dummy (1=yes, 0=no) rural mean= 0.15, urban mean=0.30
Life Expectancy	Life Expectancy	Independent	Quantitative (real numbers), rural mean= 65, urban mean= 66.6

Pure Water	Pure Water	Independent	Dummy (1=yes, 0=no) rural mean= 0.82, urban mean=0.96.
Sanitation	Sanitation	Independent	Dummy (1=yes, 0=no) rural mean= 0.69, urban mean=0.81.
Medicare	Medicare	Independent	Dummy (1=yes, 0=no) rural mean= 0.30, urban mean=0.68.

Source: Authors self computation.

In most cases, urban women are in a better condition than the rural women but there are two exceptional cases, such as household expenditure decision and freedom of movements.

\* There is 5 % more women in village can take household expenditure decision than the women living in cities. It causes as rural women folk has recently engaged in some economic activities, for-example, small agricultural business, poultry and livestock raring, active participation with NGOs, small cottage industries as well as huge engagement in garments sector in Bangladesh.

\*\* Freedom of movement is always been assumed much more enjoyed by the urban people, among our respondents, rural females have better movement facilities than urban females due to the present condition of Bangladesh. We get 30 % women in rural areas having the freedom of movement facility whatever only 18 % urban women enjoy it. The problem of insecurity and sexual harassment are less common in villages which are extremely acute in urban areas, especially in the slums.

## 5. Result and Discussions

The present study has been analyzed through the descriptive variables and multiple regression models. We basically use two multiple regression models, firstly, the decision making on social perspective and another one is purchasing power on economic factors.

### 5.1 Decision making on social perspective

The model for decision making in social perspective can be explained as follows:

$$\text{Decision} = \alpha_1 + \beta_1 \text{governance} + \beta_2 \text{politics} + \beta_3 \text{houe\_exp} + \beta_4 \text{free\_move} + \beta_5 \text{Self\_righ} + U_t$$

We have estimated several dependent variables as responses considering the decision making process, such as governance power, participation in politics, household expenditures, freedom in movement and self right. The findings of the researchers are insignificant for most of the cases although governance and freedom of movements are postulated significant in case of our first model (village women). The Regression table for decision-making on independent variables in village and urban areas is analyzed through the Ordinary Least Square (OLS) method. In this section, dependent variable governance implied positive results for both areas whereas urban governance parameter has greater value but insignificant. The rural governance estimator, both urban and rural estimations provide significant and positive results. It means urban women have greater decision empowerment than rural women as both the areas the governance power of Bangladeshi women tremendously increased. Freedom of movement is nowadays greater in remote areas specifying a crucial change and elaboration of women empowerment concept in rural areas.

It supplies not only positive but even a significant value. On the other hand, urban freedom of movement is less effective as well as in significant.

**Table 2:** Decision making on social perspective

Independent Variables	Decision making (coef/se) Model 1 (village)	Decision making (coef/se) Model 2 (urban)
governance	0.5359* (0.079)	0.6869* (0.102)
politics	0.0984 (0.139)	0.09635 (0.122)
House_exp	0.1358 (0.119)	-0.01005 (0.106)
Free_move	0.5438* (0.068)	0.0228 (0.122)
Self_right	-0.1202 (0.098)	0.1124 (0.092)
cons	0.048	0.020
$R^2$	0.7236	0.5243
Adj. $R^2$	0.7089	0.4989
Number of obs.	100	100

\*p<0.05

### 5.2 Regression on Purchasing Power for Economic Forces

*purchasing capacity*

$$= \alpha_2 + \gamma_1 \text{Resource ownership} + \gamma_2 \text{Financial Account} + \gamma_3 \text{pocket money} + \gamma_4 \text{willing outside job} + \gamma_5 \text{income contribution} + U_t$$

The Regression table for purchasing capacity as independent variable is regressed for several dependent economic variables in village and urban areas. Rural old women (significant estimator) have the positive resource ownership of land greater than urban old women (insignificant estimator). In addition, pocket money indicator is positively significant for both areas but the village women prevail substantial value. There is a compelling result for rural women income contribution than suburbs. The value is fairly large for rural area and significant. The implicit factor is that rural women are now actively co-operating the family income.

**Table 3:** Regression on Purchasing Power for Economic Forces

Independent Variables	Purchasing Capacity (coef/se) Model 1 (village)	Purchasing Capacity (coef/se) Model 2 (urban)
Resource Ownership of land	0.1591* (0.068)	0.1306 (0.083)
Financial Account	-0.0136 (0.107)	0.0434 (0.091)
Pocket Money	0.4571* (0.097)	0.3487* (0.067)
Willing outside job	0.1008 (0.084)	-0.1505 (0.089)
Income contribution	0.3967*	0.1693

	(0.066)	(0.089)
.cons	-0.010	.059
$R^2$	0.6386	0.4063
Adj. $R^2$	0.6153	0.3679
Number of obs.	100	100

\*p<0.05

## 6. Recommendation and Policy Suggestions

There is no alternative without women empowerment because women are the half of the total population of Bangladesh where gender equality is not possible without the development of our women. The role of education, training facilities, health and nutrition as well as equal opportunities as given to men can bring out our girls from all the obstacles and limitations. In such way, they can prove their worth and abilities as like men.

But our case is not as favorable as we think, we have found that the rural women are not in a better situation comparing to the urban women except two factors. We have already successfully attained several Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) concerning to women, such as reduction of maternal mortality rate, increase of women enrollment in education. Moreover, the national women development report-2011 ensures the women rights in the multi-dimensional cases of Bangladesh.

Presently, our government has emphasized much more on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of 2030, to implement it, the government has introduced seventh five year planning where it has been clearly indicated that "The Women Development Policy consolidated a national vision for social, legal and economic empowerment of women and guided a set of actions and resources for all stakeholders." (General Economic Division, Bangladesh Planning commission, 2015).

It is obvious that the government of Bangladesh has already undertaken several strategies for the enhancement of women power, we can address such strategies as follows:

- Reducing gender gap by ensuring fundamental rights of women,
- Enhancing their working knowledge and Vocational trainings,
- Increasing women involvement in health related programs,
- Ensuring freedom of movement both urban and rural women,
- Increase the ratio of women control over resources,
- Improving decision making power both in households and working places,
- Involvement of women more in IT related and progressive activities,
- Encourage women to change the traditional and old perceptions,
- Being women prudent in leadership throughout the country.

## 7. Conclusion

Bangladesh has been graduated from least developed to a developing country since 2018. After achieving our developing status, it is a significant issue to develop our demographic features, where women folk are playing one of the major roles to the build the economy. It is the true fact that the rural women are less benefited than the urban women if any development occurs in Bangladesh. But the present age is such an age where the development policy is like that no one will lag behind. The purpose of our study was also designed on this perspective. Although different variables are undertaken to analyze our results, we get very few significant results from our multi variable regression functions. Although we get very significant results for few variables, most of them are related to the rural part of Rajshahi district, Bangladesh such as decision making and governance, pocket money and purchasing capacity have both positive and significant relations in both rural and urban areas. On the other hand, freedom of movement, resource ownership and income contributions are only significant for villages.

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