CHAPTER III

Government Policies for Women’s Development
3.1. Introduction

The policies of the Government of Bangladesh have duly recognized the fact that women constitute half of the total population and demonstrated its concern by consciously understanding all possible efforts to raise their status in the society and integrate them in the total national development process. Article 10 of the Constitution states, “Steps shall be taken to ensure participation of women in every sphere of national life. The commitment of the country to the cause since its independence in 1971 is reflected in Article 28 of its Constitution which explicitly affirms the equality of the rights of women in all areas of life, and prohibits any obstruction to the admission of women to public places and educational institutions.”

The preliminary steps to involving women in development activities in the post-independence period were undertaken in 1972 through the establishment of the Bangladesh National Women’s Rehabilitation, which in July 1974 came to be known as the Bangladesh Women’s Rehabilitation and Welfare Foundation (BWRWF). These institutions were set up to help women and their dependent children affected by the liberation movement who had been widowed, raped, and otherwise made victims of the social upheaval which characterized the emergence of Bangladesh. In 1976, the scope of women-related activities was expanded through the formation of the Bangladesh Jatiyo Mahila Sangtha (BJMS), a national women’s organization.

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2 BWRWF programme for integrated services for family planning aims at providing women with skills which would make them self reliant through productive activities.
3 BJMS was established by the Government of Bangladesh in February 1976, as a central co-ordination body for women’s activities in Bangladesh. This association is attached to the Ministry of Womens Affairs Division and implement projects reflecting the Government policy for women affairs.
The Women in Development (WID) approach was taken up in Bangladesh during the first UN Women’s Decade (1975-1985). At the government level, the first Ministry of Women’s Affairs Division was established in 1976 with the primary objective of identifying women’s problems and to integrate them in the mainstream of national development activities. The Division was upgraded to the status of a full-fledged Ministry of Women’s Affairs in 1978, since the state came to realise that women have unequal access to some of the benefits and opportunities of development and that development planning must address these disparities between men and women and ensure that women are allowed equal opportunities as men. Bangladesh thus became the first country in Asia and the Pacific region to have established a full-fledged Ministry to deal with women’s development issues. Within this Ministry, the Women’s Affairs Directorate was created in 1984, as per the recommendation of the Martial Law Committee Report of 1982, to raise the socio-economic condition of poor women, especially in the rural areas. The status of this was officially upgraded by the government in November 1990 to the Department of Women Affairs (DWA). The Ministry in 1994 was renamed as Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MWCA). (Figure 3.1. provides detail of the evolution of Ministry of Women and Children Affairs).

3.2. Women in the Development Plans

In the First Five Year Plan (1973-78) no specific development issues were incorporated for women except rehabilitation of war affected women and their children under the Social Welfare Division. Later when it was realized that women

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Note: The Department of Women Affairs has its main office in Dhaka and field offices in 22 districts and 136 sub districts or upazilas.

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1972
Bangladesh Women's Rehabilitation Board created, replaced in 1974 by Bangladesh Women's Rehabilitation and Welfare Foundation

1976
Jatiya Mohila Sangstha established (under Min. Of Labour and Social Welfare)

1976
Women's Affairs Cell created in Social Welfare Department

1976
Assistant to the President/for Women's Affairs appointed

merged to form

reports to:

1976
Women's Affairs Division of President's Secretariat created

transferred to:

1978
Ministry renamed as Ministry of Women and Children Affairs

1982
New Ministry of Social Welfare and Women's Affairs

merged to form

Split to form:

1984
Directorate of Women's Affairs created in Min. of Social Welfare and Women's Affairs

becomes attached directorate

1989
New Ministry of Women's Affairs created

1990
Upgraded as Department of Women Affairs

1994
Ministry renamed as Ministry of Women and Children Affairs

are necessary for development, a Women Affairs Division in the President’s Secretariat was created in 1976. Some programmes were taken up during the later part of the First Five Year Plan to improve the lot of women by creating congenial socio-economic atmosphere. The real concern shown for women’s development was reflected in the education sector, population control and family planning, apart from women in production which was given relatively little importance. The Plan could not visualize any programme for women. The Plan to establish a women’s research and information cell and data bank under the Ministry of Women’s Affairs could not be implemented. Therefore the allocation of Tk. 25 million (2.78 per cent of the total allocation of the Ministry) remained unutilized and was consequently diverted to other sectors.\(^5\)

Women’s development was considered a separate issue in the Two-Year Plan (TYP, 1978-80) for the first time which was formulated during the interim period of preparation of the Second Five-Year Plan (SFYP).\(^6\) The plan gave a high priority to women’s development so that they can exercise their socio-economic rights and shoulder responsibilities. For the first time women’s development was considered from a different angle and as a development issue and major emphasis was given in the field of vocational training, agriculture based rural development programmes, creation of organizational network of BJMS and infrastructure at the

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\(^6\) When Ziar Rahman came to power, he initiated the TYP with emphasis on agriculture-based rural development, cottage industries and vocational training and productive-cum sales center.
District and Thana levels. During the Plan Period, a 15 per cent quota was reserved for increasing female employment in government and semi-government services.  

During the Second Five-Year Plan (1980-85) programmes for Women's Development continued and for the first time the Ministry of Women Affairs was allocated a separate budget and the plan objectives addressed. These included the need to:

i) create an environment that would facilitate women's participation in development activities,

ii) expand educational and specialized training opportunities for women,

iii) expand facilities for skill formation and credit availability for increased participation in income generation activities, and

iv) provide better protection and care for children.

However, resource allocation to meet such goals was not commensurate with the needs. Only about 0.2 percent of the total public sector financial outlay of the SFYP was allocated for Women Affairs Sector. An allocation of Tk 590 million was made for investment in 32 projects but only Tk 391 million was actually utilized.  

Most of the programs, therefore, could only touch the periphery, leaving the basic problems unsolved. The SFYP lacked policy perspective and emphasized the household rather than the individual, as the basic unit of production. The rhetoric of the Plan did not include target and strategy formulation to reach women clients.

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through integrated programmes. Hence the participation of women remained marginal as well as difficult to ascertain.

The Third Five-Year Plan (TFYP) 1985-90 had included in its objective the reduction of gender disparity and took a wider view on women's role in the economy. It called for more integrated approach and strategies in its WID objectives. Poverty alleviation became the central theme in the Plan and the Plan focused on employment and income generation of the most disadvantaged people of which women form the majority group. At the end of the Plan period, the year 1990 was declared as the year of the Girl Child and provision for free education for girls up to class eight outside the Municipal area.\(^\text{10}\) The major objectives of the TFYP are as follows:\(^\text{11}\)

i) to reduce imbalance between the development of men and women through increased participation of women in income generation activities,

ii) to motivate women for greater participation in education (both formal and non-formal) and skill training,

iii) to expand credit facilities for women to enable them to become self employed,

iv) to expand accommodation facilities for job-seeking and career women and expansion of community based day care facilities for the children of working women,

v) to provide leadership and managerial training to women at various levels,

\(^\text{10}\) Free education to an only girl child of the family were declared as government policy.

vi) to train and rehabilitate socially handicapped and deserted women.

It is apparent that the government efforts till the TFYP accepted marginalisation of women as a central assumption of the Plan strategy for women and did not take much interest on the challenging role of women in developing national economy. Moreover, the dynamics for promoting women’s concerns during the Second and Third Plans remained largely donor driven. It is stated that 57 percent of donor funds went to health and family planning projects while 25 percent went for self-help projects, 12 percent for education and training and 3 percent for public works.12

The Fourth Five-Year Plan (FFYP) 1990-98 for the first time aimed to integrate women in the mainstream of development to reduce gender disparity in all socio-economic spheres. The development objectives, strategies as well as policies with regard to women are placed within the context of macroeconomic framework of plan,13 and women were visualized as distinct target objectives of Women in Development. Women related objectives in the FFYP included the following:14

i) to integrate women in the mainstream economic activities so as to reduce gradually the gender disparity in all socio-economic spheres,

ii) to increase women’s participation in the public sector decision making both at national and local levels,

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12 Hamid, n. 9, p.104.

13 The three critical objectives of the macro framework are growth in national income, alleviation of poverty through employment generation and human resource development, and increased self-reliance.

14 Report of the Task Forces of Bangladesh, n.7, p.332

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iii) to raise the productivity and income opportunities of female labor force through skill development and training,

iv) to reduce population growth at a faster rate through enhancement of socio-economic status of women,

v) to reduce substantially the male-female literacy gap,

vi) to raise female nutrition level and improve provision of health services to women,

vii) to enhance the participation of women in nutrition based agriculture and maintenance of ecological balance,

viii) to reduce substantially infant and maternal mortality rates, and

ix) to ensure participation of the poorer 50 per cent women in the development process more effectively.

WID is perceived as a multisectoral issue within the macro-framework of the Plan. To achieve the above objectives during the FFYP, special thrusts had been given to sectors such as agriculture, industries, trade and services, environment and natural resources, education, health and family planning, budgetary allocation were made in each of the relevant sector separately. This change in approach was the result of concerted effort by women activist groups, NGO initiatives, the local consultative sub-group on WID and the Government’s own realisation of the importance of women’s role in the development process.

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15 Budgetary allocation to the Ministry of Women's Affairs increased by 10 percent to comprise 0.22 percent of the total budget.
However, women’s significant role in the major policy objectives are not clearly defined. Due to lack of clear understanding of the mainstream approaches, mechanism, implementation and co-ordination among different multi-sectoral ministries, no tangible progress was made in this respect. The gap between the Plan rhetoric and conceptualization of women’s concerns was evident even when targets were set. For instance, one of the goals of the FFYP was to double literacy rates from 30 percent to 60 percent by 1995. The strategy for achieving the objective was by doubling female literacy rates from 20 to 40 percent and male rates from 40 to 80 percent. In setting such a target, the planners failed to realize that aiming for an equal growth rate for both the sexes did not contribute to reducing gender disparity because female literacy rate in the base year was half that of male. Since the FFYP women were considered a distinct target group by the national development plans. Bangladesh had actively participated in the first, second, third and fourth World Conference on Women. In the light of Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action (PFA) adopted at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995, the Government was making efforts to build appropriate machinery for achieving the goals of women’s advancement. Therefore, the government was committed to implement the plans of actions and began its process of evolving plans and programmes for the advancement of women in a holistic framework.

The Fifth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) development programmes are people centered, equitably distributed, and environmentally and socially sustainable projects. Attainment of a reasonable growth rate, alleviation of poverty through generation of production, self-employment opportunities especially in non formal sectors, and increased self-reliance are inextricably linked with the increasing
participation of women in the development activities during the Fifth Plan period. The main aim of the Plan is to "integrate women's development into macro framework and to reduce gender disparity in all sectors through integration of women into the mainstream development efforts."\textsuperscript{16} This may be achieved through the adoption of a multisectoral thrust targeting women's increased participation in all sectors, at all levels. A major thrust is on developing skills of women with the aim to yield substantial increase in productivity of existing women labour force and opening up new windows of opportunities for future entrants into the labour force. Subsequently, the Plan sets 25 objectives which include right of equality between men and women in the establishment and transformation of the state structures, implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the National Action Plan for Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and recommendations of the Institutional Review of the Government's Women in Development (WID) capability (see Objective of Fifth Year Plan). Some of the Strategic concerns envisaged in the Plan are poverty reduction, public expenditure, public employment, education, health, legal protection, institutional infrastructure and or capacity building, and support services for women's employment. However, to achieve those goal there seem to be no clear mechanism and funding to implement those concerns into reality. Moreover, though the objective of the Plan gives priority to women's education, training and income generation with support for educating the girl child, it has not touched women's rights especially those related to inheritance, maintenance and custody. It also does not emphasise to bridge the gaps in opportunities and wage for

\textsuperscript{16} Fifth Five Year Plan, n.8, p.167.
women producers vis-a-vis their male counterparts in different sectors of the economy.

The set goals and objectives in the Fifth Plan are:¹⁷

a) promote equality between women and men in the sharing of power and decision making at all levels;

b) bring about changes in attitudes, structures, policies, laws and practices in order to remove obstacles to achievement of human dignity and equality in society;

c) ensure equal rights of women and men in all spheres of development, including access to information, skills, resources and opportunities;

d) enhance the participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life;

e) promote economic self-reliance for women and generate economic policies that have positive impact on employment and income of women workers in both formal and informal sectors;

f) establish and transform state structures and practices to enhance gender equality and improve the status of women;

g) create appropriate institutional arrangements with necessary financial and human resources and authorities at all levels to mainstream women's concerns in all aspects and sectors of development;

h) identify obstacles faced by members of disadvantaged groups in availing opportunities and services, in particular those suffered by women members of these communities, and take necessary steps to mitigate such barriers;

¹⁷ ibid, pp. 167-168.
i) formulate and implement specific economic, social, agriculture and related policies and programmes in support of poor female-headed households;

j) review existing discriminatory legislations and make recommendations for progressive elimination of such laws;

k) take necessary steps for implementation of CEDAW, the National Action Plan for Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and recommendations of the institutional review of the Government’s WID capability;

l) mainstream women’s concerns in agriculture and rural development, industry and commerce, basic services, e.g., health, education, drinking water supply and sanitation, and in the informal sector;

m) ensure the visibility and recognition of women’s work and contributions to the economy;

n) reduce the gap in male-female labour force participation rates;

o) promote support services for working women, e.g., child-care and transport facilities, accommodation, etc;

p) increase women’s representation in governance and administration, including in all tiers of local government;

q) reduce the gender gap in literacy rates and in access to educational opportunities, including skill development and technical training;

r) promote women’s full access through the life cycle to health and related services under the goal “Health for All”;

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s) adopt appropriate measures towards the reduction of insecurity faced by women and girls, the elimination of all sorts of violence against women and for the treatment and rehabilitation of violence survivors;

t) eliminate trafficking of women and girl children;

u) ensure participation of women in national and international peace negotiations;

v) recognize women's role and concerns in environmental and natural resource conservation and management;

w) promote the positive portrayal of women and girl children in mass media; x) institutionalize a national monitoring mechanism to monitor progress in achievement of plan targets on WID.

Mainstreaming women in development activities has neither been adopted as a national nor a local strategy. As a result, gender neutral targets are set in the Fifth Five Year Plan even in areas of health, education and employment generation, where the Plan aims to close the gap between men and women. Excepting the overall female literacy and maternal mortality, no targets are set to redress the gender gaps in other areas of health, education, employment, water and sanitation, etc. Similarly poor and disadvantaged women and female headed households are identified as one of the focus groups in the objective. Even here, no specific targets and strategies are set to cover these women. 18

Only 7 percent of the total budget of the women and children affairs sub-sector is allocated to enhance mainstreaming activities assuming that all the project are sectoral projects. These include Skill Development/Staff Training Programmes

(5.4 per cent), policy leadership and Advocacy for Gender Equality (1.1 per cent) and Research and Development of Data Base (0.4 per cent). The remaining 93 per cent of the budget is allocated for development projects and spill over projects that take away about half of the total allocation. As no break up is given for the spill over projects, it is difficult to say what proportion of the budget allocation will be used for development projects mainstreaming the activities of the Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs.\(^1^9\)

3.3. Bangladesh and Beijing Conference

Since the mid-seventies Bangladesh has been following policies and programmes for the development of women and has actively participated in the First, Second, Third and Fourth World Conferences on Women. In the light of Beijing Declaration and the PFA, the Government of Bangladesh had begun its process of evolving plans and programmes for the advancement of women in a holistic way. It reviewed and appraised the implementation of Nairobi Forward – Looking Strategies (NFLS) over the period 1985-1995. However, the objectives stated in the NFLS mostly remained unachieved. A great majority of women could not be brought into mainstream development activities. The targets for women in the employment, education and health sectors could not be achieved. Against this background PFA highlights special areas of concern that stand out as priorities for actions that are inter-related, inter depended and of high priorities.

The Beijing Declaration and the PFA, adopted unanimously at the Fourth World Conference on Women by representatives from 189 countries, reflected new international commitment to the goals of equality, development and peace for all

\(^{19}\) Ibid, p.111.
women. The PFA is a powerful agenda for the empowerment of women. It called for the integration of gender perspectives in all policies and programmes. The Platform, divided into six chapters, identified 12 critical areas of concern, and considered to represent the main obstacles to women's advancement. The twelve critical areas of concern identified by the PFA are:

- The persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women;
- Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to education and training;
- Violence against women;
- Effects of armed or other kinds of conflicts on women;
- Inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels;
- Inequality in economic structures and policies in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources;
- Insufficient mechanisms at all levels to promote advancement of women;
- Inadequate promotion and protection of women's human rights;
- Stereotyping of women and inequality in women's access to and participation in all communication systems, especially media;
- Gender inequality in the management of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment;
- Persistent discrimination against and violation of the rights of the girl child.

3.3.1. Beijing Follow-Up in the Government Sector

Immediately after the Fourth World Conference, the Government went into action by undertaking certain measures to initiate the Beijing follow-up process. The

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Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MWCA) undertook a project to translate the original version of the PFA into Bangla. The objectives of this project was to disseminate the PFA guidelines among the interested persons and organizations who might be willing to take up new projects and/or redesign old ones in the light of the PFA priorities and guidelines. By June 1996, the MWCA prepared an outline of a revised draft National Plan of Action (NPA) for the advancement of women in Bangladesh and highlighted critical areas of concern identified by the PFA along with the suggested strategic objectives and actions for all the concerned development partners. The Government prepared the sectoral action plans for the relevant line ministries this included setting up of a Task Force (TF), a core group and twelve Sectoral Needs Assessment Teams (SNATS) to mainly assess the gender needs in each of the identified sectors and suggest strategies to prepare action plans for each of these lines of ministries.21

It may be pertinent here to discuss about four important strategies adopted by the Government of Bangladesh as a follow-up to the Beijing PFA. These include:

- The Institutional Review of WID Capability of the Government of Bangladesh

  It was designed to assess whether the mechanisms, information, skills and commitment required to address issues of women’s equality and development had been put in place within government, and to identify further steps to be taken. It also aimed to equip government officials and agencies to continue to address issues of women’s equality and development.

- Declaration of the National Policy for the Advancement of Women.

21 Ibid.
As a post Beijing follow up, National Policy for Advancement of Women was developed and approved by the National Council for Women’s Development in February 1997 and declared by the Prime minister Sheikh Hasina, on March 8, 1997.

The main goals of the policy seek:

1. to establish equality between men and women in all spheres of national life,
2. to ensure women’s security in all sphere of state, society and family,
3. to ensure empowerment of women in the fields of politics, administration and the economy,
4. to establish women’s human rights,
5. to develop women as educated and efficient human resources,
6. to free women from the curse of poverty,
7. to eliminate existing discrimination against women,
8. to acknowledge women’s contribution in social and economic sphere,
9. to eradicate all forms of oppression on women and girls,
10. to establish equality between men and women in administration, politics, education, culture, sports and all other economic activities,
11. to devise and import technology, congenial to the interest of women and ban use of technology harmful to women,
12. to take adequate measures to ensure women’s health and nutrition,
13. to ensure priority of women in the arrangement of housing and providing suitable shelter for women,
14. to take measures for rehabilitating women affected by natural calamities and armed conflict,

xv. to meet the needs of women specially in difficult circumstances,

xvi. to ensure security for widows, divorced, unmarried and childless women,

xvii. to reflect gender perspective in mass-media by projecting positive image of women,

xviii. to provide assistance in flourishing creativity of meritorious and talented women, and

xix. to provide support services in the advancement of women.

- Formulation of the National Action Plan (NAP)

The National Action Plan has the following goals:\(^{23}\)

a. to make women’s development an integral part of the national development programme,

b. to establish women as equal partners in development with equal roles in policy and decision making in the family, community and the nation at large,

c. to remove legal, economic, political or cultural barriers that prevent the exercise of equal rights by undertaking policy reforms and strong affirmative actions, and

d. to raise / create public awareness about women’s different needs, interests and priorities and increase commitment to bring about improvements in women’s position and condition.

The monitoring of the NAP is the responsibility of all Ministries and not any one particular Ministry or sector. It recognizes the interlink between different aspects of women’s lives and the need to ensure equality in all spheres. The NAP operates under five major categories of actors which are as follows.


Committee (Proposed under the National Policy for Women’s Advancement), the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Women’s Development (also proposed under the same policy), MWCA and WID focal points.


d. Non-Governmental Organisations: Women’s groups, research organizations and Institutions; human rights organizations, legal aid organizations, development NGOs, employers associations and trade unions.

e. Elected Bodies: Parliament and its members and Local government bodies.

The Fifth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) set up 24 objectives for the development of women. Compared with the Fourth Five Year Plan, allocation for the Women and Children Affairs sector had been significantly enhanced in the 5th Five Year Plan i.e. from Taka 45 crore to Taka 336 crore excluding food assistance. For objectives refer no 3.2.

3.4. Government Programmes in Various Areas of Concern

The following activities have been adopted by the government in various areas of concern.
3.4.1. Women and Poverty

To alleviate poverty of women the government proposed to pursued sound macro-economic policies that should be gender-sensitive and designed with the full participation of women under specific programmes. During the TFYP (1985-90), it was realized that unless access to the development process could be ensured to the bottom 50 per cent of the society the poverty situation could get worse and development efforts may be totally thwarted. Therefore, the macro-economic framework of the TFYP was based on the alleviation of poverty.

Programmes for poverty alleviation include education, employment, credit for investment, Maternal and Child Health (MCH), legal aid, and training, as important means of meeting the basic human needs of women. These programmes also emphasize the empowerment of women's organizations while enabling them to meet their practical needs. A programme of Food for Work,\(^{24}\) was also incorporated in specially poverty stricken areas under Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) programme.\(^{25}\) Different Ministries implement different types of projects and programmes for poverty alleviation both in the rural and urban areas. These were aimed at assisting women to achieve the capacity to meet their basic needs and improve safety nets by utilizing organizational networks. Ministry of Women and Children Affairs took up a number of projects aimed at poverty alleviation through

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24 The Government's Food for Work (FFW) programme creates food-wage employment during the slack agriculture season (i.e. November-April), mostly in transport or irrigation maintenance. It also operates small programmes, funded by Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), which employ women for Post-Monsoon Road Rehabilitation - (PMR).

25 The VGD programme was established in 1975 as a feeding programme for 'vulnerable mothers and their children.' VGD centres provide take home rations for almost half a million women reaching up to 1.5 million beneficiaries concentrated in particularly disadvantaged regions. The programme is specifically targeted at destitute women with two or more children. Around 60 percent of beneficiaries of VGD were from female headed household. World Bank, *Bangladesh Poverty and Public Expenditures: An Evaluation of the Impact of Selected Government Programmes*, Report No. 7946-BD, Asia Country Department, January 16, 1990, p.130.
micro credit and skill development. Under these programmes, destitute and poor women were organized and trained and credit facilities were provided for collective and individual income generating activities. During 1997-99, Tk.160.14 million was disbursed as credit to 88,192 women for self-employment against the target Tk 160.26 million. Some projects implemented by the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs are:

- Women's vocational training for population activities
- Rural women employment creation
- Agro-based rural development programme for women
- Community based services for poor women and children through NGOs
- Technology for rural employment with special reference to women and sustainable development
- Development of asset-less women under the Vulnerable Group Development Programme.

3.4.2. Women and Health

The government policy in relation to health and family planning was aimed at achieving 'health for all' by the year 2000 and a Net Reproduction Rate (NRR) of one by the year 2005. The importance of women's health to the well-being of the family and to the society as a whole came to be recognized by the government and steps were taken to provide good health to women. To ensure that women and young children have access to health facilities, basic health services were provided at the door step of all households. Further, a large number of female health and family planning workers began to be engaged by the government to provide counseling and basic health services to the general public. Currently, 23,500 Female Family Welfare

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Assistants (FFWA) and 5000 Female Health Assistants (FHA) provide door-step basic health services to the people of Bangladesh. In addition, all the Family Welfare Visitors (FWVs) at the Union Health Family Welfare Centre (UHFWC), and all senior FWVs at Thana level are female. Women employees comprise more than 30 per cent of the total work force of the health sector.  

In order to deliver health services at the door steps of the rural population, a programme for the development of a comprehensive health infrastructure network in rural areas was undertaken through the establishment of a health complex in each “thana” (sub-district). The Government further approved a Health and Population Sector Strategy (HPSS). The vision of the HPSS includes inter alia the following principles:  

- Priority should be given in the resource allocation to support services for poor, vulnerable groups, especially poor women and children,
- Services delivery should be culture sensitive, pro-poor and client focused, especially based on women’s needs,
- Stakeholders should participate in the design and oversight of service delivery,
- Focus should be on Extended Programme of Immunization (EPI) with prioritizing the intervention that are related to maternal and child health.

Although the availability of public and private health facilities in Bangladesh has increased over time, its rate of growth has been extremely inadequate with respect to existing demand. A review of the Second (1980-95), Third (1985-90) and Fourth (1990-95) Five Year Plans shows that while budgetary allocations (as

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28 ibid.
proportion of the total budget) to family planning and population control recorded a steady increase over the three Plan periods, such allocation to health has remained stagnant as may be seen in Table 3.1. The introduction of the Maternal and Child Health Program

Table 3.1
Budgetary Allocation to Social Sectors in Bangladesh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan Period</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Percentage of total Budget</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family Planning &amp; Population Control</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second Five Year Plan (1980-85)</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Third Five Year Plan (1985-90)</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Five Year Plan (1990-95)</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>4.19</td>
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emphasizes immunization of children and women of childbearing age, training of traditional birth attendants in safe delivery procedures, referral of high risk pregnancies, and oral dehydration therapy for control of diarrhea diseases. But, the objective of reducing maternal mortality rate is yet to be realized.29

The state of nutrition among the population in general is a matter of concern to the Government. In its efforts to improve the nutrition level in the country, the Government formed the National Nutrition Council and has been declared the National Nutrition Policy and formulated a Plan of Action. Efforts for intensive awareness building services and community participation had achieved high coverage of safe drinking water supply and increased the knowledge of safe water

use. Under the National Water and Sanitation Policy being prepared by the Government, more than 85 percent of the rural population got access to tube wells within 150 meters of their homes in 1994. Although there has been an increase of over 16 percent since the 1990's, it is stated that only about 35 per cent had sanitation at their homes.\(^{30}\) Despite Bangladesh's commitment to health care, the health provisions remained woefully inadequate, particularly in rural areas. The delivery assistance was not adequately met by the supply of government's trained doctors and nurses. Only 14.6 per cent of mothers had reported that they had taken help of doctors and nurses at the time of their deliveries. The absence of professional supervision during pregnancy had also been responsible for high neo-natal deaths in the country. Trained Traditional Attendance (TBA) assisted 22.1 per cent deliveries as in July 1997. However, medical personnel did not have the skills relevant to preventive primary health care.\(^{31}\)

Under the Fifth Year Plan the Government accepted the Primary Health Care (PHC) approach as a strategy to achieve the goal of Health For All (HFA). Primary health care services were provided through a four tier system, that is, at community level-through community health workers; at ward level-through satellite clinics/health posts; at union level-through Union Health and Family Welfare Centres (HFWC); and at Upazila level-through the Upazila Health Complex. At the Union Health Centre (UHC), a number of diagnostic tests were performed. In addition, a package of essential health services was introduced on a pilot basis to


meet the major needs of the people with minimum required services. A comprehensive referral system was also developed to provide referral services.

However, much debate has taken place on the issues of decentralization, local planning and management of health services, although no clear-cut policy on these issues has been made. The present structure of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MHFW) with Population and Health Directorates (with separate cadres at all levels) does not adequately respond to the needs of child and maternal health care, and clinical contraception and thus limiting the potential for increasing the range, quality and effectiveness. Functionally, the separate structure impedes referrals, generates internal conflicts and contributes to the low utilization of public facilities. In addition, current management systems provide few incentives to improve the quality of care and respond to the clients needs. The management culture in the sector needs to be changed so that the providers are motivated to serve the needs of the clients. 32

3.4.3. Literacy and Education

There is increasing recognition of the importance of female education in improving women's access to employment, their productivity and also in influencing the health and nutritional status of children and fertility levels. Various policies have been introduced recently in Bangladesh to encourage female enrolment and reduce drop out.

The Constitution of Bangladesh has the following provisions concerning education:

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32 Fifth Five Year, n.8, p.462.
"... the state shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such a stage as may be determined by law; relating education to the needs of society and producing properly trained and motivated citizens to serve those needs; removing illiteracy within such time as maybe determined by law."

The education policy refers to 'the determined effort by the Government to provide an expanded opportunity to all levels of education to bring them (women) at par with men'. Accepting the earlier neglect, the Government professes to provide increased educational facilities to women in order to eliminate all gender imbalance in respect of enrolment, dropout rates and the urban-rural gap. The Government has also announced a policy of 'Mass Oriented Universal Primary Education' and 'Education for all' by the year 2000'.

The strategy of Government for the year 2000 has been ambitious. It aims to increase the access and enrolment of school age children in primary education to 85 per cent by 1995 and to 95 per cent by 2000, covering not less than 75 per cent of girls by 1995 and 90 per cent of them by 2000. It further envisages to increase the primary completion rate for girls (as well as boys) from 35 per cent in 1990 to not less than 45 per cent in 1995 and at least 65 per cent by 2000 and to provides special incentives for girl's education during and beyond the primary stage.

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To implement the Constitutional provisions regarding education, the Government of Bangladesh has launched the following programmes to enhance the literacy rate to 100 per cent by the year 2000 A.D.\textsuperscript{35}

- Primary education has been made compulsory for both boys and girls. The programmes have been effective since January 1992. Under these programmes, textbooks are supplied free of cost to all children of primary schools. A new Primary Mass Education Division was created which has been placed under the direct supervision of the Prime Minister;

- The Government has launched the Food for Education Programme in an effort to check drop-outs and increase enrolment. Under this programme poor families who send their children regularly to primary schools are entitled to receive every month 18 kg of wheat per child subject to a maximum of 2 children. This is expected to increase the enrolment rate of boys and girls;

- The Government has introduced a programme of stipends for girl students in Secondary Schools and Madrasahs;

- Secondary education for girl students upto class V111 outside the municipal area has been made free;

- The Government has decided to establish one separate secondary school for girls in each thana (sub district);

- Only one girl child of any parent will be given the opportunity to study up to degree level free of cost.

\textsuperscript{35} Bangladesh, Bangladesh Country Paper on the Advancement of Women to the Next Century: Equality, Development, Peace, Draft-Bangladesh (n.d.), pp. 18-19
• Increased out of school provision including provision targeted at school-age children, drawing on NGO models.

Besides the Government has also decided to reserve ten per cent posts in all positions for women. In addition to this, 60 per cent of the teaching posts in government primary schools are reserved for women only. 36 Considering the high level of illiteracy, the Fifth Five-Year Plan has incorporated the objectives of universal education and non-formal primary education to reduce mass illiteracy. The allocation for education sector expenditure has also increased in the Plan. The NAP includes elimination of gender disparity, expansion of non-formal education and undertaking of social mobilization programmes. The government administers an extensive primary education system, which involves about 80,000 primary schools, 324,000 teachers and 18.4 million. 37 As a result of all these efforts of the government, enrolment of students for both the boys and girls at primary schools has increased significantly (Table 3.2). It shows that enrolment of female students increased to 8.78 million in 1998 from 8.36 million in 1996. Male-female ratio increased to 51.91: 48.09 in 1997 from 52.45: 47.55 in 1996. The Higher Secondary Education Project (HSEP), costing Taka. 2439. 90 million was completed by June 1999. Under this project, 132 higher secondary level colleges and 26 secondary schools have been developed. Dropout rate of students at secondary level has reduced to 37.6 percent in 1998 from 42.5 percent in 1996 and 40.1 percent in 1997. For girls, the rate has dropped to 37.6 in 1998 from 48.4 in 1996. 38

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36 Goswani, n.1, p.69.
38 ibid, p.178.
Table 3.2
Enrolment of Students at Primary Level in Bangladesh (in million).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Enrolment of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>9.51</td>
<td>9.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(96.95)</td>
<td>(2.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>9.68</td>
<td>9.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(96.69)</td>
<td>(92.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(98.15)</td>
<td>(94.21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: i. Population represent those of age group 6-10 years
ii. Figures in parentheses are gross enrolment rates in percentages.

Table 3.3
Enrolment of Students at Secondary Level in Bangladesh (in million)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Enrolment of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>8.15</td>
<td>7.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(36.32)</td>
<td>(33.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>8.48</td>
<td>8.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(37.74)</td>
<td>(35.52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>8.76</td>
<td>8.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(39.61)</td>
<td>(38.50)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: i. Population represent those of age group 11-15 years
ii. Figures in parentheses are gross enrolment rates in percentages.

Enrolment of students at secondary level is shown in Table 3.3. It shows that total enrolment rate has gone up from 34.87 per cent in 1996 to 39.06 percent in 1998. Enrolment rate for girls increased to 38.50 in 1998 from 33.38 and 35.52 in 1996 and 1997 respectively and for boys it has increased from 36.32 in 1996 to 39.61 in 1998. Still there is gender gap in the ratio despite improvements and it is a matter of serious concern. Bangladesh has been successful in forging constructive partnerships between the states, local communities, and NGOs in improving of female education. As such, many NGOs working at the grassroots have in their
programmes project components of education for children, including girls, coming from the poorer sections of society. The role of NGO’s in enhancing female education has been recognized and emphasized by the Government.

Due to the steps taken by the Government with respect to female education, a large number of girls are being enrolled in schools; the number of girls enrolled are increasing but their number is still lower than boys. As pointed out in chapter 11 of the thesis, there is an acute disparity in enrolment between women and men from higher secondary level to higher education. The previous Plans have outlined a number of key objectives, of which one is to ‘ensure women’s participation in each field of education.’ However, no targets have been set for increasing girls, as opposed to overall enrolment at different levels.39

3.4.4. Women and Economy

The Constitution of Bangladesh ensures equal rights to men and women in all spheres of life (Para 28 of the Constitution). In an effort to redress the situation of women and bring them at par with men, a number of measures and policies were adopted by the Government. One of the most important of these measures is the reservation of jobs for women in the public sector.

*Public Sector*

Reservation of quota for women in public services was first promulgated under a notification of the Government in 1976. This was a direct outcome of a greater national awareness created about the centrality of women’s role in the development process with the declaration of the year 1975 as the International Year

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of Women and the decade 1976-85 as the UN Decade of Women. The order reads as follows:

"There shall be 10 per cent quota for women candidates in all categories of vacancies subject to their fulfillment of basic qualification. This, however, will not apply in respect of recruitment to technical post, post in defense services and in such other post as may be considered unsuitable by the Ministry concerned." 40

It was a policy aimed at promoting employment among women but a 10 per cent quota is not sufficient to absorb greater number of educated women. 41 Recently, the Government has decided to increase women’s quota from 10 per cent to 15 per cent for non-gazetted jobs only. Therefore, quota provisions have been made for the recruitment of women. Ten percent officers and fifteen percent staff positions at the entry level are reserved for women and women are recruited on merit as well. The age limit for women to be eligible for a government job is 30 years. A large number of women are working in the rural areas as field workers or agents of different development programmes. According to the Government rules, the workers under development budget get equal benefits regarding leave, maternity benefits etc., but are not entitled to retirement benefits or pension like regular public servants. Some special steps have been taken by the MWCA to support working women and such steps include establishing career women’s hostels, day care services for children of working women and an employment information centre.

It is apparent from the above that women are entitled to get public service mainly on two counts - on the basis of their merit and on the basis of their sex. However, the public sector has not been able to provide for flexible working hours

40 Khan, n.11, pp. 47-48.
41 Shabana, n. 33, p.117
to adjust family responsibilities though provisions for paid maternity leave exist for women. Paternal leave as a concept has not yet been accepted in the country though men sometimes take leave during the child birth of their wives. The empowerment of qualified women in senior planning and decision-making positions through contracts and lateral entry, and the increase of quota provisions to increase the actual proportion of women at various levels, need to be ensured. It is surprising that long after the introduction of the quota system, women constitute only five per cent officers, about twelve per cent staff positions and three per cent lower-level posts. There are no women in the top civil service positions.

\[ii\] Self Employment Programmes of the Government

Various government agencies have specific self-employment generating programme agencies for poverty alleviation especially in areas such as fisheries, livestock, agriculture etc. These programmes have created opportunities for women to access credit without collaterals. The training opportunities created under different ministries/agencies for vocational skills are, however, inadequate compared to the needs. Special training on advanced technology such as computers, telecommunications, printing etc., have been introduced for women by various government and non-government organizations.

3.4.5. Women and Politics

\[i\] Right to Political Participation

In Bangladesh, various affirmative measures have been taken to increase women's representation in decision making and public bodies. In matter of political

\[42\] UNIFEM, n. 27, p. 17.
\[43\] Rosa, n. 34, p.14.
rights the Constitution does not make any distinction between man and woman. The Constitution advances and incorporates the principle of 'special representation of women.' Articles 50 and 66 which lay down the qualifications for elections as President, Vice President and Member of Parliament provide for non-discrimination on any ground such as race, religion, sex etc. The Tenth Amendment of the Constitution enacted in June 1990 restores the provision of reservation of seats for women in their Parliament under Article 65 and provides for the reservation of 30 seats to ensure their participation in politics in addition to the 300 elected seats.\footnote{Farah Kabir, Fazana Hossain, "Gender Issues and Democratic Order in South Asia: A Bangladesh Perspective", in Ifte Kharuzzaman and Imtiaz Ahmed, ed., \textit{Bangladesh and SAARC: Issues, Perspectives and Outlook} (Dhaka: The University Press Limited, 1998) p.31.}

Women’s participation in local Government is another area of political participation. There are reserved seats for women in all municipal and local government bodies. Women’s representation is secured by nomination of three women’s members in the Union and Upazila Parishads and the Paurashava’s under the relevant local government ordinances.

3.4.6. Women and Violence

Violence against women exists in many dimensions in Bangladesh. Cases of violence include murder, rape, kidnapping, acid burns, unnatural death etc. The situation calls for a comprehensive efforts to combat the trends of oppression and violence against women.

The National Policy specifically identifies action against violence as a priority and suggests the following:
- eradicate physical, mental and sexual harassment at the family and social level, rape, prostitution of women, dowry and violence against women;

- amend existing laws which are repressive to women in order to update these laws and the formulation of new laws and giving special assistance to the oppressed women;

- prevent trafficking of women and rehabilitate victims;

- eradicate oppression of women and ensure their participation in Judicial system and at all levels of police force;

- make judicial procedures easy so that the legal procedures for torturing women and girl child, and trafficking are complete within six months.\(^45\)

The Action Plan for Ministry of Health and Family Welfare envisages provisions for care and treatment to patients with burns at thana level. Ministry of Information also strives to raise public awareness about violence / trafficking against women. The MWCA has installed a cell to monitor all cases of violence and sexual abuse. This cell assists women in taking legal action and in resolving conflicts. Women and Child Repression Act 1995 provides for capital punishment for repression of women and children. This Act provides for the setting up of separate courts, one in each district. Ten such courts have been established.\(^46\) The enactment of Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000 has further enhanced the protection of women and children.

\(^{45}\) UNIFEM, n. 27, p.15.

\(^{46}\) Mid-Term Review of the Fifth-Five Year Plan 1997-2002, n. 26, p.204.
3.4.7. Legal Framework

Legislative actions have been taken to protect the interests of women through the enactment of new laws or modifications of the existing laws and procedures. Special tribunals have been set up to try cases relating to violence against women. An area under effective consideration of the Government is the improvement of the medico-legal system, which is an integral part of the police investigations. Since the existing forensic medicine and investigation facilities in the country are insufficient, the Government is actively considering improvement of the quality of service and increase access to medicine, burn facilities in the hospitals. To facilitate women’s access to the police, women’s Investigation Cells has been set up on pilot basis with a view to provide safe and confidential environment for women so that they are able to report acts of violence against them. The Women and Child Repression (Special Provisions) Act, enacted in 1995 provides for capital punishment to offenders. A new law Women and Children Repression Prevention Bill, 1998 is being enacted which proposes stronger action against cases of violence against women and children. Besides, Women organizations and some NGOs have been playing a significant role in providing legal aids and counseling services to the victim of violence.

Bangladesh has not incorporated international instruments into its municipal and statutory law. However, the provisions found in part-III of the Constitution relating to Fundamental Rights have been adopted from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Unfortunately due to the non-corporation of international instruments it is not easy to get the provisions of the Conventions on the elimination’s of discrimination against women and safeguarding the rights of the girl-child into arguments petition in the courts. Experience has shown that a majority
of judges, while hearing a case in which the above provisions and the Convention can be applied and have been violated, demands to know the provisions of statutory law and refuse to dwell on the contents of most international instruments, as they have not been ratified by the state.47

In 1980 the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was signed by some 50 countries. To date, 116 countries have ratified it. They have obligated themselves to pursue policies contained in the Convention towards elimination of discrimination and to report to the United Nations on such progress made to that end within one year of ratification and every four years thereafter. The Government of Bangladesh ratified the CEDAW in November 1984, with several reservations which, it claimed, were in conflict with personal laws. However, according to the Government of Bangladesh, personal laws mean the laws applicable to the majority Muslim community only. The CEDAW recognizes the right to work as a human right (Article 11) and addresses, in particular, discrimination against rural women (Article 14). It urges the state to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas so that they may participate and benefit from rural development equally with men. It specifically lays down that rural women must be given equal rights in development planning, given access to health care facilities, to benefit from social security programmes, to obtain formal and non-formal education and training, to organize self-help groups and co-operatives and participate in community activities.

The country's efforts to encourage women in all the above matters have been half hearted. It is noticed that in spite of constitutional and general legislative

provisions aimed at achieving equality for women under law, gap still remains between the provisions of the Constitutional laws and the personal laws of both Muslims and Hindus. Again there is difference between the de-facto and de jure status of women. As a matter of fact, due to the aforesaid reasons in spite of enormous efforts made by the Government, the desired change in the status and role of women in the society cannot yet be made. The main obstacle to the realization of equality is the pervasiveness of social attitudes and customs, deep rooted in traditional history.

As stated at the outset, Bangladesh considers the issues of Women in Development as one of top priority sectors on account of its own need to transform its potentially rich human resources into an enduring asset. In the light of the National Policy for the Advancement of Women, National Action and the ongoing Fifth Five-Year Plan, the Bangladesh Government could derive greater success in formulating women-specific plans. However, most of the Government policies are still at the formulation stage and their effective implementation is yet to be achieved.