ABSTRACT

The term Informal Sector (IS) is an important addition into the development planning especially in developing countries like Bangladesh. IS is not an isolated sector; it has interdependence with the Formal Sector (FS). That’s why it is not only surviving, but also expanding day by day. The word 'informal' has already demanded that we should change it into 'formal form'. ILO, report aptly remarked “The entry of women into the labour market permitted the majority households to cope with the reduction in real incomes provoked by the economic crisis.”

Over the last few years there has been increasing interest of international organization particularly of ILO, in the field of informal sector, particularly in developing countries. The present study is the result of these development in Bangladesh, as one of the few countries in Asia, where there is high workers participation in informal sector economy. The political expediency and development requirements provide ample rational to undertake such studies.

The present study is a modest attempt to understand and explain the working conditions of female work force in construction and construction related economic activities in informal sector in a regional context in Bangladesh. The study is organised around certain fundamental sociological variables of family, marital status, education, income and payment structure, gender relations and status of women and developing economy. This is a study of theoretical dialogue between the traditional forces of society and economy and modern legal state and international context of equality and human rights. These two sets of forces are systematically interacting and giving a new shape to society, economy and culture in a developing society. Women and particularly working women constitute an important component of sociological study in such a context. Working women by definition is the female component of humanity engaged in
productive labour that receives payment (wages) for the contribution she gives in creating the assets. In the terminology of industrial sociology, it is a social activity which fetches economic return and the labour invested is sold and purchased in market situation. This very naturally involves the principles of demand and supply and the productive potentials of the labour (training, education, skill and experience) and marketability of its produce.

The real status of women workers can be determined in terms of the occupational distribution of employed women. According to the World Bank report 2001, around 65 percent of total employment in Dhaka City is in IS. The Human Resource Development (HRD) 2002, report has brought out to light that "the monetisation of non-market work of women is more than a question of justice". The working class women migrate from villages to urban areas mainly for the purpose of earning their living. Woman as gender category is generally located at lower, subordinate and less rewarding positions in the structure of social relationship. Economic placement of women in market relations is no exception to this general principle. Patriarchy is one way to explain these societal realities. The initial perception of the informal sector was the marginal livelihood of workers. The distinguishing characteristic used was wage earning formal employment as against self-informal employment (Islam, 1992). Bangladesh is one of the SAARC countries, whose population is 130 million (BBS, 2001) as a developing economy and society. Employed population in labour force of the country is 54.9 percent with 103.8 male per 100 female. According to Labour Force Survey 1999\2000, a total of 51.03 million labour force (male 30.75 million and female 20.28 million) are engaged in a variety of professions, the highest (62.3%) still being in agriculture. Informal labour force dominates the labour market. The size of the informal sector is 65% of the total labour force. The total labour force in the informal sector is 36 million and annual labour growth in this sector is 5%. The survey indicates that daily
labourers and full time employed workers were 17.9 % (BILS, 2000). According to a crude estimate of BIDS, 1998, the informal sector currently accounts for 84.5 per cent of total employment including agriculture and out of total informal employment about 59 per cent is shared by agriculture sector. At present apparently a large segment of women workers are engaged in informal sector activities out of it 9.5 per cent women are employed as day labourers according to (BBS, 1999-2000). Various indicators of low socio-economic position like literacy, participation in employment, payment of wages, decision making capacity etc are systematically examined for the understanding of the status of women in IS in Bangladesh in the present study.

Hence, the present exercise envisages to highlight the inadequacies of earlier researches and try to fill the gap in the field of database scientific information regarding the working condition of female employees in the IS in Bangladesh in general and in the Savar Thana, Dhaka in particular. This endeavor has its own significance in the sense that it has focused on a number of important problems facing the women worker in IS who are economically backward and unprivileged. In this study a wholesome profiles of working women respondents have been emphasised particularly relating to socio-economic background as women’s job opportunities, wage pattern, age, occupations, level of education, experience of job, assignment of task, training, dismissal/termination of job, incentive wage payments, welfare programmes for women, leave facilities, holidays, transport problems, future prospects, job environment, attitudes of male and female colleagues as field supervisors, neighbours, living conditions, housing problems, recreational and cultural activities, problems of women workers association/unions and their activities, residential accommodations, income as well Government and NGOs’ policies towards women development in IS also being considered and furnished in this research work. In this way, to examine and verify these objectives, some hypothetical statements have been
made in the introductory chapter, which constitutes the core point to be tested and evaluated in this study.

The present study is confined to understand the female labourers problem in IS as there are so many sub-sectors and occupational varieties in these unorganised sector and the problems of women wage workers are manifold and it may be very difficult to conduct an in-depth study of all these problems. Hence, this in-depth study of the problems again confined to the following aspects in view of the several constraints of time, money, paucity of data etc.

Entire study is spread over seven chapters beginning with an introduction of the problem and concluding with major findings and suggestions. Between these two ends, there are chapters on methodology; research design and sampling followed by collection of field data and its analysis and interpretation. It presents the primary discussion and deals with significance of informal sectors studies, prior researches, research gap, objectives of the study present work is an attempt to examine and analyse the conditions of women worker in informal sector with particular reference of Savar Thana, Dhaka, Bangladesh, so that appropriate policies at the macro and micro levels can be developed to address them. To conduct the study, some objectives are set out to examine and explain in the course of the research in chapter 1 of framework of the study. These included as:

The first objective of this research is to examine and analyse the socio-economic background of women work force in construction and construction related activities and evaluate the social structural component determining their participation in the work force. Second objective of the study is to examine and explain the working conditions, payment structure and service support system available to the female workers. Third objective to examine and explain the inter relationship between traditional norms of recruitment, division of labour at work place, leisure and payment to the workers and modern legal provisions of rights of labour with regards to work, mode of payment and other welfare
measures. Fourth objective is to examine and explain the success and failure of governmental intervention with regards to payment, harassment and exploitation of female work force. Fifth objective is to know and assess the nature and role of NGOs' in the social development of women workforce in IS. It also presents the socio-economic and demographic profile of the study areas.

And the main feature of the informal sector are the subject matter of the next section of Chapter. Second chapter deals with the general feature of construction and construction related sectors and the socio-economic distinction of the working women in IS have been discussed in this section. The conceptual frame work and the composition. In terms of sector of economy it may be divided into formal and informal sector. The term 'informal sector' may be used to refer to the economic activities which have the following characteristics: ILO adopted the informal sector as a conceptual category characterized as: non permanence and casualness; carried in a small scale, less capitalized establishment mostly relying on household labour; out side the scope of existing company law or government regulations; small scale operation; family ownership of enterprises; reliance on indigenous resources. The empirical position of the IS employment is 65 per cent of the total employment (World Bank, 2001). Workers participate extensively in IS which can be divided into four major categories (i) Agriculture include social and agro-based forestry, animal husbandry, weeding, bedding, transplantation, harvesting, dairying, side line agriculture, semi-peasant, other crash crops, bee-keeping, fisheries, irrigation. horticulture etc. (ii) Small scale village industries include handicraft, handloom, beedi making, domestic matches, tailoring, garments unit, food processing unit, poultry farm, live stock, weaving and sericulture, etc. (iii) Construction sector includes casual work like brick breakers, earth cutting, water carrying, stone-crashing work vendors, scavenger, carpenter, mason, sweeper, stone quarry labourers, brick kiln workers, building construction workers etc.
(iv) Trades, service and transportation include, petty vendors, small retail shop, street vendor, food stall, fruit and vegetable sellers, hawkers, barbers, beauty parlors, garbage cleaners, boot polish, bottle cleaners and rag pickers, domestic helper and mid-wives, in transportation, truck, and load carrier, rickshaw puller and tractor loaders and so on mostly employment provides to unskilled, illiterate and poorer section of the society. The target groups seeking employment in these areas of economic activities are landless workers, marginal farmers’ slum dwellers and women in general.

Chapter Three (methodology of research) deals with methodological approaches of this research study. Research design and the hypotheses, the method of data collection, the sample frame, the statistical tools of research and the plan of the thesis are discussed. To conduct this study empirically the universe of the study has been delimited and identified and by sampling techniques a representative sample of the respondents from the identified universe has been taken scientifically at (9.0 per cent) level of sampling of total numbers of 200 respondents have been identified. As the universe of study is female workers engaged in informal sector of economic activities in Savar Thana region of Bangladesh, there may be two ways to collect data from this universe.

1. Through Census Method i.e. studying all the units of the universe which comprises of 2315 women workers in different components of informal sector. Practically it is very difficult to collect data from such a big number for the purpose of this study.

2. Sampling Method: generally in empirical researches in sociology collection of primary data is done by drawing a representative sample from the universe. Sample as we know is a small proportion of a large whole, which represents the characteristics of the universe. In the present study therefore, a representative sample has been drawn keeping in view different components of informal sector activities in Savar Thana, Dhaka region. These sectors include
Brick Fields, Building Construction, Road Construction, Material Processing Units, and Earth Cutting etc. Obviously total women workers (2315) are distributed in these different sections of activities. Therefore, a sample of 200 (9 per cent of 2315 approximately) will be a representative sample for the collection of primary data from the respondents.

The principle of proportionality has been applied and 80 from brick fields activities, 40 from building construction activities, 40 from road construction, 20 from construction material processing units and 20 from others (earth cutting, sand and stone bringing, water carrying, sweeping etc.) making a sum of 200 have been identified by purposive random sampling technique. Thus, different variables such as age, sex, marital status, income, family background, education, terms and condition of work, nature of work, wage rate, wage discrimination, provision of health care, security measures etc. have been taken into consideration while making a sampling.

For this purpose, out of total 73 (approximately) fields, 36 fields (50 % of total) has been picked up on purposive sampling basis, where in men and women workers work daylong basis. To understand the working condition of female wage labourers, their socio-economic background in these fields have been taken into consideration in details. Collection of information from the selected and identified units of the universe of the study may be done through different techniques generally applied in anthropological and sociological studies. These include observation, interview, interview-schedule, questionnaire and case study etc.

To achieve the objectives of the study, the following hypotheses have been drawn and tested empirically in the field: (i) Working women in construction and construction related activity receive less payment as compare to male workers for the same job. (ii) Most of the women workers come from
uneducated and unskilled family background. (iii) There is exploitation and harassment of working women sometimes to the extent of sexual exploitation. (iv) Mostly women workers are barred from some specific job positions of responsibility. (v) Most of the cases of discrimination and exploitation go unreported though there are prescribed measures of legal intervention in such cases. (vi) Engagement in the work and payment for the job and job conditions is mostly negotiated by middlemen and brokers. (vii) The working environment both physical and socio-economic are not favourable and conducive for the physical or mental health of workers which causes tension and illness of the health.

Chapter Four presents the status of the urban Informal sector in the developing countries and discusses overall picture of informal sector in SAARC countries. Chapter Five reviews of the government policies and programmes of the informal sector and NGOs’ development schemes towards informal sector. It also discusses magnitude of employment of women’s labour force market and legal status.

Chapter Six is a detailed analyses of various problems from the view of socio-economic status of informal sector women labourers based on empirical data. Analysis and interpretations based on descriptive statistics, chi-square test etc. is done in this chapter. It also deals with the reporting, tabulating, findings, analysis and discussion of the result. Although several laws and provisions have been enacted to improve women’s status in informal sector but these are not visible in practice, in real field situation. The government and NGOs’ are working at the grass roots level by implying national level policies and programmes to change the status of workers particularly working women in informal sector, but these are not truly applied into effect in the real life situation. The construction sector has remained labour intensive production with low level of mechanization. Most of the features of the construction sector as
well as the work relations of the constructions are inherited from a pre-industrial society. The modern construction sector in public as well as private enterprises where both male and female wage workers work in ramshackle infrastructure with very poor payment and without having minimum level of facilities of lively hood. The activities that potentially covers the informal sectors are not only heterogeneous but tend to absorb surplus labour in the economy.

Chapter Seven contains summaries, conclusion and policy based recommendations of the study. This study also presents the conclusion obtained from the finding of study. Let me confess at the very outset that the present study does not include a large proportion of women workers in the informal sector engaged in casual labour in Bangladesh. Hence, any find conclusion out of this study may be premature in terms of its final validity. However, the data lead us to conclude that the nature of employments in IS is less favourable for women workers compared to men workers. This may be due to high degree of discrimination, harassment and exploitation of women workers at work place. The entrance of women into IS is largely due to economic pressure, either as a secondary source of family income or as the primary source where there is no male earner in the family. Mainly of working women enter in informal sector due to poverty. They tend to migrate themselves in a nearby city and try to search informal sector wage occupation with a minimum wage.

Due to the limitations of the FS to accommodate the growing labour force into employment and the IS appears to be the single major source of employment in Bangladesh. IS currently accounts for 84.5 (BBS,2001) of total employment despite inadequate attention by the planners and policy makers concerning to mainstream economy in the country. The existing legal framework is also not very conducive to IS growth. There is no legal protection to the IS particularly to the female wage workers who are unprotected, insecure and victims of discrimination by not getting equal remuneration etc. No definite revision has
been made to regulate the IS casual jobs. Thus rest of the policies appears to be ambiguous. By and large, the IS has immense potentials for generating employment and income and consequently for poverty alleviation. By giving adequate policy support including protective legislation the IS can effectively reinforce the FS activities with the effect on generating employment and income. So, it is essential for integrating the IS with the main stream of economy expanding demand potentials, stimulating favourable structure of the IS.

Need not to emphasise that informal sector has immense potential for employment. It can generate high production and great income as it is very large and diversified sector. Thus, it can play a vital role in the rural urban poverty alleviation. It is sufficiently clear that the IS will continue to be a significant component of the Bangladesh economy. From the all-available evidences the wage rate difference of male and female workers are broadly confirmed both by ILO-BIDS survey, 1998.

In terms of the encatchment area of the workers in informal sector, it is observe that majority is drawn from domestic segments of rural economy where unskilled and mostly uneducated people are engaged in local economic activities. Their movement from domestic section to a separate and informal work is mostly during off-season or due to negative conditions of survival in rural society. Generally the movement of labour is collective and it's determinants are obviously social like, family kinship, neighbourhood and village ties. Thus labour in informal sector is primarily unskilled unlike these in fisheries, poultry, (Beedi) making and other informal enterprises. This is the reason that they are considered as labours and not the employees. It can be argued that the nature of employment in IS is generally unfavorable to women compared with men. Women's participation is more frequent in semi-urban and urban areas particularly manufacturing as well as construction sectors. It is found from the study that most the female wage workers don't have any appointment
letter or written document whereas this appointment or written document is the basis of their fighting for legal rights. This has a critical importance for a large proportion of urban and semi-urban population.

A vast majority of working women in Bangladesh are employed in the urban informal sector. Most of them are ‘push migrants’ from the rural areas, having no rural option left for them. Most of wage employed women concentrate at the bottom of the earnings. Low demand for female labour, due to unequal access to labour market, factors related to their limited education and unskilled working capacity. There is also a small scale self employed groups in IS. These activities are still running without any formal approval by the government. If we look at the distribution of women workers in the payment structure it is found that it is the female labour, which is encountered at the lowest level of payment structure.

Poverty in women workers caused low rate of economic growth and unfavourable income opportunities between male and female workers. The IS workers are badly insecure and are not protected by labour laws as these laws are not properly implemented. They also work in unhealthy and unhygienic conditions. Unfavourable working hours expose them to harassment and exploitation at the work place. It is in fact true and becomes clear that the goals of development either government or non-government cannot be implemented without solving the stark poverty. The patriarchal social structure has to be demolished. So, considering these immediate appropriate and effective interventions both at the micro and macro levels are therefore necessary to improve their potentiality to informal sector fruitfully.

The analysis of socio-economic background of the sampled respondents reveal that 63.5 per cent women workers come from nuclear family. Married respondents are 42.7 per cent while unmarried workers constitute 10.6 per cent. It is important to note that more than one-fourth (26.1 per cent) respondents who
are widowed. Thus the respondents are divorced constitute more than 40.0 per cent of the total respondents. Sociological implications of such a vulnerable and weak status of women are many. This segment of women workers has several other limitations and disadvantages which expose them to a high degree of exploitation. 68.0 per cent of them are illiterate and from poor family background. In the background of this grass roots information an attempt has been made to relate and explain the conditions face by these women workers in the network of their social relationships.

Table 6.1.2 indicates that the family income of 28.5 per cent workers is below 2000 Tk. per month while more than half (52.0 per cent) of the respondent's family income is between 2000-3000 Taka. Thus majority of the respondent's monthly income is relatively meagre and such income group belongs to the poor section of Bangladesh society. Gender is one of the determinants of payment of wages to the workers in traditional patriarchal social order. In this study this is found 12.0 per cent female workers get less than 20 Tk. while 27.7 percent receive 20-30 Tk. less as compare to their male counterpart for the same work. The chi-square table 6.2.1 shows there is significant level of confidence at 0.004 which reveals that monthly income is significantly influencing the level of satisfaction of the respondents. In the table 6.2.4 the chi-square value 0.005 also demonstrate that the there is a highly significant deference between the various categories of mode of income and gender bas wages difference of the respondents. Why this differential ? Is Bangladesh labour laws are different and silent to this reality ? No, the situation led to the enactment of a number of legislations beginning from the year 1881, these include, inter alias the Factories Act 1881, Women’s Compensation Act 1923, Trade Unions Act 1926, Trade Disputes Act 1929, Payment of Wages Act 1936 and accordingly Bangladesh Government passed Minimum Wage Ordinance 1994. Maternity Benefit Act
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Article, 25, 27, (a), (b), 28 (a) of the constitution explicitly urge for equal wages for equal work. It has also passed Minimum Wages Act in 1994. Punitive action is also proposed for making difference in the payment on sex basis. How to resolve the internal contradictions is the million dollars questions. In spite of so many legal provisions and organisational checks the old practice of differential payment on the basis of gender persists particularly in informal sector due to the poverty and illiteracy and lack of training and skill of women workers in construction and construction related activities. There is a need to sensitise state machinery and implementation agencies to appreciate the problems of working women.

Working women are worst victim of ignorance primarily due to lack of minimum level of education, skill and wage awareness. The data in table 6.1.4 show that 46.5 per cent women workers are not aware about minimum level of wage structure stipulated by the government of Bangladesh. The chi-square (table 6.3.12) demonstrate that there is a significant difference between the level of education and their level of knowledge regarding Minimum Wage Amount Act or structure which is significant at 0.002 level of confidence. Usually women workers in informal sector particularly in construction related economic activities don’t receive any appointment letter or any written document for joining these work, which may be the basis of fighting for their legal rights. To sustain the existence of these workers in economic activities in IS, social awareness programme should be spread over in this area. This situation complicates the problems of female workers in informal sector as governmental intervention in this regard is poor and the workers are not aware of the problems. A judicious treatment to the problems of workers is therefore difficult. Arrival of some NGOs in the welfare arena may be the hope of future. Gender
discrimination in different spheres of traditional society is a normal phenomenon. In this study it is found that more than 60.0 per cent female respondents experience discrimination at work place in one or the other form. The prominent areas of discrimination are payment, leave and overtime provisions. 42.3 per cent workers inform that they do not get equal payment for the same work as compared to male workers. 27.6 per cent workers accept that they are not allowed to leave from the work place while 7.3 per cent complain that overtime provision is not extended to them while the male workers in the same enterprise avail this benefits. Why this all happens ? Why are women workers not treated at par with male workers ? Are there biological constraints or social structural limitations responsible for this inequality ? In terms of the responses of the respondents answers to these questions are like this. 30.0 per cent of them are of the view that woman is considered physically weak and biologically constrained for physical work. The majority view (74.0 per cent) is that wages are determined by the males and therefore, it goes infavour of male and women are automatically disadvantaged.

Gender exploitation particularly at work place in organised as well as unorganised sector of economy in developing society is a common phenomenon. There are reports and information from different organisations and agencies conducting survey and research in labour welfare sector that confirm the common man’s observation that exploitation of women at work place is known to almost everybody. To assess the problem of exploitation of women workers at work place in this study, it is found that 62.0 per cent sample workers (table 6.1.9) accept that they are exploited in one or the other ways by different components of the enterprise, may it be by way of assigning more work or engaging for longer working hours. 66.8 per cent workers (table 6.1.10) concede that they are sexually harassed at work place. This particularly happens with a female worker under age group of (15-25) years. Who are these who exploit
these women sexually? The data show that the employer (41.0 per cent), co-workers (30.0 per cent), field supervisor (7.0 per cent), cashier (2.0 per cent) are the men in the organisation who misuse the vulnerability of women workers in the enterprise. Are the workers aware of protective legislation in this regard as stipulated by the government of Bangladesh under the Article 27? Answer is negative. By and large, the female workers are not aware of the various legislations and provisions as Article-27 states categorically 'all citizens are equal before the law, and are entitled to equal protection by the law.' All the provisions and Act are not gender specific although punitively implied in the formal sector but in the spheres of informal sector activity thus are quite neglected and invisible.

Poor status of working women shows a complex and pitiable picture in informal sector. They are generally engaged into a variety of economic activity which leads them working inside of the home. Data in table 6.1.11 reveal that 42.0 per cent female workers engaged in these economic activities due to stark poverty and 28.5 per cent are in severe crisis of employment. The highest percent is living below poverty line as 46.0 per cent (BBS, 2001) are unable to fulfill their basic needs. However, lack of marketable skill and knowledge of information and support services compel them to join these sort of jobs. Scarcity of job opportunities pushes women to a multiplicity of hazardous work. Besides, destitution, famine, landlessness, victim of floods and river erosion, death of parents or husband, second marriage, sickness of family members or husband, maladjustment etc. are some major factors which compel them to engage in such economic activities. According to table 6.1.12, 37.0 per cent women workers do the job due to heavy economic burden of the family. Large family size is another important factor for the women to engage in some productive activity.

Economic pressure is the prominent factor inducing women to participate in such activities. Data in table 6.1.13 demonstrate that as much as 80.5 per cent women
are not provided by any medical care or first aid, in case of any accident at work places. The Factory Act Rules of Bangladesh, 1979 (Section-44) in the IS stated that first aid shall be accessible during all working hours and it also prescribed that all such enterprises where women workers are employed should have the provision of child care facilities. Data in table 6.1.3.1 show that 39.0 per cent women worker receive some medical help in the condition that to advance payment or loan to be adjusted in the subsequent months of payment. In the table 6.1.18, 62.5 per cent women have no positive comments about the environment of the working places having poor urban neighbourhoods with inadequate housing and often exposed to a range of toxic smell, which is hazardous for their health. The chi-square (table 6.2.11) shows that the value is significant at 0.01 level of confidence which indicates that the variables of monthly income and job environment of the respondents has significant impacts on various factors of job environment at work place.

Poor infrastructure, quite traditional tools and techniques exert high pressure and physical inconvenience to the workers. This leads to fatigue and torture of the workers. Level of women participation in work force depends mostly on the socials and congenial working environment of enterprises. The UN Conference of Women and Environment Re-de-Jenerio,1992 stated human development depends on the physical and socio-cultural environment with in which people are located. From the fact, it is evident that the unfavourable environment at work place hampers the productivity of workers very adversely by crippling their health which is the cause of loss of productivity of the workers. Provision of the reliable medical facilities is one obligation of the employer to its employees. According to the Factory Act 1979, when enquired about such provisions for the worker at work place in this study it has been reported by 39.0 per cent respondents that there are some arrangement provided by the employer as medical aid to the workers while majority of the respondents (57.0 per cent)
have denied the availability of such facilities to them at the workplace. The figure reflects the dubious distinction between the prescription and the practice.

Women work force contributes a lot for the national economy and as such they should not remain unsecured and unprotected at any cost. They should be given equal rights and status like that of their male counterpart. No woman should face any sort of harassment or violence anywhere in the state under any circumstances. This should be ensured by the concerned authority with viable practice. They should also be viable for its proper accountability. Workers in informal sector aspire for decent and secure lives, increased income and access to basic social services. The persistent expansion of informal employment pose both a challenge and an opportunity to the local, national and international labour market. The IS workers are to face numerous occupational problems, which needs to be organised in such way that their rights can be established. A separate labour department may be created which will monitor the pragmatic problem of informal sector. The department may be given power to fix wage on the basis of nature of work.

As female, the women workers become extremely handicapped if provisions of leave particularly related with their biological makeup like (gynecological) pregnancy, child birth related issues, child care are not available to them. In this study it has been noted that women workers in this segments of IS do not get the benefit of such leave provisions. As a consequence they suffer at health front, loose job and therefore the earning wages and income, neglect their family particularly children which is quite injurious to their physical and mental well-being. It may therefore be recommended that maternity leave, encashment of leave and insurance should be granted to women workers in informal sector. To ensure security of the women their health insurance should be considered. This includes all necessary safety equipment for personal protection. In all workplaces basic facilities like toilet, fresh drinking water, transport conveyance
should be made available. Hence the safety and security for all working women must be ensured. Because these working women contribute a lot for our national economy and as such they should remain unsecured and unprotected at any cost. Necessary laws are to be enacted if necessary to ensure the safety and security of women. They should be given equal rights and status like that of their male counterpart. No women should face any sort of harassment or violence anywhere in the state under any circumstances. This should be ensured by the concerned authority of the government. They should also be viable for its proper accountability.

The emergence of economic development can not be explained without reference to formal policies of government. So the government policies should be oriented to support, to enhance large employment potentials. More intensive and pragmatic policy should be developed for the development of the workers particularly for women workers. But the reality is that, mere recommendations are not sufficient for the purpose. Needs attempt to resolve the persisting problems. If proper policies and guide lines with its implementation for the IS workers are taken as initiatives to reduces the differences among FS and IS, then a positive result can be expected. Formulation of laws for IS is the prime need to eradicate problems relating maternity benefits, wage discrimination, security in work place, security in professions and sexual harassment.

Aspects relating to entry into this sector and factors which are enormously affecting working women in these are: Lesser mobility and heavy burden and casual nature of work, poor and undiversified work opportunities; Increased subcontracting as a result, low wages and irregular job, unstable incomes and no regular and stable work schedules etc.; Absence of permanent work in IS is in contrary to the law and provisions; Sexual and other harassment for being women; Low level of education and skills, no protection of labour laws, no leave or holiday or other provisions; No work related benefits; Older women are
retrenched and most cases these who are unable to long work being forced to long hours of work; Absence of trade union strength and decision making ability; Poor family income of the households influence women to work as paid workers in the IS; Divorced women also involve as paid workers and in most cases they are engaged in construction and construction related work in the urban and rural areas; Land less rural women work with male workers as day labour to support their family income.

Observation shows that women lack the minimum level of education and skill which would qualify them for employment in the urban informal sector. They are mostly ‘push’ migrants forced out of the rural areas in the absence of any rural options to earn a living and they are being largely discriminated and harassed sexual, physical assault, abusive behave and so on.

Majority of women workers in informal sector are facing economic exploitation with low wages and meager remuneration as compared to the counter part male workers. The payment of wages to workers in IS is lower than that of the FS. The National Wage Commission fixed Tk.930 per month for Garments sector workers. In IS minimum wage fixed by BMWB is Tk. 1200 per month for small scale industries, whereas Tk.1250 for medium scale industries, but there is no fixed wages regulated for wage workers in IS particularly in construction and construction related work. Women do arduous work in un hygienic conditions affecting their health, mental and physical strain, which causes social tension and thus, they are loosing their esteem for work and productivity. Women workers have duel role to perform within the family and outside of the family. Their role as earner (producer) is often not recognised. It is their social and reproductive role which is given premium by the society. Women’s contribution in these working sites in IS as well as to the family and national economy remain largely undervalued, invisible and less rewarded. Poor and weaker section of women are virtually powerless, with less bargaining strength, with a poor and little access to
the development resources. Labour laws, relating to the critical areas of remuneration, maternity benefits, child care facilities, safety guard i.e. conducive tools, better technologies, tools and assets, mechanism facilities, security, hours of work overtime, communication as well as medical care benefits having quietly invisible and most of the cases is very poor. Although several more government and NGO’s bodies are working to develop poor and destitute women by changing their quality of life with certain policies and programmes, but in real field situation in IS particularly construction and construction related sites are quite adverse and vulnerable. And in most of the cases women workers have no viable options to resists exploitations and discriminations. Labouring women in poverty lack bargaining capacity which makes them more vulnerable to exploitation and thus impoverishment continues. The highest percentage of economic activities are in construction and construction related work which is considered the second largest sector of economy. Despite there no effective monitoring mechanism could be established to keep these women workers in focus by effect in main stream of development. The family environment also influences women to participate in IS labour market.

The gender inequalities and discrimination is manifested in male and female earnings. Operation which fetch higher wages are preserved for males, whereas work of arduous nature organizing lower wages is done by women the same case is happening to the construction workers. Here women are assigned un skilled work, they are paid less even in skilled operation in constructions in construction work, men do skilled jobs brick laying while women mix mortar and carry head loads of earth and bricks. Though few more NGOs are working in these areas but they are not found to be working directly to improve women wage workers in IS. Women are found some gender specific job and no one found to be a supervisor, guide, contractor or entrepreneurs at real field situation as compare to other male workers. So now is the time to recognise their rights, paving the way
for their development. Empowerment is multi-faced process, which encompass many aspects enhancing awareness, increasing access to resource of economical, social and political but with these an equally important is the mobilisation and organisation of women into groups the basis for the solidarity, strength and action.

Low social and economic position of women are usually attributed to patriarchy in developing society, Bangladesh is no exception to it. The IS workers are in hazardous position due to gender inequalities and unequal distribution of power and resources. However, employment also affects women to push multiplicity of hazardous work. Skill (technique of the work) plays a role in the fixing and determinations of wages while experience does not get much premium or benefits in the wage fixing market. Since majority of labour force in unorganised sector of economy is illiterate or semi-literate women without any training or technical qualification, their chances of being economically exploited become quite high. Its negative impacts are deep as female work force is doubly disadvantaged, one due to traditional patriarchal social structure and the other due to exploitative economic order.