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**Women in Bangladesh Civil Service: Vulnerability and Challenges**

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**Abstract:** *This paper mainly presents the state of women in Bangladesh Civil Service<sup>1</sup> recruited through Bangladesh Civil Service Examination. In particular, it attempts to find out the structural, institutional and operational factors responsible for under-representation of women in civil service. Finally, it provides a set of policy recommendations for reducing the vulnerability and challenges confronted by women during selection of civil servants. The paper is based on key informant interview, review of official documents and reports.*

*The representation of women in civil service<sup>2</sup> does not in any way replicate the actual female representation in society. Women comprise 50 per cent of total population but represent only 8.19 per cent administrative and 12.16 per cent technical or professional posts of civil service in Bangladesh. It is mentioned that administrative officials selected by Bangladesh Public Service Commission have scope to exercise administrative power in the public administration. The Constitution of Bangladesh has mandated for making special provision for women to secure their adequate representation in civil service. Accordingly, 10 per cent posts of civil service are preserved for women. Further, special programmes for enhancing gender equality equity have been considered as crosscutting issues in the Constitution of Bangladesh, National Policy on Women's Development, Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and Annual Development Programmes, but empirically these reflect merely. The country case experiences of Bangladesh are expected to be invaluable for the concerned policy makers, stakeholders and professionals of different countries to a great extent.*

## **1. Introduction**

Women are subject to gross discrimination in society although considerable progress has taken place in the area of women's advancement during the last thirty-seven years of independence of Bangladesh. Inclusion of women's advancement and rights as a special issue is essential for three reasons: to uphold fundamental human rights because women's rights are also human rights; to achieve efficiency in poverty reduction and to achieve sustainable development.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'public service' and 'civil service' are synonymously used in this paper to denote the entire body of the government personnel employed for the service of the Republic. The military and elected officials of the Republic are excluded from this term. The term 'Bangladesh Public Service Commission' has been operationally defined in this study to refer to an institution or a body, which is accountable for executing the functions as proclaimed in the Constitution of Bangladesh.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'civil service' includes all functionaries of the government excepting those in the military service (Report of the Pay and Services Commission, Government of Bangladesh, 1977). The civil service of Bangladesh has several features in the organization, composition and classification (Source: M.M.R., Morshed, *Bureaucratic Response to Administrative Decentralization*, Dhaka, University Press Limited, 1997:77). Based on level of responsibility, educational qualification and pay scale the civil service vertically falls into four categories i.e., class I, class II, class III and class IV. The differentiation between the classes of civil service is strictly maintained and inter-class movement is discouraged and extremely difficult. Accordingly, those who belong to the lower classes for example the class III and class IV are considered as restricted classes within the civil service system. The class I officers have the highest power and prestige of the civil service.

<sup>3</sup> Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (GOB), *Unlocking the Potential, National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction*, General Economic Division, Planning Commission, October, 2005:145.

The Bangladesh Civil Service examinations popularity known as 'BCS Examination' is considered as the most lucrative and prestigious job in Bangladesh. The BCS examination conducted by the Bangladesh Public Service Commission (herein after PSC<sup>4</sup>) is seen as the gateway for entry into the civil service. The PSC has got legal mandates<sup>5</sup> for conducting BCS examination. The Constitution of Bangladesh under Articles 137-141 has also assigned the Commission the role of selecting the most competent persons for the civil service of the Republic through competitive examinations and tests in a fair and transparent manner.<sup>6</sup> The PSC selects these persons through BCS examination. Empirical evidence shows that Women's participation in the higher levels of administration is poorly represented than that of their male counterparts. Thus in all categories of jobs, women hold less the quota or reserved posts for them.<sup>7</sup> In 1996, the percentage of women employees in the public sector was only 10 percent. Women hold about 8 percent in Class I and Class II, 12 percent in Class III and 6 percent of Class IV in the civil service of Bangladesh. This paper presents an overview of representatives of women in civil service of Bangladesh recruited through only BCS examination. Further, it also attempts assess existing policies on women's employment, and problems behind the vulnerability and under-representation of women in civil service, challenges confronted by the women, and their appropriate remedies as well.

## 2. Methodology

This paper is based on secondary data collected by Transparency International Bangladesh during 2006-7. A total of 19 gazette notifications<sup>8</sup> published by the Ministry of Establishment during 1984-2007 on appointment of civil servants popularly known as BCS Cadre<sup>9</sup> recruited through BCS examination were used as key source of information of this paper. The recruited BCS cadres officials included in the gazettes were divided into two broad categories i.e., female and male. In addition, the gazetted information has been supplemented by key informant interviews, and critical review of the legal mandates and relevant official documents and reports.

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<sup>4</sup> The Bangladesh Public Service Commission (PSC) is one of the most vital constitutional bodies and a pillar of National Integrity System in Bangladesh. The establishment of PSC, appointment of member, term of office, scope and functions of the Commission and preparing annual report, etc. are firmly based on the Constitutional mandates. The PSC, the gateway of the civil service in Bangladesh, is a very vital body for promoting excellence in the public administration and governance of the republic. In fact, the degree to which the country will have a professional, honest, neutral and fair civil service greatly depends on the PSC independence, effectiveness, efficiency and credibility of the PSC.

<sup>5</sup> GOB, *The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh*. Dhaka, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, as modified up to 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2000; *The Bangladesh Public Service Commission Ordinance*, Ordinance No. VIII, 1977; *PSC Consultation Regulations* for establishment of a single PSC in place of two Commissions, 1979; *The Bangladesh Public Service Commission (Conduct of Business) Rules*, 1981, Ministry of Establishment, Dhaka; BCS Recruitment Rules, Ministry of Establishment, Notification No. SRD 445 A-L/86/ME/EU/S-9/86, Dhaka, 1 December, 1986.

<sup>6</sup> GOB, *The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, as modified up to 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> GOB, *Public Administration for 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Report of the Public Administration Reform Commission, , Volume 1, June 2000:34.

<sup>8</sup> Gazette Notification is an official document of a government to document all appointments, postings, and transfers of civil servants. The names of the concerned persons are mentioned in this document. Orders of the government, which are not only for internal use, but also for public information, fall in this category. The persons mentioned in the gazette notification are known as gazetted officers. These sorts of civil servants can authenticate documents and give character certificates needed for official purposes (A.M.M. Shawkat Ali, *The Lore of the Mandarins-Toward a Non - Partisan Public Service Commission in Bangladesh*, Dhaka, University Press Limited, .2002: 290-91).

<sup>9</sup> A job seeker who is selected for civil service or Foreign Service is known to belong to that service or cadre (Source: *ibid*, page 288).

### **3. Findings**

#### **3.1 Legal Mandates on Equality Women's Employment**

##### **The Constitutional Mandate**

The Constitution of the Bangladesh ensures equal rights to all citizens and prohibits discrimination and inequality on the basis of sex. Article 29 of the Constitution of Bangladesh has promulgates the mandates in favour of women as: (1) there shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in respect of employment or office in the service of the Republic; (2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office in the service of the Republic; (3) Nothing in this article shall prevent the state from making special provision in favour of any backward section of citizens for the purpose of securing their adequate representation in the service of the Republic; giving effect to any law which makes provision for reserving appointments relating to any religious or denominational institution to persons of that religion or denomination; reserving for members of one sex any class of employment or office on the ground that it is considered by its nature to be unsuited to members of the opposite sex.<sup>10</sup> Thus the Constitution of Bangladesh has promulgated legal mandates to ensure participation of all citizens irrespective of sex, religion, ethnicity, and region in the civil service of the Republic as fundamental right. The Constitution does not prevent the state from making any special provision in favour of the minorities for the purpose of securing their adequate representation and a level playing field for entry into the service of the Republic.

##### **National Women Development Policy 2008<sup>11</sup>**

This policy document has emphasised on engagement of women in all stages of development mainstreaming including in the civil service and to establish equal rights. This policy has given special emphasis on women's employment and administrative empowerment. The key goals of this policy are to: take initiative for employment of both literate and illiterate women; initiative to increase quota reservation including at job level for women and its effective implementation; create an enable environment for entry into the service, and their advancement, and better position in the service; take initiative to reform women's substantial employment related all laws, rules and policies; take necessary measures for creating more opportunities for women in the foreign labour market; make arrangements for easier entry into the higher administrative posts of government job through contractual and lateral entry process; take initiative for employment in the Bangladeshi embassy offices, university grants commission, vice chancellor of the university, planning commission and higher judiciary posts for women; increase quota for all gazetted and non-gazetted posts for entry into and different levels of the services; ensure implementation of quota system at all areas and continue quota system; maintain quota system in all autonomous and semi-autonomous bodies of the government; and encourage non-government and voluntary organizations to follow the same; take initiative to increase the existing quota for ensuring equal and full participation of women in line with the recommendation of the Economic and Social Commission of the United Nations.

##### **Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)**

The Government of Bangladesh has reconfirmed its commitment to women's advancement and gender equity and equality at the international level through formulating a scheme for reducing poverty which is known as PRSP. As part of this, government has ratified the UN Convention on the "Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" (CEDAW) in 1984 and then ratified "Optional Protocol" on CEDAW in 2000. Bangladesh is also a signatory to the Beijing Declaration and endorsed its Platform for Action in 1995. The government of Bangladesh has also made its

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<sup>10</sup> *The Constitution of Bangladesh*, Article 29.

<sup>11</sup> *National Women Development Policy*, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, Dhaka, February 2008:15-17.

commitment for achieving Millennium Development Goals.<sup>12</sup> The PRSP, which is prepared with recommendation of World Bank, has been updated for another five years. However, in order to achieve good gender governance, the Government aims at attaining certain goals like (I) ensure women's full participation in mainstream economic activities; (II) ensure social protection for women against vulnerability and risks; (III) enhance women's participation in decision making; (IV) promote gender equality and empowerment of women (MDG); (V) ensure women's concern in international forums; (VI) strengthen institutions for monitoring and evaluation of gender equality issues.<sup>13</sup> These goals for women are expected to eliminate discriminations against women in Bangladesh.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.2 Mandates on Recruitment of Civil Servants

The first ever official recruitment rules for the selection of civil servants especially the BCS cadre officials- the first Class Gazetted civil servants of the Republic were made in 1981.<sup>15</sup> The whole recruitment process of BCS cadre officials requires a bulk of activities. Both the New Appointment Section of the Ministry of Establishment, Bangladesh, and the BPSC has to complete the recruitment related activities. However, the civil servants of Bangladesh are recruited through four ways:

- (i) direct recruitment through open competitive examination; (ii) selection/Interview (iii) recruitment through Transfer and *Ad Hoc* Appointments, and (iv) recruitment through Promotion: The Commission gives advice to the President in respect of the candidates who are recommended depending on whether they have the requisite character and ability for the service or post for which they are proposed for appointment.<sup>16</sup>

#### Qualification to appear at the BCS Examination<sup>17</sup>

The candidates must be a citizen of Bangladesh. Generally, the age limit is from 21 years to 30 years, but for the freedom fighters or their offerings, the age limit is up to 32 years. It is also relaxed for tribal up to 32 years only for BCS (General education), BCS (Vocational Education,) BCS (Health) and BCS (Judicial). The applicant must hold at least a second class bachelor degree and 2<sup>nd</sup> division in Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examinations. Total 6 points from HSC and SSC examinations and bachelor degree is required.

#### Reserved Posts or Quota System for Women

The entry into civil service of Bangladesh is not open to all. Since 1972 the reserve system or quota for women has been followed in Bangladesh for enhancing greater equity in the representation of both female and male in the civil service. Under the existing quota system (shown in table 1) only 45 percent posts are filled up under merit quota and the remaining 55 percent are fulfilled non-merit quota. In order to enhance representation of women in the civil service of Bangladesh, 10 per cent posts have been reserved for the women. The quota system aims at improving the scope of employment for women in BCS as they have long been deprived of education, training, all other opportunities<sup>18</sup> and to remove stereotyped images towards female profession.<sup>19</sup> The quota system is also seen as the affirmative action taken by government.

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<sup>12</sup> *Unlocking the Potential, National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction*, General Economic Division, Planning Commission, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, October, 2005:146.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, page 148.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, page 312.

<sup>15</sup> *BCS Recruitment Rules of 1981* and Ministry of Establishment, Government of Bangladesh, Notification No. S.R.D. 445 A-L/86/ME/EU/S-9/86, 1 December 1986; Cited in *The Establishment Manual*, Vol. I, 1980:99-114.

<sup>16</sup> *The Bangladesh Public Service Commission (Conduct of Business) Rules*, 1981:4.

<sup>17</sup> *Bangladesh Civil Service (Age, Qualification and Examination for Direct Recruitment) Rules*, 1982.

<sup>18</sup> Jahan, Momtaz, Gender Mainstreaming in Bangladesh Civil Service: Prospects and Constraints, in *Journal of Asian Affairs*, Vol. 29, No. 1, January-March 2007: 50.

**Table 1: Percentage Allocation of Quota System**

Distribution of Job Vacancies or Type of Quota	Gazetted Posts (/Class I and Class II)	Non-Gazetted Posts (/Class III and Class IV)
Merit	45%	-
Women	10%	15%
District	10%	30%
Successor of Freedom Fighters	30%	30%
Tribal	5%	5%
Orphan and Retarded	-	10%
Ansar and VDP Members	-	10%
Total	100%	100%

Source: Ministry of Establishment, Government of Bangladesh, 1995

### 3.3 Recruited BCS Cadre Officials: An Overview

The term 'BCS Cadre' denotes the civil/public servants of Bangladesh recruited through an open competitive examination popularly known as BCS Examination under new the BCS Recruitment Rules of 1981. The BCS cadre officers<sup>20</sup> are the 1<sup>st</sup> class gazetted<sup>21</sup> civil servants of the Republic. In the cadre system<sup>22</sup>, every post is borne clearly against one or another cadre and no member of a particular cadre is expected to be posted in the post borne against another cadre. This implies that a civil servant who becomes a member of a particular cadre is clearly aware about his own lines and prospect for promotion.<sup>23</sup> The class I and II officers of the republic are civil servants but all of them do not belong to the BCS cadre services. The class I officers recruited through BCS examination belong to the BCS cadre/ cadre officers. The BCS cadre officers compared to other class I officers enjoy more service benefits, prospect for relatively rapid promotion, better training and varied job assignments.<sup>24</sup> Thus the BCS is a broad based civil service with all its member cadres as class I Gazetted officers.<sup>25</sup> The Ministry of Establishment is the sole authority to give final appointment of BCS cadre officials recommended by the BPSC.

Since 1972 Women have been participating in the civil service of Bangladesh. The PSC has recommended a total number of 41,413 persons through BCS examinations or equivalent type of examinations<sup>26</sup> in 28 cadres during 1972-2007. A total number of 39,431 persons have been recommended by the PSC through 26 BCS Examinations held during 1982-2007. Out the BCS examinations, a total of ten (2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>,

<sup>19</sup>Kashem, M.M. et. Al, *Review of Quota Utilization Reserved for Women*, Dhaka: Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, 2002:50.

<sup>20</sup> At present there are 27<sup>20</sup> cares in Bangladesh Civil Service. These are: BCS (Administration), BCS (Agriculture), BCS (Ansar), BCS (Audit and Accounts), BCS (Cooperative), BCS (Customs & Excise), BCS (Economic), BCS (Education: Technical), BCS (Fisheries), BCS (Food), BCS (Foreign), BCS (Forest), BCS (General Education), BCS (Health & Family Planning), BCS (Information), BCS (Livestock), BCS (Police), BCS (Postal), BCS (Public Health Engineering), BCS (Public Works), BCS (Railway Engineering), BCS (Railway Trade and Commerce), BCS (Road and Highways), BCS (Statistics), BCS (Taxation), BCS (Telecommunication) and BCS (Trade).

<sup>21</sup> The government employees are broadly classified into two broad categories, i.e., gazetted and non-gazetted. The recruitment, appointment, transfer, promotion, posting, disciplinary matters etc. are notified in the official notice published by the government. The gazetted officials have high power and responsibilities and enjoy greater privileges than that of gazetted civil service of the republic. On the other hand non-gazetted and non-cadre officials or civil servants have no definite structures of mobility either horizontally or vertically (Source: Morshed, 1997:77).

<sup>22</sup> A cadre system entails organization of civil servants into semi-functional occupational groups or cadres. The cadre services are those services, which are constituted under law with a number of positions or structure, recruitment and promotion rules (Source: Janhan, 2007:45).

<sup>23</sup> Khan, Mohammad Mohabbat, *Administrative Reforms in Bangladesh*, Dhaka, University Press Limited, 1998:58.

<sup>24</sup> Khan, Mohammad Mohabbat, *Administrative Reforms in Bangladesh*, Dhaka, University Press Limited, 1998:49.

<sup>25</sup> Jahan, Momtaz, Gender Mainstreaming in Bangladesh Civil Service: Prospects and Constraints, in *Journal of Asian Affairs*, Vol. 29, No. 1, January-March 2007: 46.

<sup>26</sup> This is the total number of BCS (or equivalent) cadre officers since 1972.

14<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 26<sup>th</sup> BCS Examinations) were special BCS Examination for recruiting persons of professional<sup>27</sup> or technical cadre posts and the rest 9 examinations (in table 2) were conducted for recruiting civil servants for the general cadre posts<sup>28</sup>. The 12<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> BCS examinations were conducted for the recruitment of the police cadre officials and dependants of the freedom fighters respectively.

**Table 2: An overview of BCS Examinees notified in the Gazettes (by sex)**

Name of BCS Exams	General Cadre Posts			Professional Cadre Posts			Total
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
5 <sup>th</sup> BCS Exam 1984	598	74	672	80	7	87	759
7 <sup>th</sup> BCS Exam 1985	621	85	706	1,405	233	1638	2344
8 <sup>th</sup> BCS Exam 1986	344	50	394	1,370	242	1612	2006
9 <sup>th</sup> BCS Exam 1988-89	227	33	260	647	149	796	1056
10 <sup>th</sup> BCS Exam 1989-90	232	35	267	564	77	641	908
11 <sup>th</sup> BCS Exam 1990-91	217	35	252	339	54	393	645
13 <sup>th</sup> BCS Exam, 1991-92	318	50	368	636	108	744	1112
14 <sup>th</sup> Sp BCS Exam 1992	0	0	0	1,318	514	1832	1832
15 <sup>th</sup> BCS Exam 1993	271	46	317	373	93	466	783
16 <sup>th</sup> Sp BCS Exam 1994	0	0	0	873	378	1251	1251
17 <sup>th</sup> BCS Exam 1995	158	20	178	321	59	380	558
18 <sup>th</sup> BCS Exam 1996	290	66	356	991	192	1183	1539
19 <sup>th</sup> BCS Exam 1998	0	0	0	493	54	547	547
20 <sup>th</sup> BCS Exam 1998	379	83	462	1,182	364	1546	2008
21 <sup>st</sup> BCS Exam 2001	311	67	378	725	172	897	1275
22 <sup>nd</sup> BCS Exam 2001	352	82	434	1,466	330	1796	2230
24 <sup>th</sup> BCS Exam 2002	570	140	710	3,123	1,232	4355	5065
25 <sup>th</sup> BCS Exam 2004	405	97	502	1,586	576	2162	2664
26 <sup>th</sup> Special BCS '04	0	0	0	702	345	1047	1047
Total (Persons)	5,293	963	6,256	18,194	5,179	23,373	29,629

**Data Source:** Data Source: Karim, 2007; Bangladesh Gazette Notifications

**Notes:** The 5<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup> BCS examinations were held during Ershad, BNP, Awami League and BNP-led 4 Party Alliance respectively; the 14<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> BCS Exams were conducted for Professional Cadres; information on the 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> BCS Exams was not included here due to unavailability of the respective gazettes.

Women took part in all BCS examinations except the 12<sup>th</sup> as this exam was arranged for recruited only the male persons for police cadre posts. The women got opportunity to compete for the police cadre posts from 15<sup>th</sup> BCS examination (held in 1993). 14<sup>th</sup> BCS examination, it is believed that Bangladesh is a Muslim populated country where participation of women in police enforcement would not be accepted by the people any way. Thus till the last decade, women were used to opt for educational or health service cadre posts. But now women are opted all cadres including police and administrative cadre posts.

### **Women in Bangladesh Civil Service (1984-2007)<sup>29</sup>: An Overview**

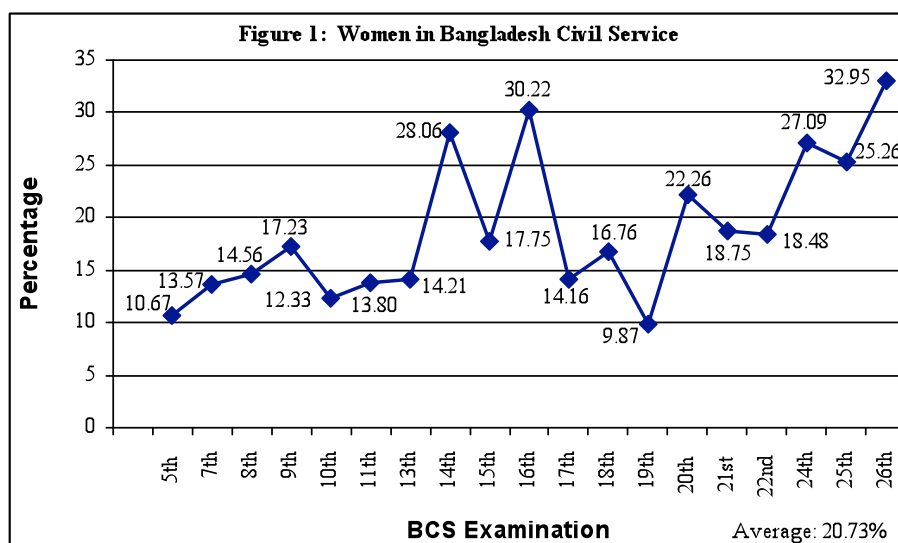
The representation of women (including both general and professional posts) in civil service recruited through BCS examination has increased gradually over the last two and half decades (1984-2007). Accordingly, the female participation has increased to 32.95

<sup>27</sup> The professional cadre posts of Bangladesh civil service are restricted to the candidates with certain academic background. Specialization is necessary for a professional cadre. The names of the professional cadre are BCS Agriculture, Live Stock, Health & Family Planning, Public Works, Roads & Highways, Public Health Engineering, Telecommunication, Railway Engineering, Education Technical, Statistics, Forest, Information, Technical, and so on. It is believed that persons belonging to the professional cadres have little scope and opportunity to play roles in making policy decisions.

<sup>28</sup> The general cadres (i.e., Administration, Police, Foreign Affairs, Customs & Excise, Audit & Accounts, Taxation, Postal, Food General, Information General, Economics of Bangladesh civil service) are regarded as the most prestigious cadres in the civil service, as there is ample scope to exercise administrative authority in the administration.

<sup>29</sup> Religious and Minority background information on the 1st - 4th and 6, 12, 14, 16, 19, 23, 26<sup>th</sup> BCS Exams are not included here due to the unavailability of these Gazette Notifications.

percent in the 26<sup>th</sup> BCS as against 10.67 percent in the 5<sup>th</sup> BCS examination. The representation of women in the general cadre has not reflected the country's population. Thus the representation of women in general cadre post of civil service does not in any way reflect the actual female representation of population of the country.



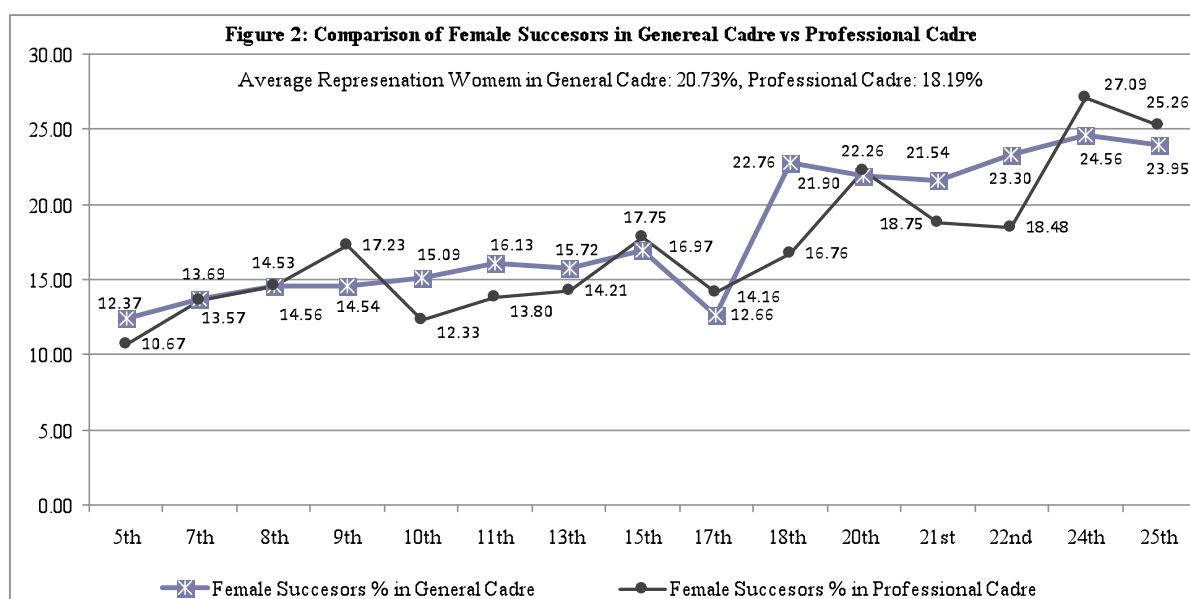
**Data Source:** Data Source: Data Source: Karim, 2007; Bangladesh Gazette Notifications

**Notes:** The 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> BCS and 12<sup>th</sup> BCS Exams was not included here due to unavailability of the respective gazettes; the 5<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup> BCS examinations were held during Ershad, BNP, Awami League and BNP-led 4 Party Alliance respectively; the 14<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> BCS Exams were conducted for Professional Cadres.

The findings show that women has got only one-fifth (i.e., 20.73 per cent) part of the posts recruited through BCS examination, which also includes 10 per cent for women of civil service on an average during the same period. But based on merit quota women have got only 10.73 per cent posts of civil service. Although the representation of women in the civil service of Bangladesh increasing day by day, but still the participation of women is fur behind the actual representation of female population. The highest and the lowest representation from the women were observed in the 26<sup>th</sup> (32.95 percent) and the 19<sup>th</sup> (9.87 per cent) BCS examinations respectively. The findings (in figure 1) also reveal that the representation has remarkably increased during the 5<sup>th</sup> (10.67 per cent) to 26<sup>th</sup> (32.95 per cent) BCS examinations with ups and down. The study found no valid reason for the lowest ever representation of women in the civil service of Bangladesh through 19<sup>th</sup> BCS examination. The change women's representation of in the civil service has been observed as abnormal during 14<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> BCS examination. But after 22<sup>nd</sup> BCS examination, women's representation has gradually increased with no change. Despite government's initiatives, women's participation in the civil service has not increased dramatically during the last two decades.

### Women in BCS General and Professional Cadre Posts

The findings (figure 2) demonstrate that the representation of women (including 10 per cent quota for women) has increased remarkably from 12.38 per cent in the 5<sup>th</sup> to 23.95 per cent in the 25<sup>th</sup> BCS examination. The findings also reveal that from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> BCS examinations, there were no major progress within these groups but the later showed noticeable progress than that of the previous one. The outstanding observation is that the women got only 8.19 per cent general cadre posts of civil service through open competition with their male counterpart.



**Data Source:** Data Source: Karim, 2007; Bangladesh Gazette Notifications

**Notes:** The 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> BCS Exams was not included here due to unavailability of the respective gazettes.

The representation of women (in figure 2) in the BCS professional cadre posts was found inconsistent from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> BCS examinations. The lowest ever representation of women in BCS professional cadre was observed in the 5<sup>th</sup> BCS (8.05 per cent) followed by the 19<sup>th</sup> (9.87 per cent) BCS and the highest proportion of representation was observed in the 26<sup>th</sup> BCS examinations. The main reason for inconsistency in the representation of women in professional cadre is lack of availability of female candidate for specific cadre posts (i.e., Public Works, Roads & Highways, Public Health Engineering, Telecommunication, Railway Engineering, etc.). No noticeable difference in the trend of representation of women in both general and professional cadre posts recruited through the BCS examination.

## Diagnosed Vulnerabilities and Challenges Confronted by Women

### Structural and Institutional Drawbacks

- The existing policies on women's development, employment and empowerment in Bangladesh are not effectively, transparently and creditably applied. The gender policy in Bangladesh has not been finalized and approved by the government, although the country has got independence 37 years. After making the draft version of Women Development Policy 200d, the present caretaker government has already faced tremendous resistance from Islamists. Under this situation, the government has decided to change in the draft with views form the Islamists. It is believed that the present government will not be able to finalize the latest draft (2008). The previous two versions (1997 and 2004) were also abundant due to the same reason;
- During 1991 to 2007 three times female Prime Ministers have ruled the country, but substantive measures for diagnosing the barriers behind the under representation of women in civil service care posts, and enhancing the participation of women to compete for the civil service job not observed;
- Appointment of gender insensitive male persons as Member of the Bangladesh Public Service Commission made during the last one decade;
- Involvement of gender insensitive persons in the viva voce of BCS Examination over the years;



- No effective and gender friendly measure has yet been taken the government for creating an enable working environment for the working Women in the public service;
- Absence of gender sensitive code of conduct, mass awareness advocacy campaign programmes specially working male persons in the civil service;
- Lack of adequate facilities and services (day care centre/unit within office campus; separate washroom for female staff; amiable working atmosphere; transport and accommodation, etc.) for working women are not duly considered;
- Existing policies on posting, deputation and transfer of female civil servants in comparatively better places than their male counterpart are merely implemented properly. This sort of practice discourage women to avoid civil serve to a great extent;
- During 1991-2007 three female Prime Ministers led the country but only three women (out 35 Members) got appointment as Member of the PSC. This also reflects government's negligence in effective drive for creating enable environment for
- . The whole tenure were led by, but out of eleven Members of the PSC have been appointed by the three successive governments;
- Misconduct with the women candidates, and giving poor marks in the BCS viva voce were normal phenomena in 11<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> BCS examinations.<sup>30</sup> A Member, resigned from PSC in 2005 was much divisive because of his biasness towards female candidates, and for being inattention towards the female candidates in the Viva Voce. Accordingly, the female candidates were forced to attend in the viva voce of BCS examination was borkha, a dress covering the whole body including the face. At least one third of the Members (out of 11 no.) of the PSC (during 2000-2006) were reputed for their antagonistic attitude towards the female candidates during viva voce of BCS examinations. But none of them have faced disciplinary action on charge of their discriminatory behaviour against the female examinees during their tenure in the PSC. In order to understand the discriminations and irregularities in the BCS examinations, particularly since 1991, the viva voce marks of the female examinees (including those who have got job and the unsuccessful candidates) may be re-examined;
- The quota system has never implemented in a transparency and responsive way.<sup>31</sup> Since 1972, the PSC and Ministry of Establishment have ever published the results of BCS examination along with background information, i.e., sex identity of the recommended cadre officials for the civil service. The existing official secrets act<sup>32</sup> in Bangladesh have not only restricted the freedom of information to service recipients of PSC but also served as a safeguard for the corrupt personnel in the PSC. The general people and the BCS examinees never know whether the existing allocation of the reserved posts/ quota for the female candidates is implemented properly or not. As a result, the successful BCS cadre officials, policy makers, and general citizens of the country have been in the dark about the trend of the representation of women in

<sup>30</sup> Learnt from key informants such as PSC Members, high officials of the PSC and BCS examinees.

<sup>31</sup> Karim, Md. Rezaul, 2007. *Bangladesh Pubic Service Commission: A Diagnostic Study*, Transparency International Bangladesh, Dhaka, 2007:10 ([www.ti-bangladesh.org/research/ES\\_PSC.pdf](http://www.ti-bangladesh.org/research/ES_PSC.pdf)).

<sup>32</sup> Evidence Act, 1872, Section 123: ....no one is permitted to give evidence derived form unpublished official records relating to 'Affairs of State', except with the permission of the Departmental head who may either grant or withhold the permission. Official Secrets Act, 1923, Section 5:... if any person possessing any document or information which has been entrusted to him in confidence by any government official, or which he has obtained as an official, (a) wilfully communicates it to any unauthorised persons; (b) uses it for the benefit of foreign power, (c) retains it in breach of duty, (d) fails to take reasonable care so as to endanger its safety, he shall be guilty of an offence. Rules of Business, 1975, Section 26(1):... government servants to communicate information, acquired directly or indirectly form official documents or relating to official matter, to the press, to non-officials or even officials belonging to other government officers. The Government Servants (Conduct) Rules, 1979, Section 19:. ...a government servant shall not disclose the contents of any official document or communicate any information of official nature, directly or indirectly to government servants of other ministries, or departments or to non-official persons or to the press.

the civil service. The official documents and gazette notifications do not have data regarding quota of the BCS cadre officials. It is believed that this sort of practice has opened the frontiers of manipulation of quota system by the subsequent ruling parties.

### **Social and Cultural Factors**

- The major factors which also contribute greatly for under representation of women in Bangladesh civil service are: non Co-operation of family Members; lack of security; women are expected to stay in the house not in the office during day time but male are expected to play the role of bread-earner; editing traditional social values; restricted social mobility; societal backwardness; orthodox religious attitudes; and uncongenial environment, etc.

### **Recommendations for Gender Sensitive Employment Opportunity**

- Effective measures should be taken to ensure proper implementation of policies and action plans taken by the government on women's equality and equity opportunities;
- Government should ensure taking necessary effective initiative for improving working conditions (i.e., provision of day care centre, reproduction health and childcare facilities; appropriate accommodation and transport facilities, etc.) for women, and thereby to attract women in the civil service;
- Effective measures should be taken to ensure posting and transfer women as per existing policies of government;
- At least one third of Members of the PSC should be appointed from competitive and qualified women;
- It must ensure appointment of gender sensitive and credible persons as Chairman and Members of Bangladesh Public Service Commission. There should have mechanisms for involvement of gender sensitive persons in the whole recruitment process in the viva voce of civil BCS examination. Necessary legal mandate should be made accordingly;
- The accountability of persons involved in the recruitment process should be ensured;
- Initiatives should be taken to acquire requisite academic qualifications of women for joining in the civil service;
- It should ensure gender neutral attitude in recruitment, promotion and transfer;
- It should ensure implementation of decision taken by the government regarding the posting of couples in the same or adjacent working places of localities;
- Existing recruitment Rules & Procedures should be revised and updates so that merit based recruitment is ensured;
- It should ensure equitable, credible, transparent and merit-based recruitment it should revise and updated the existing recruitment policies and procedures of civil servants in Bangladesh. Internationally reputed exams like GRE, GMet, SAT, etc., may be considered in this regard. A set of transparent and effective rules and procedures should be made with due emphasis;
- It should ensure a transparent and effective guideline/manual for the viva-voce. The examination system should ensure evaluation of all exams and tests by relevant, skilled and credible and non-discriminatory examiners;
- The marks of all examinations (both successful and unsuccessful) and quota of all successful BCS examinees should be made public through website, and result sheets.
- The whole recruitment process should be made transparent and equitable and credible so that no biasness happen during recruitment of the civil servants;

Finally, it can be said that alike any country, the equal and equitable participation of women in the civil service of Bangladesh is a fundamental right. In order to create a gender sensitive and enable working environment, and a level playing field for all citizen's of a country on the ground of sex identity, necessary effective measures should be taken by government and concerned stakeholders simultaneously. The experiences and lessons learnt from Bangladesh reveals that the Constitutional and legal mandates, national policies, strategies and plans, and quota reservation for women etc., which are known as safeguards for women, cannot ensure equal and equitable employment opportunity and working environment for women. Locally suitable policies, actions and a social movement leading towards creating a gender sensitive environment and enable environment for women, will in fact, lead to improve women's representation in civil service of Bangladesh and any other countries also.