Chapter 40
Women’s Entrepreneurship Development in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT
Women’s entrepreneurship is important for women’s position in society and for economic development of a country. It opens up new avenues for creating employment opportunities for women and men. It is a matter of encouraging that a good number of women are contributing in the economic progress of Bangladesh, making them involved in medium and small enterprises. In this process, policy-related factors and institutional factors play a vital role. Government agencies provide policy, legal, and financial support, taking active support from non-state actors. Specially, NGOs have been working in Bangladesh from 1980s to create a viable social environment for business women. Though more women are now involved in economic activities than in the past, women constitute less than 10 percent of the country’s total business entrepreneurs. Women do business in a masculine society where they encounter policy-related problems, and they do not get proper supports from all respective institutions because of corruption and lack of information. It is assumed that combined initiatives of government and non-government institutes will be successful in encountering the changes of business women in Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION
Women in Bangladesh face many challenges in doing business when their traditional roles make them responsible for preparing food to feed their families and supplying household needs. The opportunity to expand their work beyond a household level or develop other kinds of businesses is often hindered because of the dominance of patriarchy. Also, they do not get the same access to training, services, equipment, and financing as men. Women are also often constrained by laws or social discrimination that prevent them from owning property, borrowing money, and gaining access to land and natural resources. Despite these obstacles, many women are involved in income-generating activities, particularly small-scale business activities. Recently, that an increasing

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A recent United Nations report concluded that the economic development of Bangladesh is closely linked to the advancement of women (Cited in, SMEF and MIDAS, 2009).

A survey found that a woman first established business in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) in 1954. Although women first established enterprises in the mid-fifties, most woman-owned enterprises were developed after the independence of Bangladesh was declared in 1971. A sample survey found that 14 enterprises were established between 1976-1980, 24 during 1981-1985, 43 during 1986-1990, 85 enterprises were established during 1991-95, 195 during 1996-2000 and 78 between 2006 and 2009. After 2000, Bangladeshi people observed a different scenario in the case of women’s involvement in small business: nearly 50% of enterprises established in between 2000 to 2010 were owned by women (SMEF, 2009) (For more details, see Table 3 in the Appendix).

Another recent report revealed that, from 1996 to 2005, about two-thirds of the women entrepreneurs surveyed started their business (BWCCI, 2008: 8). This trend is not only increasing from the previous level in Bangladesh, but it is also comparatively better than in some countries of the South Asia region (For more details see Table 748).
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