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## Social Business and its Impact on Women Empowerment: A Case Study on two villages in Khulna, Bangladesh

Dipika Chandra<sup>a</sup>\*, Abdullah Abusayed Khan<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Sociology Discipline, Khulna University, Khulna-9208, Bangladesh E-mail: dipikasoc09@gmail.com <sup>b</sup>Sociology Discipline, Khulna University, Khulna-9208, Bangladesh. E-mail: khanbdnks@yahoo.com; khanbdnks@ku.ac.bd

#### Abstract

Social business, a new dimension for economic up gradation of rural poor people of Bangladesh. It has been paving the way of income generating activities of rural poor women in the country. This study was an attempt to understand how social business facilitates to empower women. The study extensively tries to display a comparative picture regarding different dimensions of empowerment before involving in social business and after involving in social business. For this purpose, Hatbati and Hatalbunia-two villages of Batiaghata Upazila under Khulna District in Bangladesh were selected purposively as the study area. Five cases had been analyzed to meet the objectives of the study. Research question is whether social business is playing an important role of women empowerment? Mainly primary data were collected to conduct the study from February 2019 to April 2019. The study revealed that after involving in Social Business the women started to participate in different income generating activities. Then, they also started to control over income, expenditure, credit and savings. They could then participate in household decision making more than before. Because of involving in Grameen credit program the rate of participating in social and political activities among the women also increased. Their mobility outside home and exposure to media and communication was increased after involving in social business. It was found that in dimensions the women started to become more empowered than before involving in Social Business. However, authors suggested that from these case studies with the time dimension modernization of the distribution of grameen credit associated with modern technical know-how and digitalization impact needs to be incorporated under holistic manner for women empowerment in the villages.

*Key Words:* Social Business, Grameen Credit, Women Empowerment., Entrepreneurship

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#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Muhammad Yunus, the founder of the Grameen Bank, undertook a project in 1976 to identify the causes and the extent of poverty of the people living in the surrounding villages of the University of Chittagong in Bangladesh. In 1983, the research project became a specialized formal sector financial institution through a government statute named the Grameen Bank (Chowdhury, 2009). This 37-year long experience of building firms whose purpose is to alleviate poverty has led to developing a new type of business, the social business (Yunus *et al.* 2010). Social enterprise introduces a revolutionary dimension to the free market economy. In third world countries like Bangladesh, it would not be pragmatic to combat poverty and other social problems (Habib, 2012). Thus, the first motive of a social business is not profit, and second, it does not pay its investors dividends. Instead, it aims to solve social problems with products and services at affordable prices or give the poor and marginalized people ownership in a business, allowing them to share in its profits (Yunus, 2010).

Moreover, during the last two decades, empowerment has become a famous dialogue in all meetings, seminars, symposiums, and workshops concerning human development and its socioeconomic progress (Kabeer, 2001). Women empowerment is considered a process of gaining and controlling material and intellectual resources, which will support them in developing their selfsufficiency and enable them to achieve independent rights, thereby challenging the ideology of patriarchy and speaking for gender-based discrimination (Batliwala, 1995). At the same time, Professor Dr. Mohammad Yunus postulates a new world of business. Social business as profitmaximizing and social benefit-maximizing enterprises coexist to achieve social objectives in particular and make a world without poverty in general (Yunus, 2007). As a social business, microcredit providers' main aim is to create self-employment opportunities for the rural unemployed and underemployed people, especially rural women. Culturally, women were confined to houses in Bangladesh until microcredit stepped in and empowered them. Grameen Bank has 8.4 million mostly women borrowers and holds \$1.5 billion in villagers' savings (Bornstein, 2011).So, the study aimed to analyze the role of social business in empowering the rural women in the sphere of decision-making in the household, participation in incomegenerating activities, social mobility, participation in cultural and political aspects, etc., basically in rural areas. The study also revealed that microcredit had created an excellent opportunity for rural women to be empowered by their easy loan giving process as a part of social business. One of the most critical aspects of Dr. Yunus's contribution is the first stress on women's hygiene, latrine system, and health sector besides arranging microcredit in the country's rural areas. Still, no in-depth studies were done about the site mentioned above, primarily through qualitative analysis. The research question is whether a social business is playing an essential role in women empowerment?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

**Hashemi** *et al.* **(1996)** evaluated the role of credit on women's empowerment positively. Their findings show that those women who have received microcredit from BRAC have more freedom to move in public. It also identifies that those who received microcredit from GB participated mostly in household decision-making and did not face much violence.



**Montgomery** *et al.* (1996) explained the impact of credit on women empowerment negatively. They conducted their study on male and female lone using a simple indicator- authority over the loan assisted activity. Their findings showed that only 9% of female borrowers who took loans for the first time exercised full control over loan funded activities, whereas 87% performed their roles as a family partnership. On the other hand, 33% of male borrowers who took loans for the first time had full authority over the loan-assisted activity, whereas 56% performed their roles as a family partnership. Their study also indicates that access to loans is not necessary regarding the change of cash management within the household for either female or male lone. Interpreting male dominance in the decision-making process, they conclude that access to loans does little for empowering women.

Amin *et al.* (1998) conducted a study on lone women of five NGOs in rural Bangladesh. They also compared credit members of NGOs in credit program areas with the non-members of NGOs in the non-program areas regarding women's empowerment. Firstly, they have formulated hypotheses that participation in credit and credit-related activities lead to a greater charge of the members than non-credit members. Secondly, the duration of credit membership is positively associated with women's empowerment.

Hunt and Kasynathan (2002) pointed out that only a few numbers of women receiving credit could control their loans. Many women received loans by their name and passed on the full amount of their loans directly to their husbands, sons, or sons-in-law. In other cases, women had limited control over loan management and family activities. They did also indicate that dowry prices might be raised due to women's increased access to credit. Their findings also denoted that the contextual factors, such as extreme poverty and landlessness, were more strongly associated with women's increased mobility beyond credit programs. According to them, the assumption that credit leads to less violence is questionable and dangerous by itself.

**Yunus (2007),** in his book entitled" *Creating a World without Poverty: Social Business and the Future of Capitalism,* "firstly used the term social business and defined it as a non-loss, non-dividend company designed to address a social objective within the highly regulated marketplace of today. He also mentioned two different types of social businesses:

- 1. Type I social business focuses on providing a product and service with a specific social, ethical, or environmental goal, such as Grameen Danone.
- 2. Type II social business is a profit-oriented business owned by the poor or other underprivileged parts of society, either directly or through a trust, who can gain immediate dividends or indirect benefits such as Grameen Bank.

**Rouf (2011),** in his study, tried to examine the degree to which women borrowers of the Grameen Bank are being empowered to participate in familial decision-making around the management of income and expenditures like food, children's education, dowry, and teenage marriages, as well as their engagement in community activities such as the degree of freedom women, are granted to visit public places like schools, local councils, banks, and markets. In particular, the study explores the Grameen Bank's role in women's empowerment through the Sixteen Decisions, an educational program designed to empower women in the family and community. This study used a mixed-methods research design that included 61 GB women borrowers selected through purposive sampling.

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**Nurhayati (2016)** commented that perspectives on the term social entrepreneurship are growing and diverse among scholars, practitioners, and related institutions. They agreed that the final goal to be achieved should lead to the interests and empowerment of society. The author also observed that people's poverty is not due to laziness or lack skills, but the opportunity and less favorable policy factors.

Ali et al. (2017) depicted that "Actually social networking helps social entrepreneurs to identify and evaluate new venture opportunities; To transform creative business ideas into innovative products and services; To Interpret market, customer and demand-supply relationship; To develop a marketing plan, improve social networking skills and gain the ability to pitch an idea; To navigate the venture capital investment process."

**Mamun et. al. (2019)** opined that thanks to the development of group lending approach of Grameen Bank established by Nobel laureate Professor Mohammad Yunus, which has later been widely accepted as an alternative to the traditional collateral-based lending in extending credit facilities to the door of hardcore poor at affordable terms, Bangladesh has been able to register tremendous success in alleviating poverty. They also said that apart from Bangladesh, Grameen type microcredit programs are now being replicated in more than 100 countries both in the developing and developed world.

**Ferdousi & Mahmud (2019)** described that women's, particularly rural women's, economic actions are mostly limited to the household tasks because of the current male-controlled standards of the culture and social businesses long as equity funds are generating chances for the women to follow entrepreneurial occupation. They argued that government and non-government organizations and private sectors remained recommended to originate onward to deliver additional social business funds and shape the women entrepreneurs' helpful situation.

Ali (2020) opined that "The improvement of labor-skill development must accompany knowledge network. Value addition of the network from the grass-root level to the bottom-up approach and top-down approach towards the lower level must coordinate to remove jobless growth by arranging new training for both men and women of different income strata to cope with the changes, challenges, and prospects of the 4IR."

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study was descriptive, and the case study method was used to have in-depth information about social business and its impact on women empowerment. The study intends only qualitative analysis through preparing cases from the practical scenario which were observed. *Hetalia and Hatbati* villages under *Batiaghata* Thana of Khulna district in Bangladesh were purposively selected for the study. Unit of analysis was chosen among women involved in social business, mainly Grameen credit program of *Hetalbunia and Hatbati* villages under *Batiaghata* Thana of Khulna district for more than one year. Five women, out of which three women from *Hatalbunia* village and two women from *Hatbati*, were purposively selected as cases in this study. The interviewer collected data from the field through a checklist having their consent to disclose their name in a research paper. Mainly primary data were collected to conduct the study from February 2019 to April 2019. Later, findings had been analyzed descriptively to understand the condition of women empowerment influenced by social business.



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## 4. CASES AND FINDINGS

#### Case 1

Rebeka Begum, a housewife before involving Grameen Credit and Social Business, now leads a good life after becoming a Grameen Bank member and taking credit from there. She started a small business of her own by taking credit from Grameen Bank and investing that credit in making pickles and selling those in the market. Her condition was not in this position a few years ago. She was married at a very early age, and her husband was a farmer; at present, he derived an electronic bike. And her family had to lead their daily lives hand to mouth. Now she had a quite economically solvent life. She lived in an extended family with seven members, and her house was made up of teen sheds. Her family had a small amount of land. The total income of her household income was BDT 13000 monthly. She did not know much about Social Business but hard a little from Grameen Bank, and she is involved with Grameen credit. Getting inspiration from Grameen Credit worker, she was involved with Social Business but faced problem after joining here as she did not get proper supportive environment from surroundings. But ignoring all unfavorable situations, she joined in Social Business to establish self-identity and her second aim was to reduce the poverty of the family. She took credits ten times and was informed about the interest. She had to pay the installment weekly, and the primary source of paying that installment was an electronic bike, which her husband pulled. Generally, her husband was responsible for paying the installments, and he also controlled that credited money.

Furthermore, she agreed that she got a way of income-generating activities, and her family income was increased after receiving the credit from Grameen Bank. She mainly dealt with the pickles business, but she was also involved with crop producing, homestead gardening, cattle rearing, and poultry rearing, more or less. Before applying for Social Business, she had low control over income, credit, and savings, but she influenced them. This scenario was also applicable in household decision-making, the participation of social and political activities, in case of mobility in various places, exposure to media. At present, she was conscious of women's rights and had a high perception of women's rights. Her expectation towards Social Business is very high if it would reduce the poverty of destitute families like her. She also expected that it would remove women's unemployment and violence against women, especially domestic violence.

Moreover, Social business would increase the demand for business productivity and improve women's status in society. She said that Grameen Credit had shown a path of living both for her and her family members. But she wished to the reduction of installment rate of Grameen Credit. She thought that after involvement in Social Business, she had got much control over family decision-making and could decide or could influence the family members' decisions. All these had become possible because of Social Business, and she was grateful to Grameen Bank for allowing her to take credit and involve with Social Business.

## Case 2

Feroza Begum was one of the Social Business beneficiaries who has a solvent life after involving Grameen Bank and taking credit. After taking credit, she invested that money in a small business, which brought blessings for her. But before applying with Social Business, she was a housewife, and her husband was day labor. But at present, both of them were handling the small business of handmade daily goods. She lived in a nuclear family with four members in a teen shed house,

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and her husband was the family head. She did not know about Social Business, but she only knew that she was involved with Grameen credit of Grameen Bank. She got inspiration from a Grameen credit worker about the credit facilities and faced no social business involvement problem. She wanted to help her husband upgrade the family situation and become a Grameen Bank member to add her husband's income. She generally took five times credit from Grameen Bank and was aware of the interest rate of Grameen Credit. Her husband was mainly responsible for paying the installments, but she controlled the credited money, and she agreed that her family income had increased because of the credited money. In the case of women empowerment, she said that she did not influence the family decision-making process, was not involved in any productive sector of income generation, could not go to her parent's house according to her own will, and went to vote according to the will of her husband when she was not involved with Social Business. But at present, her status in the family had been changed, and she could patch up with her husband. She got a new dimension in household decision-making, social and political participation mobility in the market, hospital, clinic, parent's house, and another sector with an opportunity to group discussion, meet with local leaders, and access mass media after her involvement with Social business. From group discussion held every Sunday at Grameen Bank, she became conscious about women's rights and was very hopeful about Social Business's prospect. She thought that Grameen Bank's initiative would remove women's unemployment, which would pave the way for women's empowerment more and more. She concluded that she did not pay heed to what had been said about Grameen Bank by the government or other people, and she believed that Grameen Bank had taken this step for better meant of the country. It had diverted women into income-generating activities from the kitchen.

#### Case 3

Sumitra, one of the credit holders of Grameen Bank of her locality, was leading her life in great trouble though she took credit for Grameen Bank. She lived in an extended family with ten family members, and her father in law was the household head. Before joining Social Business, she was a housewife, but her occupational status was not changed after joining Social Business. As she gave the credited money to her husband, she could not interfere in using that money. She was little informed about Social business and was mainly involved with Grameen credit of Social Business. She got the inspiration to apply in Social Business but did not support her family members and husband. But she wanted to add her husband's income. She took credit for four times and was well known about the interest rate. Generally, she used to pay the installment monthly but could not regularly bear the installment because of family members' diseases. The only source of repaying loans was crop selling, and her husband was responsible for refunding the credit as he used to control the credited money. She did not have much participation in income-generating activities before involvement with credit. Still, she could contribute a little in crop-producing, homestead gardening, and cattle rearing after getting Grameen credit. She had almost the same (low) control in income, expenditure, and savings before and after joining Social Business. She could not decide in family and had to obey whatever her husband and in-laws used to say. But she could move to market, parents house and outside according to her will than before. At present, she had the opportunity to group discussion every Sunday of every week and had much scope to learn many things from that group discussion. She was not much aware of women's



Dipika Chandra, Abdullah Abusayed Khan rights and had a low perception of Social Business's prospects. She said, "ami taka naiamarsamirupokararjonnoamikekorbooi taka diya. Osob social business diyaamarkehoba" (In Bengali). She did not want to be self-employed and gave that money to her husband. But in recent times, the repayment of loans had become a burden to her husband, and she was facing pressure from Grameen Bank. Sumitra had become tensed about her family's future as she was not able to pay the interest. She could not maintain her family because the burden of part of Grameen credit for her women's empowerment was a useless matter. Moreover, technological diffusion she needs for a better income-generating program.

## Case 4

This case study was conducted on Moyna Khatun, who took Grameen Credit from the local Grameen Bank of Hatbati. Though she took credit from Grameen Bank, she gave her husband the money to invest in his business. As she lived in an extended family with five members, she had to take care of her family members and not support her own business. She had no idea about Social Business but was inspired by her husband to take credit from Grameen Bank. She did not face a problem joining here and was aware of the interest rate of Grameen Credit. She paid the installment weekly, and her husband was responsible for paying the installment by business profit. Though her husband controlled the credited money, her family income had been increased without her economic involvement. Moyna used to help her husband in the small business both before and after participation in Social Business. Her control over credit, expenditure, and savings had been upgraded than before, but she did not influence family decision-making after joining Social business. In mobility outside, she got much freedom than before, but her media exposure status was not satisfactory. She was conscious of women's rights but could not enjoy the rights of her own. She expected that Social Business would bring blessings to women's employment in Bangladesh, and the demand for the local product would also increase both in the national and international markets. Though she was satisfied with her life, she did not enjoy the empowerment access, giving her a better life at present she was possessing. Moyna also wants to learn modern small business techniques depending on the digitalization process.

## Case 5

Nilima, a housewife before joining Social Business, had a business of her own when she took Grameen Credit and invested the credited money in a productive sector. As her husband was a day laborer, her family was poverty-stricken, so she wanted to reduce her family's poverty and start a small business for this purpose. She was living in a nuclear family, having three members and her husband was the household head. She was living in a teen shed house, having no land. She had no different idea about Social Business, but she was involved with Grameen Credit, a social business type. Getting inspiration from a neighbor, she decided to take credit from Grameen Bank and faced a problem to handle this because of a lack of skills and competencies at the beginning. She took credit for four times, being aware of the interest rate. She had to pay installments weekly as she was responsible for paying the installment from business profit. Nilima used to control the credited money herself and was able to pay installments regularly. Before her Social Business involvement, she had low participation in income-generating activities, but she had entirely good homestead gardening, small business, and handicraft involvement. Her ability to control income, expenditure, credit and savings was medium. But she had little

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influence on household decision making. Her participation in social and political activities increased more than before, but she could not cast a vote according to her own will. Her mobility in the market, the office of NGO had been raised by medium level while in the case of media exposure, she could not have much influence except the group discussion of every week. She was much conscious about women's rights but had nothing to do with household decision-making and any other parts of women's empowerment. She was economically empowered, but she was a week in women empowerment in familial or physiological dimensions. But she expected that her social business would accelerate her from this situation. She hoped that Social Business would reduce domestic violence and enable women to decide on their own life. Moreover, she thought that Social Business would pave the way for women's empowerment in the future. Still, she expected that the authority would slow down the interest rate of Grameen Credit, which would be very much beneficial for all the women taking Grameen Credit.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Overall, findings expose that women involved in Social Business had better socio-economic conditions than before. Furthermore, they were rushing towards women's empowerment as their tendency to become self-sufficient had grown. But women empowerment depends highly on occupation, participation in household decisions and perception about women's rights, etc. From the case study, it had been found that though all the women were related to Grameen credit and other types of Social Business, they had low control over credit as most of the respondents' husbands used to control that credit. Moreover, in women empowerment, they had inadequate access to various sectors of income-generating activities, household decision making, social and political movements, and mobility. Still, they got relative access to control over credit, expenditure, income, and savings with high access to group discussion. Social Business had given these women access to credit, but their empowerment had not been ensured yet. Their exposure to media and communication was also low. But after involving in social business, the women started to participate in other income-generating activities - E-business, small business, buying cattle, fish cultivation, poultry rearing, handicrafts, etc. As a result, their income level was also rising gradually. Then, they also started to control income, expenditure, credit, and savings. They could then participate in household decision making more than before. Because of the Social Business program's involvement, the rate of participating in social and political activities also increased. Their mobility outside home and exposure to media and communication was increased after involving in Social Business. The study found the in dimensions of empowerment, women are now staying in a higher position than before Social Business. And thus, Social Business is playing a vital role in empowering women in rural Bangladesh. Ali (2020) justifiably described that knowledge management is an essential tool for the economy, and women also involved in getting knowledge about the fourth industrial revolution. But one thing is clear from these case studies with the time dimension modernization of the distribution of Grameen credit associated with modern technological know-how and digitalization impact needs to be incorporated under holistic manner for the betterment of the socio-economic condition of the rural women to attain their empowerment through participating in the decision-making process.



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## 6. SUMMARY AND POTENTIAL FUTURE RESEARCH

Social business has become a hope for rural women who are always oppressed in the patriarchal society and cannot express their opinion because of economic insolvency and lack of socio-political power. Social business is paving the way to uplift rural women's socio-economic condition, especially those whose livelihoods are bracketed together in poverty. Though the interest-rate of Grameen Bank is higher than any other traditional bank, it plays a vital role in empowering rural women by creating the opportunity to participate in income-generating activities and household decision-making by providing Grameen credit according to their advantages. The study extensively displays a comparative picture regarding women's stipulation in the different dimensions of empowerment before involving in Social Business and after applying in Social Business. However, with time, Grameen microcredit and social business strategy should be more dynamic with innovation, creativity, and applicability towards the rural low women group.

However, these case studies lack at studying the extent of women empowerment quantitatively. This study mainly focuses only on Grameen Credit, which is partial to describing social business and women empowerment in two villages only. Further investigation may be undertaken to cover all social business types and measure women empowerment using qualitative analysis in different areas of the country and compare with social business in different country scenarios. The in-depth study needs to be addressed. Moreover, through this social business and Grameen microcredit, whether SDG -1 and 5 were fulfilled that need to be identified for which in-depth study is being required.

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