



**IN QUEST OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT**  
FROM THE GRASSROOTS TO THE NATIONAL ARENA

BIANNUAL REPORT



**Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha**

**IN QUEST OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT**  
**From The Grassroots To The National Arena**



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**Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha**

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## Acronyms

<b>AIDS</b>	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
<b>ALRD</b>	Association for Land Reform and Development
<b>AOC</b>	Amar Odhikar Campaign (My Rights Campaign)
<b>BIDS</b>	Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies
<b>AL</b>	Bangladesh Awami League
<b>BNPS</b>	Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha
<b>BSAF</b>	Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum
<b>CARE</b>	Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere
<b>CAW</b>	Committee for Asian Women
<b>CEDAW</b>	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
<b>CHT</b>	Chittagong Hill Tracts
<b>CIDA</b>	Canadian International Development Agency
<b>CRTS</b>	Centre for Rehabilitation of Torture Survivors
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>CUP</b>	Coalition for the Urban Poor
<b>CWS</b>	Church World Service
<b>ED</b>	Executive Director
<b>EZE</b>	The Protestant Association for Cooperation in Development, Germany
<b>EED</b>	Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst, Germany
<b>G8</b>	Group of Eight, eight most powerful countries within the European Union
<b>GO</b>	Government Organization
<b>HBF</b>	Heinrich Böll Foundation
<b>HIV</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
<b>ICCO</b>	Inter Church Organisation for Development Cooperation, The Netherlands
<b>IED</b>	Institute for Environment and Development
<b>IGA</b>	Income-Generating Activities
<b>I-PRSP</b>	Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
<b>JP</b>	Jatiya Party
<b>KAP</b>	Knowledge, Attitude, Practice
<b>LEB</b>	Local Elected Body
<b>LDC</b>	Least Developed Country
<b>MP</b>	Member of Parliament
<b>NORAD</b>	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organizations
<b>ODA</b>	Official Development Assistance
<b>ON</b>	Oxfam Novib, The Netherlands
<b>PRIME</b>	Promoting Rights of Women through Changing Mindset
<b>PRSP</b>	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
<b>SAAPE</b>	South Asian Alliance of Poverty Eradication
<b>SAARC</b>	South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation
<b>SANGAT</b>	South Asian Network of Gender Activists and Trainers
<b>SANSAD</b>	South Asian Network for Social and Agricultural Development
<b>SDC</b>	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
<b>UNDEF</b>	United Nation Democracy Fund
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
<b>UNIFEM</b>	United Nations Development Fund for Women
<b>UP</b>	Union Parishad
<b>USA</b>	United States of America
<b>VIP</b>	Very Important Person
<b>VGd</b>	Vulnerable Group Development
<b>VGf</b>	Vulnerable Group Feeding
<b>W8</b>	Eight extraordinary women, one unique voice
<b>WDF</b>	Women Development Forum



## Foreword

This biannual report seeks to document our efforts to resume and carry on in full swing the halted march towards our goal; it narrates the experience of overcoming the hurdles put after 2001 by the then the rule regressive rule on us and other fellow-travelers who uphold secular and pluralistic values. Throughout the period of 2007-2009, we revived with utmost dedication and hard work our programs with grassroots women and re-emerged in the policy advocacy arena with our agenda of empowering women. By dint of our commitment and the generous support of all our partners, we have already managed to make steady progress and even extend our presence across the continent.

It is our pleasure to mention that in this period, internationally, we became part of a campaign called W8, a global advocacy group of eight women interfacing G8 for essential services like health, education and sanitation. Regionally, we continued as a core committee member of South Asian Alliance of Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) and leading its Regional Gender Thematic Group. Nationally, we became active in the My Right Campaign to ensure the rights of education and healthcare as the convener of this network.

The period is also marked by some notable achievements in the national context. A major breakthrough happened in our national election 2008 through which a record number of women won people's mandate. It is for the first time in the country that women hold the topmost positions in places like the Ministries of Food and Agriculture, Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs, and Labor. There are signs that the present government will revive the much needed

National Policy for the Advancement of Women (1997), formulated by a network of women's organizations, of which BNPS was a leading member. The government has also promised to pass a bill for ensuring 33% women's representation in parliament which has been a foremost policy agenda of BNPS.

We notice that the present national budget is more gender-sensitive than before as it contains gender disaggregated information and analysis. This could be also marked as a success of BNPS as it is the first organization in Bangladesh to start analyzing the national budget from a gender perspective in 2000. We did not deviate from the path we set, even in our worst times between 2002 and 2007. Throughout those painful years, we continued to track down the national budget with our meager resources and tried hard to make our collective voice heard by the policy makers.

A wind of change is now being felt in the national education sector. As a women and minority rights organization, BNPS always advocates a uniform, universal and people-oriented education system consistent with our Constitution and the spirit of the liberation war. The national education policy now in process has addressed many issues we have long been propagating for educational reforms. Also, we have joined the ongoing reform process by taking up a challenging project on making education gender-responsive.

Last but not the least, a breeze of peace has started blowing again in the backyard of our ethnic sisters in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). After the end of a prolonged armed conflict we started working together for peace, justice and empowerment there. We hope to resume our unfinished work. We hope to walk together with our indigenous sisters of the CHT as well as the plain land on the thoroughfare of peace and harmony. We envision a plural society that will celebrate equality and diversity.

The women's movement of Bangladesh has still a long way to go to eliminate the sinister web of patriarchy and establish a gender-just society. We would like to encourage all our colleagues, grassroots women, and civil society members to

be active to encounter the challenges of women's unequal position and disempowerment. BNPS aspires to continue its struggle and join hands with everybody fighting for the same cause.

We gratefully recognize the unstinting support we are getting from our compatriots in our quest for women's empowerment and we hope that all our partners, donors and well-wishers will never deprive us of their support and cooperation in future. Thank you all!

In solidarity,

Rokeya Kabir  
Executive Director



## Section 1

### Tale of Overcoming Challenges and Sticking to the Cause

Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS) is an activist women's organization, working since 1986 to establish equal rights of women at all levels from the family to the state. BNPS has been working at the national level to bring about positive policy and legal reforms and at the community level to implement a variety of programs through organizing and mobilizing people at the grassroots.

BNPS follows a bottom-up right-based approach linking community efforts to the national level. In the process its role is one of a catalyst and facilitator. BNPS has been trying to create an environment for women and other marginalized groups so that they can raise their voice and claims their entitlements. A variety of activities like awareness raising, institution building, livelihood efforts and reforms of different policies, systems, institutions and mindsets are carried out for the purpose. The congenial working environment, culture of co-operation and team work and non-hierarchical management with an activist orientation obtaining in BNPS are by all as an asset of the organization.

So far BNPS has directly worked with around 200,000 women and over the last two decades more than 800,000 people from different backgrounds have been involved in the efforts of BNPS. Already, the organization has been recognized as one of the most dynamic women's organizations in Bangladesh. BNPS has been focusing on the social, economic and political empowerment of women, strengthening local government, facilitating electoral and educational reforms, and gender budget analysis. As a trend-setting organization, BNPS introduced the issue of gender in our education system. In 1993, BNPS started reviewing madrasah education from the gender perspective. In 2000, BNPS for the first time in the country, started national budget analysis from the gender perspective. BNPS also played a pioneering role in taking up firm stands on many challenging issues like inheritance laws, women's representation in the power structure i.e. the

national parliament and local government. As a strategy to advance the cause of women on these issues BNPS pioneered many networks/platforms. In the late 1980s and the early 1990s it also worked to build a bridge between NGOs and other broader groups of civil society. It then began to work with different cultural media to enhance the awareness-building process. As one of the pioneer organizations it started sensitizing media people on gender and other development issues from the beginning of the 1990s. BNPS works at the community level for involving women in income-generating activities (IGA) through providing credit support, training for the management of micro enterprises, accounts-keeping and skill development. These interventions have helped to create a sustained environment and space for women.

BNPS not only has the wisdom and expertise of working with women towards their social and economic empowerment but also has political activism to champion women's and human rights in the face of opposition from the conservative forces. BNPS has been striving since its inception to get rid of various conservative, anti-women and anti-poor attitudes and thus to weaken the base of fundamentalists and their exploitation network in Bangladesh.

After 2001, BNPS had to go through an extremely difficult situation that was both emotionally and physically challenging. At was a really tough journey for the organization due to the prevailing state of affairs in the country. From January 2002 to 2004, BNPS was subjected to enormous harassment by the "powers that be" in the name of investigation. Different organs of the government pounced upon the organization to it a teach lesson, different baseless allegations were raised and legal cases filed against it resulting in a loss of its operational freedom. It may be mentioned that the coalition government which came to power along with some Islamic fundamentalist groups in



October 2001 targeted five progressive NGOs to stop their operation. In fact, all those reactionary forces targeted the organization's secular values and its advocacy for the rights of women and other ethnic and religious groups as well as their freedom of choice as citizens.

At the time of the then government's hostility towards BNPS, it was implementing the following three projects:

1. Socio-Political and Economic Empowerment of Women in Bangladesh.  
Jointly funded by European Union; ICCO, The Netherlands; EED and HBF, Germany.
2. Promoting Responsive Governance and Gender Justice.  
Funded by Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).
3. Empowerment of Women through Greater Access to National Resources.  
Funded by Bangladesh Freedom Foundation.

Under these projects BNPS was implementing some pioneering the activities like the development of a national network of elected women members of the union parishad (UP), training of UP members for introducing a participatory process of budget framing, introducing a direct dialogue between the elected UP chairmen and members on the one hand and the voters, community forums of women and other sections of community on the other to enable to use local government as a pressure group. This program was being implemented through developing a network of women elected in the UP.

But these activities suffered a serious setback after October 2001 when BNPS was barred from receiving any funds from its donors. Since BNPS could not access foreign funds for more than six years, active partnership with different donors virtually stopped.

To cope with the situation, BNPS had to adopt some appropriate strategies. The point was 'not to give up', yet to be diligent and strategic, with no compromise on values. It low-profiled itself and tried to sustain the work already done for women's

empowerment. At the same time, it continued to do advocacy and networking nationally and internationally in collaboration with like-minded organizations and individuals.

The silencing of its voice went against the natural character and culture of BNPS. Most of the advocacy and lobbying for women's rights temporarily took a back stage.

The political scenario of the country prompted BNPS to build a strategic alliance with like-minded organizations, keeping the cause of the organization in focus and trying to win the difficult struggle for survival. An important step taken during those troubled times was to establish a strategic alliance with Institute for Environment and Development (IED). After much deliberation and reflection, BNPS decided in late 2003, to work in collaboration with IED for survival, who later on took the responsibility of continuing the women's rights work through its portfolio of human/citizen rights and environment. Then in July 2004, ICCO, The Netherlands and EED, Germany came forward to support BNPS in keeping its cause in focus and getting ahead with a low profile. To face the challenge of survival under those trying circumstances, BNPS adopted self-financing micro finance model that paid for the minimum expenses of administration and staff salary through developing a business plan for 2004 to 2007. The communities with whom BNPS worked and was in constant touch understood the context of the organization due to their long relationship and mutual trust.

Though there was a high degree of uncertainty about the organization's future in those days, most of the staff stuck to the organization in solidarity because of its forward-looking values, right-based work and the hope and strength to survive. The overall environment, commitment and activist orientation of BNPS helped many to decide to stay with the organization during the crisis. Many of the BNPS staff reveal that they boosted their self-confidence and kept their hopes alive by constantly thinking aloud 'we have together built this organization and we are here to work for women's rights.'

In brief most of the staff who stayed and those who left for lack of funds stood together with the organization in a strong spirit of solidarity.

Passing through the phase of collaborative work with other organizations carried out from 2004 to 2006, BNPS is now poised well to reflect on its future directions, strategies, identity, strategic partnership areas. It can now more effectively enhance the linkage between its grassroots-based work and civil society-based-work to promote women's rights and human rights, to enhance accountability in governing systems, to empower local government and to nurture in general all people's movements to protect the interests of poor women and the disadvantaged.

After a long period of sufferings, with the departure of the previous government, the time of two-year neutral caretaker government came. It was at that time that BNPS could get all its registrations renewed and start contacting donors for its programs again. It received fund from MISEREOR for a one-year study project entitled, Alternative Education System Sensitive to Gender and Pluralism which came to an end in October 2008. EED extended its support to BNPS for organizing a training course entitled, Gender

Budgeting: A Framework for Women Empowerment and Social Accountability. In this context BNPS has decided to emerge out of the cyst and run its programs as it was doing before 2002.

In July 2008, a one-year bridging grant from EED was received to restart the PRiME project. With the support of the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) a two-year policy study and advocacy project entitled, Promoting Rights of Women through Changing Mindset, was started in August 2008. In March 2009, Oxfam-Novib of The Netherlands has started funding a three-year project entitled, Making Education Gender Responsive and Preventive to HIV/AIDS. MISEREOR and EED have extended their support for the PRiME project for another three years, up to June 2012.



## Organizational Profile of BNPS

### Vision

A society free from all sorts of discrimination.

### Mission

Empowerment of women, ethnic and religious minorities to reach the goal of a vibrant society, free from all sorts of discrimination.

### Goals

Establishing an enabling environment for the disadvantaged people, particularly women to be able to get organized, exert for demand and ensure access to their rights and quality services for social, political and economic empowerment.

### Core Values of the Organization

BNPS has an ideological base with some core values. These are considered as guiding factors that contribute as essential elements to developing all the programs implemented by the organization. BNPS believes development as intervention for social transformation. The following are the core values of the organization:

*Inclusion:* BNPS makes every effort to include all sections of societies, particularly the disadvantaged and marginalized groups, women, poor and minorities in its development program.

*Plurality:* BNPS promotes a culture of plurality.

*Secularism:* BNPS believes in and encourages secularism in all aspects of social and national life to eradicate disparity and discrimination against any religion or ethnic group

### Core Competencies

- Long experience in the women's rights movement
- Wide acceptance in the community, civil society, media and donors as a women's rights organization
- An activist nature of work done by committed workers
- An organization with the required flexibility and willingness to learn
- A bottom-up approach to work
- National, regional and international networks
- Micro-macro linkage

### Principal Thematic Areas

- Mainstreaming gender and marginalized groups
- Poverty eradication
- Governance
- Promoting the concept of a plural society

## Core Programs

The programs of BNPS center around the following three main empowerment areas:

### *Policy reform interventions and mass awareness*

- Reform of the education system
- Reform of the electoral process
- Analysis of the national budget and PRSP
- Mapping the implementation of policies and commitments

### *Local governance*

- Strengthening local government and community level governance through inclusion of marginalized people

### *Community level awareness, mobilization and livelihood initiatives*

- Leadership development through institution building and development education
- Legal awareness and legal aid through referral service
- Financial services to poor women

## Strategic Segments

- Advocacy and lobbying
- Networking
- Cultural activism
- Public debate
- Promoting the accountability of duty bearers, policy-makers and other actors

## Support Programs

- Monitoring and evaluation
- Training
- Policy research, documentation and publication

## Priority Empowerment Areas through Programmatic Interventions

Social Empowerment	Economic Empowerment	Political Empowerment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Social mobilization and Institution development</li> <li>■ Development education</li> <li>■ Awareness raising on civic and legal rights</li> <li>■ Making education system gender sensitive</li> <li>■ Disaster management and environment development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Capacity and skill development</li> <li>■ Livelihood improvement and asset building of women</li> <li>■ Market extension for women and vulnerable segments of the society</li> <li>■ Gender budget analysis</li> <li>■ PRSP analysis Increasing women's access to public resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Strengthening local government and governance</li> <li>■ Electoral reform</li> <li>■ Increasing the participation of women in political institutions</li> </ul>



## Projects Implemented in Relation to the Programmatic Strategic Issues

Programmatic Strategic Issues	Relevant Projects	Year of Implementation	Project Donors
Women's Empowerment and its Sustainability	Women's Development	1987 - 1996	ICCO-The Netherlands, CWS, NY, USA
	Study of Women Education in Bangladesh	1995	Heinrich Böll Foundation, Germany
	Strengthening the Women's Movement in Bangladesh	1997 - 1998	NORAD
	Socio-Political and Economic Empowerment of Women	1997 - 1999	ICCO and Christian Aid
	Strengthening the Women Empowerment Process in Bangladesh	1999 - 2002	ICCO and EZE
	Creating Enabling Environment for Women	1998 - 2000	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
	Empowerment of Women through Greater Access to National Resources	2000 - 2001	Bangladesh Freedom Foundation
Economic Empowerment and Livelihood Development	Socio Economic and Structural Empowerment of Women	1996 - 2001	HBF-Germany
	Gender Budgeting: A framework for women empowerment & Social Accountability	15 May 2007 to 30 September 2007	EED-Germany
	Integrated Health Development	1990 - 1996	ODA/ NGO Project
Environment and Disaster Management	Multi Purpose use of Cyclone Shelter	1992 - 1995	France Embassy
	Reconstruction of House at the Flood affected area	1998 - 1999	ICCO
	Rehabilitation Program	1991, 1997	SDC, The Netherlands Embassy, CIDA, Proshika and SOH
Political Empowerment	Voter education on Women Issues	1996	The Asia Foundation
	Networking and Advocacy for Legal Rights	1997 - 1998	The Asia Foundation
	Democracy Education for Effective LEBs	1997 - 1999	The Asia Foundation
	Election Observation from Gender and Minority Perspective	2001	The Asia Foundation
	Promoting Responsive Governance & Gender Justice Project	2000 - 2002	SDC

Ongoing Projects

Promoting Rights Through Mobilization and Empowerment (PRIME)

EED and MISEREOR, Germany supported



Promoting Rights of Women Through Changing Mindset

UNDEF supported



Making Education Gender Responsive and Preventive to HIV/AIDS

Oxfam Novib supported





## Section 2

### Advocacy for Political and Economic Empowerment of Women

As a leading member of the women's movement network which facilitated the formulation of The National Policy for the Advancement of Women (1997), Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS) is still fighting for women's empowerment in Bangladesh. To accelerate the political and economic empowerment process of women BNPS is active in policy advocacy at home and abroad. BNPS regularly conducts policy research and analysis whenever it deems necessary to support its own advocacy initiatives or to equip women's movement activists with required information and analysis. These policy researches, policy analysis, brief studies, fact sheets, briefing papers and other information materials try to identify gaps and lacunae in the ongoing efforts for the political and economic empowerment of women and provide new insights and policy directions in this respect. BNPS regularly share findings and information generated by its policy studies, analysis and briefing papers with the stakeholders and policy makers through seminars, workshops, press conferences or briefings, publications, newspaper articles, memorandums submitted to policy formulation bodies, and organizing social mobilizations when required.

#### Creating an Environment for Economic Empowerment

##### Advocacy for a Gender Responsive National Budget and PRSP

BNPS is the pioneer organization in Bangladesh to have started an analysis of the national budget and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) from a gender perspective in 2001. BNPS has been trying to articulate the demand and necessity of gender budgeting in the country and share it both with the proponents of women's empowerment and the policy-makers. The discourse of gender budgeting and allocating resources from a gender perspective is gradually getting impetus and is being increasingly reflected in the national budget.

In this context BNPS has been conducting a national budget analysis from a gender perspective for the last nine years. In the reporting period, two more studies were conducted to analyze the national budget and the PRSP from a gender perspective. Both the studies were supported by New York based United Nation Democracy

Fund (UNDEF) under a BNPS policy study and advocacy project entitled, Promoting Rights of Women through Changing Mindset.

##### Study to Identify the Status of Women in the National Budget of Bangladesh

As a sequel of six earlier studies, this policy research (2009), Study to Identify the Status of Women in the National Budget of Bangladesh, looks at the national budget to see how a budget really considers the gender relations and women's advancement. It aims at finding the reasons behind the under-utilization of the money earmarked for women's development. In addition, this study aims at assessing whether the development projects undertaken in the national budget for women conform to the priority needs of women and also at evaluating the performance of these projects to empower women. Focusing on the budget documents and the implementation status of projects through case studies, the study has argued that the national budget is still discriminatory in terms of gender concerns and the poor women have not benefited in a real sense from the allocations made in the budget.

Dr. Pratima Paul-Majumder, Senior Research Fellow of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) has conducted the study for BNPS.



#### Addressing Women's Advancements and Rights Issues in I-PRSP and PRSPs of Bangladesh

Following an earlier (2008) BNPS analysis of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) this study, Addressing Women's Advancements and Rights Issues in I-PRSP and PRSPs of Bangladesh, has made a critical look at the PRSP documents from a gender perspective to see how this national policy instrument addresses the issue of women's advancement in Bangladesh. It has also identified the strengths and weaknesses of these documents so that further necessary steps can be taken. The study has reviewed the existing relevant documents, gathered information from the grassroots through a number of focus group discussions and individual interviews. Dr. Kaniz N. Siddique, an international consultant at the Ministry of Finance has conducted this study for BNPS.



#### Capacity Development Training on Gender Budgeting

In addition to conduct policy studies, BNPS undertook capacity development initiatives of 18 NGOs on gender budgeting through a three-day course titled, Gender Budgeting: A Framework for Women's Empowerment and Social Accountability. Along with 23 NGO staff, one Assistant Director of the Department of Women's Affairs participated in the training course.



## Creating an Environment for Political Empowerment

In Bangladesh women have played a very important role in all democratic movements, but their participation in various spheres of political life has continued to remain minimal in comparison to their male counterparts. Politics is always considered a dirty game meant only for 'big boys'. This becomes evident in election times when there is a high incidence of violence. The prevailing climate of political violence including corruption and misuse of power discourages women from participating in politics. In addition, there are cultural barriers which serve to increase the existing gender gaps.

BNPS believes that elimination of discrimination against women and promotion of equality for them can never be achieved without creating a proper space for them and widening their access to political sphere both at the national and grassroots levels. Since its inception, BNPS has been the pioneer in demanding women's

representation in the power structure i.e. in the parliament and local government, the reform of laws and electoral rules to ensure women's greater access to the political arena. In the reporting period, BNPS continued its advocacy for women's political empowerment along with building leadership among grassroots women.

### National Level

#### *Status of Implementation of National Policies and Other Commitments Related to Women in Bangladesh*

This policy study, Status of Implementation of National Policies and Other Commitments Related to Women in Bangladesh has reviewed a range of national policies and international covenants and revealed to what extent these are gender-friendly in the context of Bangladesh. The objective of the study is to make an overview and assessment of the policy framework on gender and development, and the state of implementation of such policies along with the compliance of different international commitments.

The study has made a series of recommendations to make the policies work in favor of women's advancement that has also been emphasized in the National Women's Advancement Policy supported by the Constitution.

Professor Salahuddin M. Aminuzzaman, a renowned public policy analyst working with the University of Dhaka conducted this study as a part of the UNDEF supported project, Promoting Rights of Women through Changing Mindset.



### *National Seminar on Political Empowerment and Advancement of Women*

Putting forward the demands of the local women's movement for 40% women's representatives in all tiers of local government and 33% women's participation in all committees of political parties, a national level seminar on Political Empowerment & Advancement of Women was



held on 6 December 2007 at the National Press Club, VIP lounge, Dhaka. Participants including political leaders, civil society members, government officials, policy makers, academicians, justice, women leaders, journalists, and NGOs representatives were present in the seminar to raise a collective voice in favor of the demands.

### *Re-union of Women Freedom Fighters*

Today's independent and sovereign Bangladesh is the outcome of the nine-month long bloody liberation war of 1971 against the Pakistan army. Women suffered most from atrocities in the war but they were not just helpless rape victims of the Pakistan army. Brave women throughout the country defied torture and death to give shelter to freedom fighters. They treated the wounded freedom fighters as doctors and nurses and took arms training and fought on different war fronts. Some of those women received gallantry awards for their heroism. But, unfortunately the role of women in the liberation war is usually sketched only as that of victims of rape and torture in general. Believing as it does in the political empowerment of women, BNPS wants to uphold women's active role in the liberation war as a source of inspiration for the women of the present generation.

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To recall that heroic role of women and disseminate it to the present generation Bangladesh Nari Progati Shangha along with Mahila Muktijodha Sangsad (Women Freedom Fighters Council) and Institute for Environment & Development (IED) organized a reunion of Women Freedom Fighters on 11 December 2007 at Chhayant Bhaban in Dhaka. Around 400 participants including 200 women freedom fighters, political leaders, parliament members, academicians, retired government officials, lawyers, judges, women leaders, human rights and development activists, journalists, cultural activists were presented on the occasion. Air Vice Marshal (Retd) AK Khandoker,

Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Liberation Army was chief guest and Professor Sanjida Khatun, chief of Muktisangrami Shilpi Sanstha (Artists in Liberation War) was special guest on the occasion. The reunion was presided over by Dr. Makhduma Nargis Ratna, General Secretary of Mahila Muktijoddha Sangsad. Rokeya Kabir, Executive Director of BNPS, presented the key-note paper in the discussion session.

Speakers and participants demanded the trial of those who committed war crimes in 1971. They urged the government to constitute a special tribunal and try the war criminals saying it was the duty of the state and the government. The women who fought in the liberation war also demanded to bar the war criminals from taking part in elections.

The major national electronic and print media covered the occasion with due importance.

### *Press Conference Demanding More Women's Participation in Election*

To address the frustrating non-existence of women's participation in the election of nine municipalities and four city corporations in August 2008 BNPS organized a press conference on 26th August 2008 in the Dhaka Reporters' Unity auditorium.

At the conference, BNPS shared the findings and observations on women's candidature in the aforementioned elections which was below the expectation level of the women's movement. Moreover, women's participation in election management and observation was also low. With a view to enhancing women's sincere participation in elections and in policy-making, BNPS demanded 33 percent women's representation in the political parties as per the declaration of the Election Commission.

Speakers at the press conference urged that the political parties should nominate women candidates to compete for general seats in the election. At the same time, duties of the women counselors of municipalities and city corporations should be specified and direct election should be mandatory for seats reserved for women in the Parliament. The demands also included

appointing women as election commissioners, presiding officers, polling officers, polling agents for electoral management activities and more women's participation in election observation activities. Moreover, speakers urged the Election Commission to preserve the gender-disaggregated data of the persons involved in polling activities.

### *Leaflet Demanding More Pledges to Women's Development in Election Manifesto*

Before the national parliamentary election of 2008, BNPS published a leaflet demanding specific promises from the contesting political parties concerning women's development in their election manifestoes. Copies of the leaflet containing specific demands were sent to political parties and circulated to media, NGOs, CSOs, women rights organizations and other stakeholders to create public opinion.

### *Report on Women's Status in the Electoral Process*

In June 2009, a comprehensive report entitled "Women Status in Electoral Process," was completed to find out the trends of female voter's participation in elections, women's participation in national and local government elections as candidates and the reflection of women's rights and development in political parties' election manifestoes. Based on the data collected by the advocacy cell of BNPS Professor Salahuddin M Aminuzzaman, Department of Public Administration of Dhaka University, prepared the report. This report will be used to advance various issues related to women's political empowerment process in Bangladesh.

### *Fact Sheet on Women's Participation in National Parliament Election*

The advocacy cell of BNPS extensively observed the participation of women in the national parliamentary election held in December 2008. A fact sheet on women's participation in the electoral process and in politics since the independence of Bangladesh was developed with an analysis of various trends. Different print and electronic media were provided with this information and then they highlighted the issue of women's participation in the electoral process in media with special reference to BNPS.



### The Changed Context:

#### Women's Increased Participation in Politics and the Electoral Process

Traditionally, women voters were considered less important in Bangladesh and there was a strong perception that their votes could be decided by the male members of their families. Women voters were less in number than men and their turn-out in the polling centre were lower as well. The representation of women in the national parliament and their participation in elections was one of the lowest in the world. The ratio of women parliamentarians was only 2% in the last national parliament which was the lowest in South Asia. But the situation changed in the last national election of 29 December 2008.

Bangladeshi women voters for the first time outnumbered men by more than 1.4 million, as shown by the new voters' roll with photographs prepared for the ninth parliamentary elections. The

number of voters this time stands at 81,058,698. Of them, 41,236,149 (51% of total voters) are women and 39,822,549 men -- the former outnumbering the latter by 1,413,600.

For the first time in the history of Bangladesh a record number of women candidates participated in the national poll. Out of 38 contending political parties 16 nominated 75 female candidates. In addition to this, 13 independent women also participated in this poll. Finally 52 women contested the poll. Out of 52 women candidates a total of 20 have been elected for the 300-member 9th parliament (6.33% women) of the republic. Compared to the eight parliaments this is a three-fold increase in number. Only six women from three parties became MPs in the former parliament by direct vote.



#### Reception of Women Parliamentarians

In recognition of women's achievement in politics Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS) and Institute for Environment and Development (IED) jointly organized a program to hail 65 female members of the ninth parliament of Bangladesh. Female members of parliament (MPs) were accorded reception by presenting crests, addresses of honor and flower bouquets. Thirty-one women MPs of Bangladesh Awami League (AL), Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jatiya Party (JP) elected by direct vote and

selected by the respective parties for reserved seats for women were present in the reception. Deputy leader of the parliament Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, agriculture minister Begum Matia Chowdhury and home minister Begum Sahara Khatun were present among the prominent MPs.

Women law-makers both from the treasury and opposition benches unanimously vowed to work together for the betterment of the country's women. Addressing the reception they unequivocally said that no political differences could stop them from discharging their sacred duties for women's empowerment and upholding their dignity in this male-dominated society.

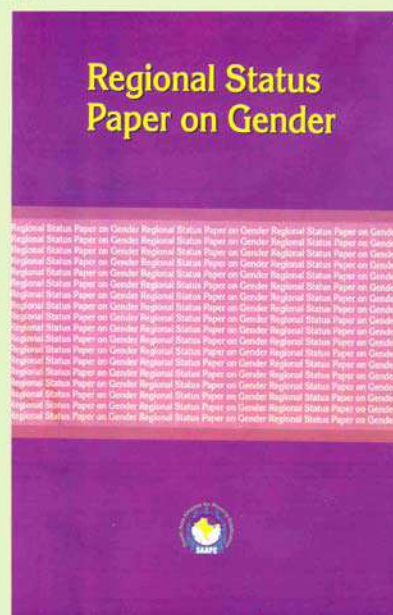
Eminent personalities and proponents of women's political empowerment Professor Khan Sarwar Murshid, Professor Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, Dr Halima Khatun, Ms. Latifa Akand and Ms. Sultana Sarwat Ara Zaman, among others, attended the reception with Principal Ms. Mahfuza Khanom in the chair. Ms. Rokeya Kabir, Executive Director of BNPS initiated the session with a welcome speech where she highlighted the chronological activities of the women's movement and its contribution to women's empowerment in Bangladesh. IED's Executive Director, Mr. Numan Ahmed Khan, elaborated the context of this program.

The reception held in Poet Sufia Kamal Auditorium at the National Museum, Dhaka on April 13, 2009 was attended by leading women's organizations, NGOs, government officials, and civil society activists.

#### South Asia Regional level

##### *South Asian Regional Status Paper on Women's Participation in Politics*

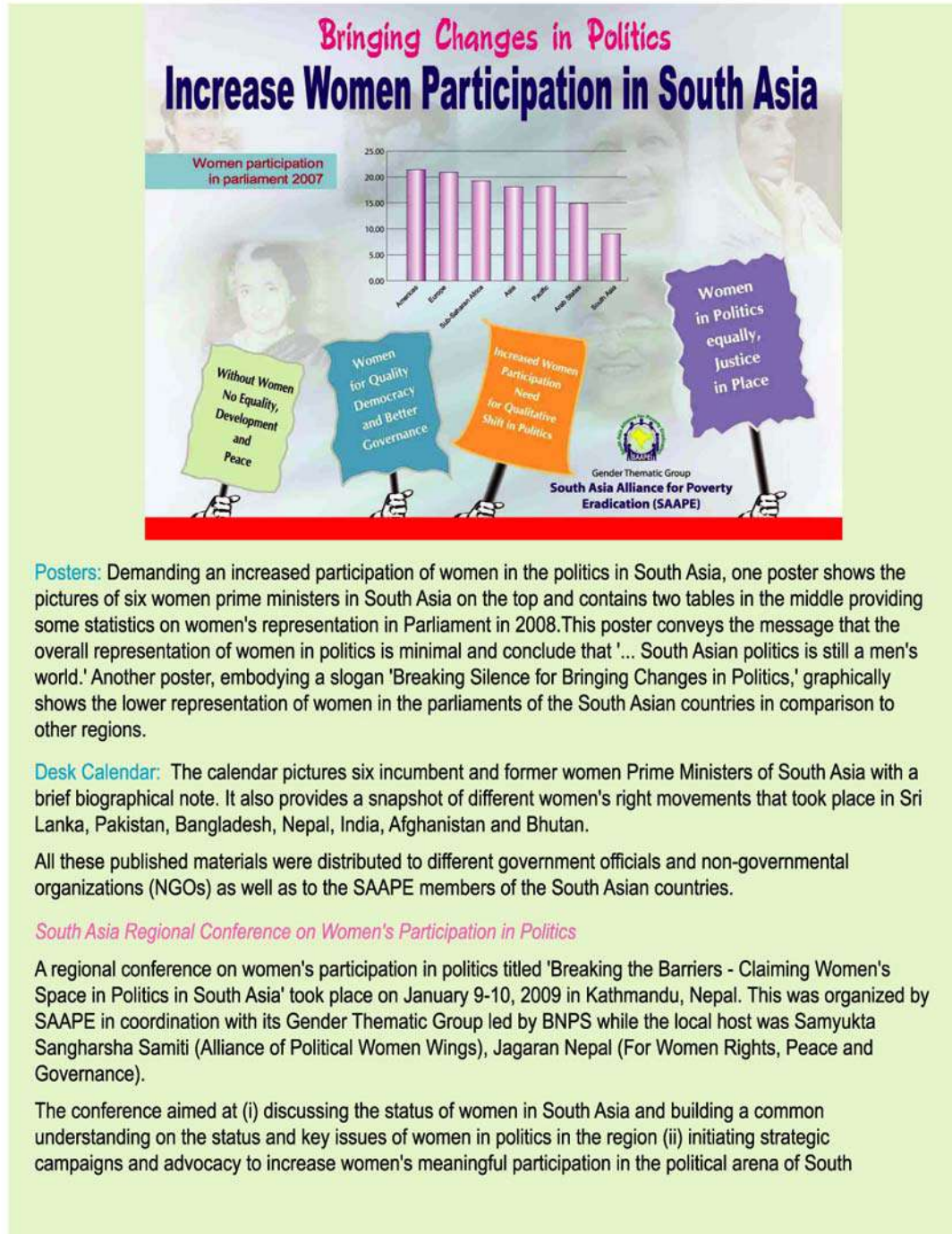
At the South Asian regional level, BNPS is a founder-member of South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) and has been leading its gender thematic group. Aiming to make aware the target audience about the marginality of and discrimination against women in the political arena of South Asia as well as to influence policy makers and political parties to take measures to ensure women's political representation at all decision-making levels and in the electoral process, BNPS, the Regional Gender Thematic Focal Organization of SAAPE, published the Regional Status Paper entitled 'Political Participation of Women in South Asia.' The paper was disseminated to different stakeholders including the SAAPE Gender Thematic Groups and the SAAPE alliance, government and non-governmental organizations, civil society, political parties, media, academicians, and human and women rights activists. In the short-term, the publication, helped to raise awareness about the position of women in the politics of South Asia while it mobilized greater support for the cause of increased women's representation in parliaments as well as at the decision-making levels of political parties in the long term.



##### *Campaign for Greater Participation of Women in the Politics of South Asia*

To campaign for a greater participation of women in the politics of south Asia BNPS also developed and published two posters and one desk calendar containing the relevant message for the purpose.





**Posters:** Demanding an increased participation of women in the politics in South Asia, one poster shows the pictures of six women prime ministers in South Asia on the top and contains two tables in the middle providing some statistics on women's representation in Parliament in 2008. This poster conveys the message that the overall representation of women in politics is minimal and conclude that '... South Asian politics is still a men's world.' Another poster, embodying a slogan 'Breaking Silence for Bringing Changes in Politics,' graphically shows the lower representation of women in the parliaments of the South Asian countries in comparison to other regions.

**Desk Calendar:** The calendar pictures six incumbent and former women Prime Ministers of South Asia with a brief biographical note. It also provides a snapshot of different women's right movements that took place in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Afghanistan and Bhutan.

All these published materials were distributed to different government officials and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as to the SAAPE members of the South Asian countries.

#### *South Asia Regional Conference on Women's Participation in Politics*

A regional conference on women's participation in politics titled 'Breaking the Barriers - Claiming Women's Space in Politics in South Asia' took place on January 9-10, 2009 in Kathmandu, Nepal. This was organized by SAAPE in coordination with its Gender Thematic Group led by BNPS while the local host was Samyukta Sangharsha Samiti (Alliance of Political Women Wings), Jagaran Nepal (For Women Rights, Peace and Governance).

The conference aimed at (i) discussing the status of women in South Asia and building a common understanding on the status and key issues of women in politics in the region (ii) initiating strategic campaigns and advocacy to increase women's meaningful participation in the political arena of South



Asian countries, and (iii) increasing coordination and collaboration among the actors of the campaign on women in politics in South Asia.

The conference was participated in by different groups like academics, parliamentarians, representatives of political parties, civil society organizations, social movements, community organizations, relevant institutions, experts, and trade union leaders from Nepal, India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan.

The conference was able to build a common understanding among its participants on the status and key issues of women in South Asia and also to develop a regional campaign and advocacy strategy to go ahead with the issue in collaboration with the member countries.

The conference made a campaign call covering the issues related to women's political empowerment in South Asia including an urge to the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) leadership (governments, political parties, civil society organizations) to declare 2010 as the 'Year For The Promotion of Women In Politics.'



### **Advocacy and Lobbying at the Regional and International levels**

BNPS believes that in this era of globalization, it is important to carry out advocacy and lobbying at the regional and international level for establishing women's equal rights. This would also create an opportunity to form a pressure group that can influence the policy-making process regionally and globally, which in turn will help to facilitate BNPS's work at the national level. In view of this BNPS has involved itself with the following networks/alliances.

#### **Network and Alliance at the Regional/International Level**

##### **The W8: Eight extraordinary women, one unique voice**

As a dedicated advocate of people's rights to basic services, Executive Director of BNPS Ms Rokeya Kabir has been selected by Oxfam International as a member of a cabinet of eight women/W8, interfacing G8 countries. Launched in February 2009, W8 consists of eight women ambassadors from Oxfam's essential services focus countries including Bangladesh, India, Thailand, Philippines, Malawi, Mali, Nicaragua and Georgia. Since the formation, the coalition has been speaking on behalf of the global poor and marginalized people who do not have free access to education, health, and sanitation and taking the voice and realities of communities to the world leaders. Their lobbying is mainly directed at G8 leaders to persuade them to invest more in poor countries to ensure essential services for all.



#### South Asian Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE)

South Asian Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) is a regional network of like-minded organizations for advocacy on the issues of poverty and deprivation, discrimination, social development and the process of 'globalization.' NGOs, mass organizations, academicians, trade unions, community based organizations and different movements are part of this network. It was formed in 2001 and its regional secretariat is based in Kathmandu, Nepal. The objective of this alliance is to create a poverty-free and equitable society where people can get an opportunity to enjoy their rights and dignity. BNPS has been acting as a regional thematic focal organization on gender of this alliance and the ED of BNPS has been playing an important role in setting its political agenda as one of the founding members of its regional core committee.

The alliance has broadly identified five thematic issues such as gender equality, good governance, labour rights, peace and demilitarization, and food sovereignty. BNPS is the lead organization on gender equality. It has also been selected as the country focal organization for SAAPE in Bangladesh.

As a gender focal organization, BNPS continues its advocacy work for a gender-sensitive budget, increased political participation of women, and other important issues of women both in rural and urban areas in the region.

#### Committee for Asian Women (CAW)

Committee for Asian Women (CAW) is an Asian regional organization for women workers based in Bangkok, Thailand. CAW celebrated her silver jubilee year in 2002. For the last 25 years, CAW has been dealing with issues of women workers in Asia. BNPS as a member of CAW has been highlighting the issue of women workers, particularly in the expanding informal sector.

A study has been conducted on "Impact of Globalization on Women in Bangladesh". Besides, two papers have been prepared on globalization and its impact on women and women workers, one for a regional workshop in India and another for an international seminar in Hong Kong City University.



### Water and Democracy Forum

This forum consists of 46 partner organizations from India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan of South Asia. The objective of this forum is to explore opportunities for action to protect and promote people's right to water, in respective countries as well as within South Asia. BNPS as a member of the steering committee of this forum participated in different meetings and workshops and contributed to producing policy documents.

### South Asian Network of Gender Activists and Trainers (SANGAT)

It is a South Asia level network dealing with gender related issues. Its objective is to strengthen the women's movement in South Asia and help the regional women raise their voice, claim their entitlements and establish their rights as human rights. It was established in 1998, and based in New Delhi, India. BNPS is an active member of SANGAT since its inception.

### South Asian Network for Social and Agricultural Development (SANSAD)

SANSAD was established in 2004 as a regional level network of like-minded voluntary organizations, academic institutions, farmers and trade associations to ensure people's participation in the processes of development, peace and governance for addressing the regional concerns. Based in New Delhi, India, SANSAD supports people's efforts to build communities and create the social cohesion necessary for healthy, caring societies, and assist in the development of sustainable livelihoods that meet the needs of all community members. BNPS is actively involved with SANSAD activities in Bangladesh and at the regional level.

Moreover, through participating in different International and Regional workshops, seminars and symposiums, the Executive Director of BNPS contributed to the process of inclusion of different issues concerning women's empowerment, rights and opportunities in the declarations and policies of different international and regional organizations.

## Networks/Alliances at the National Level

Since its inception, BNPS has been taking initiatives to bring a reform in the NGO sector in Bangladesh to make it an organized movement and include the process of empowerment of the poor and women in NGO programs. BNPS has been working to bring an element of activism in NGO work in place of their traditional project-oriented development efforts. Tireless efforts are being made to bring issues like, fundamentalism, secularism and its relation to democracy and development in the forefront of NGO activities. In this context BNPS is also playing an active role in facilitating the process of promoting different forums/networks like Coalition for the Urban Poor (CUP), Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF), Democracy Forum, Sammilito Nari Samaj (United Women's Platform) and Women's Development Forum. In the inception period the BNPS office was used as the secretariat of all these networks/forums and the ED of BNPS worked as their founding coordinator.

### Amar Odhikar (My Rights) Campaign

Since September 2008, BNPS has been active in a national campaign on ensuring the rights of all to essential services. The campaign is called Amar Odhikar Campaign (AOC). AOC is an alliance of CSOs with a view to bringing about substantive changes in the quality and delivery of essential services. Facilitated by the Southern Campaign Group of Oxfam Novib (ON) and launched at the end of 2007, it has paying particular attention to education and health. The initiative was followed by a series of practical



actions amounting to a review of the existing literature, observing the realities at the grassroots level, and organizing dialogues with prominent political leaders, law-makers, members of parliamentary standing committees, key informants such as educationists, academics, CSO leaders and researchers on all relevant issues.

On October 25, 2008 the campaign was launched in Dhaka with the aim to establish the right to primary education. Four specific demands were put forward. Firstly, one school has to be established in every village; secondly, one teacher must be appointed for each group of 30 students; thirdly, the school must provide the mid-day meal for the children; and finally, the right to education must be included in the constitution as a fundamental right.

The purpose of AOC is to mobilize the civil society of Bangladesh to persuade the government to ensure the essential basic services for all. At present the campaign is focusing on the quality and equitable standards of education. Ms. Rokeya Kabir, Executive Director of BNPS is the convener of AOC.

#### Coalition for the Urban Poor (CUP)

It is a national network primarily dealing with the marginal people in the urban areas and slum dwellers in Dhaka City. CUP has proved as an important platform for the urban poor for their economic development and all kinds of rights. It has been playing a vital role in stopping the eviction of slum dwellers.

Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF): It was formed for triggering a national discourse on the right of children and addressing the issue of child labor.

#### Democracy Forum

With the initiative of BNPS, Democracy Forum was developed in 1997. This was formed for expediting the political empowerment of women, establishing good governance and strengthening local government. Involving the NGOs working in Dhaka and outside, it initiated the democracy education process. BNPS worked as the secretariat of this network.

#### Sammilito Nari Samaj (United Women's Platform)

BNPS took the initiative to sensitize and mobilize women activists and different organizations to push for women rights issues and fight against violence against women. The Executive Director of BNPS acted as the founder coordinator of this forum and BNPS provided it with secretarial support throughout the country. Workshops, seminars, rallies and processions were organized by this forum against cases of rape and the killing of Yasmin, a young working girl by police. The protests finally turned into a countrywide movement named the "Yasmin Murder Movement".

#### Women's Development Forum:

For developing women's leadership in the NGO sector, BNPS created a space for women working in big NGOs and leaders of small women-headed NGOs. On June 27, 1993 a network was formed named Mohila NGO Forum and later on it was renamed as Women Development Forum (WDF). BNPS played the role of coordinating the platform. Through this network a movement was initiated against the harassment of women at their workplaces and the movement helped to develop the organizing and mobilizing capacity of women leaders.

#### Samajik Protirodh Committee (Social Action Committee against Violence)

It is a national network consisting of 42 women and human rights groups. BNPS, as a member of the network, contributed to formulating policy papers and developing IEC materials on the following;

- Conventions, sharing meetings, press conferences and human chains.
- The national women's advancement policy.
- Increased numbers of reserved seats for women in the parliament and direct election in those seats.
- Resisting violence against women.
- Increased the women's participation in the decisions-making process all levels.
- A uniform family code.

### Poribesh Banchao Andolon (Environment Movement)

Poribesh Banchao Andolon is an activists' group working on environmental issues. A number of progressive organizations and individuals are members of this movement. BNPS is one of them. Many eminent personalities of Bangladesh are working with this platform. The movement mobilizes opinion on environmental issues at all levels, ranging from the grassroots to the policy-making domain.

### Governance Coalition

Governance Coalition was established in 2004 with the motto of "Promoting Responsive Governance and Human Rights". The mission of the coalition is to ensure effective participation of the poor and marginalized people in exercising their rights over the decision-making and policy-making processes that affect their lives. BNPS is a member of this coalition.

### Sampreeti Mancha:

It is a forum of writers, intellectuals and professionals like teacher, doctors, engineers, journalists etc. The forum addresses various issues concerning violence against ethnic and religious minorities. BNPS is facilitating this forum by providing space for their activities and the secretarial support.

### Education Reform

Reforming the education system in Bangladesh is one of the core programmatic areas of BNPS under its policy reform mass awareness intervention. As a women and minority rights organization, BNPS firmly believes in the following as the guiding force of its pedagogical philosophy:

- Pluralism and diversity
- Unity in diversity
- Humanism
- Secularism





BNPS always advocates for a uniform, universal and people-oriented education system consistent with our constitution and the spirit of the liberation war. BNPS has been creating public opinion against madrasah education since 1994 as it is one of main obstacles to promoting women's rights and gender equality in Bangladesh. A study entitled 'Madrasah Education in Bangladesh: Background, Present Scenario and the Position of Women' was conducted in 1993 by eminent educationist and column writer Abul Momen. This study report was enriched with the recommendations made in a seminar held in 1996 and was published in book form in 1997. A further study report titled 'Madrasah Education: An Observation' was published in 2003. Through these endeavors, the need for reforming madrasah education was emphasized and expressed at civil society and government levels. Many donors including UNICEF stopped their funding of madrasah education as a result the informed advocacy of BNPS.

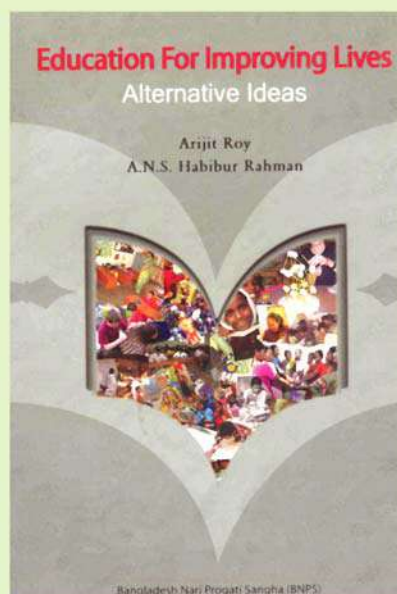
#### Study Report on 'Education for Improving Lives: Alternative Ideas'

Besides advocating a uniform education system, BNPS also developed a concrete guideline to implement such an education system. An analytical report on 'Education for Improving Lives: Alternative Ideas' was published in October 2008 and disseminated among educationists, academicians, teachers, political leaders, donors and civil society members. This report provides a complete guideline to formulate and implement a uniform and inclusive education policy in Bangladesh.

This report was the outcome of a one-year study project titled 'Alternative Education System Sensitive to Gender and Pluralism in Bangladesh.' The goal of the project was to develop recommendations for an alternative education system, which is sensitive to gender, human rights and the principle of plurality.

Ten focus group discussions at the upazila (sub-district) level, four workshops at the district level, four workshops at the divisional level and one national level sharing with policy-makers were conducted to develop the guideline and the study report.

The present government, as part of their election commitments to the people, is reviewing the education policy of the country to make it uniform and secular. Among many of the changes suggested in the proposed education policy BNPS' advocacy points are being reflected.





## Section 3

### Grassroots: Where We are Grounded At

BNPS is mainly grounded at the grassroots working with the marginalized women in rural areas and urban slums. To promote the cause of women's equality BNPS has created a strong presence at the national level through its powerful advocacy for basic issues related to women empowerment.

Promoting Rights through Mobilization and Empowerment or PRiME is the core program of BNPS which translates the mission statement of the organization into action. With the support of EED, Germany this program was initiated in July 2008. After the successful completion of this one-year program in June 2009, it has been extended for another three years (July 2009-June 2012). MISEREOR of Germany has joined EED to support the 2nd phase of PRiME.

The following activities are being carried out in five working areas to build up women's organizations and develop their leadership capacity for social action and economic activities. Other objectives of the program are to enhance women's participation in local governance and manage their livelihood through acquiring skills and access to market and to mobilize the community to advance social causes which have an impact on women's advancement and empowerment.

#### Twelve Thousand Women Organized for Change and Empowerment

##### *Group Formation*

Creating a space for women is the primary component of BNPS' grassroots level intervention for women's empowerment through which they could organize themselves, analyze their problems and setting, identify the causes behind their unequal status and move forward collectively. Under the facilities of BNPS, in the reporting period, 12,000 women have organized themselves into 600 groups at five field areas, namely Dhaka and Chittagong cities, Netrakona, Barhatta and Sandwip. Each group is now engaging itself in its social, economic and political advancement activities based on an annual plan developed by its members and facilitated by BNPS staff. Each of the 600 groups meets at least once a month to review the progress of its annual plan.

##### *Monthly Awareness Session for Group Members*

An awareness session is an integral part of the monthly group meeting. At the group level, a courtyard meeting is organized on a monthly basis to make the group members and other community people aware of the related social, economic, health, nutrition, sanitation, civic and rights issues and other relevant information. Implementation of different area specific activities is also discussed in these sessions. The staff of BNPS facilitate these sessions. The male members of the community also participate in these sessions. In the reporting period, 6,898 courtyard meetings have been organized.



The role of women and men and the appropriate actions to improve gender relations; different policies, laws, and responsibilities of concerned GO-NGO agencies; health, right to education, sanitation, birth registration; organisation and development, planning, skill development, increased production, market extension, social mobilization etc were some major issues discussed in the awareness sessions in the reporting period. The BNPS staff used a flip chart provided by the central office to facilitate the awareness sessions.

The following table shows the numbers of awareness sessions along with those of the participants organized in five centers during July 2008-June 2009.

Center	No. of awareness session	No. of participants
Dhaka	1123	9077
Netrakona	1130	11416
Chittagong	1164	9936
Barhatta	1130	17896
Sandwip	2351	38816
Total	6,898	87,141

*Cluster Committee: A Step after the Primary Group*



A Cluster Committee is a ward level committee consisting of 10 to 15 representatives of 5 proximate groups. Following the project guideline, 118 Cluster Committees have been formed covering 600 groups. All the Cluster Committees have developed their annual plans based on their group level planning.

Developing women leadership and initiating collective efforts to implement the group level plan is the core area of a Cluster Committee's activities. The committee seats at least once a month. The issue of identifying and getting proper service on child and maternal health, safe drinking water, vaccination, birth registration, waste disposal, tree plantation were the major discussion issues of Cluster Committee meetings in the reporting period. Besides their regular activities, some Cluster Committees successfully established linkage for group members in obtaining public services.



### Cluster Committee to Ensure Services

At Netrakona, a Cluster Committee contacted the nearby CARE office to report against the irregular presence and service of the CARE field health worker in their community. After the reporting, the service of the health worker has become regular.

At Barhatta, the cluster leaders successfully mobilized the upazila livestock office and the upazila agriculture office to provide training to group members in poultry rearing and preparing compost fertilizer. In all centers, the cluster leaders keep regular contacts with the local government to ensure people's access to government safety net

services like Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) and Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) cards, supernumerary allowance, widow allowance, and other government services like sanitary latrines, tube-well, marriage registration etc.

Economic empowerment interventions are carried out through the above-mentioned five centers. Women from poor households organized into groups and clusters are the participants in economic empowerment programs.

### *Income Generation: Skill and Entrepreneurship Training for the Group Members*

The women organized at the grassroots level are from the marginalized section of society with a low income, no or less education and less privilege. Most of them have to engage in hard work to feed and rear their families but traditionally their contribution is often ignored as non-formal laborers.

BNPS facilitates these women's entry into the semi-formal and formal labor sector by providing them with technical skill and training in different IGAs and improving their entrepreneurship capacity. Moreover, BNPS Micro Finance Trust (MFT) provides financial support for IGAs undertaken by the group members. In the reporting period 16 training courses on different IGA skills held for 400 women in five centers. Besides, 12 training courses on entrepreneurship development were organized through which 300 women got entrepreneurship skill. The courses on skill development training were: embroidery, homestead vegetables gardening, poultry rearing, nursery management, making hand bags and preparing sweet-boxes.

### Training Turns to Action

Mariom Begum, age 22, has read up to class five. Her husband Chanchol Mia has no fixed occupation like many other urban poor living in slums. He does rickshaw pulling, day labor, and whatever he can manage. With two children out of school, extreme poverty and uncertainty was a regular feature of their daily living. Sometimes she earned a little by making dresses with a rental swing machine. In July 2008, she joined in Meradia 'Balaka' grassroots women group of BNPS Dhaka center. After being a group member she got the opportunity of obtaining training in entrepreneurship development. She had not enough capital but the training boosted her confidence and widened her vision to find out a

scope of entrepreneurship by unlocking her hidden business prospect. The slum in which they live is at the end of eastern Dhaka where a new bus service started at the beginning of 2009. That newly started Bengal City Service brought her the much wanted opportunity. She started a street-side food shed targeting to serve lunch and dinner at a cheaper price than restaurants for bus drivers, staff, rickshaw-pullers, hawkers, construction laborers and other street dwellers. Her husband also has joined her as full-time helping hand. Her daily net income is now 400 to 500 taka. Both her children have started going to the nearby school this year.

*Assisting in Establishing Linkage with External Skill Training Providers*

The Community Organizers and Program Organizers of the center offices are helping the group members in exploring the opportunities of training at the upazila/district level government and private institutions. At the Barhatta center, 30 members received training in poultry farming and 77 members received training in agriculture through such linkage with the department of youth development and the department of agriculture. The staff of the Dhaka center established linkage with the training program of Islamic Relief, an INGO. Four group members have received training in mobile phone set servicing through this successful linkage. In Chittagang, 188 group members have been linked with the micro-credit program of different NGOs.

*Market Extension Training: Multiple Impacts in Promoting Women's Empowerment*

Creating income generating skill has proved not-enough to have the optimum return because women have no access to and control over the market. The above project has introduced market extension training for women and makes linkage arrangements between local market committees and women entrepreneurs and producers. Each center has 6 (at Sandwip 12) groups consisting of 15-20 members. They are engaged in extending the market of their products. These groups are called market extension groups and they are provided with training in marketing.

To ease the groups' access to market-places meetings with nearby market committees are conducted in each center.

**Income, Employment and Marketing**

The name of Market Extension Group 1 in Netrakona is North Satpai Bazar Market Extension Group. It is led by Shibani Gupta. Her spouse Jhunu Gupta works in a local tobacco factory as a support staff member. Bearing the minimum family expenditure of five members (including three daughters) was a tough challenge for them.

To earn for the family the Shibani attend a skill development training course of BNPS on making sweet-boxes along with other group

members. After receiving the training she started making sweet-boxes commercially investing thirty thousand taka managed by her husband. Initially, the role of Shibani and her group was limited to making the products. Her husband played the role of purchasing raw materials and supplying the finished goods to a middle party.

The scenario changed when Shibani and her group received training in market extension. After knowing the ins and outs of the supply chain, outsourcing, marketing, pricing, market and marketing skill they started collecting raw materials through proper bargaining from different sources at



a competitive price. Also, they started supplying the products directly to sweet-meat shops and restaurants and collecting orders. The business started expanding. Shibani got a credit support of Taka 30000 from BNPS Micro Finance Trust. Now they supply 5000 boxes weekly which was 2000 to 2500 before. The invested running capital stands at taka 80,000.



In a conservative society like rural Bangladesh, it is truly challenging for women to get access to the market-place. However, in our initial experience, market committees have not shown any reluctance to accept women entrepreneurs except in Sandwip. In other areas, women have started assessing the market demand, earning the best price through the most rational decision and procuring the production materials at a competitive price, which is essential for success in entrepreneurship.

The entry of women into the direct market segment is not only adding value to their income, but it has a strong impact on breaking the gender stereotyped role of women in our society.

#### *Leadership Capacity Building for Grassroots Women*

One of the aims of organizing grassroots women is to develop their leadership which goes along with the group formation process naturally. Besides, BNPS facilitates their leadership development process by providing training to the group and cluster leaders in formal leadership development. Between July 2008 and June 2009, 18 leadership training events have been conducted in participation of 500 women groups and cluster leaders.

As a result of the training for the leaders, awareness has been raised about claiming their rights. They are now doing much better in conducting meetings, documenting the meeting decisions, identifying problems and planning for addressing the problems with minimum supports from the implementing organization. They are also found to take the lead in solving the local level practical problems such as preventing early marriage and family violence, ensuring just services from public service authorities, establishing linkage with other organizations etc.

#### Sandwip Women Leaders Aiming at Local Government Election



*Bilkis Begum*

*Shankari Rani Sheel*

*Nilufar Yasmin*

At Sandwip, the Cluster Committee members have decided to nominate their leaders for the upcoming union council election. Shankari Rani Sheel of Cluster No. 1, Nilufar Yasmin of Cluster 2 and Bilkis Begum of group 97 gained support of the group and cluster members and the local people to contest the forthcoming election. These three women have proved their leadership capability by successfully preventing/handling some incidents of violence against women, dowry and early marriage and above all by leading local level advocacy with government officials to ensure public services.

## Organized to Assert Rights and Access to Services



Within the working area of Barhatta center 'Jithon' is a remote village without any government or nongovernmental primary school at all. The members of the Jithon cluster were firmly committed to establishing a school in their locality for their children. Kolpona and Delwara were assigned to contact 'Shabolombi' and 'Christian Life' (two different NGOs of Barhatta who have non-formal education program) to lobby for a school program in Jithon. They got assurances from Christian Life in March 2009. Then the cluster members along with the BNPS staff conducted a survey to make a list of children aged 5-6 who were ready to get into the proposed school and to select teachers and the school place in the community. The school was set up in Kolpona's house and it started on 30 March of 2009.

In Chittagong, 'Smriti' Cluster Committee members

successfully recovered a community pond (water source) by disconnecting a drainage line into it and cleaning it by their own initiative. The 'Doel' Cluster Committee managed to have a dustbin installed in their area by lobbying with the City Corporation.

At Sandwip, 'Shamun' colony is the residence of the members of group number 145. The only connecting road to the colony goes under water every rainy season. In March 2009, the group members along with the concerned cluster leaders contacted the local union parishad member Mr. Abul Bashar to repair the road before the upcoming monsoon. The road was repaired in time. Members of group number 103 installed a bamboo-bridge in their neighborhood with their own money and engaging the male members of locality.



## Making Education Gender Responsive and Preventive to HIV/AIDS

To contribute to developing an effective education and awareness system that can effectively address gender inequalities, power imbalance and its impact on reproductive health and the spread of HIV/AIDS, BNPS has started a two-year project with the support of Oxfam Novib in March 2009. The specific objectives of the project are:

- To map the available education materials (produced by public and private sectors in relation to gender, reproductive health and HIV/AIDS) developed in order to avoid reinventing the wheel and pinpoint the interventions required;
- To enhance the teaching capacity and knowledge level of selected school teachers, community health workers and BNPS frontline staff/volunteers;
- To develop gender-responsive, reproductive health/HIV/AIDS-oriented lesson plans and learning materials;
- To sensitize students/young women and community people to gender inequalities and their impact on reproductive health and HIV/AIDS; and
- To build a national consensus on a reformed education system sensitive to gender, and its impact on reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and poverty.

The project is aimed at national level policy intervention based on piloting activities in Netrakona Sadar and Barhatta sub-districts, and Dhaka city.



## Section 4

**Staff Capacity Building**

BNPS keeps on renewing the capacity of its staff through training, workshops, and exposure visits to make their knowledge and skill level up-to-date and effective. Whenever both financial and human resources permit BNPS organizes capacity development training internally. In addition to this internal capacity development exercise, the staff also attends capacity development events organized by an external organization both at home and abroad. The following staff capacity development events were organized or availed of during the reporting period:

#### Staff Development Training: Internal

A total of 31 female and 28 male staff attended the following three courses internally organized by the training cell of BNPS:

- Capacity building training for the field staff of the PRiME project, November 3-5, 2008
- Training on Market Extension for the field staff, March 15-17, 2009
- Project orientation and training on conducting KAP survey for the project 'Making Education Gender Sensitive and Preventive to HIV/AIDS', June 23-24, 2009





#### Staff Development Training: Externa

- 'Development of Human Rights based Strategy to Prevent Torture', December 30-31, 2007, organized by Centre for Rehabilitation of Torture Survivors (CRTS)-Bangladesh.
- 'Gender Responsive Budget', March 24-25, 2008, organized by Steps Towards Development, UNIFEM and Unnoyan Somunnay.
- 'CEDAW Alternative Report Writing' April 23-24, 2008, organized by Steps Towards Development.
- South Asia Workshop on 'Access to Land, Water and Forest Resource of the Poor, Women and Indigenous Peoples', June 29-30, 2008, organized by ALRD.
- 'Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation', April 5-7, 2009, organized by Caritas Bangladesh.

#### Training/Seminar/Workshop: Abroad

- Workshop on 'Water and Democracy', April 9-10, 2008, Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, India, organised by Water and Democracy Forum
- Workshop on 'Water and Democracy', August 27-30, 2008, Bhubaneswar, India, organized by Water and Democracy Forum
- Workshop on 'Asia Regional Consultation on LDC Issue and Conference on Democracy, Development and Peace in Asia', November 7-11, 2008, Kathmandu, Nepal, organised by South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE)
- Conference of South Asian Women. January 9-10, 2009, Kathmandu, Nepal, coorganised by SAAPE and BNPS, Regional Gender Thematic Focal organisation of SAAPE
- " United Nations 53rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, March 2009, UN Headquarter, New York, USA
- Meeting on 'Essential Services Popular Mobilization and Media Team, March 2009, the Hague, Netherlands, hosted by Oxfam Novib
- Meeting on "Civil G8 Dialogue", 2 - 5 May 2009, Rome, Italy, hosted by Rome Municipality and Oxfam Novib

## Documentation and Publication



BNPS has quite a strong presence in documentation and publication in the NGO arena. It publishes study reports, books, booklets, journals, posters, leaflets, stickers and other various communication materials. The purpose of different kinds of materials published by BNPS is to promote and disseminate the information related to its various advocacy initiatives. These materials are also used as facilitating tools of interaction between stakeholders to initiate a discourse and mobilize opinion. It also maintains its website and a library at its office premises. The following materials were published in the reporting period to support different issues namely gender budgeting, education policy analysis, various aspects of women's political empowerment, national election and analysis of election manifestos of political parties from a women's perspective.

### List of Publications

<b>Journal</b>	Nari O Progati (Women and Progress), A half-yearly of BNPS, 4 issues ( <i>in Bangla</i> )
<b>Study</b>	Role of Fiscal Policy in Achieving a Gender Responsive National Budget in Bangladesh ( <i>in Bangla and English</i> )
	Education for Improving Lives: Alternative Ideas ( <i>in English</i> )
<b>Booklet</b>	Women in Election Manifesto of Political Parties ( <i>in Bangla</i> )
	South Asia Regional Status Paper on Gender ( <i>in Bangla and English</i> )
	Political Empowerment of Women: In Parliament and Government ( <i>in Bangla</i> )
<b>Report</b>	Proceedings of the Workshop on Water and Democracy in South Asia ( <i>in English</i> )
	Daring to Lead: The Evolution of Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS) ( <i>in English</i> )
<b>Poster</b>	Bringing Changes in Politics: Increased Women Participation in South Asia ( <i>in English</i> )
	Women's Participation in Parliament in South Asia ( <i>in English</i> )
	Women and Men United to End Violence against Women and Girls ( <i>in English and Bangla</i> )
	Begum Rokeya ( <i>in Bangla</i> )
<b>Leaflet</b>	Unite to End Violence Against Women and Girls ( <i>in Bangla</i> )
	Memorandum to Political Parties on the Eve of 9 <sup>th</sup> National Parliament Election ( <i>in Bangla</i> )
	Ensure Ten Percent Direct Allocation for Women in National Budget ( <i>in Bangla</i> )
<b>Fact sheet</b>	Women's Advancement towards Political Empowerment ( <i>in Bangla</i> )
<b>Desk Calendar</b>	Women's Political Empowerment in South Asia ( <i>in English</i> )



### **Internal Audit System**

BNPS has taken a good step in the regular monitoring of its activities. Its internal audit department reviews the operation of the internal control system which keeps the management informed about the ongoing circumstances. The internal audit system also examines the different aspects of financial management such as checking bill vouchers, books of accounts, and whether the rules and regulations of accounts are properly followed or not. This internal audit system identifies the problems, the root causes of those problems and finds the ways to resolve them.

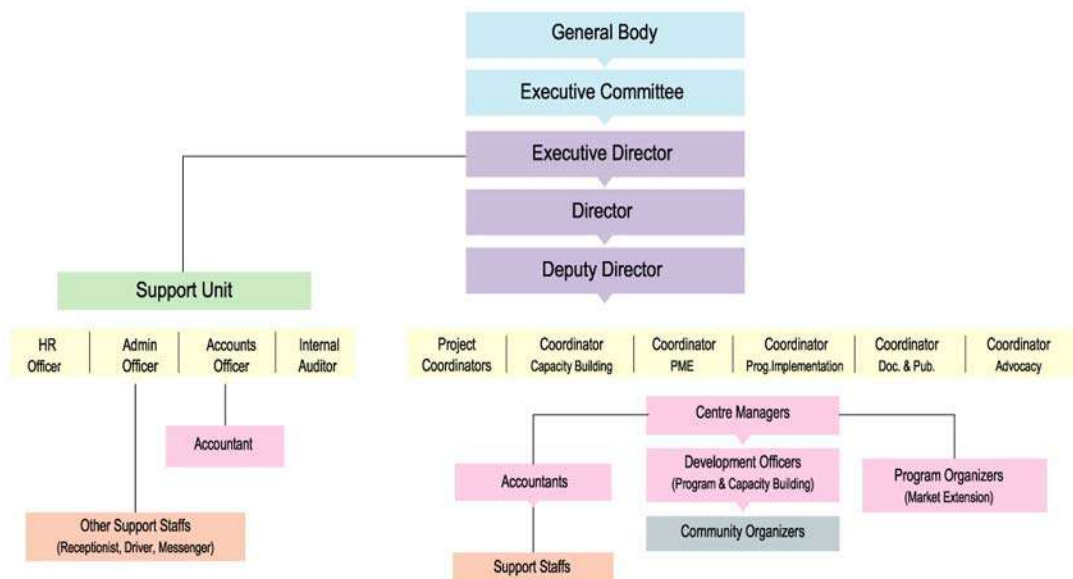
### **External Evaluation**

The most recent external evaluation of BNPS was carried out in May 2009 by a renowned audit firm of Bangladesh, ACNABIN. Assigned by Oxfam Novib, ACNABIN carried out an Organizational System Review of BNPS.

### Executive Committee of BNPS

Name	Designation	Profession
Ms. Rahima Chowdhurani	Chairperson	Social Worker
Ms. Shyamoli Nasreen Chaudhury	Vice Chairperson	Retd. Teacher
Afroza Banu	Vice Chairperson	Cultural Activist
Shibani Das	Treasurer	Retd. Teacher
Ms. Rokeya Kabir	Member Secretary	Freedom fighter and Women activist
Ms. Syeda Shamim Siddiqui	Member	Social Worker
Mahfuza Khanam	Member	Retd. Professor
Parveen Sultana Jhuma	Member	Journalist
Kanak Chanpa Chakma	Member	Artist

### Organogram





### Work Area of BNPS



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