

# **Empowering Women Entrepreneurs Through Microfinance – A Case of Rural Bangladesh**

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## **Abstract**

Women's empowerment has been at the centre of research focus for many decades. Extant literature examined the process, outcome and various challenges. Some claimed substantial success, while others contradicted with evidence of failure. But the success remains a matter of debate due to lack of empirical evidence of actual empowerment of women around the world. The current study aimed to address this gap by taking a case study method. The study critically evaluates 20 cases carefully sampled to include representatives from the entire country of Bangladesh. The study demonstrates popular beliefs about microfinance often misguide even the borrowers and they start living in a fabricated feeling of empowerment, facing real challenges to achieve true empowerment in their lives. The impact of this finding is twofold; firstly there is a theoretical contribution, where the definition of women's empowerment is proposed to be revisited considering findings from these cases. And lastly, the policy makers at governmental and non-governmental organisations, and multinational donor agencies need to revise their assessment tools for funding.

**Keywords:** *Women Entrepreneurs, Empowerment, Microfinance, Rural Bangladesh.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Microfinance is a powerful and potent instrument of social change, particularly so for women. Globally, microcredit schemes and programs serve almost 20 million people, of which 74 percent are women (Armendáriz and Morduch, 2010). The world's largest and most successful microfinance institution, the Grameen Bank, caters to mostly female clients, who make up 90 percent of their client base. In the hands of a woman, a microcredit loan has a better chance to change not just her life, but to improve her children's opportunities and her society's prosperity.

Women's empowerment is more social and psychological rather than economic in its characteristics. In rural Bangladesh, along with the poverty level reductions, these women would enjoy their freedom of choice and mobility.

Typically, most rural Bangladeshi women grow up with limited access to education, which further hinders their capability to earn a living and therefore, engage in informal sector work including selling groceries in roadside shops, working as domestic help, and crushing bricks (Asian Development Bank, 2001). However, to improve women's conditions in the society, non-government organizations (NGOs) promote microfinance programmes to provide employment opportunities, skills training

and awareness of women rights. The following discussion introduces a research that probed key practices of entrepreneurial efforts by Bangladeshi women in the local market through microcredit borrowing. Current understanding of microcredit practices is discussed followed by a brief discussion on the methods used for the study. Finally, a detailed discussion of the results with implications precedes recommendations for policies that may enrich the practices of microcredit.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Microfinance and Rural Women Entrepreneurs in Bangladesh***

Currently we see the major role of microfinance programmes as explicitly targeting rural women, to empower them to become small entrepreneurs. There are diverse motivations for pursuing the cause of women and their situations. There are many arguments that women are among the poorest and the most vulnerable of the underprivileged, and thus extending assistance to them should always be a priority. Additionally, others believe that making investments towards increasing women's skills and capabilities gives them the power to make choices of their own and important life decisions, which in turn contributes towards greater, more holistic economic growth and development. There are documented cases where increase in women's resources directly leads to the welfare of family, especially the children (Mayoux, 1996; Kabeer, 2001; Hulme and Mosley, 1996). Also, increased access to finance for women is representative of an opportunity for higher levels of empowerment (Mayoux, 2001).

Microfinance offers women the chance to enter the public sphere as businesswomen, expanding their roles

beyond the traditional ones of a housewife and mother and letting them become independent earners of livelihood. Participation in the economy also leads to greater involvement of women in the social and political spheres. Women may become strong enough to advocate for radical changes within their communities, leading to improvement in their social situations as well as benefitting other girls and women around them.

Feminist organizations most often perceive microcredit as an instrument in the fight for women's independence and rights (Loomba, 2014). Adding to this, is the prevalent belief of many microfinance institutions in Bangladesh that women frequently turn out to be more reliable and trustworthy borrowers, who are more likely to return the money than their male counterparts.

### ***Link to Other Sectors Where Women Can Use Microcredit***

It seemed that many of the women were largely unaware of the myriad of training programmes and skills enhancement facilities offered by the NGOs in the area. Raising this awareness, so that the women members of the microcredit schemes could fully avail themselves and gain maximum benefits from these income-generating activities and increase their knowledge and technical skills, would lead to these women becoming self-sufficient and are better able to take responsibility for themselves and their families.

Actively participating in microfinance programmes did increase their income levels, but to sustain this growth, it is imperative for these women to become skilled by training in various fields such as setting up their own SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises), where handmade products such as local handicrafts, pottery, household items, etc., they could

manufacture themselves could be sold. Besides these SMEs, there are also agricultural training services, where training is provided on setting up and managing poultry and dairy farms, advanced, technical knowledge on crop management and farming methods is imparted and many other valuable skills are being taught to women participants, so that they could take charge of earning their own livelihoods and improving the status of their families. Skilled women are more independent, self-sufficient and knowledgeable and in turn, are far more empowered than those who are simply receiving credit through microfinance programmes, without taking any initiatives to improve their skill set, to secure their future (Amir, 2015).

#### **Microcredit and Some Current Issues**

A joint study, conducted by the researchers Ruhul Amin, Stan Becker and Abdul Bayes attempted to explore the extent to which the level of poor women's participation correlated with how empowered they would become as a result. Empirical data from different regions of rural Bangladesh was employed in this regard. Quantitative data collected from a certain, representative sample of the female loan borrowers, as well as qualitative data taken from selected female loan borrowers of five NGOs across rural Bangladesh were analysed for this study. A comparison was made by the authors between two groups – one, consisting of NGO credit members (who were regular borrowers) from an NGO programme area and the other mostly comprising non-credit members (those who had never taken a loan) from non-NGO programme areas. Women's empowerment was the standout feature in this comparative study to find out whether the variation between membership and non-membership led to

any differences in the level of empowerment in women's socio-economic lives.

The outcome presented results which showed a positive connection between microcredit and empowerment (Amin, Becker and Bayes, 1998). But a current study shows only 10 percent have borrowed money more than 8 years before and they successfully utilise loan amount to transform income generating activities. This also proven by our quantitative research result, where Noorjahan and Nurunnahar claimed freedom of their choice of their small business and poultry business, have taken loan long before than others.

#### **Microcredit – The Way Forward**

A quantitative study carried out in the mountainous Chitral region, bordered by Afghanistan, Pakistan and China, revealed that there was general agreement among the participants and respondents about microfinance schemes increasing their personal self-confidence and courage and improving their skills set and self-worthiness. The statistics also revealed the trend that microcredit was positively correlated with higher literacy levels among the women and an increased awareness about children's education, health services, reproductive rights and facilities and also legal entitlements. The respondents also reported a marked increase in their awareness about their surroundings and environmental conservation, after participating in microcredit schemes. 92% of the respondents cited a reduction in poverty levels, as they started enjoying the benefits of either direct or indirect economic progress and a general atmosphere of peace and contentment prevailed in their families and households (Amir, 2015).

But the empowerment is more social and psychological in characteristics, than it

is so economically. Despite the poverty level reductions, there was still no long-term, sustainable action plan to ensure that these women would keep enjoying their improved financial status.

NGO credit members were well ahead in all three abovementioned aspects, when placed in comparison to non-credit members. On top of this, even the non-credit members who resided in NGO programme areas were better empowered in the authority and autonomy indices, in comparison to the non-members who lived in non-programme areas. There is also further indication that yearly income, house type and education level, etc. all tend to be positively associated with the autonomy indices (Bayes, 1999). And there is of course, the association of the duration of NGO membership and non-agricultural professions/occupations (the long-term members very often chose to move beyond agricultural activities and chose other methods of earning their livelihoods). In the member households, there was a considerable decrease in the level of restrictions and dominance husbands previously practiced in the household affairs.

All the positive findings in the results clearly point out that NGO credit programmes in rural Bangladesh are not only likely to bring about rapid economic improvement in the situation of women, but will also hasten their empowerment in all related areas. The characteristics of self-reliance, intelligence, practicality, confidence, assertiveness, and higher awareness of their rights, is often reported to be evident in NGO credit members (Bayes, 1999).

For most female borrowers, credit is much more than simply access to money. It entails women escaping from the vicious cycle of poverty, and achieving social, political and economic empowerment within their homes, villages and ultimately

in their countries, when observed collectively at the national level. Some prime examples are:

- Microcredit has played a prominent and crucial role in rural Bangladesh in the field of poverty reduction and over 40% of this could be attributed to microcredit programmes and the initiatives taken by NGOs in this regard.
- The combination of education and financial services programmes in Nepal and elsewhere in South Asia, has empowered women, to ensure the equal access to food, medical care and schooling, for female children and given women a stronger, more involved role in domestic, familial decisions and property transactions.

An anthropological study conducted by Rabiul Karim and Chi Kong Law (2013) used a cross-sectional design to collect data from 342 randomly selected participants in five northwest villages of Bangladesh. The study examined the influences of gender ideology on women's microcredit participation and their status within the household in rural Bangladesh. In the findings, almost 52 percent of the married women were microcredit borrowers. But, in 81 percent of the recorded cases, the financial dealings and the transactions of the loans were fully controlled by the husbands of these women. But quantitative survey of this study results indicated out of 325 borrowers, 30 percent of the borrowers' husbands held the borrowed money. This variation due to focused on specific geographic location but our study covers six division, situation differ due to socio-cultural impact.

So, there is a clear indication here that low socioeconomic status influences women borrowing loans, and a

conservative and constrained gender ideology prevents them from fully utilizing the benefits of the loan. On the other hand, the liberal gender ideology on the husbands' parts allow them to borrow the loans in the first place and in some exceptional cases, exercise more control over the newly acquired monetary resources (active microcredit participation), which leads to the improvement of their status as a household co-breadwinner.

One of the major practical implications of this study is that it discusses and analyses under what conditions microcredit intervention can contribute to improving women's status in rural Bangladesh. This kind of intervention should effectively address patriarchal ideology by producing an environment where people may have a chance to contemplate and rethink the importance of women's contributions and roles in society. It is quite true that despite the husbands allowing the women to borrow the loans, they still did not feel comfortable enough to delegate them with the responsibilities of handling the financial resources, as they believed the money to be a source of "power" and "authority", and most of the men in Bangladesh have clearly not transformed their mind-set enough, to relinquish their "dominant" positions in the household and in society (Karim and Law, 2013).

## **METHOD**

The research targeted the rural Bangladeshi women, exploring credit activities as a generator of women's empowerment and investigated the process of women's empowerment which enhancing their socio-economic status. About 82 percent of women lived in rural areas of Bangladesh in the late 1980s

(*Statistical Year Book of Bangladesh, 1998, BBS*), and majority of the borrowers are from rural Bangladesh. Hence, this study focused on women entrepreneurs from rural areas of Bangladesh.

Although the qualitative approach is dominant in this research, the method used was a combination of qualitative and quantitative both, namely the triangulation method. Quantitative data to get demographic information and qualitative data to get women's perceptions of in-depth data and information.

Qualitative methods are more appropriate and effective ways of collecting data when researching women's needs and interests (Boesveld, 1986). In complex social research, particularly in pluralistic and sensitive areas, qualitative approaches can provide more reliable and graphic accounts (Orum et al, 1991).

To grapple the long-term impact, we need to base our findings on an introspective approach. This led us to use the case study analysis method for deeper understanding of the phenomenon of empowerment among Bangladeshi women. In depth interviews were carried out with selected representatives from the survey samples following up on the responses later from the surveys. A thematic approach was used to guide the interviews but the open-ended nature of the themes allowed the respondents to tell their stories in a very unrestrictive manner.

Overall twenty interviews were carried out in this part of the research. The stories collected through these interviewees were reviewed by the researcher from audio tapes and written reports to relate the findings in the quantitative results. The critical analyses are recorded in the following sections of this chapter. The technique used in this part of the study is standard case study analysis.

## FINDINGS

### *Qualitative Analysis - Content Analysis*

After screening all the interviews for relevance with the findings in the quantitative survey the researcher identified the following 20 cases that were found to be significantly relevant. The age group of these samples was similar as the sample was extracted from the same group that responded the quantitative survey. And the rest of the demographic details remained the same.

A high proportion of the borrowers were in the middle age, which is between 25-45 years old, were married women and family consists of 4 members. These women struggle most to meet up their daily needs as well as provide at least reasonable life-style to their children. So, they ended up to taking loans from micro-credit providers to break cycle of the poverty.

### **Theme – Economic Empowerment**

#### *Freedom of Poverty*

Researcher observes in many cases where the average borrowing amount and the borrowing period reflects the results found in the quantitative results of this survey. For example, Mosammat Nafisa, 55-year-old widow borrowed Tk.1000, 2 years before from Association for Social Advancement (ASA) said:

“Oh Dear, after my only son passed way, I used to beg door to door for my living. When I heard from my neighbour about microcredit, I went their office and learn more about this and borrowed BDT 800 to get a certificate on vet- vaccination program. Now, I’m working as a veterinary nurse going different villages every day and not begging for living.”

### *Ability to Afford Gifts*

Changes in the spending abilities is a very common impact that we observe in a microcredit recipient’s life. The ability to spend more is perceived among these women as an indicator of empowerment. Researcher observes similar feelings in the following case. Nurunnahar, 50 years old, mother of four children and a grandmother is very happy with her poultry business. Without any educational qualification, she is running well her business well, paying instalments on time and thinking to buy a rickshaw for her youngest son. But her happiness lies on other reason. Now she can give gifts to her parents in an occasion like Eid and her husband cannot restrict her because she is using her own business profits. Nurunnahar said,

*“When occasions come, I used to beg to my husband to give me some money so that I can buy at least few things for my parents. But now, I don’t even inform him, I go to market and buy which I like most for them.”*

### *Ability to Afford Improved Livelihood*

When interviews were conducted, researcher noticed that every village woman were wearing lipstick, they were smelling nice with hair-oils and wearing colourful ribbons. Researcher thought, though they are going to meet an outsider (researcher), they felt to be more presentable. But then Momotaj, 37 years old microcredit precipitant for handicraft business, informed researcher that after taking microcredit, women are self-dependent now. They have their freedom of choice now, they prefer to spend money on their own cosmetics and they choose to look presentable in front of others. She also informed:

*“..... now my daughters and son can wear new dresses on the Eid (Religious festival). Before my husband used to buy, but now we all go to market to select our dresses.”*

Research found similar expressions as above case in the following case. Overall every interviewee agreed that after taking loan, their commodities consumptions have increased. Sobita Mondol, uneducated 44 years Hindu vegetarian widow, who bought a cow for her dairy business with loan said,

*“I used to sell milk but hardly can have it. But now I’ve two cows, giving sufficient milks which I can sell as well as consume me and family.”*

Sakhina Khanam also said the same story, 30 years old, uneducated married woman and mother of two said, they hardly used to buy fish and meat for their meals, these were occasional meal for them. But now Sakhina’s family can have fish, even big fishes, meat e.g. beef, mutton every week. As because they are doing well with their potato farming business which they started one and half years before after taking loan from Grameen Bank.

Jhorna Roy, 38 years old mother of two, who was well-off with her husband who used to be an office Clark in a private company. One year before when her husband lost his job, they fell in deep sea and then Jhorna’s graduation degree helped her to established first coaching centre in their locality. She borrowed Tk.5000, bought few mates and starts her teaching village school going girls. She said that now parents can afford private tutor for their children. This indicates that

now parents can afford private tutor for their children.

Noorjahan, a 45 years old woman from Chittogong is currently a member of the trusty board of a Nobel Prize winning Bank. She was originally born a village called Jobra in the poverty, stricken area of Chittagong. Her father was also a farmer maintaining family of 8 children. She was also married at a very young age of 13 and has had five children by the age of 25. She was involved in a pilot project by one of the micro-credit dispensing units and she changed her fate by utilizing the money and developing her small business in the locality. All her five children go to the school, the eldest just completed her graduation from one of the universities with a study loan support from the same bank that Noorjahan originally took support from. Now she is planning to send her eldest daughter overseas to complete her Master degree. This is another extreme example of a woman breaking out of the cycle of disempowerment and age-old history of gender based stratification in Bangladesh.

## **Theme – Social Empowerment**

### ***Diversity***

Business success lies on networks now-a-days. And that’s why mobile phones are famous even in rural villages of Bangladesh. Hosne Ara Banu, who is producing vegetables for outside market thinks “knowing the right price of her vegetables is one of the key factors to her business.

“Four years before I did not know, who is the potential buyer for my product and most of the vegetables have been destroyed. But now, I even borrowed another Tk.2000 to expand my vegetable garden.”

This story matched with a proxy indicator in quantitative survey, which showed that they can afford mobile phones which make them empowered and change their life-styles.

Morgina Begam, she was a 25 years old widow with 5 minor children (3 sons and 2 daughters) when her husband died. The husband's death was sudden and accidental due to snake bite one night when he was coming back from his warehouse at the local rice market. Margina suddenly found herself in a deep mass both financially and socially due to the absence of her family's principle care giver, the husband. It took about a month for Margina to have recuperated from this situation and strategies to survived fighting all the challenges due to the situation. She really could not gasp the depth of the challenges and ended-up working as a maid with a local family where the husband was a senior officer in one of the Grameen Bank branches in the locality. She had to start working as a maid due to lack of her skills both educational or financial management capacity although she was coming from an economically sound background. Margina was barely surviving with the income and couldn't afford to provide education or proper clothing and nutritious food for her 5 children. She was thinking of looking for 2nd or 3rd job when her current employer, the Grameen Bank officer empathized with her and advised her to up-skill with one of the programmes of Village health education and become a village health worker. She took the advice very positively and devoted in re-training herself beside her current employment.

This brought a dramatic change in her life style, extending her network, giving her mobility and financial freedom to save and invest in further projects such as buying a Rickshaw for her eldest son who was about to become an adult that

year. Her own income from the work as a village health worker and her son's additional income as a Rickshaw-puller gave them an opportunity to save enough to further invest in a shop at the local village market. Besides all these gradual financial developments Margina managed to marry off two of her daughters to respectable families and continued good quality education for her other children. When I met this woman, she was a proud mother, happy mother-in-law, and a woman full of confidence coming out of financial stability, enjoying a respectable status in her locality.

### *Status & Self-Esteem*

Selina Banu is doing very well in her poultry business, her husband and in-laws ask her before spending money, even they show respect too but she busted into tears when I ask how often you or your family members visits doctor. Five years before, she lost her first son, because on that time they were not able to go to doctor to do treatment for him. Her son had typhoid and passed away without medicine. Their situation has changed now, both are working and can have access to treatment.

Even respondents agreed that microcredit boost their life-styles, when they have been asked whether their husbands' behaviour towards them, they responded positively. Means their husbands are treating them with respect, listen them often as well as household decisions they take jointly. Konokchapa, 39 years old mother of three who is running tea-stall near to local market said, "now my husband lends me hands when I need for my tea-stall. He understood that the decision I took to borrow money and open this shop was good one year before. Now even sometimes he asks me whether I wish to watch Play (Jatra) or go for shopping to outside locality." Similar scenario was assessed in quantitative

survey where borrowers' perception of empowerment life-style changes and we have seen that their status within the family has increased.

We also observed evidences of secondary control over the finances reflected in our earlier results in our interviews. Sahara Khatun, 35 years divorcee living with her brother's family with her two daughters. Initially, her sister-in-law used to treat her like maid, had to do household works. On top of that her daughters used to be treated badly by her nieces and nephews. Then Sahara decided to be self-dependent and took loan to start her own poultry farm. But the financial matter controlled by her brother. This refers that even though she borrowed to be self-dependent but her brother has the control over money.

But another story strikes me very much which Researcher heard from Umorunness, who is also works as Health worker on BRAC's Health & Population Department. She said, there are some good and bad on her business and to meet up the installments, she had to sell most of her ornaments which she has got on her wedding time. In survey, we have noticed that their ornaments value decreases. We cannot be sure of the reason for this decrease but perhaps the extra investment needed to run their microcredit initiative might have been gathered from selling off these ornaments. But the overall decrease in their value of ornaments shows that although the spending power increases the priorities in spending changes as the income increases in the women of Bangladesh. They might be feeling more secured after starting to earn and thus are less interested to invest in ornaments in the form of secured savings.

Microcredit increased their respect on their in-laws too. Nasima 21 years old newlywed bride was deprived by their in-laws. She barely can go out with her

husband, because most of the time she used to be engaged with household works. She is high school graduate and has good scene of cosmetics and dresses. So, she decided to open a beauty parlor next to their residence. Within six months, her business becomes profitable business. Because there were no parlors around that area, so when village women need make-up or hair-do on their wedding day, Nasima's "Sundoree" parlor in only one destination. In survey, we assessed microcredit borrowers' perception of empowerment life-style changes and we have seen that their status/respect within the family has increased.

#### ***Persistence of Patriarchy***

Shikha Rani, Pottery maker borrowed money from microcredit provider long back and she is doing well in her business. But she was telling her story, she started crying:

"Didi (Sister) what can I say, how can I say that my husband still not allows me for delivery or buying raw materials for my pottery business".

This is the lack of control over business decisions which have been found in quantitative survey as well.

There are evidences about the freedom of movement over the microcredit borrowers although they are engaging in income generating activities. Madhobi Lata, unmarried 25 years girl took loan to buy a sewing machine and making dresses for other village women informed that she is not allowed participating any social activities e.g. Durga-Puja or Janmastami's dance or singing competitions. Because her father thinks if she participates, she won't get groom to get married with. Here we can see no freedom of movement due

to socio-cultural barriers which has been indicated on quantitative survey.

Kulsum, a 25 years old young woman from Kustia was born in a farmer's family who was involved in producing tobacco leaves in their agricultural farm. Since birth she was forced to be malnourished due to lack of her father's ability to provide sufficient food for a family of 4 sisters and 2 brothers. She was married to a local rickshaw-puller at an early age of 14 and had her first child at the age of 15. By 25 she has had 5 children, all of them are similarly malnourished, none of the 4 daughters goes to school like Kulsum and her only son is treated like a king within the household. So, Kulsum is living her life and covered a full-cycle giving birth to a next generation women in Bangladesh who's fate remains the same as their mother, of being treated as a second-class citizen of the society.

### **Theme – Political Empowerment**

The rural women borrowers in Bangladesh claims that they have been empowered in many of their responses, their involvement in the social clubs are very limited and this is reflected in the following case. Even her mother, Maya Saha also expresses her depression that she never ever allowed to cast vote independently. Her husband Mohon Saha decides which political party she should cast vote for.

### ***Summary of Findings***

#### **Social Status**

The change in lifestyles of the women in our cases is evident and correlates with our findings in the quantitative section of this study. Still the changes in empowerment are more evident as perceived rather than actual

empowerment. It is expected to have been reflected in their lives as the women in these case starts to play their changed role in the society as new income earners. Still these women have expressed serious concern about their status in the society or in some cases even with in their family.

In Noorjahan's example she has earned her status in the society through microcredit. She has broken the chain of the women's life-cycle through micro-credit which brings financial freedom in her life. After getting financial freedom, she has got the freedom of mobility in the community as well as outside the village which creates networking and enhances her social status.

On the other hand, Kulsum hasn't taken micro-credit and was fulfilling the life-cycle due to lack of financial freedom. And that financial restriction didn't allow getting proper education to her as well as her daughters which leads to children malnourish. So, Kulsum hasn't got social status because she hasn't got the freedom of mobility in the community and outside the village.

So, we need to investigate the reason for this leakage of empowering activities. We have to realize that the extra income those are being generated due to these microcredit activities are not independent of the economy and not even out of their family structure. Thus, the benefits are trickling towards the male counterpart of the women borrowers of microcredit. And the male beneficiaries fail to realize the role of women when they also claim the benefits out of these initiatives. They are perhaps being equally empowered and the inequality between these two genders remains unchanged. Details of this phenomenon will be discussed further in the following chapter of this thesis and will be thoroughly investigated comparing the concept with the current literature.

## CONCLUSION

The findings and evidence in the existing literature available on microcredit and women empowerment, indicate an apparently positive picture on how these initiatives have succeeded in improving the lives of women all over rural Bangladesh. Findings indicate a rise in living standards, decision-making power, mobility, self-respect and economic independence and financial stability amongst the credit members. The women end up spending more on household expenditures such as food, groceries, clothing, utilities, children's education, healthcare services and many others and they do so with more confidence and ease, due to the availability of finances. Lifestyles are substantially improved and most of literature points out the same aspect. But there are still some challenges and constraints and the whole picture is not so rosy.

As pointed out earlier, women still experience social restrictions, and must abide by certain, patriarchal norms and values, which keep them subservient to men. For example, as seen in my data and findings, women's freedom of movement is not changed that much, where they are still not allowed to travel to other neighbouring villages and cities, for business or any other purposes and husbands and other male members of their family influence their decisions in this regard. And as pointed out before, not much considerable transformations have occurred regarding the betterment of women's social status and political involvement and these areas need to be addressed.

Another article by Naila Kabeer (2005) explores some of these major negative aspects of microcredit and aims

to rethink the whole notion by questioning how much it really contributes to women empowerment. She concludes at the end of her paper that it is one of the injustices of the way that society is organized in Bangladesh that even extremely able women, those from better-off households and more educated, are largely unable to realize their entrepreneurial potential because their gender acts as a barrier to gaining access to the necessary resources. Men have always had more opportunities and choices in terms of accessing economic resources than women, from an equivalent class.

Women's higher repayment records in microcredit do not reflect their socialized compliance in the face of the instrumentalist authority of NGO or government officials, as the more negative evaluations tend to suggest, but also the compliance which comes with having very few choices and limited options. Kabeer suggests alternative, purposive interventions, which can help to direct resources to women, thereby overcoming past barriers which have led to the suppression of their entrepreneurial potential. And then these women must be welcomed on the grounds of efficiency and equity. (Kabeer, 2001)

As evidenced in my case studies and quantitative data, the indicators of women's empowerment are much more "perceived" in nature, rather than being "actual" empowerment. To bring about holistic, all-inclusive and more comprehensive transformations, the established patriarchal systems need to be challenged, deconstructed and overhauled and the mentality of men and male members of society, needs to change in a drastic way, so that the environment becomes more favourable and welcoming for women. Their contributions, their important role in the family and society, need to be duly acknowledged and given

its due importance, if women want to be treated as equals and given the respect that they rightfully deserve. Only then, will empowerment really come about and its effects positively impact Bangladeshi society.

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