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Jill Sperandio

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stitutions and to own them. I use data from government and informal sector
educational institutions and interviews with female private school owners col-
lected during fieldwork in Bangladesh. I discuss the factors that may militate
against women taking advantage of developing opportunities particularly in the
formal and private education sectors in Bangladesh. Adopting a critical feminist
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ing progress towards gender equity in educational leadership in the public and
private education in Bangladesh.

The underrepresentation of women in educational leadership and manage-
ment, from school to national level, continues to be a feature of education
systems worldwide. This is particularly the case in the countries of South
Asia, where teaching has been overwhelmingly male-dominated (Haq &
Haq, 1998). Many governments have acknowledged the need for gender
equity supported by conscious policy making and implementation to in-
duct women into managerial positions in education, but few have translated
intent into action. Women in South Asian countries have limited represen-
tation as principals or assistant principals of schools and colleges, or hold
positions in the higher levels of educational policymaking. This is the case
in the formal public education sector in Bangladesh.

However, changes in the delivery of education within Bangladesh have
the potential to provide many new opportunities for women to become in-
volved in leading and managing schools and other educational facilities.
The Government of Bangladesh (1990) acknowledged the difficulty of
meeting universal education goals given the limited nature of existing edu-
cational facilities and the financial resources available. As a result, the
Government, in conjunction with the Bangladesh National Commission of
UNESCO (BNCU), has authorized a number of developments in the field

About the Author

Jill Sperandio is an Assistant Professor in the educational leadership program at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Her research interest focuses on leadership for women and girls, both in the states and in developing countries around the world. Email: *jis204@lehigh.edu.*

of non-formal education that reach out to deprived groups within the school-aged population (Ministry of Education, 2005-2006). In addition, the expansion of the private education sector has been rapid and includes schools and universities; some licensed by the government but many remaining unlicensed (Ahmed & Ahmed, 2002).

These developments have created more leadership and management positions in formal and informal education sectors. They have also offered opportunities in the private education sector for entrepreneurial individuals to open and manage new schools. In this article I describe the extent to which Bangladeshi women have taken advantage of the increased opportunities both to lead and manage educational institutions and to own them. I use data from government and informal sector educational institutions and interviews with female private school owners collected during fieldwork in Bangladesh. I discuss the factors that may militate against women taking advantage of developing opportunities particularly in the formal and private education sectors in Bangladesh. Adopting a critical feminist perspective and an awareness of sociological research relating cultural differences to educational leadership, I conclude by recommending methods of ensuring progress towards gender equity in educational leadership in the public and private education in Bangladesh.

Background

The People's Republic of Bangladesh has a population now estimated to be 147.4 million people (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2006), 77% of whom live in rural areas (Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics [BANBEIS], 2004). Annual per capita purchasing power is US$ 2,100 (CIA, 2006). The literacy rate for both sexes for those 15 years and older is 43%, and for females 31.8% (BANBEIS, 2004). The population is predominantly Muslim (90%), and Hindu. The national language is Bangla although English is widely spoken and understood and was the language of instruction in public secondary schools until 1970 (CIA, 2006).

Formal structure of education in Bangladesh has many characteristics inherited from the British system established when the country was part of the British Indian Empire and subsequently from the educational system of India. There is a three-part education system in the formal government-op-

erated sector. This consists of five years of primary or elementary educa-
tion, three years of lower or junior secondary, and two years of secondary
schooling leading to the Matriculation Examination (World Educational
Service, 2004). Two years of higher secondary education follows, leading
to university entrance. Since Bangladesh established itself as an independ-
ent state in 1970, the language of instruction has been Bangla (Ahmed &
Ahmed, 2002).

More than 20% of all elementary schools and 97% of all secondary
schools are privately owned. Additionally, sixteen private universities are
modeled after higher education institutions in the United States in that they
offer four-year bachelor's degree programs, use a credit hour system and
follow the U.S. academic calendar year (BANBEIS, 2004). A very visible
group of schools in the private sector are English-medium; at the secondary
level, these schools prepare students for the British 'O' and 'A' level exami-
nations that are administered by the British Council in Dhaka, and
externally graded.

A large group of religious schools, the *madrasahs*, some or which are
private and some government supported, are generally linked to mosques
and rely on public donations to the mosques. The madrasahs provide a ba-
sic Muslim religious education and literacy to more than three million chil-
dren of whom 46% are girls (BANBEIS, 2004).

Non-Formal Education

A very different situation exists in the non-formal education sector consist-
ing of donor-funded schooling initiatives, where the donors range from so-
cial entrepreneurs to large charities such as World Vision and Christian Aid
to Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) funded through international
aid agencies. In the Fourth Five Year Plan for Universal Primary Education,
1990-1995, the Government acknowledged that although efforts to in-
crease enrollment in primary school, particularly for girls, had led to im-
provements, it was unable to deliver primary education to all school-age
children (Jalaluddin & Chowdhury, 1997). It therefore formally recog-
nized the importance of non-formal education and repeated its appeal for a
multi-front attack on illiteracy by expanding non-formal primary educa-
tion, strengthening the government mass literacy centers and mobilizing
NGOs (Government of Bangladesh, 1990).

Notable among the providers of non-formal education has been the Ban-
gladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) operating the Non-For-
mal Primary Education program (NFPE) that controls more than 34,000
schools in predominantly rural areas catering to more than a million stu-
dents (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee [BRAC], 2004). The
schools have been tailored to meet the needs of the poor who cannot afford
even the low costs associated with government schooling, either due to
monetary or opportunity costs. More than 70% of the students enrolled in
the schools are girls.

Table 1
Percentage of Females in Positions in the Ministry of Education
in Bangladesh.

Position	Total Positions	Females	%
Ministers, Secretaries, Directors	27	4	14.8
Deputy and Assistant Secretaries and Directors	111	27	24.3
Research and Education Officers and Trainers	61	33	54.0

(*Source:* Arzoo, 2003)

Women in Leadership Roles

The Formal Education Sector

Women are underrepresented in all areas of the education system in Bangladesh, with the exception of the non-formal sector. Women occupy few top level positions at the policy making and implementation levels in the Ministry of Education and the Directorates with the exception of the position of Minister of Primary Education (see Table 1).

In the government schools and colleges, women's representation at head and assistant head levels is low in comparison with men despite the fact that a number of these schools and colleges are single sex girls where female head teachers and assistant heads are mandatory (see Tables 2 and 3).

In the government madrasahs, none of the three superintendent positions are held by women, despite the large numbers of girls in these schools (see Table 4).

The Non-Formal Education Sector

Women have a much higher representation in both school leadership and policy making and implementation in the non-formal education sector, although no aggregated data are available. This has been in response to the

Table 2
Percentage of Females in Positions of Head/Deputy Heads Teachers
in Government Funded Colleges in Bangladesh.

Position	Total Positions	Females	%
College Heads	242	42	17.4
Assistant Heads	164	42	25.6

(*Source:* BANBEIS, 2006)

Table 3
Percentage of Females in Positions of Head/Assistant Head Teacher in
Government Funded Secondary Schools in Bangladesh.

Position	Total Positions	Females	%
Head	313	71	22.7
Assistant Heads	343	92	26.8

(*Source:* BANBEIS, 2006)

deliberate policies of international organizations and charities to imple-
ment gender equity in their hiring. Motivated both by philosophical consid-
erations and the practical need to qualify for external funding of their
projects, Bangladeshi NGOs have also adopted internationally recognized
gender equity standards. Outstanding in the development of non-formal
educational facilities that both serve girls and promote female leadership is
the BRAC educational program.

In the BRAC schools, more than 90% of head teachers are women who
are married and live within the local community. BRAC school
teacher/school head positions for one room rural schools require a mini-
mum academic qualification of a Secondary School Certificate (SSC). The
academic qualification may be relaxed for exceptional candidates but ten
years of schooling is a minimum requirement. The teacher must be pre-
pared to complete the teacher training course of at least 15 days at any of the
BRAC training centers within the first year of employment. She must be a
permanent resident of the village in which the school is located, be ac-
cepted by the community, be married, and have another source of income
for her family (as this is regarded as a part-time job that has an honorarium
of $ US 20 per month). Additionally, she cannot bring her children to
school during school time, and cannot have family restrictions or social
barriers for conducting co-curricular activities.

The selection process involves a panel of Regional Managers, Quality
Assurance Specialists and Area Education Managers, who short list 3–5

Table 4
Percentage of Females in Positions of Head/Assistant Head Teacher in
Government Funded or Licensed Madrasahs.

Position	Total Positions	Females	%
Head	8,316	236	2.8
Assistant Head	6,565	113	1.7

(*Source:* BANBEIS, 2006)

qualified women. The short-listed candidates are interviewed and take a written test to establish their mastery of mother tongue, math, English, and general knowledge. Two successful candidates are selected for each school position, one of whom goes on for training, the other who serves as a backup in the case of sickness or dropout on the part of the selected applicant (A. Tapan, personal communication, July 2, 2006).

At the trainer and administrative level, women now hold approximately a third of available positions in the BRAC organization, which has actively promoted female leadership at its Program Organizer (PO) level, tailoring recruitment to women in isolated rural areas. A PO must have a minimum qualification of a Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSSC). Program Officers supervise 12 to 16 schools, and their work covers three areas of leadership and management. The first concerns the opening of new schools that involves meetings with local communities, site selection, teacher and student recruitment, communication with local government, school budget development, supplying the school, and parent contacts. The second group of activities concerns the operation of new and reopened schools, involving bi-weekly school visits to supervise schools, monthly refresher training for teachers, attending and coordinating monthly parents meetings, organizing school committee meetings, maintaining contact with local government and others influential in the community, transferring students to formal education, school repair, and parent contact. The third area in which PO's are active is that of office management that includes the writing of school supervision reports, weekly meetings with area officials, maintaining documents and stock registers, and teacher attendance and leave.

Not only have the positions of school teacher/head of school and of program officer provided a large number of secondary school educated women in rural areas with work outside the home, training and an opportunity to use both their education and leadership and management skills, but they have also revolutionized Bangladeshi village communities. The leadership of village schools by women has done away with the stereotypical role of the male teacher or master. It has provided these women teachers with status in society, financial independence, and also political recognition. More than 400 female teachers were elected as community representatives in local union-level elections in 2002 (BRAC, 2004). Women program organizers also defy norms regarding women's seclusion and limited physical space by bicycling or motorcycling from school to school across the countryside. In doing so, they provide important role models for the female students in the schools they serve.

The Private Education Sector

The Government's inability to expand the formal secondary education sector has led to the rapid growth of private secondary schooling, colleges, and universities since the 1980s. Table 5 indicates the corresponding opportunities that this expansion has provided for school administrators. However, the percentage of these positions that have been secured by women is mark-

Table 5
Women in Educational Leadership in the Private Education Sector.

Position	Total Positions	Females	%
College Heads	2,368	135	5.7
Assistant Head	419	31	7.4
Licensed School Head	16,664	1,079	6.5
Licensed Assistant School Head	12,888	1,067	8.3

(*Source:* BANBEIS, 2006)

edly smaller than that of the formal sector. Women are either not seeking these positions, or are failing to secure them.

Women Entrepreneurs in Private Schooling

The expansion of the private school sector has, however, offered a group of women an opportunity to own and lead schools. A group of prominent, private English medium schools are owned by women, in some cases funded by family assets, in others by loans obtained from banks. Interviews with seven of these school owners indicated that there were a number of commonalities in their experiences. The women come from elite social groups. They are highly educated, often schooled in English medium schools run by Christian missionary groups or the Catholic Church, and then at local Bangladeshi universities in the period prior to Bangladesh gaining independence from Pakistan.

These women set up schools shortly after independence in 1972 in response to a middle and upper class backlash to the change from English to Bangla as the language of instruction in government schools. Private schools were not legally recognized at this time, and as such, the women took advantage of a loophole in the law which allowed tutoring businesses where class size did not exceed nine students. While initially providing English medium schooling for the owners' children and those of friends at both primary and secondary levels, the schools rapidly attracted the children of people powerful in the new government. This clientele offered the women protection from prosecution as they expanded, and ultimately the opportunity to purchase school sites and negotiate bank loans, services not previously offered to women. These women went on to expand their small businesses to become high prestige educational institutions marked by high student achievement as measured by student success on British public examinations. All the women attributed their success to their determination to maintain high academic standards and be responsive to the niche markets that they served (Y. Murshed, personal communication, June 26, 2006).

The women founders of these schools were, in some instances, able to utilize family connections and family financial resources. However, one female pioneer in the private school business broke new ground by gaining both loans without family collateral (commercial banks up to this point did not loan to women) and by persuading the government to make available government land and schools abandoned with the partition from Pakistan in 1975 at fixed prices for private school developers. The success of this woman opened the door for many others to follow.

Private English-medium schools have been given a further boost by the globalization of the garment industry which is a major contributor to the Bangladeshi economy. This industrial growth has helped develop an affluent middle class with family and business connections in Britain, the United States, and the Middle East. However, although the existing female-owned and operated schools have continued to thrive, an initial survey of new schools suggests that women are no longer finding it easy to enter the market. With expectations rising among the middle and upper class client population with regard to standards of school facilities and teaching, new schools are being developed by consortia of businessmen with large financial resources and extensive commercial experience. Women attempting to start up new schools with limited financial assets may find it difficult to compete.

Analysis

The opportunities offered by an expanding non-formal and private education sector, a more gender sensitive approach to filling civil service positions in the ministries and directorates at government level, and the high profile of women in elected government positions, provide opportunities and a favorable climate for women to assume more management and leadership roles in education. Although the numbers of women who have done this has increased during the past decade, particularly in the non formal sector where opportunities have been tailored to the needs of women, women's involvement does not appear to be keeping pace with the expansion of opportunities available to them. Failure to fill positions as school leaders reduces the opportunities available to women to bring a fresh perspective to school leadership, redefine power and power structures in policy making in education, and provide role models and mentors for new generations of women less bound by traditional social constraints. As Heck (1996) noted, "school principals definitely play a key role in translating changing societal aspirations into educational experiences desired by the community" (p. 93).

Factors Discouraging Women from Taking Leadership and Management Positions

The key question posed by Jensen (2003) regarding underrepresentation of women in educational leadership is, "to what extent are women actively en-

couraged or discouraged from applying for management and leadership positions [in schools]?" (p. 5). Cultural considerations must play an important part in answering this question for any given group of women and a number of researchers have explored this issue. Cubillo and Brown (2003) examine how the "glass ceilings and glass walls" (p. 278) that face women aspiring to leadership positions vary from culture to culture, but that successful negotiation of these barriers had commonalities across cultures with women attributing their success to familial support and encouragement. Norris and Inglehart (2000), discussing the larger issue of women assuming societal leadership roles in a world-wide study, noted that "culture matters" (p. 14) and that available opportunities and favorable attitudes towards women's leadership, by themselves, "are not sufficient to produce effective breakthroughs in the structural and institutional barriers, especially in the short term" (p. 14). Shakeshaft (1989), building on models explaining women's lack of achievement in obtaining educational management positions in the USA (Hansot & Tyack, 1981), depicts internal barriers to success, such a low self image, lack of confidence, and lack of motivation or aspiration as resulting from the social context of men holding power and privilege over women in society at large. A study of barriers to women managers' advancement in education in Uganda (Brown & Ralph, 1996) also noted the effects of reduced access of women to education, the experiences that females have in education which are different to the experiences of males, and the additional social responsibilities that the majority of girls and women hold.

A study of the problems faced by women aspiring to leadership positions in Pakistan (Memon, 2003), a country with a similar social and religious structure to Bangladesh, suggested that women in South Asian patriarchal Moslem cultures face a number of challenges. Women from middle and low socio-economic backgrounds face competition not only from males, but from women of elite backgrounds with access to information, resources and mobility, and who may use the *Queen Bee Syndrome* (Edson, 1988) to discourage, rather than encourage, other women. Women operate in a culture of male dominated management in which women managers do not challenge their male counterparts' views in professional settings. Women become passive participants and do not learn skills and advance up the career ladder as a result. Women have multilevel social responsibilities and are cautious about seeking promotion if this would mean a move away from their home. In more traditional households in the existing patriarchal society, issues of *purdah* or seclusion, dependence on men due to lack of personal assets, and the lack of female support groups militate against women pursuing careers. Women do not conform to the 'tough' and 'authoritarian' style that males in the profession adopt, and they are therefore seen as 'too weak' to operate effectively in large schools and educational organizations. Traditional hiring and promotion procedures and requirements discourage or disadvantage women, especially when they require many years of experience in the educational labor force and previous leadership experience, or

involve recommendations or interviews with predominantly male superiors. Women may face harassment from their male peers or superiors in the workplace that discourages them from pursing a career (Memon, 2003).

Although there is little research on the experiences of Bangladeshi women who seek careers in education and aspire to management and leadership positions, studies of the effects of promoting girls' secondary education in Bangladesh by subsidizing school fees suggests that traditional attitudes toward women could well discourage them seeking such positions. Sarker, Chowdhury, and Tariq (1995) noted that education for girls is mostly perceived as a domestic benefit, enabling them to get better husbands, to help their husbands, or to teach and better look after their own children. Sweetser (1999), in a report exploring gender relations, non-formal education, and social change in Bangladesh, noted a marked generational difference in attitudes towards women. She described the attitudes of older men, which included their disapproval of 'modern trends' of women or girls going to school, working in the fields, arranging their own marriages, riding bicycles and motorcycles, taking up seats on buses, and being served in a shop first. Sweetser also noted that "typically, the first benefit of girls' education cited by villages pertains to their future roles managing the home economy" (p. 19). One male interviewee in this study stated he believed it was pointless sending girls to secondary school because they would still have to bribe someone to get a job, and "What they really need . . . is a husband" (p. 18). However, Raynor (2005), in her study of girls' access to education in Bangladesh, noted that "most people linked girls' education to employment, but for the men/boys interviewed, the stated reason was almost exclusively financial, whereas women/girls linked employment to such things as 'independence' confidence and worth" (p. 95).

Raynor (2005) also noted that Bangladesh government support of gender equity has a chequered history. Bangladesh ranks 76th out of 78 countries on the UNDP Gender Empowerment measure. When the Government of Bangladesh ratified the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), it maintained reservations on all articles calling for women's equal rights in the family (Jahan, 1995). Moni (2005) highlights the 'rewriting' of the National Women's Development Policy adopted in 1997 with the aim of creating an enabling environment for the empowerment of women and furthering gender equity in line with the requirements of various international conventions to which Bangladesh is a signatory. Among the changes proposed is the replacement of the commitment to appoint women to 30% of all government posts to ensure women's equal and full participation at all levels of decision making including the policy making positions of the government by the less stringent one "to increase participation and increase existing quotas of women in decision making positions" (p. 3).

Currently the lack of expansion in the formal government secondary school system due to financial constraints also contributes to a lack of opportunity to move into administrative positions. Positions only become

available on the retirement or resignation of incumbents, with a group of highly qualified and long-serving practitioners waiting their turn. In situations such as this, the only women who would meet the formal qualifications, which include school employment, are employed in girls' schools so that increased female representation in secondary school administration would mean women moving from the single sex to coeducational schools allowing other women to take their place in the girls' schools. Given traditional attitudes to women in Bangladeshi society, selection committees staffed by older males are unlikely to look favorably on women applying for leadership positions.

It is important to note that women are underrepresented in the teaching profession in general, representing only 34% of the teachers in government secondary schools, 18.6% of the teachers in non-formal and private schools, and 36% of the teachers in primary schools, both government and private (BANBEIS, 2004). Over all, less that 6.5% of all teachers and administrators in the government and private schools are women.

Discussion and Recommendations

Women's underrepresentation in educational leadership in Bangladesh appears to have many causes ranging from traditional attitudes linked to patriarchy and religion, to the lack of a pool of qualified women due to limitations in access to secondary education for girls, to a failure of the government to adopt measures that would open up leadership positions to women. Clearly there is a need for research that focuses on the experiences of women aspiring to, and holding management and leadership positions in all branches of the education system in Bangladesh. Women's perceptions of the barriers they face and how they can be overcome, together with the benefits they perceive for both themselves and society at large by occupying such positions are important to determine what measures to take to create a more gender equal situation.

However, there appear to be a number of measures that could be taken to increase both the pool of women qualified to move into leadership positions, and to ensure that positions are made available to them. Raynor (2005) noted

> many of the education programs operating in Bangladesh to improve girls' access to secondary education have as an objective the channeling of girls into teaching, partly to ensure that girls have female role-models in schools, partly because teaching is seen as an 'appropriate' job for women, but also to meet the needs of the ever-expanding education system. (p. 90)

Although increasing girls' access to secondary education and increasing the pool of women teachers in a traditionally male-dominated profession is clearly an important first step, career counseling that includes developing aspirations and expectations of leadership experience is important to coun-

tering traditional male expectations that education will simply be used to enhance family well-being and teaching is an end in itself.

The BRAC model that targets women for leadership positions, providing training and a work environment sensitive to women's needs, which include the ability to work near home, to have the support of the community, and an opportunity to advance up a scale of increasing responsibility, should be emulated in the formal education sector. The evidence from BRAC suggests that not only do individual women benefit from such leadership opportunities, but that once gained, women employ their leadership skills in many other spheres to the enrichment of society at large.

Women entrepreneurs in the private education sector are currently limited to an elite group of well-educated women who enjoy the backing and resources of their families. However, the opportunities for individual women to undertake this type of entrepreneurship may well be limited by the increasing costs of developing schools, and a lack of understanding of the ways in which schools can be made cost effective while delivering high quality education. At the lower end of the socio-economic scale, government, NGOs, and other related agencies are providing many opportunities to promote entrepreneurial skills among women (Chowdhury, 1998; Chowdhury & Naher, 1993). However, there appears to have been no consideration given to promoting school ownership among women of lower socioeconomic status, although the need for schools clearly exists. A study of private schooling in India noted its potential for providing an income flow for lower caste families (Tooley & Dixon, 2003). Existing provision of loans and training to low income women to start private schools as commercial ventures should be given serious consideration given that it would both increase the well-being of these women and their families, and provide an important service to the communities in which they live.

Increasing female representation in the leadership of schools and colleges, as well as the policy making branches of the Ministry of Education should be a priority for a government committed to gender equity. Bangladesh should follow the example of countries such as Uganda by requiring all government and licensed private schools to appoint a male and female administrator to the position of head and deputy head of school, thus increasing the number of women with the required experience to help determine educational policy. Similarly, the qualifications needed for promotion, particularly those relating to length of service in the teaching profession, should be reviewed in recognition of the limited opportunities women have had to obtain a secondary education, which in turn limited the representation of women in the teaching profession. The government should honor its commitment to a minimum 30% of women at the policy making level, the internationally recognized minimum needed for women's voices to be influential at this level.

The ability of women to assume leadership and management roles in all sectors of the Bangladesh education system deserves further study. Attitudes and traditional community structures are changing, and women must

position themselves to be active participants in the change process if they are not to be further disadvantaged.

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