

Chapter-32

Ministry of Religious Affairs

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Religion has been an important institution since the dawn of time. It is inseparable from politics, economy, social policies, art and culture as well as from the passionate world of a human being. Religion helps society by managing different practices of customs directly or indirectly. The essence of all religions is the worship of truth, and pursuit of harmony. Religion brings peace, happiness, rules and discipline in a society. In the present world, development is also associated with religion. Therefore, religion is quite important for every aspect of the society and the state.

1.2 Bangladesh is a land of liberal religious culture. Government has taken a number of initiatives to administer religious consciousness effectively. The strategies of government have been published in different policy documents including the 7th Five Year Plan. A major aspect of the Religious Affairs sub sector of the 7th Five Year Plan is pre-primary education program. This program is intended to increase the literacy among men and women as well as teaching of religious and moral values. The overall target of the 7th Five Year Plan is to increasing the enrolment of 6+ Childs to primary school, increase the literacy rate of adolescent and illiterate adults and increase opportunity of disadvantaged poor learning of Holy Quran which uplift morality, social and religious values. Besides free Medicare service will be given to the poor and disadvantaged people. All these initiatives are closely associated with women's advancement.

2.0 Major Functions of the Ministry

- ❖ Extending the overall co-operation and providing grants to the poor, taking initiatives for resource mobilisation in implementing development activities of the Islamic Foundation, Waqf Administration, Hindu, Buddhist & Christian Religious Welfare Trusts relating to their research and supervision;
- ❖ Dealing with all matters relating to Haj and Umrah, including announcement of Haj policy and Haj Package, signing of bi-lateral Haj agreement and management of residential accommodation for Haj pilgrims and matters related to other religious tours and religious delegations to and from foreign countries;
- ❖ Assistance in Maintenance of Waqf and Debouttar properties and providing assistance in the operation;
- ❖ Assisting research and publications in the field of religion and providing co-operation in the management of charitable institutions;

- ❖ Arranging and participating in international conferences, seminars and dialogues on matters related to religions and religious affairs and establishing contacts, relations, improving relations and signing contracts, agreements, conventions with different countries and international organisations/ institutions;
- ❖ Ensuring social development, conducting research, preventing corruption and terrorism, strengthening fraternity and religious harmony through the different activities of religious organisations;
- ❖ Providing grants-in-aid including reforms of different religious organisations and institutions, matters related to moon sighting and celebration of important occasions.
- ❖ Supporting the destitute for their rehabilitation with financial assistance.

3.0 Strategic objectives of the Ministry and their relevance with Women's Advancement and Rights

- ❖ **Establishment of moral and ethical society:** pre-primary learning centers will increase the participation of girls in education. This will increase their social awareness, participation in social activities and overall social security. Women's employment opportunities will be increased in different education centers. Women's participation in post-literacy and continuing education courses will be ensured through prioritizing women's participation in such courses. This will make direct impact on women's empowerment. With higher education, women's participation in decision-making process and economic activities will also be increased.
- ❖ **Efficient & effective management of Hajj activities:** To ensure facilities and services to the increasing number of female pilgrims, female member are being employed in different delegations. This is making a positive impact on women's advancement.
- ❖ **Development & improvement of the management of religious organizations and infrastructure:** Improvement of the management of Waqf Estates and Debouttar Properties will create women's employment and help promote their income. Women will be indirectly benefitted from the development of religious institutions.
- ❖ **Improvement of socio economic status of the religious personalities and the destitute:** Zakat money is playing a direct role in making the extremely poor and destitute women financially self-reliant. Women's economic self-reliance will increase their dignity in the family and in the society.

4.0 Roles and Responsibilities of the Ministry of Religious Affairs for Women's Advancement and Rights

4.1 Ministry of Religious Affairs has been playing an important role in improving women's economic and social status in the society. Under the Mosque, Pagoda and Temple based child and mass education program, 20 lac 89 thousand girls and boys are getting pre-primary and religious education and literacy knowledge at 64,800 education centers throughout the country. Besides, about 11 lakh 09 thousand 380 hundred women are getting health care facilities and self-employment opportunity through Islamic Mission and Zakat fund program.

5.0 Priority Spending Areas and Benefits for Women's Advancement

Serial No.	Priority Spending Areas/Programmes	Impact on Women Development (direct/indirect)
1	2	3
1.	Pre-school and religious education for child development	Expansion of pre-primary and religious education is making way for women to eradicate illiteracy. As a result, the scope for the freedom of expression and employment for women is being widened.
2.	Training to religious personalities for enhancing their social awareness	This program will diminish the insensitivity of religious personalities. They will be more conscious and contribute to anti-social activities. In the long run this will result in the reduction of violence against women.
3.	Development of Haj and Umrah management and sending delegation team with Medical team	Development of Haj and Umrah management by providing on line registration, Visa lodgment and modern technology. Now women members included in the Haj delegation team and Haj Medical team. This is making a positive impact on women's advancement.
4.	Research and publication of books	The sense of ethics and values develops the sense of respect towards others. This will also help raise the dignity of women.
5.	Bringing dynamism in library and continuing educational activities for socio-economic & moral development	Through this program women are gaining knowledge and becoming self-educated and self-reliant.
6.	Give financial assistance to the poor & destitute people and extension of health care services	Destitute women can be self reliant through grants-in-aid. Expansion of medical facilities in remote areas is creating opportunities to improve women's general and reproductive health. This will reduce mortality rate of woman.

Serial No.	Priority Spending Areas/Programmes	Impact on Women Development (direct/indirect)
1	2	3
	Implementation of Islamic cultural activities aimed at achieving mental development of children	Mental and social development for the children, adolescents group in schools, colleges and madrasha level.

6.0 Women's Share in Ministry's Total Expenditure

(Taka in Crore)

Description	Budget 2017-18			Revised 2016-17			Budget 2016-17		
	Budget	Women Share		Revised	Women Share		Budget	Women Share	
		Women	percent		Women	percent		Women	percent
Total Budget	400266	112019	27.99	317174	86586	27.3	340605	92781	27.24
Ministry Budget	659	280	42.55	606	338	55.81	524	270	51.6
Development	443	273	61.61	394	331	83.95	321	257	80.26
Non-Development	216	8	3.49	212	7	3.43	204	13	6.51

Source: RCGP database

7.0 Success in Promoting Women's Advancement

- ❖ **Mosque, Temple and Pagoda based child and Mass literacy program:** This program was started in 1992. Total 1,48,30,450 learners got education under this program of which 72,41,730 were women.
- ❖ **Islamic Mission program:** Both allopathic and homeopathy treatments are provided through this program. Since its inception in 1983, this program provided allopathic treatment to 1,87,64,480 persons and homeopathy treatment to 59,83,752 persons. In 2016-17 financial year, this program provided allopathic and homeopathy treatment to 11,80,000 persons, about 50% of which are women.
- ❖ **Collection and distribution of Zakat among poor for self-reliance:** 'Zakat Board' helps the poor through different areas of activity. The board provided support to 470, 898, 940 and 1230 women in 2011-12, 2012-2013, 2013-14 and 2014-15 financial years respectively. The board provided support to 18,658 women in 2016-17 financial year .

8.0 Recommendations for Future Activities

- ❖ The number of female teachers should be increased in the programs of pre-primary education and religious education.
- ❖ Initiatives should be undertaken to disseminate the interpretations of different religious books relating to the issues of women rights.
- ❖ It should be raised in all forum that every religion accords special place to women.
- ❖ Awareness building programs should be undertaken to eradicate religious superstitions.