

Chapter-40

Ministry of Shipping

1.0 Introduction

1.1 From time immemorial, the history, economy, society and culture of Bangladesh have evolved centring rivers. The tales of joys and sorrows and the history of success of the people of Bengal have been depicted against the background of hundreds of rivers crisscrossing the country. There was a time when rivers were the sole means of communication serving as economic pipeline of Bangladesh. Since old eras, the civilisation flourishing on the banks of rivers has continuously shaped the economy, society and cultural life of this country. Not only the river routes, but also Chittagong and Mongla ports and in recent years Payra port and land ports being Bangladesh's main gateway to external trade are the key stakeholders of the development of the country. The Ministry of Shipping is actively engaged in connecting the internal trade to the external world through the river routes. This Ministry is entrusted with the task of invigorating the economy by maintaining the navigability of waterways crisscrossing the country, managing river-ports and landing stations, and undertaking various activities to upgrade shipping facilities.

1.2 Waterways are the most important means of communication in a populous country like Bangladesh as extension of river-routes has no impact on per capita arable land. This means of communication is popular across the globe because this is economical, environment-friendly and less risky than other modes of transport. The cost of transporting 1 ton of goods through inland waterways is below Taka 1.00, whereas it is Taka 2.50 by rail and Taka 4.50 by road.

1.3 Every year about 225 million passengers and 25 million vehicles are transported by ferries, coaster and cargo services through inland waterways. About 60 percent of export and import is made through Chittagong and Mongla seaports. Moreover, waterways are the only means of communication of the people living in coastal areas. A total of 23 land ports operating under the Ministry of Shipping play an important role in expanding bilateral and tripartite trade. Thus the Ministry of Shipping is contributing effectively towards accelerating growth by transporting passengers and goods economically and expanding inland and overseas trade.

2.0 Major Functions of the Ministry of Shipping

- ❖ Management, development and maintenance of river-ports, seaports and land-ports;

- ❖ Maintenance, conservation and development of beacon lights and lighthouses on coastal routes and installation of buoys and PC ports on inland river routes;
- ❖ Formulation, execution and updating of laws/acts, rules and regulations relating to ports, shipping and maritime affairs;
- ❖ Ensuring safety of inland water transportation and providing maritime and marine services;
- ❖ Maintenance and development of navigability of inland and coastal waterways;
- ❖ Management, control, survey and registration of mechanized marine vessels, providing maritime education and training, issuing certificates and licenses;
- ❖ Control of pollution generated by marine vessels on inland waterways and in maritime boundary of Bangladesh; and
- ❖ International and bilateral matters relating to shipping and mercantile marine.

3.0 Strategic objectives of the Ministry and their Relevance to Women's Advancement

- 3.1 Modernisation of seaports, development of channels and enhancement of skills and improvement in quality of services:** Owing to implementation of this strategic objective, cost of imports and exports of the country will be reduced and the quality of service, improved. As a result, commodities will be produced and marketed at a lower cost and local and foreign investment, increased. These will holistically raise employment opportunities resulting ultimately in enhancement of women's engagement in economic activities.
- 3.2 Overall development and expansion of shipping system:** Steps have been taken to raise new fleet of merchant ships with a view to making the existing shipping system of the country more dynamic. Massive employment opportunities will be created through development of skilled manpower in the maritime sector. This also holds potential for women's employment.
- 3.3 Development and maintenance of inland waterways and expansion of inland water transport system:** Women's access to labour markets has been easier and opportunities created for them to be engaged in income-generating activities. Women's movement through inland waterways is on the increase as this mode of transport is women-friendly and cheaper than other means of communication.
- 3.4 Expansion of export and import activities through development of physical infrastructures at land ports:** There has been an increase in the import from and export to neighbouring countries made through a total of 23 land ports at present. This has also enhanced women's opportunities of getting better services.

4.0 Role of the Ministry of Shipping in developing Women and establishing their Rights

- 4.1 Owing to the roles played by the Ministry of Shipping in overall development of communication network in the country, economic activities are becoming vibrant, trade and commerce expanding, and opportunities are being created for fresh employment. As a result, scope for women's involvement in economic activities is broadening. Moreover, women's connectivity to the broader society is growing further alongside enhancement of their mobility. Thus the development activities of the Ministry of Shipping are creating positive impact on women's development although this issue is not mentioned conspicuously in policy documents.
- 4.2 In marine vessels, spacious seating arrangements have been made and facilities for drinking water, separate toilets and emergency medical care provided for women passengers; in addition, safe embarkation and disembarkation facilities have been ensured for them. In the infrastructures of seaports, river ports and land ports, waiting rooms have been provided for women passengers along with facilities for drinking water and toilets. Steps have been taken to ensure hassle-free delivery of services to women along with ticket collection facilities.
- 4.3 In order to ensure the security of female passengers, personnel of Bangladesh Ansar (home guard) have been deployed round the clock in ferry and launch services and at landing stations. It has been ensured to attach top priority to salvaging women and children in rescue operations following accidents. The Ministry of Shipping has taken initiatives to procure technology-based, modern rescue vessels that will indirectly impact upon the safety of womenfolk in the events of accidents.
- 4.4 Shipping system has been improved owing to continuous efforts taken to ensure the maintenance and enhancement of navigability of waterways under the supervision of the Ministry; this has resulted in conserving fresh water, increasing irrigation facilities, spreading fish cultivation and improving environment. As a result, quality of life has been raised and scopes widened for women to take part in economic activities. Apart from these, the works of excavation of rivers have created employment opportunities from which women labourers are deriving direct benefit.
- 4.5 Owing to development of the waterways encircling the city of Dhaka, qualitative improvements have been made to environment and water of riverbank areas which are expected to create a positive impact on maternal and child health. Special facilities have been provided in waterbuses plying the circular waterways around Dhaka to ensure comfortable travel of women users.
- 4.6 Efforts are underway to provide web-based information about the departure and arrival of vessels operating in different river routes and rates of passenger fares and

cargo charges at various river ports and terminals. Computerisation of the works of various agencies under the Ministry will enhance the quality of shipping services giving benefits to women. On the other hand, port-centric ICT-based service sector will provide employment opportunities for women.

5.0 Priority Spending Areas and Programmes of the Ministry of Shipping and their Impact on Women's Advancement

| Serial No. | Priority Spending Areas/Programmes | Impact on Women's Advancement (Direct or Indirect) |
|------------|--|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 1. | Development and maintenance of inland waterways and important channels | Employment opportunities will be generated for women labourers in construction of development infrastructures and excavation works undertaken to ensure the navigability of channels for continuing uninterrupted river traffic service through inland waterways and port channels during dry season. Women passengers using waterways will be benefitted owing to development of river routes. Apart from this, women will get easier access to labour markets and more opportunities of income-enhancing employment as their movement will be smooth and hassle-free through inland waterways. |
| 2. | Maintenance and development of infrastructure facilities for water transport | Temporary employment opportunities will be created for women in maintenance and development works of infrastructure facilities of river-ports and waterways. As their movement becomes safe and easy owing to these works, rate of their entry to labour market will be increased. |
| 3. | Modernisation of seaports and improvement of shipping system | Reduction in lead time owing to modernisation of seaports and improvement of shipping system will result in expansion of export-oriented industries (especially garments industry) where more opportunities will be created for women's employment. As these improvements facilitate faster delivery of foodstuff during calamities, women can develop a stronger capacity to withstand the vulnerability of natural disasters. |
| 4. | Seafarers' Training | Inclusion of female cadets in seafarers' training courses at Marine Academy has opened the doorway to women to straightway enter a dignified and high-earning profession in the maritime sector. Moreover, as seamen's income has increased in general, the female members of their families are indirectly deriving benefits from this. |

| Serial No. | Priority Spending Areas/Programmes | Impact on Women's Advancement (Direct or Indirect) |
|------------|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 5. | Infrastructural Improvement of Land Port Stations | Infrastructural development of land-ports has resulted in an increase in import from and export to neighbouring countries; this has enhanced women's employment in this area to a great extent. |

6.0 Expenditure for Women's Development against total Budget of the Ministry

(Taka in Crore)

| Description | Budget 2017-18 | | | Revised 2016-17 | | | Budget 2016-17 | | |
|-----------------|----------------|---------------|---------|-----------------|---------------|---------|----------------|---------------|---------|
| | Budget | Women's Share | | Revised | Women's Share | | Budget | Women's Share | |
| | | Women | percent | | Women | percent | | Women | percent |
| Total Budget | 400266 | 112019 | 27.99 | 317174 | 86586 | 27.3 | 340605 | 92781 | 27.24 |
| Ministry Budget | 2732 | 1167 | 42.71 | 2230 | 923 | 41.38 | 2055 | 762 | 37.09 |
| Development | 2185 | 1141 | 52.2 | 1708 | 899 | 52.66 | 1531 | 739 | 48.3 |
| Non-Development | 547 | 26 | 4.82 | 522 | 24 | 4.52 | 524 | 23 | 4.37 |

Source: RCGP database

7.0 Achievements of the Ministry of Shipping in developing Women and establishing their rights

- ❖ Increase in imports-exports through ports has impacted on women's development in the country. In particular, expansion of readymade garments industry owing to developed port services has resulted in creating employment opportunities for a large number of women;
- ❖ Pre-sea female cadet training (20 female out of 220) started at Marine Academy in 2012 has created scopes for women's employment globally in the field of development and expansion of shipping. Owing to construction of a separate hostel for female cadets at Marine Academy, they are getting an opportunity of obtaining training there in a secure and beautiful environment;
- ❖ Women's movement on inland waterways is on the increase because the cost of travelling by river is comparatively cheaper than other means of communication. Women's advancement is also influenced owing to use of waterways.

8.0 Recommendations for Future Activities

- ❖ Separate vessels earmarked for women like 'female buses' may be introduced to operate at fixed hours in river routes to facilitate the large number of women who commute to workplaces every day;

- ❖ Opportunities for women's employment may be explored and utilised in various fields of maintenance of navigability, development and expansion of waterways, and management of mercantile marine;
- ❖ Facilities provided to and security of women passengers travelling in river routes are to be further improved so that this means of communication becomes more friendly to them;
- ❖ In order to create employment opportunities for female cadets (nautical engineers), the Ministry of Shipping, Marine Academy and Bangladesh Shipping Corporation may take effective initiatives.