

Chapter-21

Election Commission

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 As a constitutional body, Election Commission Bangladesh is working independently for holding elections on a regular basis with transparency and accountability. The Commission has a significant role for strengthening democracy through holding free, fair and neutral election which paves the way for establishing good governance.
- 1.2 Effective participation of women in all spheres of national life is a precondition for strong and functional democracy. The Election Commission (EC) is a constitutional entity principally responsible for holding free and fair elections and performing other activities that come within the purview of election management alongside the management of polling stations, declaration of election schedules, supervision of officials during the election period, promoting public awareness and preparation, announcing and publication of election results. EC ensures proper application of laws by resolution of election disputes and complaints as well. Since half of the population is women, the Commission is continuing its efforts to confirm effective participation of women in the whole process for establishing a sustainable democratic state.

2.0 The main functions of Election Commission are:

- ❖ Delimitation of constituencies for the purpose of elections of Member of Parliament;
- ❖ Conducting elections for the office of Honorable President, Honorable Members of Parliament, different Local Government Bodies and other electoral processes prescribed by any other law;
- ❖ Preparing and updating electoral rolls for the purpose of all national and local level elections;
- ❖ Preparation and distribution of National Identity Cards (NID);
- ❖ Constituting Electoral Tribunal and disposal of election disputes in accordance with law;
- ❖ Registration of political parties and allocation and reservation of symbols for registered political parties and candidates;
- ❖ Correspondence and coordination with different international and regional organizations, organizing and participating in the international conferences, workshops/seminars and activities relating to formulation of contracts; and

- ❖ Preparation of proposals for formulating laws, rules, regulations, and guidelines with regard to elections and the Election Commission.

3.0 Strategic objectives of the Election Commission and their Relevance with Women's Advancement and Rights:

- 3.1 **Building public confidence in the Election Commission:** Greater participation of women in the mainstream activities of the state and the inclusion of decision-making process ensure comprehensive women empowerment in the county. The Election Commission always encourages more and effective participation of women in all levels of elections which has an indirect impact on women development and empowerment.
- 3.2 **Preparation of reliable and authentic electoral rolls:** Preparation of accurate electoral roll, preparation and distribution of National Identity Cards and holding free and fair elections under accurate electoral rolls is the prime responsibility of the Election Commission. Inclusion of women in the electoral roll as a voter and getting National Identity Card is obvious recognition of their self-esteem and individualism. It inspires them to involve in the democratic process. At present, tendency as well as opportunity to be a candidate has increased due to women empowerment. Through participation in the electoral process, the leadership of women is expanded which plays a great role for overall democracy and development of the state.
- 3.3 **Conducting elections and modernization of election management:** Rules relating to enhancing women leadership in political parties and its proper implementation have been made. In the Registration Rules of political parties, a compulsory provision has been made for keeping 33% female representation in all levels of committees of political parties by 2020. Hence women's participation as representative in the National Parliament is expected to be increased. Further, the number of women representatives in local government bodies will also increase resulting in their empowerment. Fair and neutral elections will encourage women to participate in the election process. Introduction of modern information technology will also help women officers and staff to discharge their job responsibilities smoothly. Due to the greater involvement of women, overall development and decision making in government will be enhanced and this will in turn help to empower the women as a whole.
- 3.4 **Support the democratic culture:** Persistence of democratic system establishes governance, righteousness and equality which directly contribute to poverty reduction. Esteemed participation of marginal women group will accelerate women's empowerment and momentum of development.

4.0 Roles and responsibilities of Election Commissions for Women's Advancement and Rights

- 4.1 Women's participation rate in the electoral process and its effectiveness depend on the decisions and implementation of rules by the election conducting organization. Women's participation is influenced by even some remote and non-gender issues such as, election time, places of vote centers, ballot paper design etc. The Election Commission is fully aware of these issues and is considering these with high importance.
- 4.2 The desired advancement of women can be attained only when they conduct their day to day activities with dignity, honor and without being fettered by any impediment. The Commission is playing a pivotal role in women empowerment by consolidating and upholding democratic rights. Free and fair election elevate the election culture which has been a catalyst for women to take part in elections both as voter and candidate. Accurate electoral role and improvement in polling environment not only motivate women to cast vote but also works as recognition to their prestige and dignity. The Commission, realizes that it is essential for every political party to internalize women's participation in its decision making process to ensure their effective contribution at the national level. For this purpose, it has been made mandatory for registration of a party, to ensure 33 percent women's participation in its highest decision making process.

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.	Conduct National Parliament and local government elections	❖ A strong structural democracy as well as democratic process is a pre-requisite for good governance and human rights. Functional democracy ensures the representation of people from all walks of life specially the marginal and unprivileged communities. Polling process encourages women to participate in decision making at the local and national levels. Consequently, matters relating to women are getting importance in electoral commitments.
2.	Updating electoral rolls and effective maintenance of database	❖ The dignity and individualism of women is recognized by their inclusion in the voter list. Women can exercise their democratic rights by taking part in election. Through the application of voting right women demonstrate their equal right. It also creates scopes to put themselves in the role of state affairs and to influence national

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1	2	3
		decisions as a valuable citizen. Inclusion in voter list has increased employment opportunities for women as well.
3.	Using information technology in election management	❖ Use of modern technology in electoral process will help women officials and staffs assigned with polling duties perform their responsibilities without any hazard. It ensures participation of women in democratic process. Greater women participation enhances women involvement and empowerment in the development and decision making process of the government.
4.	Increase public awareness through campaigning / publicity	❖ Women awareness is being accelerated through campaigning / advocacy, which plays a supporting role to preserve women right and to take decision of participating in the electoral process.

6.0 Women's Share in Ministry's Total Expenditure

(Taka in Crore)

Description	Budget 2019-20			Revised 2018-19			Budget 2018-19			Actual 2017-18		
	Budget	Women Share		Revised	Women Share		Budget	Women Share		Actual	Women Share	
		Women	percent		Women	percent		Women	percent		Women	percent
Total Budget	523190	161247	30.82	442541	136036	30.74	464573	136938	29.48	321861	88441	27.48
Ministry Budget	1921	959	49.91	4343	2965	68.28	1895	658	34.7	415	254	61.15
Development	1141	262	22.98	2020	876	43.35	210	187	89.23	125	39	31.52
Operating	779	696	89.33	2323	2090	89.96	1685	470	27.9	290	214	73.94

Source: RCGP database

7.0 Success in Promoting Women's Advancement

- ❖ Women are not eligible to exercise their voting rights in many countries even at this time of the 21st century with spectacular development and excellence. In 2008 all eligible voters were enlisted in the electoral roll through positive campaigning as well as appointing women data entry operator. At present out of 10.66 crore voters, half of them are women. Women's pride and dignity got due recognition by their inclusion in the electoral roll.
- ❖ A significant number of women officials have discharged their duties as election officials in recently held Parliament, City Corporation, Upazilla Parishad, Municipality and Union Parishad elections. Women competence and qualification were recognized through appointing Women Returning Officers, Assistant Returning Officers, Police Personnel, Ansars, Presiding Officers, Assistant Presiding Officers and Polling Officers.

- ❖ Regulation for reserved seats in the local government elections such as Union Parishad, Municipality, City Corporation and Upazila Parishad and reservation of 50 seats for women in the Parliament and, above all, women's free participation in all general seats have been ensured. In addition, it has been made mandatory for every political party to have 33 percent women in the top leadership positions in order to be eligible for registration [Article 90B(b)(ii) of Representation of The People Order, 1972]. Consequently, women participation in decision making process at national level is guaranteed which facilitates women advancement and empowerment.
- ❖ According to the Article 90B (ii) of the Representation of the People Order, 1972, as a condition of registration of political parties, at least 33 percent women participation in all the political parties will be ensured by 2020. In the Tenth National Parliament (2014-18), women members were reserved for 50 seats, 18 were elected, four more won by the by-election, 72 female members in the by-election, and 20.57 percent of the total members.
- ❖ Participation in the 'Multi-stakeholder consultation on women participation in elections' event to increase awareness about the rights and application of women's rights under the 'Support to Bangladesh Parliamentary Elections-SBPE' project implemented by the Election Commission Secretariat with the help of the UNDP on the eleventh parliamentary elections. Gender and Election capacity buildings BRIDGE workshop were organized at departmental level. In addition, six Public Service Announcements (PSAs) have been promoted to increase awareness of women in print and electronic media under this project.
- ❖ It was possible to inspire the political party to nominate women candidates in the elections by organizing a nationwide public outreach / awareness-raising event on the eleventh parliamentary elections.

8.0 Recommendations for Future Activities

- ❖ To encourage political parties and the media for taking all out efforts in order to ensure women's participation in politics at a higher rate;
- ❖ To implement programs for creating awareness regarding establishment, application and benefits of political rights by women;
- ❖ To ensure 33 percent representation of women in the top leadership positions of political parties;
- ❖ To encourage political parties about giving more nominations to women;

- ❖ To create awareness of exercising voting rights for realizing and establishing women's political rights and to implement programs on voter training from the grassroots to the national level;
- ❖ To encourage the non-government organizations including women's organizations in order to urge women for their active participation in politics.