Seminar Report
On
“Women and Water: Global Scenario and Bangladesh Perspectives”

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Executive Summary

Bangladesh Women and Water Network (BWWN) is a non-profit sister organization of Bangladesh Water Partnership (BWP)- the country chapter of Global Water Partnership (GWP). BWWN works under GWP/BWP to create awareness about women’s involvement in Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and WASH to connect rural women to national women’s movement and help them to be empowered in decision making & implementation. Through celebration of International Women’s day jointly with the Department of Women and Gender Studies (DWGS) of Dhaka University, BWWN sensitized the participants about the untapped arena of the intricate relation between women and water. The primary beneficiaries were the students of DWGS, who had the opportunity to learn first-hand from the event a significant relation with water and women. The celebration also served to raise awareness and bring forth valuable recommendations from the participants.

Introduction

For the first time ever, Bangladesh Women and Water Network (BWWN) celebrated International Women’s Day (IWD) on 8th March, 2016. This occasion was celebrated in collaboration with Department of Women and Gender Studies (DWGS) of Dhaka University and was funded by Bangladesh Water Partnership (BWP). The event took place at the Senate Bhaban and consisted of a rally followed by half day seminar on “Women and Water: Global Scenario and Bangladesh Perspectives”. The principal objective of the celebration was to disseminate knowledge amongst university students to raise awareness about gender-based water management. The celebration was attended by more than 120 participants from Academic, Non Academic organizations and members of BWWN. The seminar was chaired by Dr. Sayed Saikh Imtiaz, Chairman of DWGS.

Objectives

The objectives of the seminar were as follows:

a. To create awareness and focus the importance of women participation in water sector both in grass-root and national level.

b. Capacity building of students and women water professionals by sharing knowledge.

c. To promote ownership in water resources management.
Ms. Ishrat Khan Barsha, Assistant Professor of DWGS, warmly welcomed the guests and participants to the seminar. She mentioned that International Women’s Day is a very important and significant celebration for the department and its students. She highly appreciated the initiative, first of its kind, to celebrate women and water on a big platform. She then ushered Dr. K. Azharul Haq, President of BWP, to share his valuable thoughts.

Dr. K. Azharul Haq, President of BWP informed the participants about women’s participation in BWP, its achievement and future strategies under the umbrella of GWP. He also shared a real world scenario in global perspective and urged for women education to get involved in water management from the very early stage. he said that without active participation of women, we cannot build a water secure world. He ended his speech by referring to the theme of this year’s IWD and said that “we not only pledge for parity, we act for it”. He urged everyone to convert the slogan of “Pledge for Parity” into action.

Ms Mukta Akter, Member Secretary of BWWN and Executive Secretary of BWP, presented a synopsis on activities, vision and mission of BWWN. Her speech focused on how women involvement is crucial for stable economic development. Further she emphasized on youth engagement actively to make the BWWN’s action more functioning towards gender equity and women empowerment.
The key note speaker of the event was Begum Shamsun Nahar, Coordinator of BWWN. She started her speech with a brief history of IWD and mentioned that it took around 150 years worth of revolution to establish the IWD as an entity. She then informed that, in Bangladesh, the IWD was first celebrated in Pauroshava Hall Room at Noakhali, in 1986. She gave an overview of the scenario of women and water in Bangladesh. She pointed out that women are not only involved in domestic use of water but largely involved with river, fishing, farming, agriculture, irrigation and the likes. Further she informed that the residents of river banks are mostly women since the men live in the cities for most of the year to earn their livelihoods. As a result, the women have to deal with the perks of living on precarious river banks. However, she suggested that households run by women cannot be called “female-headed households” but are rather termed “female-managed households”. Begum Shamsun Nahar also pointed out that women are responsible for both wastage and conservation of water. As such, the lives of women attach with water that in ways more than we can imagine. Despite the intricate relationship between women and water, women are neither acknowledged socially nor by the government. She ended her speech by proposing that the issue of water be incorporated in the coursework of DWGS. She also offered internship to interested students of DWGS in Water Development Board, BWWN and BWP.

Ms. Kamrun Nahar, a successful grass-root level entrepreneur from Cox’s Bazaar was invited to motivate students by sharing her success story on water management in her locality. She shared her journey from being a widow with no money who looks after six members of her family. She now not only provides for her own family but also encourages and helps women of her community. Despite the challenges thrown by society, Ms. Nahar triumphed to establish her own identity. She is now involved in small-scale vegetable farming, domestic animal rearing and cloth stitching.
There was a cultural segment in the event which was followed by a thematic short drama and was performed by the students of DWGS. The play depicted the challenges in rural life that the women face every way in life while fetching water for their family.

There were 2 designated discussants from faculty members of DWGS, named Mr. Helal Hossain Dhali and Dr. Soma Dey, who discussed on the importance of women participation in water management in Bangladesh. Mr. Dhali pointed out that the role of women in water management is yet to be acknowledged. He also opined that the economic perspective to the water-women issue is widely overlooked. Dr. Dey discussed about the role of women in water management which is commonly but falsely presumed to be restricted to domestic use of water only. She further mentioned that women participation is judged based on their number in water-user group and this quantitative approach can be misleading since there is no provision for qualitative impact on women’s lives. Dr. Dey opined that a holistic approach covering social, environmental and qualitative dimensions be adopted for sustainability in the long run. She also suggested that urbanization be considered as a crucial factor in the water-women agenda. She concluded her speech by mentioning that for any kind of advancement to materialize, the preconception of our society regarding women must change.

❖ Open Discussion

The open discussion moderated by the session chair, Dr. Imtiaz. The participants actively participated in the discussion. A number of productive recommendations were given by the participants during this session. Some of them are as follows:-

- To enhance involvement the women in Water Resources Management from their academic stage.
- To extend research on the poor women of urban slums since negligible work has been done so far regarding their situation despite their condition being worse than that of rural women.
- To raise awareness among the students about water wastage and optimal water use.

Ms. Nazmun Nahar, member of BWWN and librarian of WARPO, highly appreciated the initiative taken by BWWN, BWP and DWGS for conducting this seminar by mentioning that one of the most cross-cutting issues today is that of water and women. Dr. Haq ended the discussion by proposing that BWP can fund Master’s thesis, related to water-gender nexus, of the students of DWGS. He also encouraged the students to join youth programs.
The seminar ended on a happy note with the faculty of DWGS performing to a chorus song on the IWD theme and concluding remarks from the session chair.

**Outcome**

The seminar successfully sensitized the participants about the vital yet unacknowledged role of women in the water sector. It also encouraged the students to be engaged proactively with water and gender issues.
Photo Gallery