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Musammet Ismat Ara Begum

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## Corporate Social Responsibility and Gender Commitments of Commercial Banks in Bangladesh

By Musammet Ismat Ara Begum<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The growing field of Corporate Social Responsibility includes gender equality issues as a corporate commitment to society as well as the organization. It emphasizes equal opportunities for males and females in every sphere of organizational practice. However, the practices are most relevant to economic gains and political and regulatory purposes instead of demands for society, ethics and human rights. This research paper finds that the commercial banks of Bangladesh practice their gender commitments within a Corporate Social Responsibility framework and concentrate more on economic and political gains than mainstream gender practices from an ethical point of view. Incorporating gender issues in the organizational practices of commercial banks is one kind of rhetorical or nominal participation in a strategic way.

*Keywords:* Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), gender equality, Bangladesh Bank, commercial banks

### Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a widely accepted framework in different discourses for a philanthropic view of business corporations today. CSR issues are applied in various sectors of society and human activities that include sustainability, environmental degradation, social welfare, culture and heritage. Some trends of CSR have incorporated gender issues in their frameworks due to the women's liberation movement, at the beginning of this century (Vike et al., 2014, p. 199). In this situation, companies have given high emphasis to addressing gender equality agendas in their CSR programmes (Grosser, 2009, p. 290). However, the approaches of addressing gender parity in CSR have some inadequacies. Grosser and Moon (2005) point out that information for gender equality in CSR reporting is inadequate and inconsistent with the approaches of gender mainstreaming (p. 327). The United Nations Global Compact has CSR reporting guidelines for human rights and gender equality which are vague and do not address gender equality in the workplace as a mainstream issue of reporting (Kilgour, 2007, p. 767). Thompson (2008) argues that gender equality does not exist as a highly listed CSR agenda, while the United Nations (UN) has prioritized gender equality for human and economic development (p.88). In this connection, commercial banks of Bangladesh work with gender commitments in CSR frameworks in their businesses and report to Bangladesh Bank (BB) [The Central Bank of Bangladesh] regularly.

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<sup>1</sup> Musammet Ismat Ara Begum is working as Deputy Director in the SME & Special Programmes Department of Bangladesh Bank (The Central Bank of Bangladesh), Head Office, Dhaka Bangladesh. She is available at dina\_anthro@yahoo.com, or ismat.ara@bb.org.bd. She was graduated from the Crawford School of Public Policy-Master of Public Policy (specializing in Development Policy) at The Australian National University in 2014-2015. She is keen to work with gender issues, environmental issues and issues of corporate social responsibility.

Here, the study analyses gender commitments in the CSR framework of commercial banks in Bangladesh, which employ a huge number of men and women in Bangladesh. Tabassum et al. (2011) argue that a large number of females are being employed every year who face the challenges of the male-oriented, complex and competitive working environment of commercial banks (p. 267). In this situation, as a regulatory body, BB has given their instructions to commercial banks to focus on gender issues in their organizational structures and workplaces as well as concentrating on gender issues in their CSR framework accordingly (DOS Circular 05, 2011). The study reviews how gender issues are addressed in CSR frameworks and practices, how CSR frameworks might help to progress gender equality in organizational businesses and how the gender-related policies in CSR are translated and integrated by commercial banks for the purpose of reporting to BB in view of four theoretical perspectives of CSR: instrumental, political, integrative and ethical.

Generally, literature on CSR and gender issues mainly focuses on the benefits, such as the business gains of making gender equality commitments in the CSR framework, as gender and CSR are 'big wins' for business and society (Vike et al., 2014) and gender intensive leadership in business increases CSR endorsement, sustainability and business gains (Catelyst, 2011). On the contrary, some literature concentrates on the approaches of CSR activities in gender parity as: potential and actual contribution of CSR in gender mainstreaming (Grosser & Moon, 2005, p. 327), gender issues in different perspectives on CSR (Garriga&Mele, 2004), gender equality issues through CSR for governance and potential change in organization (Grosser, 2011). In Bangladesh context, there are some studies in commercial banks with the attention on the quality of the work/life balance of female employees in private commercial banks (Tabassum et al., 2011), potential effects of corporate governance of commercial banks through CSR reporting (Das et al., 2015), the exercise of power by branch managers and its connection with employees' commitment to the organization and job satisfaction in state-owned commercial banks (Jahangir, 2003). Unlike the present study, none of these studies have considered the trends and approaches of gender equality issues and regulations in accordance with these four theoretical perspectives of CSR. This study represents a more inclusive context of CSR by including gender equality issues and regulatory requirements. However, the relationships between gender equality issues and theoretical perspectives that are explored in the study are not absolute, but rather based on assumptions and understanding developed from the existing literature and records.

This paper consists of six main sections, including the aforesaid introduction that contains the objectives, research questions and literature review of the study. Section 2 expands on gender commitments in CSR. Section 3 is the theoretical analysis of CSR with respect to gender issues. Section 4 explains the background of gender incorporation into the CSR policy of Bangladesh Bank for commercial banks. Sections 5 and 6 are the assessment and analysis of CSR and gender commitments in the practices of CSR activities of commercial banks in accordance with the theoretical frameworks. Section 7 is the conclusion with revisiting theoretical frameworks and assessment with the main findings of the study.

### **CSR, Gender Commitments and Regulatory Requirements**

CSR is a matter of business-society relations which has been developed in business practices since the mid-nineteenth century through the influential book *Social Responsibilities of*

*the Businessman* by Howard Bowen (1953). The idea has become a noticeable one through some new approaches (corporate citizenship, corporate governance and corporate sustainability). Thus CSR includes numerous issues in which the most popular issues are support and assistance for community health, safety, literacy, support for education, special schooling, job training, employment, environmental issues, community and economic development and other basic human needs and desires (Kotler & Lee, 2005, p. 4). Leonard & McAdam (2003) show that CSR comprises human rights, securing workplace and employee issues, resisting unfair business practices, organizational governance, environmental aspects, marketplace consumer issues, community involvement, social development, etc. (p.27). Catalyst (2011) has categorised the extent of CSR activities into four areas: the workplace, the marketplace, the community and the environment (p. 1). In this regard, gender commitments are gradually embodied in CSR frameworks within the peripheries of governance, business and social regulation (Grosser & Moon, 2005, p. 327). So, gender equality in the workplace and employee issues are considerable commitments of CSR.

Gender equality issues have been included in CSR guidelines in the UN Global Compact (Kilgour, 2007, p. 751), which is questionable due to the idea of gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming views in development aim to eliminate gender inequality and address concerns about women's access to development activities and bureaucracies. According to the Expert Group commissioned by the Council of Europe (1998), 'gender mainstreaming is the (re)organization, improvement and policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making' (cited in Burton & Pollack, 2002, p. 342). Alternatively, Rees (2004) argues:

...gender mainstreaming turns the attention away from individuals and their rights (equal treatment) and from group and their special needs and disadvantages (positive action) and focus instead upon the systems and structures that give rise to those special needs and disadvantages in the first place. (p. 4)

She has identified some specific tools such as work/life balance, policies addressing dignity and status at work, review for transparent human resource management and equal pay (Rees, 2004, p.4). In this regard, Thompson (2008) argues that organizations and their cultures, practices, expectations and approaches are influenced by the authoritative interests of stakeholders. These biases are embedded in practices, approaches, desires and structures where gender inequality and gender inequity could seem invisible. The positive and moral responsibilities of businesses include efforts for new practices and structures to promote the equal treatment for men and women as stakeholders in business, corporate and global economies (Thompson, 2008, p. 96). However, Grosser & Moon (2005), show that gender equality information exists in several CSR-related reports with a limited scope as optional (p. 327), so the issue has been noticed in CSR but not in the mainstream (p. 334). Therefore, Grosser & Moon (2005) state that gender mainstreaming is a combination of some techniques such as: monitoring, assessing and reporting on the political process. These techniques involve women in decision making in some ways which are compatible with a CSR agenda (Vike et al., 2014, p. 199). In these situations, Grosser (2011) claims, without the analysis of gender, corporate impacts upon society, responsibility towards society and the field

of CSR could not be fully understood (p. 34). An effective advancement of women in the workplace requires leadership commitment, gender equality in business goals, gender-specific data and action in recruitment, retention, turnover, maternity return rates, promotion, training and development, evaluation by employees, etc. (Grosser & Moon, 2005, p. 329). These practices require policies, regulations and commitments to direct CSR.

Browne (2004) shows that voluntary regulations for gender equality and CSR cannot support effectively in the absence of government policies in particular issues of gender even when the organization is committed to narrowing the gap of gender discrimination (p. 554). Moreover, Petschow et al. (2005) argue that 'markets are social institutions which are always shaped by norms and values of other institutions' (p. 53). These norms and values reveal uneven ground and power relations for men and women. Thus, the regulatory policy is significant for the advancement of gender equality in organizational structures. In his analysis, Marshal (2007) argues that 'now women are found in many occupations and managerial positions and the gender pay gap has been narrowed to some extent. But these changes are modest and do not change the innate gendered nature of organizations' (p. 165). Thus, gender mainstreaming approaches seek government intervention for gender equality. Gender mainstreaming literature focuses on political opportunities and strategies for gender equality with respect to government policy outlines (Grosser, 2011, p. 272). Accordingly, the Equal Opportunity Commission (2005) argues that more research is required to analyse the further development of gender equality agendas to help ensure the sharing of responsibilities among individuals, employers and governments (cited in Grosser, 2009, p. 303).

### **Theoretical Perspectives of CSR**

CSR has a long and diverse history with various theories, approaches and terminologies. Thus the field has no leading paradigm and there is not even a strong definition or core principle of the idea of CSR (Garriga & Mele, 2004, p. 51). However, Garriga & Mele (2004) divided the observation of CSR activities and approaches into four theoretical perspectives: instrumental, political, integrative and ethical. These perspectives were inspired by Parsons (1961) who had observed CSR in any social system: environmental adaptation (connected with resources and economics), goal attainment (engaged with political issues), social integration and pattern maintenance (related with culture and values) (Garriga & Mele, 2004, p. 52). The perspectives analyzed herein are concerned with gender commitments in CSR and relevant regulatory requirements.

#### *Instrumental Perspective*

The instrumental perspective represents CSR activities as instruments to achieve economic gain, competitiveness, wealth creation and profit. CSR would be acceptable only if it helps to achieve economic gain (Grosser, 2011, p. 67). Garriga & Mele (2004) identify three approaches to obtain the objectives: maximizing shareholders' value, strategies to achieve competitive advantages and cause-oriented marketing (p. 53). According to McWilliams and Seigal (2001), an adequate level of philanthropic investment is acceptable for the purpose of profit (p. 117), which is the main focus of instrumental aspect. Grosser & Moon (2004) argue that the field of women's

employment and wages has been an emerging interest for long-term business success and equality of opportunity which is beyond the basic equal opportunity regulation for gender diversity in employment (p. 329). In this perspective, business literature adopts gender equality issues as an instrumental business case and a market mechanism. Gender issues have been considered to gain profit or competitive advantages in corporate culture which is criticized by feminist scholars as an inadequate process of addressing gender concerns and many important gender equality issues (fair and equal wages, women's involvement in supply chain) have not been addressed if they are non-profitable for a business (Grosser, 2011, p. 66). However, CSR activities and gender equality as instruments come through regulation and legal frameworks in many cases.

Friedman (1970) opines, 'the only one responsibility of business towards society is the maximization of profits among shareholders within the legal framework and the ethical custom of the country' (Garriga & Mele, 2004, p. 53). The instrumental perspective uses market mechanisms for CSR activities due to political, social and economic pressure as forms of government and civil society (Grosser, 2011, p. 67). As a result, CSR and gender issues become institutionalized in the firms through this way.

#### *Political Perspective*

The political perspective includes the power of the corporation in society and its responsible use in the political field and power relations to accept social duties and rights and participate in social cooperation. It is an interaction between business and society in terms of the power and position of the business and its inherent responsibility (Garriga & Mele, 2004, p. 55). Davis (1960) argues that business power has a crucial role to create social impact (cited in Garriga & Mele, 2004, p. 55). Thus, CSR activities and gender issues are the responsible use of business power.

CSR has been regarded as a challenge of governance where participation is essential (Grosser, 2011, p. 76). In this process, gender also plays a significant role in participation. As a governance process, CSR links corporate governance and societal governance with gender equality issues in organizations' agendas (Grossner, 2011, p. 98). Governance processes emphasize gender equality issues as CSR tools and practices to use corporate power in an organization. Corporate power addresses gender issues due to legal requirement and reporting purposes (Grosser, 2011, p.94).

#### *Integrative Perspective*

In the viewpoint of an integrative perspective, corporate management should consider social demands and incorporate these issues in such a way that businesses operate in accordance with social values (Garigga & Mele, 2004, p. 57). The integrative perspective concentrates on the satisfaction of social demands due to the existence, continuity and growth of the business. Social demands are a way of gaining certain legitimacy, status and prestige for business organizations (Garriga & Mele, 2004, p. 57). But social demands as business responsibilities are limited to the space and time of each situation.

Accordingly, gender equality in business practices is not only a socially responsible act or going beyond obeying the law of regulation; rather it is abiding by social and legal laws (Grosser, 2011, p. 70). Like the instrumental perspective, CSR is an instrument to attain social legitimacy,

greater social acceptance and status for an organization (Garriga & Mele, 2004, p. 58) which considers gender issues on account of social norms and values. It examines CSR information, reporting, policies, practices and particular performances regarding gender parity in the workplace and how these might help to change in organization in social and legal law (Garriga & Mele, 2004, p. 117). The integrative perspective focuses on legal and social responsiveness in the form of CSR activities. Gender and CSR activities are regulated by social and legal policies and regulations. For example, appropriate behavior and guidelines for managerial activities are legitimated by the social and legal way in public policy (Garriga & Mele, 2004, p. 58).

### *Ethical Perspective*

The ethical perspective is based on the principle of doing the right thing to achieve a good society and human rights (Garriga & Mele, 2004, p. 60). The ethical perspective is rooted in ethical responsibilities for society and thinks that firms should accept social responsibilities as a moral obligation (Garriga & Mele, 2004, p. 52-53). It encourages businesses to do the right thing for the achievement of a good society and environment and establishment of human rights. This perspective focuses on a normative stakeholder approach, universal rights, a sustainable development approach and a common good attitude (Garriga & Mele, 2004, p. 60-62). So, women's participation in the labor market is an ethical requirement to build the relationship between business and society (Grosser, 2011, p. 74). Support in gender equality issues through business organizations' activities is a part of a moral practice and normative issue. However, the implications of business ethics and feminist ethics are often debated (Grosser, 2011, p. 76). As an acknowledged universal human right, gender equality matters are always paid lip service by CSR initiatives but got a 'hidden mandate' due to the prevalent violations (Kilgour, 2007, p. 751).

Scherer and Palazzo (2008) point out that the ethical perspective tries to incorporate the organizational and political order of society and the notion of democracy (p. 420). The normative stakeholder approach of ethical theory is an implication of stakeholder consultation for corporate social and human rights impact assessment together with the implication of the view of CSR as a governance process (Grosser, 2011, p. 75). A socially responsible corporation should legitimate interest of all stakeholders and genders. These ethical and normative issues are legitimized by the national and international human rights watch groups (Garriga & Mele, 2004, p. 60).

In particular, these theoretical perspectives of CSR have different viewpoints of gender commitment according to their approaches. Different perspectives have different purposes for incorporating the issues of gender equality. The instrumental perspective focuses on economic gain and incorporates gender issues as an approach to a win-win situation. Accordingly, the political perspective comprises the use of social and political power of a business to establish its position in society (Garriga & Mele, 2004, p. 56). In this regard, addressing gender equality issues are a potential way to establish the power of businesses in society. Accordingly, the organizational governance, regulation and reporting are closely related to leadership and the exercise of power. In addition, the political perspective emphasizes involvement and participation through governance and regulation processes. These two approaches represent profitable and power-related gender issues in CSR which ignore many other vital gender issues as well. On the contrary, the integrative perspective extends beyond regulations and focuses on social demands. Therefore, the commitment to gender equality issues has been incorporated as the demand for a better society.

The ethical perspective is the widest view of CSR which covers not only legal and social demands but also includes moral grounds as well as human rights. As a result, among these perspectives, the incorporation of gender issues is well-organized in the ethical viewpoint. Interestingly, all of these perspectives have incorporated gender equality issues as a remote/isolated issue instead of a mainstream business issue. The analytical viewpoint of gender has not been considered to incorporate gender in CSR. However, the integrative and ethical viewpoints focus more on strategic needs of gender.

### **Gender Equality Issues under the Supervision of Bangladesh Bank**

The banking sector of Bangladesh has a long history of involvement in philanthropic activities like donations for different charitable organizations, religious and educational institutions, poor people, city beautification and patronizing art and culture. But all of these practices followed an unstructured way from the beginning. Later, the Company Act of 1994 in Bangladesh set some general structures of corporate financial reporting, but the Act had no provisions for CSR activities. In 2006, adoption of International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) in Bangladesh encouraged the listed companies to circulate additional statements for non-financial activities to facilitate their economic decisions (Das et al., 2015, p. 131). In 2008, some initiatives were taken by BB to organize the involvement of commercial banks and financial institutions in CSR activities in a structured CSR format (Bangladesh Bank CSR, 2010, p. 2).

In the year 2008, BB introduced CSR guidelines for commercial banks and financial institutions of Bangladesh (DOS circular No. 01, 2008). In the guidelines, CSR has been introduced as strategic and long-run competitive advantages of financial institutions to run their businesses. It also mentions:

CSR programs and actions go beyond mandatory compliances into voluntary engagements to promote equitable, sustainable development. Besides the self-evident ethical case, a strong business case for CSR (as investment in a strategic asset or distinctive capability, rather than an expense) is also getting clearer with developing practice; seen as benefiting a business by: building reputation, brand value, customer loyalty, employee motivation and retention; mitigating risks in own operations and in assessing suppliers and clients; cutting down wastes (energy, raw materials etc.), driving up efficiency; gaining new markets for products and services, in the communities/social groups benefited by the CSR actions. (DOS circular No. 01, 2008, p. 1)

Moreover, commercial banks and other financial institutions are advised by BB to move towards CSR activities, establish a separate CSR desk and promoting gender equality in the workplace to achieve basic human rights and socio-economic growth (Das et al., 2015, p. 132). Consequently, commercial banks have started reporting about their activities and expenditures on CSR to Bangladesh Bank since 2008. The sector-wide trends and expenditures for CSR represent rapid growth year by year on reports. The total expenditure for CSR has been increased almost 23 times in 2014 than of that in 2007. Among all specific sectors, commercial banks have continued to

maintain a major share of expenditure in disaster relief, education and health which is 75.24% of the total share (CSR Review of BB, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 & 2015). Education, health and disaster relief contributed to 29.74%, 27.10% and 18.60% share, respectively (CSR Review, 2015, p. 11). Promoting art and culture has been increasing year by year. Since 2010, environment-related expenditure has been introduced; however, the growth in this sector is not as much as education and health yet.

In 2011, BB set a goal to promote gender equality through gender-related policies and staffing in commercial banks to uphold productivity and growth through female participation in the labor force (CSR Review, 2012). According to DOS circular No. 05,

Promoting gender equality issues in the workplace is an important element of CSR obligation both in terms of basic human rights and as a prerequisite for inclusive socio-economic growth. A decision has been taken to include gender equality-related performance indicators ... CSR reporting by commercial banks from December 2011 onward with a view to monitoring year on year changes for assessing whether performance is improving or otherwise. (p. 1)

Initially, BB has emphasized ten gender equality issues as a minimum in their reporting, including work environment, recruitment, transport facility beyond usual office hours, daycare and maternity leave as shown in Table 1. Thus, commercial banks are paying attention to gender fairness issues in their internal work environments, recruitment processes and maternity leave policies within their CSR activities and reporting to BB (CSR Review, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 & 2015).

### **Assessment of CSR and Gender Commitments of Commercial Banks in Bangladesh**

Commercial banks lead the financial sector in Bangladesh (Talukder et al., 2014, p. 29). It has experienced rapid growth for the last two decades due to dominant support and playing a fundamental role for industrial and commercial activities. Based on objectives, the banking sector has been categorized in two major sections: scheduled [get the license for doing business under the bank company act 1991] and non-scheduled [established for special purposes with definite objectives and cannot perform all functions of scheduled banks] bank. There are in total 56 scheduled banks in Bangladesh that operate their activities for commercial purposes under the supervision of Bangladesh Bank through the Bangladesh Bank Order of 1972 and the Bank Company Act of 1991 and its further amendment. Moreover, Bangladesh Bank frequently implements policies and regulations for commercial banks for the purpose of monitoring, supervision and national interests. The scheduled banks in Bangladesh are categorized as: state-owned commercial banks (6) which have government ownership, specialized banks (2) which have government ownership for special purposes like agriculture, private commercial banks (39) owned by local entrepreneurs and foreign commercial banks (9) owned by foreign entrepreneur (Bangladesh Bank website). More than 8,000 branches of 56 commercial banks are operating all over the country. All of the commercial banks of Bangladesh are almost the same in their characteristics, functions and programmes, organizational structures and human resources management (Talukder et al., 2014, p.34) and they all employ a significant number of males and

females. Increasing demands of experience, efficient human resources, job satisfaction and working environment are the common features of commercial banks (Uddin & Rahman, 2014, p. 1).

This research considers available primary data and information from the websites of commercial banks and secondary data and review reports of commercial banks submitted to BB regarding CSR for a period of 8 years, from 2007 to 2014. In this period, gender issues related data are available from 2011 to 2014. In addition, data from 2007 to 2013 are comprised of 47 commercial banks (before giving license to 9 new private commercial banks by Bangladesh Bank in 2013) and data from 2014 is for 56 commercial banks of Bangladesh. Commercial banks report their data and information for CSR activities to the Green Banking and Corporate Social Responsibility Department (which is now named as Sustainable Finance Department) of BB since 2013. Before establishing that department, commercial banks used to report to the Department of Offsite Supervision (DOS) of BB from the beginning of the CSR and gender issues data reporting (Bangladesh Bank Website).

BB analyses data and information for gender equality issues in its yearly CSR review based on two categories: the ratio of female personnel issues in terms of board members, recruitment, senior management and turnover ratio; and working environment related gender issues in terms of maternity leave, daycare facilities, transport facilities, awareness training and so on (CSR Review, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 & 2015). These two categories are analyzed here to understand the trends from four different perspectives.

#### *Female Percentage among Board Members*

According to the Bangladesh Corporate Governance Code of 2006, any listed company should have its board size from 5 people to a maximum of 20 (Das et al., 2015, p. 139), but there is no provision for gender diversity. However, some commercial banks have female members in their board. Female engagement on the members of the board for the last four years of data has shown that it has been increased from 9.73% to 11.27% (CSR Reviews of BB). The highest rates of gender diversity among board members were in foreign commercial banks in 2012 and 2013, though surprisingly it has decreased in 2014. Private commercial banks show a slightly increasing tendency. The noticeable decline in specialized banks is literally 0% in 2014 from 7.14% in 2011 (CSR Review of BB). However, many commercial banks still do not have any female members in their board of directors, like Islamic Shariah-based (Islamic religious rule-based) banks and the Commercial Bank of Ceylon (Relevant Bank's website).

#### *Female Percentage among Permanent Employees*

Among permanent employees, gender diversity in entry-level positions is almost the same and in mid-level and senior management positions gender diversity has increased for the last four years. The data for the percentage of females among permanent employees show the gender diversity for recruitment and entry-level positions has slightly increased since 2011 in the four types of commercial banks. The gender diversity among mid-level employees has been significantly increased from 8.33% to 14.95% in private commercial banks. The percentages for entry level positions are higher in private and foreign commercial banks than that of state-owned and specialized banks. In addition, state-owned commercial banks have a positive trend of women

employees in mid-level positions compared to entry and senior levels. However, in the case of senior management level, both the diversity and rate of increase remain slow (CSR Reviews of BB).

#### *Permanent Female Employees by Age*

Permanent female employees in terms of age are divided into 3 categories: less than 30 years old, between 30 and 50 years old and more than 50 years old. The report shows that the percentages of female employees who are less than 30 years old and between 30 and 50 years old have been slightly increased and there is no change in the percentage of female employees over the age of 50 for last four years. Accordingly, it reveals that a large percentage of female employees are less than 30 years old and there is no significant change in female employees over 50 years old in the four types of banks. Female employees under 30 years old had the highest rate at 23.3% in foreign commercial banks in 2011 and it continued increasing to 28.73% in 2014. In addition, the recruitment of female employees in this category has been improved significantly in state-owned banks. Moreover, the age group of 30 to 50 years has had no considerable change in the four types of banks (CSR Reviews of BB).

#### *Turnover Ratio*

The turnover ratio of male employees compared to female employees has had no significant change for four years. Data shows that the percentages of departing male employees in respect of female employees became almost double in comparison among four years which is highest in 2014 in state-owned commercial banks (CSR Review of BB).

#### *Maternity Leave Policies*

A government circular for maternity leave policy established 6 months leave in January 2011 so working mothers can spend more time and breastfeed their infants (bdews24, 2011). But the circular had not been followed properly by all commercial banks till 2014. In 2014, 51 of the 56 commercial banks followed the leave policy for their female employees. All the state-owned and specialized banks have been following the 6 months maternity leave policy since the beginning of 2011. Private commercial banks and foreign commercial banks were reluctant at first, but now the data is showing positive trends to the policy (CSR Review of BB).

#### *Daycare Facilities*

In the case of available daycare facilities in banks, reports do not show any significant change in the policy of daycare facilities or arrangement for the children of employees for the first 3 years, but a significant change occurred in 2014. In 2014, commercial banks put emphasis on daycare facilities, which indicates a positive approach for the facility (CSR Review of BB). From the beginning of the report in 2011, only one private commercial bank (Brac Bank) had one small daycare attached to their NGO (Brac) head office which is not owned by the bank alone (News Today, 2013). Following the guidance of BB, four private commercial banks and one foreign commercial bank have started head office-based cluster daycare centers under the leadership of a foreign commercial bank in August 2014 (prnwesbd.com, 2014).

### *Transport Facilities for Women Working Beyond Usual Office Hours*

Transport facilities for women working unusual office hours were the same for the last 3 years of data. Through 2014, only 22 commercial banks had this arrangement for their female employees. One state-owned and one foreign commercial bank have diminished the facility for their female employees in 2014 (CSR Review of BB). Basically, working beyond usual office hours is a common practice in commercial banks without any benefits for employees. However, BB has an instruction on BRPD circular No. 8 (2015) for commercial banks stating:

Banks are not allowed to force their employees particularly the female staff to stay at the bank at the end of working day after banking office hours, i.e., 6.00 pm. The banks will have to ensure proper security and pay compensation to any female staff if she has to stay at the bank after office hours due to special official requirement.

### *Toilet Facilities*

There is no data provided by commercial banks regarding separate toilet facilities for male and female employees and BB has also overlooked and not mentioned the issue in the review report.

### *Gender Awareness Training*

According to the report from 2014, 12 commercial banks have arranged gender awareness training for its employees, which was an increase from only 6 in 2011. Data shows that only one state-owned, 7 private commercial banks and 4 foreign commercial banks have gender awareness training programs in 2014 (CSR Review of BB).

### *Sexual Harassment Policy and Complaints*

Reports from commercial banks show positive trends on adopting policies for sexual harassment in the workplace. Only 17 banks had the policy in 2011, which has been increased to 25 banks in 2014. Data shows that 7 foreign commercial banks out of 9 have policies for sexual harassment. Interestingly, no commercial banks have shown any kind of complaints of sexual harassment by their employees in their report from the beginning to 2014. Accordingly, data shows that banks had the same initiatives and consciousness about the issue before and after implementing gender equality issues by BB (CSR Review of BB).

## **Analysis of Gender Equality Issues**

The analysis of gender equality issues on the basis of theoretical perspectives shows a remarkable scenario. The gender equality issues that are being practiced by commercial banks reveal some trends such as: recruiting female employees in entry-level positions and under the age of 30 as a kind of instrument for the goal of profit-making, which represents the instrumental approach. In the socio-cultural context of Bangladesh, women are service givers and men are service takers (Dhali, 2012, p. 6) and women have been traditionally excluded from mainstream commercial operations (Warner, 2009). Along with these cultural norms and stereotypes of

women, recruitment of young women in customer service, at help desks and as personal secretaries is a very popular practice in corporate culture rather than working in mainstream sectors of the organizational structure. Therefore, profit-oriented private and foreign commercial banks have involved a large portion of entry-level female employees in comparison with state-owned and specialized commercial banks who are working in customer care, front desk and cash section related activities and directly dealing with customers. But the ratio in state-owned and specialized banks is not as large as private and foreign commercial banks. State-owned and specialized banks follow the national recruitment policy of Bangladesh which requires 10% females in recruitment (reservation post) beyond the merit list from 1985 to now (Jahan, 2012, p. 36). Interestingly, some Islamic Shariah-based banks have no female recruitment policy due to religious values. Again, a small percentage of women in the more than 50 years old age group shows a negative tendency or nominal participation of female employees in senior management. This trend signifies that the patriarchal society of Bangladesh does not like to have women at the decision-making level (Alam, 2011, p. 18).

Accordingly, the involvement and participation of women, particularly in entry-level positions are used as instruments for profit gain in private and foreign commercial banks. Thus, compliance with most of the gender equality issues by commercial banks is from the political perspective of CSR due to regulations and reporting purposes and extending organizational power. Grosser (2011) in her study has mentioned that the view of such CSR reporting is voluntary reporting and favorable with managerial accounts instead of promoting progressive change (Grosser, 2011, p. 156). Here, the data shows that banks are emphasizing these issues positively for reporting purposes but not approaching them progressively with targets and performances. Many issues are showing slow progress year after year in reports. For example, the ratio of women as board members and senior management, daycare facilities, gender awareness training, policies for sexual harassment and transport facilities for female employees working beyond usual office hours shows the same or slow progress in these reporting years. These situations represent the reluctance of commercial banks to emphasize these issues and promote gender equality.

BB has introduced gender equality issues in CSR activities as the pathway to establishing basic human rights and socio-economic growth (Das et al., 2015, p.132). These objectives are assimilated with the integrative and ethical approaches of CSR. For example, the provision for 6 months of maternity leave is closely related to ethical and integrative perspectives of CSR in response to its nature. But the provision is not emphasized as a basic right by all private and foreign commercial banks due to their profit-seeking attitudes. The achievement of the positive trend of the provision in the data reflects the political aspect of CSR which is confirmed by negative evaluations of the Annual Performance Report of women employees who get maternity leave (BRPD Circular 08, 2015). Accordingly, rearing children properly is a vital issue not only for a sound and healthy society and country but also essential for the working mothers (News Today, 2013) and this is the approach of the ethical perspective. However, for reporting purposes, the issue is getting emphasized from the political perspective.

Furthermore, most of the commercial banks have a common trend of keeping employees at work after usual office hours. But the willingness for vehicle arrangement especially for female employees for security purposes is very slow, while the issue has been focused by BB (BRPD Circular 07, 2015). These activities come from the integrative and ethical perspectives of CSR.

Accordingly, the issue of separate toilet facilities for female employees is a social demand and basic human rights-based issue from the integrative and ethical perspective, but the issue has not been focused on yet. Again, gender awareness training programmes are incorporated with integrative and ethical perspectives to improve consciousness of gender relations among employees. Awareness training could help to build the ground for ethical and social values. Siwal (2005) argues that gender awareness training is a strategy, a tool, a space for reflection of gender knowledge, a transformative process to increase gender knowledge and develop understanding (p. 1). But the data showing slow progress of these perspectives represents a lack of enthusiasm regarding the issue.

In addition, sexual harassment policies and understanding in the organizational structure is an issue of social and ethical demands which has a decreasing tendency in the data analysis. Interestingly, no commercial banks have sexual harassment complaints whether they have the policy or not. This concern raises the question of which activities are treated as sexual harassment or not and which particular behaviors or attitudes are eligible to disclose or complain about. In society, sexual behavior, attitudes and sense of harassment develop through societal norms, values and approaches to gender relations. These norms and values lead to justifying and defining sexual harassment and dealing with it accordingly (WHO, 2009, p. 4). Furthermore, Das et al. (2015) argue that all banks report CSR programmes which are adopted and designed at the board level. There is no report and evidence where companies consider the approaches of stakeholders' perspectives in implementing CSR programmes (Das et al., 2015, p. 144) and that is true for the reporting on gender equality issues as well.

It is clear that CSR activities of gender equality issues have been addressed more from the view of political and instrumental perspectives instead of integrative and ethical perspectives, especially in private and foreign commercial banks. Social demands, human rights and morality-related issues have made slow progress according to the data for the last four years, which represents commercial banks' tendency to neglect and overlook these perspectives. Crane et al. (2008) point out that CSR is not just a technical exercise about what corporations do in society and a normative exercise about what corporations should be responsible for in society. Rather, CSR is an ideological exercise about how the political economy should be organized to restrain corporate power in society (cited in Grosser, 2011, p.76). In response to the evidence of gender equality in CSR in the UK, Grosser & Moon (2005) point out that gender diversity is getting more prominent in CSR and CSR reporting guidelines, but their tendency is not to be in the mainstream, particularly in governance processes (p. 334).

In this regard, BB regulates the commercial banks in their mainstream banking and operational activities. But in CSR issues, it is a matter of responsibility instead of liability. Therefore, BB guidelines for CSR activities (2008) mentions that, 'adoption of the guideline is voluntary not mandatory, BB shall monitor CSR adoption and CSR performance of banks and financial institutions, as an additional dimension of their management' (DOS Circular 01, 2008, p. 3). In this situation, BB is unable to increase the commercial banks' attention on integrative and ethical perspectives of gender issues. Parker (2007) explained the same situation and proposed a meta-regulation strategy in CSR regulation that laws should focus on companies' internal responsibility processes rather than external accountability outcomes (p. 3).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the analysis of the attitudes and perceptions of gender commitments in CSR frameworks of commercial banks and the regulations of BB in response with four theoretical perspectives of CSR tried to explore the trends of gender issues and commitments in CSR frameworks and regulations and monitor of BB. The findings show that commercial banks are emphasizing gender issues from the instrumental and political perspectives of CSR to achieve economic gain and accountability to the regulations and reporting. Gender issues have not been considered as a mainstream issue, but rather they have been considered marginal issues. However, the trends show that integrative and ethical perspectives of gender equality are also growing with sluggish progress as an internal responsibility of commercial banks as corporate organizations. The issues considered in a CSR framework are related to basic gender needs and women's involvement only in the gender relations of organizational structures. Participation and involvement of women is the key for focusing on basic needs such as maternity leave or daycare facilities (although it is very slow) instead of concentrating strategic needs, effective participation and decision making power of women in the mainstream. The issues should be considered as mainstream in the operation of commercial banks.

The research contributes to a growing body of literature on gender issues in CSR activities. Moreover, empirical analysis of the research adds some valuable understanding of gender issues in CSR in the contexts of commercial banks in Bangladesh which is a less studied and less familiar case in the banking sector of Bangladesh. The study has considered more general perceptions and trends based on the interpretation of data rather than investigating an absolute causal relationship between gender issues and theoretical perspectives and left the concentration on how much organizational change is occurring in terms of gender equality issues along with the second research question of this study for future research. In that regard, primary reports and information from commercial banks would be more effective to analyze the trend. Accordingly, a significant future research question is expected to be: 'What are the key determinants working behind the slow progress and in what ways can progress be motivated?'

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**Annexure 1****Table1. Corporate social responsibility [CSR] performance reporting on gender equality issues**

No.	Issues	Yes/No (if applicable)	Data	
1	Gender diversity among board members		No. of male and female members	
2	Gender diversity among permanent employee		Entry level	No. of male and Female
			Mid-level	
			Senior management	
3	Gender breakdown by age group in permanent employee		Less than 30 yr	No. of male and Female
			30-50 yrs	
			More than 50 yrs	
4	Is there any maternity leave policy?	Y/N	If yes, how many months are allowed and what is the provision for that?	
5	Is there any day care centre in head office/branch?	Y/N	If yes, how many in total in your bank?	
6	Does the bank provide transportation facility for female employees working beyond usual office hour?	Y/N		
7	Is there any separate toilet for male and female employees in head office/branch?	Y/N		
8	Employee turnover by gender in the calendar year		No. of male & female	
9	Does the bank have any training on gender equality/awareness issues?	Y/N	No. of male & female attendees	

10	Is there any sexual harassment prevention awareness/policy in bank?	Y/N	
	Was there any appropriate sexual harassment complaint made		If yes, what type of actions taken for that?

Source: DOS Circular 05, 2011, 'Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) performance reporting by banks on gender equality issues', Department of Offsite Supervision, Bangladesh Bank, 01 December 2011.