

# RCAS Bulletin

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Post-Pandemic?

Nian Peng: Berdimuhamedov's China Visit Pushes Forward China-  
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Sujit Kumar Datta: Women Empowerment Through Women  
Entrepreneurship in Bangladesh: A Mixed  
Methodology Approach

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## About RCAS

RCAS is a non-profit research organization focusing on the maritime issues and regional integration in the Indo-Pacific region. It is a newly-established institution founded in February 2022 by Dr. Nian Peng, in Haikou, China. We, at the moment, have an international research team with resident/non-resident researchers from China and other Asian states.

RCAS seizes the opportunity that China is building Hainan Free-Trade Port in which the Hainan Island will become an important window for China's opening up to the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean to become a leading research institute and think tank on maritime affairs in the Indo-Pacific region. So far, RCAS focuses on the maritime disputes and maritime cooperation in the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean, and various regional cooperation mechanisms such as BRI, LMC, RCEP and so on. It is committed to promoting the maritime cooperation, regional integration and academic exchanges in the Indo-Pacific region at large.

RCAS has received a number of research funding from universities and foundations, and conducted research programs of the South China Sea(SCS) dispute, China-South/Southeast Asian relations, BRI in South/Southeast Asia, terrorism/anti-terrorism in Afghanistan, and so on. RCAS researchers have won various awards from the Chinese Ministry of Commerce and the Hainan government.

RCAS has published nearly 10 books in Chinese and English, and more than 20 papers on SSCI/SCOPUS/CSSCI-indexed journals. Recent English publications include *The Uncertain Future of Afghanistan: Terrorism, Reconstruction, and Great-power Rivalry*(Springer Nature, forthcoming); *Populism, Nationalism and South China Sea Dispute: Chinese and Southeast Asian Perspectives*(Singapore: Springer Nature, 2022); *Crossing the Himalayas: Buddhist Ties, Regional Integration and Great-Power Rivalry*(Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *The Reshaping of China-Southeast Asia Relations in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic*(Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *International Pressures, Strategic Preference and Myanmar's China Policy since 1988*(Singapore: Springer Nature, 2020); *Managing the South China Sea Dispute: Multilateral and Bilateral Approaches*(2022); *Hedging Against the Dragon: Myanmar's Tangled Relations with China since 1988*(2021); *The Budding Indo-Myanmar Relations: Rising But Limited Challenges for China*(2019).

RCAS has also published hundreds of articles and been interviewed in various local and international media outlets such as Asia Centre in France, *The Diplomat* in the United States, *East Asian Forum(EAF)* in Australia, *Bangkok Post* in Thailand, *Lian He Zao Bao* and *Think China* in Singapore, *South China Morning Post(SCMP)* and *China-US Focus* in Hong Kong, *CGTN* and *Global Times* in China. RCAS researchers have actively participated in international conferences or study visits in the US, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Cambodia, and other places. Welcome to visit our website: <http://www.rcas.top>.

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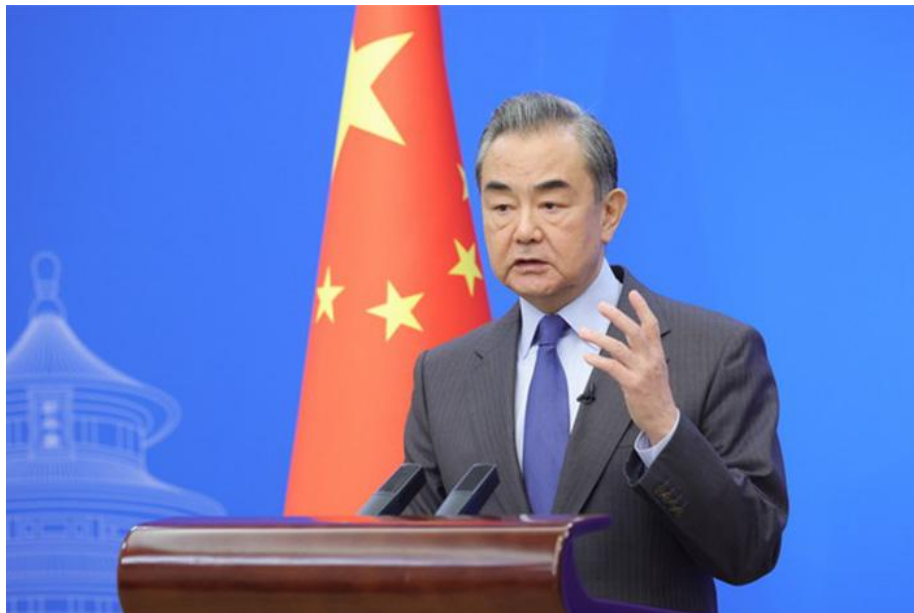
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## RCAS Commentary

### **Will China-ASEAN Relations Take a Turn for the Better Post-Pandemic?**

*Nian Peng*

Recently, at the 2022 Symposium on the International Situation and China's Foreign Relations, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi outlined six diplomatic tasks for his country in 2023. Among them, he emphasized that China “will stay committed to the principle of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness and the policy of forging friendship and partnership in our neighborhood, and deepen friendship, mutual trust and convergence of interests with our neighbors.”



▲Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi delivers a speech via video link to a foreign relations symposium on Dec.24, 2022(source: fmprc.gov.cn)

In terms of geographical proximity and economic interdependence, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is the top priority in China's neighborhood diplomacy. During the pandemic, ASEAN became China's largest trading partner, replacing the United States and the European Union. At the same time, ASEAN worked together with China to fight COVID-19. Following China's announcement that it would lift the quarantine policy for international arrivals on January 8, 2023, China-ASEAN relations will also take a turn for the better.

In my recently published book *The Reshaping of China-Southeast Asia Relations in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Singapore: Springer, 2021), I pinpointed the dual influence of the pandemic on China-ASEAN relations. During the initial stage of the pandemic, both economic links between China and ASEAN and the Chinese image in Southeast Asia were undermined. But in the long term, trade and investment cooperation among China and ASEAN states will return to normal and actually become closer. What's more, both sides have developed deeper mutual political trust after working together to fight the pandemic, which is beneficial to closer China-ASEAN relations.

Other scholars have pointed out that the pandemic caused anti-Chinese sentiment to rise, but it remains at controllable levels. In other negative impacts, border trade was blocked, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects were postponed and Chinese tourist flows were cut off by COVID-19 travel restrictions.

Now, China is opening its borders. The hope is that China can resume pre-pandemic (or greater) levels of cooperation with ASEAN on BRI infrastructure projects, border trade, the digital economy, and in other areas.

Nevertheless, the problems accumulated during the pandemic may not be so easily solved. After nearly three years of pandemic hassles, China and ASEAN both need to adjust their policies and accommodate a new normal characterized by a more intense geopolitical and geoeconomic competition between China and the United States.

As mentioned above, at the beginning of the outbreak, almost all the ASEAN countries took measures to restrict arrivals of Chinese tourists. Now that China has reopened its borders, will ASEAN countries immediately welcome them back?

After all, Japan and India immediately issued entry quarantine restrictions for Chinese tourists, and the United States, European Union, and United Kingdom are considering taking similar measures. In response, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said that “COVID response measures need to be science-based and proportionate without affecting normal travel and people-to-people exchange and cooperation.”

It is evident that the politicization of the pandemic still lingers, although the epidemic is coming to an end. Given the growing China-U.S. rivalry in Southeast Asia, the entry management measures the ASEAN countries will introduce for Chinese tourists are of particular interest. So far, only Thailand and Cambodia have overtly affirmed that they would welcome Chinese tourists without any restrictions related to COVID-19.

To ensure the continuing implementation of BRI projects that were delayed at the beginning of the pandemic, China opened a “fast lane” for personnel exchanges and a “green channel” for equipment transportation with the participating states. As a result, few BRI projects were affected severely by COVID-19.

As Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said on December 26, “This year has seen steady progress and fruitful outcomes of Belt and Road cooperation.” Not only did five new states signed cooperation documents with China to jointly build the BRI, but a large number of landmark infrastructure projects have also been completed. This includes the test operation of Jakarta-Bandung, the first high-speed railway in ASEAN, and the formal opening of the first expressway in Cambodia.

However, the recent derailment on the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway, which resulted in two deaths, is a reminder for China, that the importance of safety management in construction should not be underestimated. After all, the railway is a flagship project of the BRI in Southeast Asia, and carelessness will have a negative impact on the project.

It is high expected that the BRI will swell in the post-pandemic period, as the economic recovery of ASEAN countries creates strong domestic demand for infrastructure construction. Yet, China will face a series of challenges in expanding the BRI in Southeast Asia, including hiring local labor and meeting environmental standards, as well as facing the United States’ criticism and competition.

To prevent and control the cross-border spread of COVID-19, China temporarily suspended its border trade with the neighboring countries during the pandemic. It even built an electronic separation wall on the China-Myanmar border. This has led to a “cliff-like” decline in border trade and serious non-traditional security issues along the border.

After reopening the borders, border trade will tremendously increase in the short term. But case surges caused by imported infections and a sharp increase in border inspection pressures are also predictable challenges for both China and its ASEAN neighbors. After years of small numbers, are border authorities ready to cope with the tremendous growth of trade in a short time?

Finally, China and ASEAN nations will recover normal personnel exchanges, and the consultation on the Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea can be promoted through personal contacts. However, the external environment of the COC consultation remains troubled, as there is still some turbulence both from internal and external actors.

For instance, the United States recently publicized that China was undertaking land reclamation activities on uninhabited islands and reefs in the Nansha Qundao (Spratly Islands). In addition, in the new context of closer cooperation between the Philippines and the United States, the Marcos administration took a much more muscular posture towards the South China Sea dispute by saying it would never yield an inch of territory and threatening to conduct unilateral oil and gas exploitation in disputed waters.

More recently, Vietnam and Indonesia reached an agreement on the demarcation of their exclusive economic zones around the Natuna Islands. This may promote some ASEAN claimant countries to build alliances on the South China Sea disputes to resist China.

In conclusion, there will be opportunities for closer China-ASEAN relations now that China reopened its borders. In order to achieve that goal, all parties should prepare to accurately respond to various needs in the post-pandemic era, ensure the smooth implementation of the mega-projects within the BRI, and properly manage differences and disputes in the South China Sea.

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## RCAS Commentary

### Berdimuhamedov's China Visit Pushes Forward

#### China-Central Asia Relations

*Nian Peng*

Turkmen President Sedar Berdimuhamedov paid a state visit to China from January 5 to 6, at the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping. It was the first high-level exchange between China and a Central Asian country in the new year. During the visit, the two presidents announced the upgrading of the China-Turkmenistan relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership, a new height for bilateral relations.



▲ Turkmen President Sedar Berdimuhamedov met with Chinese President Xi Jinping (source: Xinhua News Agency)

In recent years, China has increased engagement with Central Asian states sharply, both bilaterally and multilaterally. Last year, Xi visited Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in his first trip

abroad since the pandemic began; now the Turkmen president is the first Central Asian leader (and the second foreign leader overall) received by China in 2023. The frequent exchanges between the head of states reflect that China attaches greater importance to Central Asia, which has undertaken an ever more significant role in China's neighborhood diplomacy, especially after the Russia-Ukraine war.

China has forged comprehensive strategic partnerships with all the Central Asian states. China established a comprehensive strategic partnership with Kazakhstan in 2011 and later elevated it to a permanent comprehensive strategic partnership. This was followed by Uzbekistan in 2016, Tajikistan in 2017, and Kyrgyzstan in 2018. Turkmenistan is the last country in Central Asia to develop such ties with China.

At the regional and multilateral level, China proposed the establishment of a China-Central Asia (C+C5) cooperation mechanism, a new format of multilateral cooperation between China and Central Asian countries outside the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). With the support of Turkmenistan and other Central Asian countries, the first "C+C5" summit is expected to be held this year.

At the same time, China has signed cooperation agreements under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with all the Central Asian states to strengthen synergy between the BRI and their own national development strategies. Physical connectivity such as cross-border railways, gas and oil cooperation, trade, and investment are crucial in the BRI agreements.

It is noteworthy that a cross-border railway was mentioned in the China-Turkmenistan talks, following on increased attention to the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan (CKU) railway project, brought up by Xi during his visit to Uzbekistan last year. As Turkmenistan borders Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and the Caspian Sea, the China-Turkmenistan railway will be an extension to the CKU rail line. It's hoped the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan (CKUT) railway becomes a reality in the coming years.

Running west to Iran and south to Afghanistan, the CKUT railway will be a Eurasian transportation artery and a main rail line connecting Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. Given ambitions for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to be expanded into

Afghanistan, if the CKUT can also be extended to Afghanistan, a railway network would be established linking China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

This is strategically significant to energy cooperation between China and Central Asian and South Asian countries, as well as the economic ties between them. On one hand, the cross-border rail line will make it easier to transport petroleum and natural gas, fostering more pipeline construction. Notably, China reached an oil exploitation deal with Afghanistan in recent days. On the other hand, the imbalance in trade between the countries along the line may also be redressed, considering the increased exports to China from Central and South Asia. The cross-border rail line could thereby inject political and economic vitality to China-Central Asia-South Asia trilateral relations.

At the same time, South Asia in particular has been one of the main arenas of terrorist attacks targeting Chinese workers and interests. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the wider region has witnessed waves of domestic protests and violence against governments, and leading to the ouster of incumbent ruling parties in some states such as Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Moreover, the economic depression and even economic crisis partially caused by the pandemic and the complex geological conditions in the area are also the main obstacles to the construction of cross-border railways in the region.

There are some difficulties for China to make the vision of a cross-border railway in Central and South Asia a reality. It's worth bearing in mind that difficulties do not necessarily derail such projects. Despite unstable domestic politics and the great technical difficulties of building railways in the Himalayas, in December China initiated a feasibility study for the China-Nepal cross-border railway. Therefore, a long railway across China, Central Asia, and South Asia may still be feasible in the future, and it could substantially change both geopolitics and geoeconomics in the region.

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# RCAS Paper

## Women Empowerment Through Women Entrepreneurship in Bangladesh:

### A Mixed Methodology Approach

*Sujit Kumar Datta*

**Abstract:** This research aimed to examine the role of female entrepreneurship in the process of female empowerment in Chittagong, Bangladesh. The study examined the link between women's business and women's social empowerment. A total of 160 respondents were interviewed throughout the first data-gathering phase (80 non-enterprise homemakers and 80 enterprise housewives). According to the conclusions of this study, entrepreneurship has a significant influence on women's ability to make choices in their families, notably at home. Additionally, this study discovered that businesswomen had greater control over their resources and assets than non-businesswomen (homemakers). They also have more social mobility, political involvement, and a say in their home and family's health than women who do not work. On the other hand, women who do not work in the business have less knowledge and awareness about climate change, disaster management, and women's rights than those who do. According to the research findings, having rapid access to a pay loan with favourable terms and conditions is critical to a business's success. More research should be done in Chittagong, Bangladesh, where household women's income is significant for social and economic growth.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Entrepreneur, Bangladesh, Development, Decision Making, SDGs.

### A. INTRODUCTION

All the remarkable creations in the world; half of them are women, half of them are men'-this is how the national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam saw men and women (Geeti, & Habibullah, 2016). At present, women are not lagging behind in any way. On the contrary, they are constantly moving ahead with their respective qualifications. Furthermore, three decades ago, women's walks at work were not noticeable. Nevertheless, now women are engaged in almost all professions outside the house. New entrepreneurs are being created. An entrepreneur is a woman who thinks of her employment and tries to set up or start a business independently without being subordinate

to any job or jail (Goffee, & Scase, 2015). However, overcoming this social barrier in our society, many women entrepreneurs have reached a very high success with their work. Women entrepreneurs have now taken place in people's minds.

Increasing women's financial and economic independence is a critical component on the path to sustainable development. Without the involvement of women in the mainstream development program, the institutionalization of the sustainable development process would be difficult to achieve in its entirety. Bangladesh is a developing nation in South Asia that is now one of the most hazard-prone countries on the planet due to its geographical location. Because of the effects of disasters and the damage they cause to the environment, the country's economic growth is in real danger. Women's empowerment is a process by which women can come out of their previous position, highlight their qualifications and achievements, and highlight their decisions and situations by participating in family, society, or public life. Women's empowerment is primarily a means of experiencing and making decisions in economic and political infrastructure. Women can express their talents and qualifications and strive to achieve their rights. Women's empowerment is possible only when, without any restrictions or limitations, women have the opportunity to use existing facilities to change education, career and lifestyle. Women's empowerment is one of the keys to economic development, political status quo and social change (Kabeer, 2008).

Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was a pioneer in empowering Bengali women. Bangabandhu created the Women's League in 1967, giving women a chance to participate in politics (Mantoo, 2015). In 1972, the People's Republic of Bangladesh adopted a constitution that guaranteed women equal rights at all levels of state and public life and the power to make special provisions for the development of women and backward communities (Articles 27 and 28) (Huq, 1973). Following the ideals of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangabandhu's daughter Sheikh Hasina, soon after coming to power, formulated numerous policies and laws to ensure gender equality, women's development and empowerment at all levels and has worked tirelessly to consolidate and implement it in all stages in real terms. Now the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's initiatives and achievements to ensure 100% participation of women in education, make them economically self-reliant, create a womenfriendly work environment, ensure women's safety and rights through legislation, and encourage active

participation of women in education politics are incredible. A maximum of BDT 25 lakh SME loan has been provided without collateral to make women economically self-reliant. Women entrepreneurs can also borrow from Bangladesh Bank and Asia Development Bank at 10 per cent interest (IFC. 2016). At present more than 30 lakh women workers are working in the garment industry. The government's seventh five-year plan (2016-2020) pledges to ensure women's empowerment by engaging in economic and political activities. In addition, in 2011, the National Women's Policy was enacted to promote gender equality at the workplace. Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Vulnerable Group Development (VGD), Poor Allowance, Maternity and Pregnant Mothers Allowance, Allowance for Disabled Mothers and Divorcees, Food for Work, Programs One Home-One Farm, and more schemes are available from the current government. In addition, maternity leave has been raised from four to six months to make it easier for women to return to work (Sultan, & Mahpara 2020). Through all these activities of the government, the oppressed women groups of the society can be involved in economic activities through which the empowerment of women is possible.

### *The Statement of Problem*

Women's entrepreneurship can play an influential role in eliminating women's problems at work and enhancing women empowerment. Therefore, the fifth goal of SDGs is gender equality become important. It should be noted that the inequality that creates inequality between men and women is much stronger than all other inequalities due to its multidimensionality. Every goal of the Sustainable Development Goals is, directly and indirectly, related to women's empowerment. Bangladesh ranks 50th out of 153 countries in the 2019 Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) (Sharma, eds. 2021). Moreover, Bangladesh ranks seventh in the world in terms of women's empowerment in politics. In this case, Bangladesh holds the top position among the neighbouring countries of South Asia for the fifth time in a row. The issue points to solid progress in women's empowerment. In 1990, the number of female students at the primary education level was about 54 lakhs. In 2016, it increased to 6.90 lakhs. At the secondary level, the enrollment of girls was 39 per cent in 1980, which increased to 8 per cent in 2016. However, the dropout rate of girls at the secondary level is 42 per cent. Reaching this stage, only 59 per cent of the students can complete secondary education (Hasan, 2020). In the case of tertiary level education, the trend of dropping out continues. As a result, women's participation in the labour

force decreases. The government has taken several legal and policy measures to protect women's rights in achieving SDG-5. However, there are several fundamental challenges to achieving gender equality. These challenges include eliminating violence against women and the inequality of opportunity, preventing child marriage, and promoting women's financial empowerment. Existing gender inequality is one of the obstacles to the creation of a hunger-free and self-reliant Bangladesh. It is impossible to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by suppressing women. Real experience also shows that birth rate is more successful when women's financial condition improves. Men and women are much more creative and responsible than men in economic activities (Shackelford, 1992). The increase in the rate of female education increases the overall education rate in society and reduces the family's medical expenses and criminal tendencies. Women can take decision when she feels empowered and formulates gender-friendly laws and plans (Shabib & Khan, 2014).

Women are seen to be victims of harassment in various ways. Due to these problems in the workplace, women who are educated in higher education are often reluctant to enter the workforce. Women are subjected to physical and mental abuse. These adverse effects reduce women's work satisfaction, degrade relationships with coworkers, and even lead to job losses. Therefore, the workplace has a responsibility to make women work-oriented. Women also become career-oriented when they get proper status in the workplace. Since women have to play different roles simultaneously (such as worker, wife and mother), there are some exceptional opportunities for women in the workplace. When a woman faces relatively few obstacles or conflicts in fulfilling these responsibilities, she will give importance to her family responsibilities and career. Nevertheless, the opposite will happen if there are problems at work. There are some barriers to women's participation in the workplace in our country, such as lack of vehicles, lack of toilets, lack of child care centres, and lack of safety. In addition, there are some private jobs where women have less maternity leave (Jayachandran, 2021).

### *Rationale of The Study*

In the current socio-economic context of Bangladesh, women entrepreneurs are playing an influential role in women's empowerment. On the other hand, it is not possible to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) without women's empowerment. The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the sale of women's products through the different online platforms.



Mainly because they did not leave the house in lockdown, many women bought products online at this time, which was a blessing for women involved in e-commerce. Women Entrepreneurs Association of Bangladesh mentioned that about 60 per cent of women had come online to sell products to keep the business in the Covid-19 pandemic time (Rahim, eds. 2019). Many women entrepreneurs have been interested in selling products online to sustain business in the Covid-19 pandemic. Specially educated women have come this way more. Women entrepreneurs have promoted products on Facebook, Whats App, Messenger, and Viva. Many have also done business by opening personal websites. Those concerned say it is possible to encourage and promote products online easily. Buying and selling goods online reduce the cost of operating the business. The increase in the participation of women entrepreneurs in selling products online will have a positive impact on the economy.

### *Research Hypothesis*

Economic emancipation serves as one of the critical forces in women's empowerment, and women entrepreneurs are one of the economic liberations of women. Through these women entrepreneurs, Bangladeshi women become selfreliant and influential in making various decisions in the family and society. Women's entrepreneurship plays an influential role in women's empowerment. In the same way, the empowerment of these women also plays an essential role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

### *Research Questions*

1. Does women entrepreneurship ensure women empowerment?
2. How Women Empowerment and Women Entrepreneurship play an influential role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Bangladesh by 2030?

### *Aim and Objectives of the Research*

1. To check if women's entrepreneurship ensures through women's empowerment.
2. To identify the limitations of Women's empowerment in Bangladesh.
3. To categorize the limitations of creating women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh.

4. To examine how Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be achieved through women entrepreneurs and women empowerment in Bangladesh.

### *Literature Review*

Nagarajan said that Entrepreneurship is a concept of more significant concern in the contemporary era. Entrepreneurship holds no gender biases, and women have to face all challenges in domestic needs fulfillment. In addition, women entrepreneurs must be able to create opportunities and financial independence (Nagarajan, 2016). The empowerment of women is a process of personal and social change. It takes place in the interrelated and mutually reinforcing psychological, political, social and economic fields. Through this process, women individually and collectively obtain power, meaningful choices and control over their own lives (Islam, 2020). Women's entrepreneurship can achieve financial and social empowerment, which is important for women's sustainable livelihoods (ILO, 2017). Entrepreneurship plays a prominent role in creating employment opportunities for rural communities, providing selfemployment for those who have already started a business, and improving rural areas' economic status. Nowadays, women are also interested in creating a professional company in urban and rural areas by overcoming poverty, generating income for the family, and improving living standards (Manashi 2015).

The population of any country plays a vital role in accelerating its development. For example, half of the people of Bangladesh are female. If this half of the population is backward, then the actual product of the country is not possible. Therefore, the women's society of the country has a vital role in taking the country forward. Thus, one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (Nalule, 2020). Sustainable Development aims to rid the world of hunger and poverty and all forms of inequality and inequality. The period from 2016 to 2030 has been set as the period for achieving SDG so that people can live in a beautiful and safe world with their rights. Almost all the nations of the world will continue to work towards achieving the goals of the SDGs during this period. Women's empowerment is a reflection of gender equality which is essential for a country's sustainable oven (Lee, 2021). Women's participation in the workplace, leadership in the social and political spheres, involvement in the economy, etc., are closely related to women's empowerment. However, at present, the increasing participation of women in these fields is not satisfactory. In

particular, women's participation in the workplace is negligible compared to commodities. There are many reasons behind this—currently, the participation of women in the workplace in the essay. In particular, educated women have expressed reluctance to go to the workplace and discussed its survival.

The development of small and medium enterprises in Bangladesh has a vital role in increasing employment (Islam, eds. 2011). In addition, the role of micro, small and medium enterprises is also recognized in the areas of balanced development and spreading development flow to all types of communities and regions. Realizing this importance, Bangladesh Bank has launched an SME loan facility to increase the flow of credit in these initiatives. Under this facility, the terms of credit have been made easier for women entrepreneurs (Aziz, & Siddique, 2016). Here the progress of this loan in the field of women entrepreneurs is being reviewed. According to the UN declaration, Bangladesh is on its way to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Earlier, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina won the United Nations Award in 2010 for completing the Bangladesh Millennium Development Goal (MDGs). The development of Bangladesh is a role model for the world. Women's development and empowerment have worked as regulators behind this. That is why there has been a massive change in the country in a short period. Once upon a time, women could not move freely. They had to face obstacles in entering the workplace. There was no opportunity to use women's human resources, had considerable staffing. Due to a lack of education, our women's society was lagging far behind. The condition of women has changed today with the massive efforts of the present government. The education rate has increased. The presence of women in all spheres of the country has changed the country's society and economy. Women's power is being fully utilized (Sayem, eds. 2011).

Microfinance schemes and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) contribute to poverty alleviation and women empowerment. At least 10 per cent of the loans have been allocated for women-run SMEs. The government has established a foundation called Jayeeta to help women businessmen and entrepreneurs. The foundation provides 18,000 women entrepreneurs at the grassroots level and trains women in various professions like sewing, mobile phone service, nursery, primary computer, and IT training for self-employment. As a result, women's participation in our economy is increasing. The Prime Minister said that more than 40 lakh

women are working in the garment industry. Thirty-five per cent of women have bank accounts. Women contribute 34 per cent to GDP. The government is working to increase participation in each sector to 40 per cent by 2021 and 50 per cent by 2030 (Khan et al., 2017). Finally, it is essential to state clearly that women's employment, earnings are all needed to empower them. However, they do not ensure empowerment in all respects. To be certified through these, women need the power and freedom to decide. Various studies and surveys have shown that women's freedom to choose is still limited in many respects. One promising aspect is that women's education expands the ability to make independent decisions. Nevertheless, this happens when the female education level is higher than the secondary. Therefore, for the overall position of women to develop and empower, there is a need for a coordinated effort everywhere, through which Bangladesh can achieve the sustainable development target by 2030 (Odera, & Mulusa, 2020).

The studies mentioned above have discussed how women entrepreneurs can play an influential role in women's empowerment but have not discussed how women empowerment can achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This proposed study will help identify issues that can contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goals through women's empowerment. The "Theory of Change" focuses on how the United Nations Development System (UNDS) can better work together to support the Sustainable Development Goals. Where the SDG constitutes the UNDS needs to help satisfy, this change theory focuses on the how, emphasizing that if UNDS is more "fit for purpose", reform efforts should be more purpose-oriented. The document takes the United Nations development system as its primary focus. It points out that the paper requires more consideration of developing theories of change through the pillars of the United Nations system (Hendra, & FitzGerald, 2020). Feminist research in international politics takes the experience and contribution of women seriously. In international politics, women play an essential part in the political, economic, and social processes. Feminism works in gender power and world politics to highlight different forms of discrimination and power relations towards women. Blanchard presents feminists have presented a broad discussion of security theories that have historically challenged the core concepts of international relations, primarily in security, peace, and war. Discussing various feminist writers worldwide and their work, he emphasized that international relations have been further enhanced through feminist security theories (Blanchard, 2003). To understand women and gender security in international relations, feminists

first introduced women and security. Sylvester examining feminist behaviour concerning feminism and the international community proves that feminism has a historical connection with peace and partisanship. She discusses how feminist international researchers have increasingly demonstrated how women support political violence and war (Kabeer, 2008).

To establish a hypothesized causal relationship between women empowerment through women entrepreneurship, I have conducted causal research using the quantitative method. The primary data have been collected from the women entrepreneurs of the Chittagong division of Bangladesh. I have used both probability (cluster) and non-probability (convenience) sampling techniques, using multivariate analysis techniques-exploratory, factor analysis, structural equation modeling, and paths analysis. The Common Factor Analysis with an orthogonal rotation method will use SPSS (v-22.0) to extract and separate the significant factors that develop women's empowerment through women's entrepreneurship. The face-to-face interview survey strategy is proper where the exact population is unknown, and respondents cannot answer written surveys. Therefore, a survey guide is prepared comprised of open-ended or close-ended questions that the respondent answered based on their experience and understanding.

#### *Research Sample Size:*

The sample for the present study will comprise 60 women (in two groups, with 30 women entrepreneurs in group 1 and 30 women entrepreneurs cum homemakers in group 2 residing in Chittagong, Bangladesh).

#### *Research Design:*

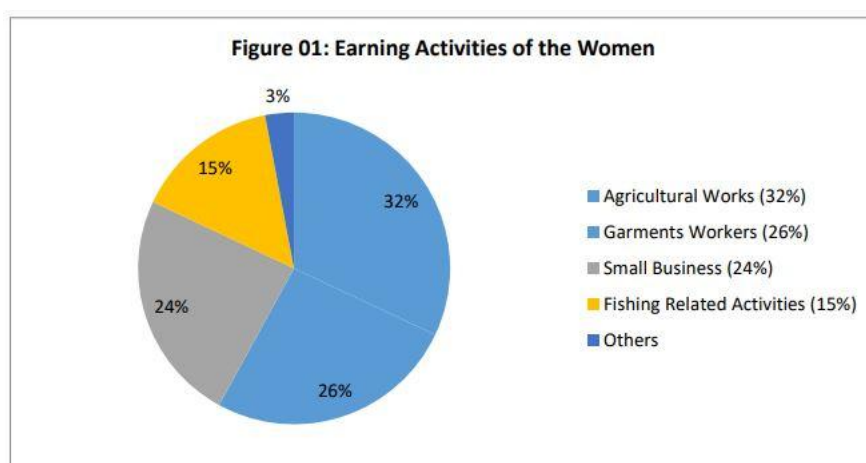
The nature of the study is both exploratory and descriptive. It is exploratory as the study aims at identifying the significance of women empowerment through women entrepreneurship. To complement some empirical material and theoretical perspectives, in the final stage of my research, I interviewed some academicians, think tank specialists, policymakers through email.

## **B. RESULTS**

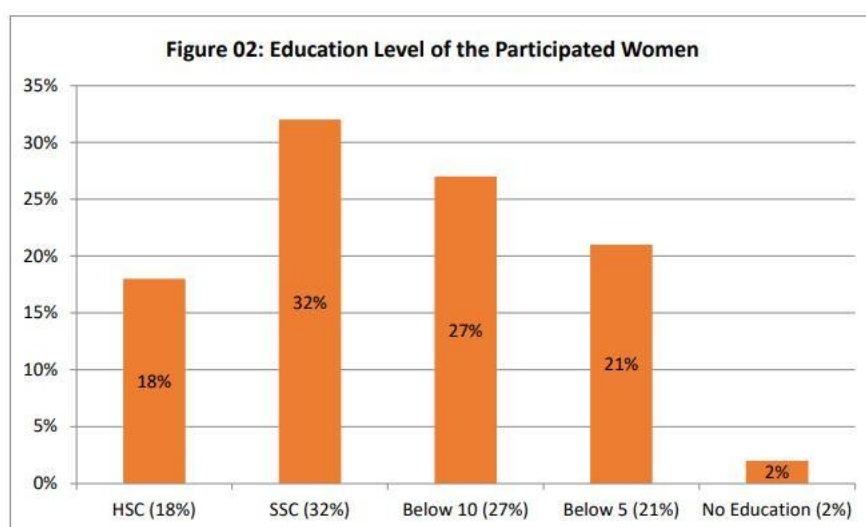
### *Socioeconomic Status of the Respondent*

The port city of Chittagong is located in Bangladesh's southern coastline region, where it often experiences coastal natural disasters. The livelihoods of the people are badly impacted. This

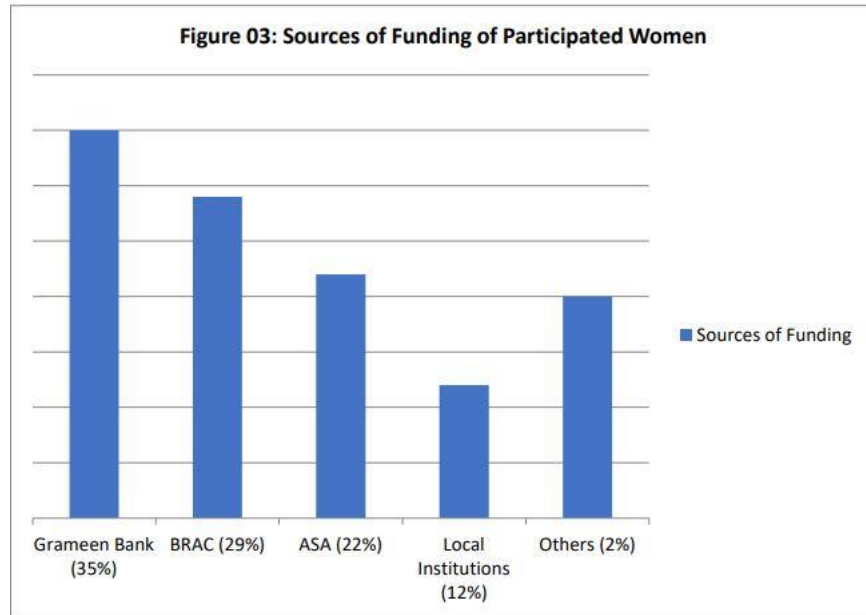
region's socioeconomic situation is precarious. The majority of people work in agriculture and labour. According to Fig. 1, “women makeup 32% of the workforce in agricultural-related occupations, 26% in the apparel industry, 24% in small companies, and 15% in the fishing industry. Fig. 2 depicts the degree of education held by female business owners. According to the survey, 32% of the female population completed the SSC, followed by 27% who finished classes up to class 10, and 18% passed the HSC. 2% of people do not have formal schooling. Fig. 3 demonstrates that Grameen Bank provided microcredit loans to 35% of businesswomen. 12% came from local institutions, 2% from other institutions, 29% from BRAC, and 22% from ASA”. Furthermore, it has been shown that Grameen Bank, BRAC, and ASA microcredit loans have more issues than BRAC and ASA microcredit loans.



Source: Author's own calculation based on primary data



Source: Author's own calculation based on primary data



**Source: Author's own calculation based on primary data**

### *Metrics for Measuring Women's Empowerment*

#### *Indicators of Resource Access and Asset Ownership*

Table 1 demonstrates that while all non-business women have lower indicators of controlling over resources, “65% of women in businesses have higher/more substantial indications. Businesswomen are seen to have more indicators of control over resources than non-businesswomen. Table 2's statistics, on the other hand, showed that most non-business women, 80% had low indicators of property ownership, whereas 60% of women in business had medium values”. The data suggest that women who do not run their businesses are less conscious of their ownership of assets.

Based on the analysis, Table 3 reveals that “90% of homemakers who participate in social activities are followed by 60% of women in the enterprise who have higher/more vital indicators of engagement in social activities, such as child immunization, dowry, early marriage, and women's health. According to the findings, businesswomen have more influence to engage in various social activities than non-businesswomen”.

#### *Indicators of Political and Developmental Activity*

According to Table 4's findings, “medium political activity is indicated by 65% of businesswomen. However, non-enterprise women took part in fewer political or leadership-

related activities. Therefore, it is implied that businesswomen are better capable than non-businesswomen of playing leadership or political positions in society, both cognitively and monetarily”.

**Table 1: Indicators of Access of Resources of Participated Women**

Control Over Resources	Business Women		Non-Business Women	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Low (< 6)	0	0	80	100
Medium (7-14)	24	30	0	0
Strong (15-22)	44	55	0	0
Very Strong (23>)	8	10	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Author's own calculation based on primary data

**Table 2: Indicators of Proprietorship of Assets of Participated Women**

Control Over Resources	Business Women		Non-Business Women	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Low (< 6)	8	10	64	80
Medium (7-14)	48	60	12	15
Strong (15-22)	16	20	4	5
Very Strong (23>)	8	10	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Author's own calculation based on primary data

#### Signs of Participating in Social Activities



**Table 3: Indicators of Engagement in Social Activities of Participated Women**

Control Over Resources	Business Women		Non-Business Women	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Low (< 11)	0	0	72	90
Medium (12-24)	24	30	4	5
Strong (25-37)	48	60	0	5
Very Strong (38>)	8	10	4	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Author's own calculation based on primary data

**Table 4: Indicators of Involvement in Political Activities of Participated Women**

Control Over Resources	Business Women	Non-Business Women
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	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Low (< 8)	12	15	80	100
Medium (9-17)	52	65	0	0
Strong (18-26)	12	15	0	0
Very Strong (27>)	4	5	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Author's own calculation based on primary data

### *Signs of Involvement in household Decision-making*

According to Table 5, “among women in business, 70% actively participate in most home choices, including those involving the acquisition of property, the education of children, and

family possibilities. In contrast, 90% of non entrepreneurial women play more minor roles in domestic decision-making. The male/father then actively participates in family decision-making”.

**Table 5: Indicators of Participation in Household Decision Making of Participated Women**

Control Over Resources	Business Women		Non-Business Women	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Low (< 20)	4	5	72	90
Medium (21-40)	8	10	4	5
Strong (41-60)	12	15	4	5
Very Strong (61>)	56	70	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Author's own calculation based on primary data

#### *Role Indicators in Healthcare Decision-making*

According to Table 6's statistics, “women make up the majority of decision makers in the workplace (65%) regarding health matters, including family planning, sickness, and disease management. In comparison, just 65% of non businesswomen are moderately active in family health-related decision-making”. Women must get primary education and empowerment to handle health-related challenges adequately.

**Table 6: Indicators of Healthcare Related Decision Making of Participated Women**

Control Over Resources	Business Women		Non-Business Women	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Low (< 7)	4	5	16	20
Medium (8-15)	8	10	52	65
Strong (16-23)	12	20	8	10
Very Strong (24>)	52	65	4	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Author's own calculation based on primary data

#### *Signs that People are aware of Women's Rights*

Table 7 demonstrates that the majority of non-businesswomen, “70% are only moderately aware of women's rights. In contrast, 85% of businesswomen strongly or significantly recognize their rights in the family and society. The study assumed that businesswomen have to engage with various clients, salespeople, and dealers for professional reasons”. They may expand their understanding of women's rights in the household and in society in this way.

**Table 7: Indicators of Awareness about Women’s Right of Participated Women**

<b>Control Over Resources</b>	<b>Business Women</b>	<b>Non-Business Women</b>
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	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Low (< 7)	0	0	12	15
Medium (8-15)	4	5	56	70
Strong (16-23)	8	10	8	10
Very Strong (24>)	68	85	4	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Author’s own calculation based on primary data**

### *Measures of how People see Women's Empowerment*

According to Table 8's findings, “businesswomen are more influential than non businesswomen. The survey found that 80% of businesswomen had an extensive understanding of empowerment, whereas 90% of non-business women have poor levels of perspective on their empowerment in society. The view and understanding of their empowerment would support encouraging

corporate success”. In contrast, businesswomen can better support their families and the community than non-businesswomen.

**Table 8: Indicators of Perception of Women Empowerment of Participated Women**

Control Over Resources	Business Women		Non-Business Women	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Low (< 75)	0	0	72	90
Medium (76-129)	4	5	8	10
Strong (130-183)	12	15	0	0
Very Strong (184>)	64	80	0	0

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Total	80	100	80	100
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Source: Author's own calculation based on primary data

### *Metrics of Knowledge of Disaster Preparedness and Climate Change*

Of the majority of non-business women, “66% had little knowledge of climate change and catastrophe management concerns, as seen in Table 9. In contrast, 72.5% of businesswomen are highly knowledgeable and aware of disaster management and climate change. Due to their government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) training in dealing with climate change and disaster management, businesswomen are more informed than non-enterprise women. Successful women in business are very conscious of disasters and climate change because they pose an immediate risk to their industry”.

**Table 9: Indicators of understanding about Climate Change and Disaster Management**

Control Over Resources	Business Women		Non-Business Women	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Low (< 5)	4	5	12	15
Medium (6-12)	8	10	56	66
Strong (13-23)	58	72.5	6	7
Very Strong (24>)	10	12.5	9	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Author's own calculation based on primary data

**Table 10: Women Empowerment through Women Entrepreneurship**

2

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Women Empowerment through...

<b><u>Economic Factors</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Source of Income</li> <li>• Source of Micro-credit loan</li> <li>• Family Education</li> </ul>	<b><u>Social Factors</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage in Social Activities</li> <li>• Engage in Political Activities</li> <li>• Awareness of Political Rights</li> <li>• Awareness of Women Rights</li> <li>• Awareness of Women Empowerment</li> </ul>
<b><u>Family Factors</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to resources</li> <li>• Proprietorship of Assets</li> <li>• Household Decision Making</li> <li>• Health Related Decision Making</li> </ul>	<b><u>Environmental Factors</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of Climate Change</li> <li>• Knowledge of Global Developmental Agenda</li> <li>• Knowledge of Environmental Degradation</li> </ul>

Source: Author's own calculation based on primary data

## *Discussion*

This paper sought to ascertain “how women's entrepreneurship may influence women's empowerment and how it could contribute to the growth of a society and a nation. More precisely, the main goal was to ascertain how various forms of female entrepreneurship may influence the advancement of women's empowerment and development. The fact that all of the hypotheses were confirmed suggests that the independent variables employed in this study have meaningful connections to women's empowerment”. The work's reliability and validity were also endorsed. However, the tiny sample size and brief trial duration left the authors unsatisfied. Additionally, the research was carried out in a particular setting. In order to give readers more accurate findings, the writers decided to undertake in-depth interviews with people from various business disciplines. We learn about several facets of women's entrepreneurship and their effects on women's emancipation from the perspectives of this study.

A successful business requires highly motivated women to create “sustainable growth via women's empowerment, and recently the government promoted women entrepreneurs and offered financial assistance and input facilities. Researchers have been drawn to this issue to learn about the many different aspects of women's entrepreneurship, including environmental influences. However, with the expansion of research, few theoretical and empirical studies have noticed the performance of women entrepreneurs (housewives) concerning their empowerment. By breaking up a sample group of housewives into two separate dimensions, this study contributed to the field by identifying and assessing the elements that affect women entrepreneurs' (housewives') performance at four study hypotheses with various components. A homemaker may possess an extraordinary capacity for commercial success, but several factors might limit her performance and women's empowerment. This study's main goal was to comprehend how numerous financial, familial, social, and environmental elements affect how well women succeed in the workplace. According to this study's findings, some climate and disaster-related issues, described in detail in Table 9, may negatively impact how well women's businesses succeed in attaining women's emancipation. The findings of the interviews highlighted and noted numerous difficulties and the potential for female entrepreneurs”. However, the research has found that successful businesswomen have more access to resources and ownership of assets than non business homemakers. Compared to non-business women,

successful businesswomen show a greater interest in participating in social and political activities. This study's findings also show that businesswomen know better about catastrophe and climate change issues. The study's findings also showed that businesswomen are better equipped than homemakers to participate in family decision-making.

#### *Implications, Limitation, Future Research Directions, Conclusion*

I sought and enlisted the help of several active homemakers in the group to achieve the study's objectives. “The study examined a range of elements, including economic, family, social, and environmental issues, all of which are connected to the impact that female entrepreneurship has on the empowerment of women, in order to dive deeper into the findings. It allowed the researchers to explore the ramifications of the findings in more detail. The study's conclusions indicate that female entrepreneurship significantly influences women's empowerment, impacting how quickly development advances. Additionally, the advancement of development is impacted by this empowerment of women. The research undertaken for the study revealed that the perceived value of understanding women's rights and women's empowerment is a complicated issue that makes it challenging to gauge the effect on women's empowerment. By examining the study's research findings, this was learned. However, the numbers also showed that women who managed their enterprises had more access to resources, real estate, and other assets than women who did not. In contrast to women who did not own their enterprises, this was the situation. Additionally, research has revealed that business-successful women have a significant role in the critical decisions that affect their families”. Additionally, compared to non businesswomen, businesswomen have a piece of higher knowledge and awareness about managing natural disasters and climate change. This is because businesswomen prioritize these issues more often.

#### *Practical Implications*

This study examined “the subject from four distinct angles and was founded on a robust theoretical foundation. The results of this study were in line with those of previous studies, and by identifying the part that female entrepreneurship plays in women's empowerment, they also made new and essential additions to the theory. The statement "female entrepreneurship plays a role in the empowerment of women" was used to achieve this. The first hypothesis states that other socioeconomic factors, such as social taboos, religious restrictions, and societal superstition, can be added to the socioeconomic features of this study, namely the more diversified

occupations of women. This is feasible because, according to the second hypothesis, this study's socioeconomic components are more intricate than earlier research. It is due to the first hypothesis' contention that women are more likely to be affected by the socioeconomic aspects of this study. This particular analysis used the environmental factor to specify the company's susceptibility and risk due to recurring natural disasters and climatic changes. The investigation's findings support all four theoretically supported hypotheses in the section. Additionally, bringing up the idea of successful female company owners in the discussion about women's empowerment added fresh ideas to the theory”.

### *Limitations*

To verify the accuracy and validity of the study's results, the report's author went through several phases of analysis. Having stated that, I am aware of the fact that there are certain restrictions on our research. Given the vast range of cultural and familial superstitions held by the respondents, it is challenging to quantify the effect female entrepreneurship has on women's empowerment. The research also examined “the results of the information on women's businesses from a small sample of respondents in the Chittagong municipal zone. The data comes from a small sample size; the respondents were housewives. As a result, it will not be possible to generalize any of the study's possible results. An empirical study on this topic with bigger sample size and participants from a variety of jobs who are not housewives might offer more accurate and sincere results and possibly have a more overt effect on the researchers”.

### *Future Research Directions*

The liberation of women via “the practice of women's entrepreneurship is a novel phenomenon within the context of the development process that offers vast opportunities for further investigation. Significant research opportunities are how these opportunities present themselves. To be more precise, future studies should address the issue of whether or not women's emancipation through the support of female entrepreneurs has significantly influenced the development of a country. One of the questions that need a response is this one. It has been proposed that a study be carried out in the Northwestern region of Bangladesh to develop the future research area. This part of the country is located in a region where the household women's income significantly influences the socio-economic growth of the area” .



## C. CONCLUSION

All non-business women have lower indicators of controlling over resources, “65% of women in businesses have higher/more substantial indications. Businesswomen are seen to have more indicators of control over resources than non-businesswomen. “90% of homemakers who participate in social activities are followed by 60% of women in the enterprise who have higher/more vital indicators of engagement in social activities, such as child immunization, dowry, early marriage, and women's health. According to the findings, businesswomen have more influence to engage in various social activities than non businesswomen”. Empowering women without economic emancipation is not feasible given the socioeconomic situation in Bangladesh. The economic independence of Bangladeshi women entrepreneurs is having a significant impact and will ultimately help Bangladesh achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. Women's remarkable awakening and empowerment had a big part in our nation's present advancement in economic, social, and political indices. However, the numerous obstacles that lie ahead cannot be avoided; therefore, there is no room for complacency. To improve our legal disparities and attitudes toward women, the nation has to make more progress.

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## About Author



Sujit Kumar Datta is Non-resident Fellow of Research Centre for Asian Studies(RCAS), China, as well as the Chairman and Associate Professor in the International Relations Department at the University of Chittagong, Bangladesh. Dr. Datta graduated with a BA(Honors) and MA degree in International Relations from the Jahangiragar University and completed his PhD in International Politics from the School of Political Science and Public Administration, Shandong University, China. After that, he had worked at the BRAC Training Division(BTD) as a faculty member. He had joined in the department of International Relations, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh as a Lecturer in January, 2010. Now, he is working as an Associate Professor in the same institution. Dr. Datta has authored several articles and book chapters in renowned national and international peer-reviewed journals(Web of Science, Scopus indexed). Dr. Datta has presented several research papers in international seminars and conferences in China, India, Malaysia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. In the COVID-19 pandemic period, he had attended several International Webinars as a Resource Person in several countries. Dr. Datta wrote a book named “一带一路国别概览 孟加拉国卷”(Belt and Road Country Overview Bangladesh volume) along with his Ph.D. Supervisor, Professor Zhang Shulan, in 2019 from the Dalian University Press, China. He supervises several MPhil and Master's students in the department of International Relations, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh. He is now involved in different research projects granted by home and abroad.