

## The Women Entrepreneur Support Fund in Bangladesh: Challenges and Prospects

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**Abstract :** Gender is about equal rights that both males and females having access to responsibilities and opportunities in decision making is a fundamental human right. It is also a precondition for, and a mark of, sustainable people-oriented development. In Bangladesh, women have fewer opportunities than men do to access credit from banks and financial institutions. Entrenched patriarchal attitudes, unequal inheritance rights, and male-dominated hierarchies in the financial system, plus high interest rates and a lack of security/collateral, make it harder for women to obtain bank loans. Limited access to institutional credit is a serious restraint on the productivity and income of women entrepreneurs, (and the wider economy). These gender-biased and structural barriers inhibit women's access to fundamental economic rights. Using a liberal feminist theoretical lens, this study provides some useful insights into the relationship between gender inequality and entrepreneurship, leading to a better understanding of women's entrepreneurship development in Bangladesh. Recently, the Bangladesh Government, the United Nations Capital Development Fund, and Bangladesh Bank opened up the Women Entrepreneur Support Fund (WESF) – Credit Guarantee Scheme (CGS) pilot project to cover collateral shortfalls for women entrepreneurs in the small and medium enterprise sector. The aim is to improve gender equality and advance women's rights in relation to receiving credit. This article examines the challenges and prospects of the WESF-CGS, and suggests that implementation of measures in WESF-CGS policymaking, coupled with a combination of legislative and regulatory reforms that implement the fundamental tenets of liberal feminism, can lead to a comprehensive and effective credit policy to boost women's agency and economic empowerment. This may ultimately lead to more sustainable development in Bangladesh.

**Keywords :** Bangladesh, credit guarantee scheme, liberal feminist theory, women entrepreneur support fund

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