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## Enrolment of girl students in secondary schools exceeds target

Staff Correspondent

The enrolment of the female students in Secondary schools of the country exceeds its target by 3 million under the Female Secondary School Assistance Project, launched to ensure Women Empowerment and reduce the Gender Disparity that prevailed in the country over the centuries.

Experts said, they already reached 3.5 million 'Girl Years' instead of the target of 3.2 million in 1999. The Girl Year means the allocation of stipend for a girl student for each academic year. With a view to ensuring the sustainability of the women development across the country at present the government is planning to extend the project for another five years. The seven-year World Bank Financed Project will be completed by next December. The proposed project has already been approved by the Economic Relation Department and is now under the consideration for the World Bank Credit.

However the World Bank is pressing upon the government to run the project under public sector finance, since it is one of the most successful project in the Education Sector. Disagreeing with the proposal made by the bank a highly placed official source told The Bangladesh Observer, the government has so many projects to run even in the face of huge financial constraints. So it is almost impossible to launch the project under the public sector.

Under the project 14 lakh female students of 4958 secondary school and madrasas in 118 thanas under the non metropolitan areas of the country availed the stipends for last few years. The 68 million US dollar Project was launched to have beneficial impact on fertility of girls who complete Secondary education and get married about 3 years later than those who are completing primary education. Those completing secondary level

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## Enrolement

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have a fertility rate of 3.3 compared to that of 4.4, who are completing primary school thereby worsening the fertility decline in the country.

Admitting the fact Tahmina Khatun, the Headmistress of Kakanhat Girl's High School in Rajshahi told a group of newsmen that the rate of early marriage as well as drop outs from high schools was declining abruptly following the introduction of the Stipends since 1994. During a visit to Rajshahi under Godagari thana this Correspondent along with other newsmen found a huge enthusiasm among the teachers and the students of Godagari Thana.

Prior to the introduction of the Stipend System almost 30 per cent of the female students got married whereas at present the rate is only five per cent, said Tahmina, who is providing financial assistance to 200 students out of 250.

According to the condition of the financial assistance for female secondary students, the eligible students will be unmarried and will obtain 45 per cent marks having 75 per cent attendance.

Despite a lot of domestic works I am happy to attend my classes regularly, as at the end of each three months I can save my stipend money in the bank as well as I can learn the banking system' said Sultana Khatun, eldest daughter, who looks forward to become a teacher.

In spite of all the facilities the Headmistress said that still they had to give a lot of efforts to make the parents understand about the necessity of sending their daughters to the school. Moreover in Class Nine and Ten the stipend money are not sufficient to bear all the expenses of their books and tuition fees of the school.

Pointing out the fact of the decreasing number of male students in some co-education schools of the country the experts emphasised the need for new research to measure the impact of the project as a whole.