

'WE ENCOURAGE WOMEN TO TRANSFORM INTO ENTREPRENEURS'

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Q & A

MA How is Bharatiya Mahila Bank different from the other banks? Are there differences in work culture?

First and foremost, Bharatiya Mahila Bank is very similar to any other Public Sector Bank in India and is governed by all the rules, regulations and guidelines as applicable to any other Public Sector Bank. At the same time, the Bank is unique in more than one way. This is the only Bank in India that has been formed with a vision of economic empowerment of women. This is the only Bank that has within 12 months of its formation, opened 37 branches across the country – all branches on Core Banking Solutions and with onsite ATMs. This is the only Bank that has, within one year of its operations launched Internet banking facility for its customers with many value added features. This is a new age Bank among Public Sector Banks.

The Bank, while has all general banking products, it predominantly lends to women and towards this end, designs products and services taking into account the core strengths of women.

The work culture in the Bank is a capricious blend of domain knowledge, expertise and innovation in the banking sector. On the one hand there are officials at various levels in the Bank drawn from other banks on deputation as well as from the open market. On the other hand, there are also the Direct Recruit Officers DROs who have been inducted afresh into the banking mainstream through IIBF. The expertise and domain knowledge of the one segment coupled with the fresh and innovative thinking of the newgen officers becomes an added advantage to the work culture of the Bank as a whole. The diversified unity in the work culture, ultimately results in benefiting the customers.





MA What is your vision for the bank? What have been the major initiatives taken during your tenure with this organization?

My vision is translating the vision of the Bank into reality – the vision of Economic empowerment of women. We are striving to reach maximum number of women in maximum number of households in India within the shortest possible time.

As to the initiatives, the setting up of the Bank in itself was a challenge. Many banks have commenced operations consuming more timeframe. Bharatiya Mahila Bank (BMB) commenced operations within 55 days of the licensing from RBI. Formulating of policies, rules, regulations, the various systems and procedures are all now in place. We have been working to increase our footprints across India and today you can see a BMB branch in almost all the States.

Besides the traditional products like Home Loan, Car Loan and basic deposit products, we introduced several women centric loan products to make women contribute to the economic growth of the country. The Bank won the Core Banking System Initiative Award of the year 2014 by the Asian Banking and Finance - Retail Banking Awards 2014, Singapore.

The Bank is also an active participant in Prime Minister's Jan Dhan Yojana.

MA Is there a need to set up a separate bank for women? How will this bank be beneficial for women?

India is the second most populous country in the world. Wom-

en who constitute almost half of the country's population are truly under leveraged economic assets. If they can become part of mainstream economy, engaging in any economic activity, it can mean a lot. It is a bitter truth that only 26% of women have regular, formal bank accounts and only a very negligible percentage of them have formal access to banking. In terms of economic empowerment of women, according to a study by Booz and Co., India is ranked 115, out of 128 countries. In India, generally most of the decisions relating to money and finance are taken by the male members on behalf of women. However, Indian women have a long history of saving and borrowing. Women for their financial needs depend mostly on the local moneylenders, despite knowing that it would be too long before they get out of their clutches. It is also a fact that the Indian woman, irrespective of her literacy level, is shy of going to a Bank; shy of entering into the Bank and interacting with the officials of the Bank.

MA What are the constraints you are facing to expand a new bank with new objectives?

The main challenge is awareness creation among the general public about the Bank. The other challenges relate to brand, manpower, setting up of infrastructure, processes and system. Banking is such an industry that needs brand identity in great degree. As a new Bank, the challenge is to establish the brand.

MA What specific areas of banking are you going to focus currently?

CASA and SME will be the major focus areas. As a start-up Bank, we need to get our core strength from

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CASA. To achieve our objectives of bringing more women from different economic strata into the main stream of national economy, through formal banking process, we will be focusing on SME and Micro credit and priority sector. We also identify the bottom of the pyramid and SHGs as a key vertical.

MA What new products will Mahila bank introduce specially for women entrepreneurs?

We have already introduced many women centric products like BMB Annapurna, BMB Parvarish, BMB Shringaar etc. where the hidden potentials of women can be turned into entrepreneurship. BMB Annapurna is a loan for running catering services even from home. BMB Parvarish is a child day care centre loan. BMB Shringaar is a loan for setting up own beauty parlours/salons. Komal kali, is a unique Recurring Deposit Product for empowering the girl child. We plan to introduce special loan products for Women Enterprises which manufacture "made in India products".

We are also developing a product for Micro Educational loans. This micro educational loan will be for students pursuing short term courses that are offered with assured placement.

MA Rural Women are not much aware and literate to handle all the legal and other formalities of banking. What steps will the bank take to reach out to those rural women?

Our Bank is keen on reaching the unserved. All the branches of the Bank are conducting Financial Literacy Camps on every Saturday. Presently we are in almost all the State Capitals. We are in the process of es-

tablishing around 20 rural unbanked centres across the country. We are also participating in the Prime Minister's Jan Dhan Yojana. We will also be introducing Business Correspondent and Business Development and Facilitator Models of Banking. The Bank will leverage technology to its optimum to reach the rural women. The Bank's mobile banking to be launched shortly will be an opportune tech-enabled application to reach out to the rural masses.

MA How do you propose to tackle the problem of collateral, as most women neither own property nor land in their own names?

We understand clearly two things. One – women do not own properties and cannot offer collaterals. Two – they do not need large loans. To help the woman entrepreneur tide over the asset ownership problem, the Bank has tied up with CGTM-SE to provide collateral free loans. Generally, women entrepreneurs start with less capital and then scale up gradually. The Bank, encourages women transform into entrepreneurs, with collateral free loan of upto Rupees one crore.

MA What is your further expansion plan? Will the bank take up wholesale banking in a big way?

Besides brick and mortar branches, the Bank will have Business Correspondent, Business Development and Facilitator Models of Banking and tech enabled services.

MA What constraints do women bankers face given the huge pressures in present banking scenario?

It is true that Banking is consid-

ered a high pressure job next to IT Sector. Considering the additional roles played by a woman in her home front, the pressure is more on the women employees.

Women need to work double to prove themselves. They are always being watched for quality work they put through.

Women are smart workers but mobility has become a problem and hence they decide to stagnate at certain levels. This is not desirable, as they develop a tendency to remain contended, do not update themselves and they also scuttle their career aspirations. As a result, the Bank loses out on good workers – good workers with limited exposure.

To overcome the work pressures and continue with their improved performance, women need to keep looking for mentors in the offices and maintain a strong support system at home.

MA What strategy do you follow to inspire and encourage women to open an account?

We believe in knowledge and service – Strong knowledge about the products and processes for our officers. Our Direct Recruit Officers are highly enthusiastic and energetic. The DROs are given intensive training on the various products of our Bank. This helps them explain each product in detail and according to the requirement of the potential customer and convert them into a customer. Our field level functionaries including the Branch Heads, take up camp mode activities where they interact with the General Public, understand their needs and then the business conversions happen automatically. The service that we provide endears us

to our customers.

The need to have an individual bank account adds pride and confidence to women customers. The product suite, customer service and above all comprehensive Financial Literacy to both rural and urban women is important to inspire them to open an account with BMB and continue their banking relationship with BMB. For example the BMB Savings Bank account offers an interest of 4.5% upto an amount of one lakh rupees and 5% for the entire amount if the amount is above one lakh rupees. Features like this are explained to them during the camps. We also conduct workshop and counselling session for women entrepreneurs towards achieving the vision of our Bank – economic empowerment of women. Be it our branch or camp or workshop, the woman walks in with hope and walks away with an assured confidence, empowered to face the world, with new perspectives.

MA What roles could professionals like Cost and Management Accountants play to assist Bharatiya Mahila Bank in enhancing performance and competitiveness?

First of all, we have an MoU in place to enhance the coming together of BMBians and Cost and Management Accountants. Students pursuing this course can avail of educational loans from BMB and the bonding starts from here.

BMB encourages professionals to start practice and this MoU supports Cost Accountants, particularly women Cost Accountants to set up practice where women practitioners enjoy interest concessions.