

Social Dynamics of Gender Role in Rice Value Chain and Decision Making in Rural Bangladesh

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Abstract

The tribal women enjoyed more flexibility about mobility than the Muslim women in the study villages may due to religious and social custom. However, despite higher flexibility about mobility, the tribal women were not significantly empowered in decision making process than the Muslim women. A few women had registered ownership on agricultural land in the study villages. Similarly, ownership of other household resources was male dominated. There was wide variation in the participation of women in the farming activities between the Muslim dominant and tribal villages. Although some women participated in the intercultural operations of non-rice crops, homeyard crops and rearing livestock but men were extensively participated in the intercultural operation of rice cultivation, and buying farm inputs and selling of marketable surplus in Mymensingh. However, the tribal women were equally participated in the farming activities (cultivation and marketing) with male.

Keywords: Social Dynamics, Gender, Rice Value Chain, Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

Women perform backbreaking tasks and play an important role in the rice sector of Bangladesh as both paid and unpaid family labor. In spite of the significance of women as unpaid labor or as agricultural wage workers in rice production, postharvest, and processing, their contributions are often under-reported and have remained invisible in agricultural statistics. Women play large and crucial but often unrecognized roles across the rice sector. Moreover, in last 10 years 6.7 million women has joint in agricultural sector while men's participation has decreased by 3 percent (LFS, 2010). Despite significant contribution of women in agriculture, their roles are mostly overlooked in the national agricultural statistics of Bangladesh. Similarly, Amin (1995) reported that contribution of women in the market value chain remains socially invisible because of their absence at the point at which their value is realized. On the other hand, women were suffered widespread gender-based discrimination in laws, customs and practices which cause severe inequalities in their ability to access, control, own and use land and limit their participation in decision-making at all levels of land governance (Elizabeth D. *et al*, 2013). Thus, assessment of women roles, constraints, needs and opportunities in the farming is very important in the point of view for delineating their contribution and encourage them to participation in the sector in the future. The specific objectives of the study were as follows:

- To identify the socio-demographic features of the study villages; and
- To assess the property rights and roles of women in the family and farm.
- To measure the extent of gender participation in the rice value chain and decision-making process; and
- To understand the social obstacles and mind-set against women empowerment.

2. Research Methodology

Two contrasting ethnic community base Districts namely Mymensingh and Bandarban were selected purposively for this study. The selected villages of Mymensingh was Muslim dominant, most arable land of the villages was plain and intensively used for crop farming. On the other hand, Bandarban is a hilly District, most people of the selected villages were tribal, agriculture lands of villages were fragmented, a few areas were suitable for crops farming, and there was lack of labour for farming. Despite lack of plain land, some areas were used for rice cultivation to meetup family requirement for staple foods and they grew some vegetables and fruits on the hilly areas. Data were collected from four villages, two from each District through Focus Group Discussion (FGD). In total four (one form each village) FGD was conducted with 12-16 respondent included male and female members of farm families in the study villages. The results were validated by the respondents in the following seasons.

3. Results

3.1 Sociodemographic Features

Table 1 shows demographic features of household in the study the villages. Nearly half of the respondents were belonging to active age group 40-50 years in the villages. Female headed household was scientifically higher in the tribal families (27%) in Bandarban than in Muslim households of Mymensingh (7%). While, average years of schooling in the Muslim dominant villages was considerably higher than that of tribal villages in Bandarban. The respondents mentioned that average years of schooling of adult male was higher than female but there were no significant differences in the level of education between the boys and girls due to incentive-based government policy. On the other hand, male was more educated than female, and even among the younger generation, boys were more motivated to higher education than girls in the tribal villages. The informants said that some rural women casted vote in the elections for a picture as suggested their husband but they even did not know the name of the candidate in Mymensingh. While the tribal women were more caution about their polling rights. It was also the case that women were stand for vote in the union council election in both the region.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of sample household in the stud villages

Items	Mymensingh (%)	Bandarban (%)
Age of respondent: 32-40 year	21	39
40-50 year	50	44
50-65 year	28	21
Female headed family	7	27
Operates own land/family properties	0	39
Education (years of schooling)	6 years	3 years

The FGD respondents of Mymensingh said that the social and religious custom was not much flexible about mobility (going outside of home for farming, other livelihood activities and shopping) of women. Therefore, women usually go to outside of the house with permission of husband or mother-in-law but there was some variation in the mobility of women between the different household types (e.g. large, medium, small and landless). The women of large and middle farm households go to relatives' house, hospital and market with other members of household or relatives. In the contrary, the majority of informants reported that female members of small farm and landless labourer household enjoyed higher mobility rights as well as more of them ware headscarf and bourka (Purdah). The women of small farm and landless labourer families go outside of house as group for farming and other livelihood activities with male and female neighbors. On the other hand, social custom of tribal villages was more flexible about women's mobility. Therefore, women independently go to fields or market for buying foods, farm inputs as well selling marketable surplus.

3.2 Property Rights and Role of Women in The Farm Households

In Mymensingh, respondents mentioned that although women entitle for fathers' property as ratio 2:1= boy: girl and mothers' property as ratio 1:1; however, most women obtained a lump sum amount of lands and/or gave up major part of their entitlement on fathers' property in order to maintain the kin relationship with their brother. Therefore, most women had no ownership on land. Although, a few women obtained land by heir but the property was

distributed to them verbally. On the other hand, entitlement of parents' property varies from one tribal group to others in Bandarban. Although, the girls only entitle for mothers' property in some tribal communities in Bandarban but the boys and girls of the case study villages entitle for equal share of parents' property.

According to key informants of Mymensingh, in Muslim dominant rural villages agriculture was the main occupation of most households and men had ultimate authority on household's resources, while most women were homemaker and unaware about their ownership on land. The key informant said that family farms were operated by household head (i.e., husband) but in absence (dead and migrated) or disability of husband, the women operate the farm with the help of male relatives and hired labor but they hardly make any decision about crop and variety selection, and doses of fertilizers and time of application. It was noted that some women even had ignorance about cropping season and most women had no knowledge on crop varieties and management. They mentioned that, women had some roles in the choice of homeyard crops but the decision about fields crops selection, varieties and crop management were male dominated in Mymensingh. The key informants mentioned that some women participated in the intercultural operations of non-rice crops but the participation of female farm family members in the intercultural operation of rice was a few. The respondents mentioned that men discussed with women in the decision-making process about domestic matter like education and marriage of children and purchasing/selling, rented in/out land but the decision about purchasing and marketing farm commodities was male dominated in Mymensingh. On the other hand, FGD members noted that tribal women had good knowledge on cropping season, crop varieties and crop management as there was no difference in the participation of tribal male and female in the rice and non-rice cropping in Bandarban. Moreover, the ratio of roles of male and female in the decision making about farming was about 60:40.

In Mymensingh, the informants reported that male were undertaken in the labour intensive heavy intercultural operations of crops in the fields (transplanting, harvesting and carrying) while the female were intensively participated in the post-harvest processing of crops (harvesting, cleaning, seed preservation), taking care of tools and machineries and rearing livestock. On the other hand, in the tribal village's women were actively participated in intercultural activities of crops in the fields and post-harvest processing with male.

The informants reported that on average women work for about 6-7 hours of a day for cooking, cleaning and other household activities in Mymensingh. Similarly, majority of respondents said that women spent lion share of days for household and farming activities including collecting fresh water for drinking and cooking from fountain of the hills. In addition, they undertake non-farm activities like handcrafts for increasing farm income.

The tribal women were more responsible for maintenance of family and farm including collecting foods from hills, cultivating crops in the fields as well as cooking and taking care of children in Bandarban. Moreover, the tribal women sold their marketable surplus and purchased foods and farm inputs from market. In contrary, in Mymensingh, the men were more responsible for maintenance of farm and families. The male members were mainly responsible for buying and selling of family foods and farm inputs while women mainly responsible for cooking and child care.

The informants in Mymensingh said that some NGOs provide micro-credit to women but the decision about spending the money for the family and farm purposes was also male dominated. They reported that both the female had lack of access to extension services such as training and information about modern technologies and farm produces. Similarly, respondents in Bandarban said that they had scarce access to extension services and credit.

4. Conclusion

The tribal women enjoyed more flexibility about mobility than the Muslim women in the study villages may due to religious and social custom. However, despite higher flexibility about mobility, the tribal women were not significantly empowered in decision making process than the Muslim women. A few women had registered ownership on agricultural land in the study villages. Similarly, ownership of other household resources was male dominated. There was wide variation in the participation of women in the farming activities between the Muslim dominant and tribal villages. Although some women participated in the intercultural operations of non-rice crops, homeyard crops and rearing livestock but men were extensively participated in the intercultural operation of rice cultivation, and buying farm inputs and selling of marketable surplus in Mymensingh. However, the tribal women were equally participated in the farming activities (cultivation and marketing) with male.

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