

NATURE AND EXTENT OF RURAL WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURAL AND NON-AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

Rural women in Bangladesh are involved in different works in agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. The present study was undertaken to determine the nature and extent of participation of rural women in various agricultural and non-agricultural activities. A sample size of 96 women labour was drawn from three villages of *Mithapukur upazial* (25°23' to 25°41' N latitude and 89°06' to 89°26' E longitude) of *Rangpur* district (25°17' to 25°57' N latitude and 88°95' to 89°32' E longitude). The findings showed that most of the respondents constitute economically active age group who were mostly illiterate. Rural women area largely took part in homestead gardening, harvesting crops, post-harvest operation, selling labour, sewing *katha*, 'buying daily necessities' and rice husking by *dhekhi*. Women were involved in various activities in order to meet basic family needs, increase family income and meet additional family requirements. The values of correlation coefficient (*r*) indicated that age of the respondents, amount of indebtedness of the family and family size were positively, and level of education and size of landholding are negatively associated with the participation of rural women in various agricultural and non-agricultural activities, whereas, average annual income and wage rate have no significant relationship with their participation in various activities.

Key words : Women in rural Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION

Women in rural Bangladesh are mostly underutilized and largely unrecognized. Though rural women constituted a large share of labour force of the country, official labour force statistics have not yet recognized the vital role women play in farm and non-farm production process. Among the 10.3 million women labour forces, the share of rural women is 7.6 million compared with the 2.6 million urban labour forces. The share of female labour forces engaged in various types of occupation is 22.2 per cent among total percentages of labour forces. Women labour force of rural areas contributed 16.4 per cent of total female labour force, while the share of urban female labour forces is only 5.8 per cent. Moreover, the participation rate of rural women labour forces is slightly lower than that of urban female labour forces which is, 25.6 for rural and 27.4 for urban female labour forces among the total participation rate of 26.1 (BBS, 2006).

Despite their routine domestic work, women in rural areas are very actively involved in agricultural production in Bangladesh. They are in general responsible for most of agricultural work in the homestead. Farm activities in the homestead, ranging from selection of seed to harvesting and storing of crops, are predominantly managed by women. It is documented that women alone or jointly with men, participate in nearly all phases of agricultural production (Rothschild and Mahmud, 1989). The overall involvement of women in rural areas of Bangladesh, however, not only includes employment in the agricultural and non-agricultural labour market, but also unpaid work for the household in crop cultivation, homestead gardening, livestock and poultry raising, fishing, cottage industry and personal services. Rural women in Bangladesh also do many other quasi-economic activities which are not valued in national income accounting.

Examples of such activities are food processing and preparation of meals for the family members; care of children, old and sick members of the household; and tutoring of children (Hossain, 2004).

A common social perception exists in Bangladesh according to which women in the farm households do not perform field and market work and men do not undertake most of the productive activities carried out in the proximity of the homestead (Abdullah and Zeidenstein, 1982). But in reality among poor households, such clearly demarcated gender divisions of labour do not apply. The traditional gender relations with women's involvement in post-harvest work and men's in fieldwork have not remained static over time. Presently, due to extreme poverty and food crisis, social norms and traditions are changing and women are appearing in the field as well (Shirin, 1995). About 60-70% of women from landless and near-landless households work as agricultural wage labourers, whereas women from larger farms do not participate in field activities (Jahan, 1990). In the Grameen Krishi Foundation working areas in North-West Bangladesh, women equally share all tasks in rice production, even the presumably male task of irrigation (Jordans and Zwatreveen, 1997). But credible documentation of women's participation in farm and non-farm activities is problematic particularly for women belonging to farm households. Invisibility of women's productive work is a problem, particularly in developing countries because women usually work within the household, and productive work is often overlapped with the so-called non-productive work (Hossain *et al.*, 2004). In recent years, empirical researches have tried to document the extent of women's involvement in special task. But further documentation is necessary to know about the nature, extent, causes and determinants of involvement of rural women in agricultural and non-agricultural activities. Owing to this necessity the present study aims to investigate the following specific objectives:

- i. To measure the various socio-economic characteristics of the rural women
- ii. To determine and describe the nature and extent of participation of rural women in agricultural and non-agricultural activities.

- iii. To analyze the causes and determinants of participation of women in those activities.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was conducted at three randomly selected villages of *Mithapukur upazila* (administrative unit next to district) in *Rangpur* district. *Mithapukur upazila* (25°23' to 25°41' N latitude and 89°06' to 89°26' E longitude) was selected purposively from *Rangpur* district (25°17' to 25°57' N latitude and 88°95' to 89°32' E longitude) which is situated in northern part of Bangladesh. Rural areas of *Mithapukur upazila* were selected due to the participation of women of those areas in various activities outside their home which is associated with their poor economic condition. Among the farm households of three selected villages, 96 households were selected randomly. Thus female members of these households, who worked outside along with their household work, were the respondents of this study. Data on various socio-economic parameters were collected through direct interview with the structured and pre-tested interview schedule during February to April 2008.

After completion of the field survey, the data obtained from all the respondents were edited, coded, compiled, tabulated and analysed according to the objectives of the study. Basic statistics such as frequency distribution, percentage, mean, standard deviation and rank were used in describing the variable of the study. 'Pearson's correlation test' was used to analyse the relationship between various factors and extent of overall participation of rural women in various activities. Overall participation was calculated by summing up all the activities done by the women either regularly or occasionally by giving a value of 2 for regularly and 1 for occasionally. So the dependent variable is extent of overall participation in various activities and independent variables are age and level of education of the respondents, size of landholdings, family size, household income, amount of indebtedness, and wage rate.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic features of the respondents

: Human being possesses various interrelated and constituent characteristics which determine his/her unique adjustment to his/her environment. It is therefore, assumed that participation of rural women in various activities would be influenced

Table 1. Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents.

Characteristics	Observed score	Mean	SD
Age(years)	20 to 58	38.98	8.37
Education (years of schooling)	0 to 8	1.65	2.36
Land ownership (decimal)	0 to 130	20.46	31.42
Family size(numbers)	1 - 8	5.07	1.89
Annual income ('000'Tk.)	22 - 108	55.59	20.44
Amount of indebtedness ('000' Tk.)	7 - 20	12.50	4.50
Wage rate (Tk./day)	60 - 90	71.56	6.93

Note : Tk. = Taka (Bangladeshi currency) Source : Field Survey, 2008

by their socio-economic characteristics which are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 portrays that the mean age of the women respondents was 39.98 years with the standard deviation (SD) of 8.37, that is, rural women of the present study belong to the economically active age group. Their education level is very much low i.e., only 1.65 years. The average annual income was about Tk. 55.56 thousands with Tk.12.50 thousands of indebtedness. The rural women of the study area involve in agricultural and non-agricultural activities with the average wage rate of Tk. 71.56 per day.

Participation in various agricultural and non-agricultural activities :

Participation refers to taking or having a part in activities in various events often with others. If there is a need there is participation. It was not possible to investigate into all kinds of participation by the rural women, The following two broad kinds of participation were undertaken in this study :

- Participation in various agricultural activities, and
- Participation in various non-agricultural activities.

Rural women of the study area were taking part in various agricultural and non-agricultural activities. The distribution of rural women according to their participation in various agricultural and non-agricultural activities has been shown in Table 2 along with participation indices and rank order.

Table 2 shows that rural women in the study area were largely involved in homestead gardening, harvesting crops and post-harvest operation, because each of this items of work ranked for I, II

and III position respectively. All of the respondents of this study were involved in homestead gardening. Moreover, out of 96 respondents, 94 involved in harvesting activities, 86 in post-harvest operation, 79 in weeding, 56 in livestock rearing, 55 in planting seedling and 40 in uprooting seedling respectively. No women were involved in land preparation and fertilizer application regularly. Only 11 and 15 respondents were involved in land preparation and fertilizer application occasionally respectively. Again, a large part of respondents (56 out of 96) were occasionally taking part in uprooting seedling activities.

The non-agricultural activities which were done by the rural women included labour selling, bamboo work, embroidery work, sewing *katha* (a traditional instrument used to cover body while sleeping), dress making, rice husking by *dekhi* (a traditional instrument used to husk the paddy), teaching children and buying daily necessities. The universal household activities like cooking, child caring, washing clothes and cleaning house were not accounted in this study. The Table 2 reveals that the participation of rural women in respect of 'selling labour' was highest, 'sewing *katha*' was the second highest and 'buying daily necessities' was the third highest. Participation in 'dress making' had the lowest index (30). Out of 96 respondents, 69 were involved in 'labour selling' in comparison with 20 in 'sewing *katha*' and 13 in 'rice husking by *dheki*' respectively. 'Rice husking by *dheki*' was another important activity done by the rural women either regularly or occasionally. It is apparent from the Table 2 that 13 women are involved in rice husking by *dheki* regularly whereas 54 women do this activity occasionally.

Table 2. Extent of participation in various agricultural and non-agricultural activities.

Items of operation		Extent of participation			Participation indices	Rank order	
		Regularly	Occasionally	Never			
Agricultural activities							
i.	Land preparation	0	11	85	11	IV	
ii.	Applying manure	4	50	42	58		
iii.	Uprooting seedling	40	56	0	136		
iv.	Planting seedling	55	29	12	139		
v.	Applying fertilizer	0	15	81	15		
vi.	Drain preparation	5	17	74	27		
vii.	Weeding	79	8	9	166		
viii.	Applying irrigation	1	32	63	34		
ix.	Fencing	20	4	72	44		
x.	Applying insecticides	10	0	86	20	I	
xi.	Homestead gardening	96	0	0	192		
xii.	Harvesting	94	2	0	190		II
xiii.	Post-harvest operation	86	4	6	176		III
xiv.	Rearing poultry	8	59	29	75		V
xv.	Rearing livestock	56	32	8	144		
Non-agricultural activities							
i.	Labour selling	69	17	10	155	I	
ii.	Bamboo work	0	30	66	30	V	
iii.	Embroidery work	0	62	34	62		
iv.	Sewing <i>katha</i>	20	74	2	114		II
v.	Dress making	1	20	75	22	IV	
vi.	Rice husking by <i>dhekhi</i>	13	54	29	80		
vii.	Teaching children	20	4	72	44		
viii.	Buying daily necessities	16	71	9	103		III

Source: Field Survey, 2008

Note: Participation indices = Regularly x 2 + Occasionally x 1 + Never x 0.

Reasons of participation in various activities: Views of the rural women : There are many reasons behind the involvement of rural women labour in various farm and non-farm activities. The causes are not mutually exclusive and the main causes found to be responsible in this study were to meet family needs, absence of male earning members, to increase family income, to meet personal needs and to meet additional family requirements. Attempts were made here to find out the most three important reasons. In order to do this the respondents of this study were asked to give priority on the above mentioned causes in order of importance. Then final rank order was calculated after giving weight to each of the priority for example, 3 for priority I, 2 for priority II and 1 for

priority I respectively. The important reasons, on the basis of the rank, of involvement of rural women in various activities are shown in Table 3.

The most important factor for seeking employment or involvement in various activities by the women was to meet family needs. The women who were very poor and those who have no alternative source of earning were involved in different types of work for improving their livelihoods. Out of 96 women, 73 were reported that they were engaged in various farm and non-farm activities in order to meet the basic needs of the family. To lead a decent living, the need for money can hardly be overemphasized. So, the second important reason for the involvement of women in various types of activities was to increase the family income followed

Table 3. Causes of the involvement of women workers in various activities.

Reasons	Priority			Total score	Final rank
	I	II	III		
To meet basic family needs	73	21	2	263	I
Absence of male earning members	23	27	2	125	IV
To increase family income	35	27	34	193	II
To meet personal needs	12	25	21	107	V
To meet additional family requirements	23	20	58	167	III

Source: Field Survey, 2008 Note: Total score = I x 3 + II x 2 + III x 1

by to meet additional family requirements as the third respectively.

Determinants of women's involvement in agricultural and non-agricultural activities :

Labour allocation between agricultural and non-agricultural activities at household and outside the household was influenced by economic and socio-cultural factors, and this deserved more attention because women's participation on outside activities was not so high in Bangladesh. In rural Bangladesh for example, women from well-to-do families generally did not engage in outside work, and they devoted more time in childcare and domestic activities instead of economic activities (Goldin, 1995). The purpose of this section was to explore the relationship between the socio-economic characteristics of the women and the extent of their participation in agricultural and non-agricultural activities. The results of the 'Pearson's correlation test' in Table 4 showed the determinants affecting rural women's participation in various activities.

Judging from the r-values of the estimated parameters, it appears that the most significant factor influencing women's participation in agricultural and non-agricultural activities was the age, i.e., participation increased with the increase of age of the respondents. The next important factor

is found to be the amount of indebtedness of the household, that is, involvement of women from poor families, (who were more indebted) was more than that of the women of well-to-do families. It was also apparent that the larger the size of the family the higher the extent of participation of women in outside activities. Level of education of the respondent and the size of the landholding were negatively associated with the women's involvement in economic activities. Women's participation decreased with the increase of level of education and size of landholding.

CONCLUSION

Women play important role in agricultural and non- agricultural activities especially in harvesting, post-harvest operation, homestead gardening, livestock and poultry rearing, selling labour etc. Economic pressure is forcing them to break away their traditional roles of housewives into farm and non-farm labourers. The findings of the present study reveal that contribution of female labour in different activities is substantial. Moreover the following specific conclusions can be made from the summary of the findings of the present study.

i. Participation of rural women is apparent in diverse forms of agricultural and non-agricultural activities.

Table 4. Factors influencing women's participation in various activities.

Dependent variable	Independent variables	Correlation coefficient (r)
Overall participation in agricultural and non-agricultural activities	Age (years)	0.608**
	Level of education (year of schooling)	-0.327**
	Landholding (decimal)	-0.499**
	Family size (number)	0.234*
	Annual household income ('000' Tk.)	0.115 ^{NS}
	Amount of indebtedness ('000 Tk.)	0.578**
	Wage rate (Tk./day)	0.151 ^{NS}

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed) ^{NS} Not significant

- ii. In case of agricultural activities women labourers are mainly involved in homestead gardening, harvesting and post-harvesting operation.
- iii. In case of non-agricultural activities the contribution of women labour is highest for selling labour.
- iv. The most important factor for seeking employment or involvement in various activities by the women is to meet family needs followed by to increase family income.

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