

An Investigation into the Status of Riverbank (Char) Women Dwellers in Bangladesh

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Abstract— *The study was undertaken to determine the status of rural women in terms of their social, economic and financial access to decision making and livelihood. It was conducted on January to February 2016. The data was collected by using an interview schedule from 60 women of Chinirpotol village of Saghata Upazila under Gaibandha District of Bangladesh in January to February 2017. It revealed that majority (51.67%) women can only sign but constituted economically active. It was found that they were actively participated in the household activities and their agricultural farming activities. It was also found that women played a significant role in the management of family affairs but a little participation in decision making because the male member was the head of a family and responsible for taking major decisions of the household. This study observed that a mentionable portion (88.33%) of the women was involved with non-government organizations (NGOs). The findings suggest that freedom for decision making, opportunities for active contribution and accessibility to income generating activities along with social awareness about their rights are necessary for improvement of the status of women.*

Keywords— *Char, investigation, riverbank, status, women.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Generally women of Bangladesh are often scheduled to work at their home and are the household head of family (Balk, 1997). Women are attributed as being of reduced position in comparison to men, and hardship is greater among women than men (ADB, 2001; MOWCA, 2008). According to the same review by ADB, 15% of all homeowners in Bangladesh are advancing by females who are either widows, separated or have a impaired spouse. Ninety-five percent of the individuals these homeowners are below the hardship range, and 33% of them are supposed to be to the dedicated poor- those residing on less than \$1.25 US per day, i.e., excessive hardship (UNDP, 1996). Women are poor because lack of right to the very least specifications for living. The overall smallest specifications for living include food, education, outfits, property and health. The quality of right to basic

members of the family specifications relies on the career, income possibilities, control over sources, current income level and endowment of that member of the family (ADB, 2007; National Women Development Policy, 2008). Women are the foundation stone of the whole community in common and for members of the family members in particular. Females perform multi-dimensional positions, say as a mother, a sis and a wife who socializes, teaches, likes, nourishes and facilitates individuals of members of the family members with commitment, passion, love, truthfulness, compliance and above all in esprit de corps (Iqbal and Atia, 2002). In balanced and reasonable cultures, individuals have equal conditions for recognizing their full human rights and potential to promote national, governmental, financial, public, and public development, and to benefit from the results. Cultural and socio-cultural factors have essential impact on equity issue in common and particularly in non-urban places. Women face a lot of problems and uneven position in the socioeconomic actions of rural areas. They are considered to try out inactive part in community. However, the contribution of women differs in different cultural categories.

A Char is a sand bar which has emerged from the riverbed following deposition and accretion of silt and alluvium (Sarker, 2016a). There are two types of char like attached and island chars. An island char is defined as that land which even in the dry season, can only be reached from the mainland crossing a main river channel (Sarker, 2016b; Sarker, 2016c). Attached chars are accessible from the mainland without crossing a channel during the dry season. (Sarker et al., 2007; Sarker et al., 2015). The study area has a difference from other plain land of the country because it is a riverbank attached char area. The main profession of the people of the riverbank attached char area is agriculture. Women of the study area are involved in agricultural activities at home as well as at crop field.

Table.1: Present status of women in Bangladesh

Indicators of status	Percentage or ratio
Indicator Ratio of girls to boys in primary school	103:100
Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel	24%
Maternal mortality ratio (deaths per 100,000 births)	320*
Percent of unemployed women, aged 15-49	65%
Proportion of women aged 15-49 who were married before age 15	33%
Proportion of women aged 20-49 who were married before age 18	74%

Source: UNICEF and BBS, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2009.

This is a traditional area where as well as marginalized landless individuals are on a freely perform their part in the natural resources management actions and other decision-making process. Currently rural women in Bangladesh have an anchoring role in the management of their family members as well as participation in different activities like crop production, livestock and poultry rearing, aquaculture. (ADB, 2007; Al-Amin, 2008; Hoque and Itohara, 2009). Women from the lowest homeowners sometimes perform outside the house as compensated workers for their family’s success (ADB, 2001). Even though the financial participation of non-urban females is significant, it is mostly unacknowledged (ADB, 2004). Women generally face social, economic, institutional and cultural barriers that should be done away with and women inspired and given ethical and material support at members of the family, community, local and international levels to continue their great work (Odeny, 1999). So, it is necessary to address the question “how do riverbank char women dwellers express their existing social, economic and financial status?” In the present study attempt has been made to assess and investigate the status of women in riverbank char areas of Gaibandha, Bangladesh.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to conduct this study. The survey method was applied in the present study because it was thought to have some advantages over other methods. Survey can be done by using three main methods (Dillion and Hardaker 1993). These are: direct field observation, collecting recorded information (secondary sources) and interviewing

respondents by semi structure questionnaire. Chinirpotol village situated in Ghuridaha Union Parishad of Saghata Upazila under Gaibandha district of Bangladesh has been purposively selected. The study area is a riverbank of Jamuna river which is the widest river of Bangladesh. The selection of the study area was based on the following main consideration: the area is famous for agricultural crop production, farmers living in clusters and almost no study was done to measure the status of women. The interview schedule was prepared carefully to record the required data of various aspects of the study. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect data from respondents. There were 305 households in the study village. About 20% households i.e. 60 households randomly selected as sample and each woman from each household was selected for this study. Qualitative information were primarily collected by the researchers through Focus Group Discussion (FGD), transect walk and field observation in January to February, 2017. However quantitative data were gathered from government website and different study report as a secondary data source.

Physical Profile of the Study Area

The study area, Chinirpotol village under Ghuridaha union is 21 kilometers far from Gaibandha district headquarters and 10 kilometers (km) from the Saghata upazila headquarters in Bangladesh. The access to district headquarters is via a metallic and katcha road. Transport facilities are available from village to upazila and district head quarters.

Table.2: Physical Profile of Chinirpotol Village

Item	Information
Village boundary North	Saghata Bazar
South	Dakbangla Bazar
East	Jamuna river
West	Guridhaho
Total households	305
Total population	1420
Total cultivable land	55 ha
Average family size	3.97
Religion	97% Muslim
Adult literacy rate	31.92%
Mosque	02
Community clinic	No

Source: Field survey, 2017

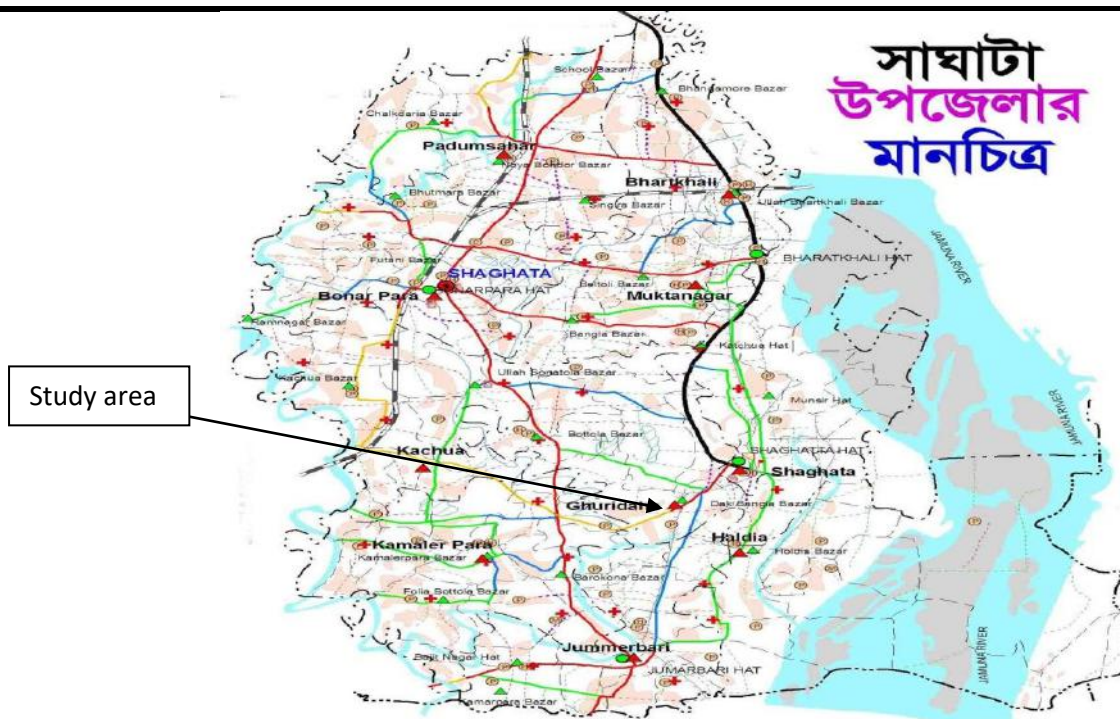


Fig. 1: Chinirpotol village (study area) indicated in the Saghata Upazila map of Bangladesh

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic characteristics

Age

Age of a respondent was measured on the basis of time from her birth to the time of interview. A score of one (1) was assigned for each year of her age. The age is one of the most important factors for determining the personality makeup of the char dwellers which may play a vital role in their empowerment (Sarker, 2016). Age of the char dwellers ranged from 21 to 63 years with an average of 40.12 years and a standard deviation of 10.12. On the basis of their age, the char dwellers were classified into three categories as shown in Table 2. The highest proportion (53.34 %) of the char dwellers were middle aged compared to 28.33 percent of the being young aged and 18.33 percent old. A close look into the data indicates that decision-making regarding household activities were mostly in the hands of middle and young aged women.

Table.3: Distribution of women according to age.

Age	Level	Respondent number	Percentage
Young	18 to 30	17	28.33
Middle	31 to 50	32	53.34
old	51 to 70	11	18.33

Source: Field survey, 2017

Sathar and Shahnaz (2000) found that age and family structure of women were the strongest determinants of women's authority in decision making in developing countries. Comparatively aged women and the women who belonged to nuclear family more likely than other women to participate in family decisions (Sarker, 2016a).

Education Level

Formal education in Bangladesh has three major stages like primary, secondary and higher education. Primary education is a 5-year cycle, while secondary education lasts 7 years with three sub-stages like 3 years of junior secondary, 2 years of secondary and 2 years of higher secondary. Education of women is generally regarded a useful collection of socioeconomic place as well as of the level of overall group complexness, and therefore, it is inversely associated with the wish for additional children and women's mean age at wedding. Information is a key determinant of the approach to life and status an individual likes in a group. It affects many elements of way of life, such as market and health activities. Information through knowledge provides access to wider resource of information and a wider perspective.

Table.4: Distribution of women according to educational level.

Sl. no.	Education level	Respondent number	Percentage
1	Illiterate	9	15
2	Only can sign	31	51.67

3	Primary (class one to five)	18	30
4	Secondary (class one to five)	2	3.33
5	Higher secondary	0	0
Total		60	100

Source: Field survey, 2017

It was observed that majority (51.67%) women could only sign but constituted economically active while 15% were illiterate. Education allows women to believe more independence or power both in conventional gender-stratified family establishing and in more egalitarian ones, providing them greater control over their own lifestyles and more powerful speech in issues impacting themselves and their families (Kasada et al., 1981; Mason, 1984; Smock, 1981)

NGO Involvement

Most of the riverbank women dwellers (88.33%) were involved to Non-government organizations (NGOs) for borrowing loan. Besides taking loan, they were becoming aware by getting training from NGOs. Some NGOs provided relief services at the emergency period like flood, river erosion, cyclones etc. Riverbank is very much vulnerable to natural disasters.

Table.5: Distribution of women char dwellers according to NGO involvement.

Sl. no.	Level of NGO Involvement	Number of respondent	Percentage (%)
1	Involved to NGO	53	88.33
2	Non-involvement to NGO	7	11.67

Source: Field survey, 2017

NGO involvement especially microfinance programs have a significant influence on social empowerment, awareness and education, self-esteem, sense of dignity, organizational and management skills, mobilization of collective strengths, etc. (Pitt and Khandaker, 1996; Khandker, 1998; Nahar, 2007).

Status of riverbank Char women

Women, in custom and practice, stayed subordinate to men in almost all aspect of their lives; greater independence was the benefit of the rich or the necessity of the very poor in the male prominent society. Most women's lifestyles stayed centered on their traditional roles and they had limited accessibility markets,

productive services, knowledge, medical good care, and municipality. At the household level, the girl kid often has imbalanced accessibility nutrition, medical good care and knowledge compare to boy kid. Many discriminatory practices arise out of some deep-rooted socio-cultural factors. Females still generate less than men generate and are mostly occupied in low paid jobs. They often do not have quick accessibility credit and other income generation opportunities, and are still under represented at management and policy levels.

Table.6: Status of riverbank Char women

Dimensions of status	Level of responses (number of respondents and percentage)	
	Yes	No
Access to resources	15 (25%)	45 (75%)
Decision making power	3 (5%)	57 (95%)
Cultural responsibilities	28 (46.67%)	32 (53.33%)
Household management	60 (100%)	0 (0%)
Participation in natural resources management	20 (33.33%)	40 (67.67%)
Harassment and assaults against women	12 (20%)	48 (80%)

Source: Field survey, 2017

Access to resources

It was found that 75% women had almost no access to income, credit, property control, knowledge and training. They were in trap of socio-cultural barriers. Their participation in the socioeconomic actions was low as compared to men participation. They bounded to act upon the orders of their husband and family associates leads. However the trend of liberty tended to increase due to press interaction and knowledge. They were not separate to spend their income for business actions. Men were regarded the undisputed leads of family associates members and thus created all the important choices. Females create the choices when it comes to saving money, but men create choices about expenditure. From a beginning age, females are trained to be submissive and self-sacrificing, and are avoided from getting community (FAKIR, 2008). As well as ladies are in a deprived scenario in comparison with men in many factors of their lifestyles in the community, especially in creating nations like Bangladesh (ADB, 2007).

Decision making power

It was observed that 95% women in the study area had no access to decision-making. They were not possessing equal opportunity to various family affairs. However, the government planed of women participation in election brought important improvement in their participation in state policies. The local body elections gave far-reaching results for women position in state policies. The rural women are the leading decision-makers in some specific areas like cattle, goat and poultry rearing, home gardening, and post-harvest activities such as storage and seed production (Bose et al., 2009). Opportunities in cash expenditure for rural women including household decisions remains little restricted in a traditional society of Bangladesh (Parveen, 2007; Sultana, 2011). Both, economic control and decision-making powers are vested in the hands of men as the household authority (Sultana, 2010).

Cultural responsibilities

In the study area women used to perform usual socio-culture obligations. None of women of the family normally worked for wages in that region. They used to help with family associates members cultivation and to do exchange focus on the crop fields of friends and kin, but apart from that their performance was in the house. A wife was regarded as being well who was able to sew, at least the children's clothes, as well as cook, wash and keep the house meticulously clean. Rural women had limitation to perform their productive roles and household tasks (Parveen, 2007).

Participation in social ceremonies

It was observed that 53.33% women in the study area had no access to social ceremonies. Women generally carried out preparations of marriages and other ceremonies which were related to household level. Shopping for such actions were dealt be women close relatives. Females close relatives performed purchase of jewelry and food for such preparations. But at society level, they were almost no permitted to attain due to the societies values, norms and culture. Causing from this scenario, females are declined contribution in income actions as well as limited flexibility declines them to accessibility in market features (Sultana, 2010).

Household management

In the study area women used to perform all household activities that means they are the key person at household management. Their participation in household management was 100%. But the women of the study area had no choice of having children or not, when and how

many. Due to government and non-government organizations they were aware about family planning.

Participation in natural resources management

It was found that 67.67% women had almost no access to manage the natural resource. The usually participated to manage the natural resources at household level but they were rarely attained at community level. Women performed important part in the major agricultural related pursuits like sowing, land preparation, harvesting, weeding, fodder collection, gross cutting, fertilization, transportation, irrigation and marketing. Sen and Srilata (2000) mentioned that empowerment of women was understood not only as a control over resources like human, financial, intellectual assets, but also as a growing basic capability by which they grew their self- confidence and enabled them to overcome external barriers.

Harassment and assault against Women

It was found that 80% women had no experience on sexual harassment. The ethical level of the society was good. In some cases, sexual harassment faced by women at workplaces. According to personal observation assault against women in the whole society in general not so large level and particularly at the household levels were increasing. Mallorie (2003) also mentioned that the reason for the small number of women in the market is not just the strength of the idea of loss of respect for such women, but also, and perhaps even more importantly, the various types of harassment that women are subject to in public spaces.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study revealed that the status of rural women of the study area was not satisfactory. They were maintaining a lower standard of living. They had a little participation in the decision making process of their family affairs. But it was observed that the women who were working and earning money had more access to decision making than who were jobless. It also observed that educated women had more access to social and economic matters than illiterate women. The educated women are more aware about their rights than illiterate women. An increasing trend of riverbank char women to agricultural activities at farm level were found in the study area. There was almost no facility for women to work other sectors except agriculture. The traditional belief, attitude and practices hindered their empowerment. So, formal and non-formal education, skill development training, access to information, small and cottage industry establishment, awareness building program should be triggered by the government organizations (GOs) and non- government organizations (NGOs) so that women of the riverbank

area can be improved their livelihood status. Since earning is a great factor for women char dwellers to get access in every aspects of empowerment, so income generating activities should be created by the GOs and NGOs. Intervention by the government organizations (GOs) and non- government organizations (NGOs) should be in the form of programs, projects, training, establishing small manufacturing factories etc to provide them greater opportunities and reduce the discriminating between male and female at the riverbank char areas.

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