

**ABSTRACT****PARTICIPATION AND BENEFITS OF WOMEN IN AQUACULTURE PRACTICES IN COASTAL AREAS OF BANGLADESH: AN OVERVIEW****Runia Mowla**

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In Bangladesh, nature and scope of women's participation in aquaculture practices is quite different across the country. Taking into account women's contribution to agriculture sector, many projects have been working in Bangladesh particularly in south and southeast coastal areas for long time. This paper is on a study which focused on women's participation and benefits they enjoy as target beneficiary group in 'Emergency cyclone Recovery and restoration Project (ECRRP)' in the south and south-east coastal areas of Bangladesh. Both primary and secondary data were collected by reviewing project documents, conducting key informants interviews and semi structured interview with project managers, FGD with women fisher groups to have in-depth information, in particular, how they are benefitted and constrained by involving in this project activities and some case studies. In Barishal region, men are considered eligible for capture fishing in the sea and river while women members are involved in horticulture, poultry and to some extent fish farming in the ponds, in many times, even women are treated as mere wives of male farmers. Findings of this study tells that women have been involved in small-scale aquaculture in different stages of operations and the decision about buying fingerlings, stocking and marketing of fish is jointly taken by men and women. Although women fish farmers are knowledgeable and manager of fish farming in homestead ponds, there are socio cultural restrictions for them to selling produce on the market. Women farmers still feel that they are benefitted, not always in terms of money and food for consumption but also status, power, respect and recognition. The present agriculture project is not in a position to evaluate the costs (time and labour input, for example) and benefits from the fisheries activities to both men and women. Project could support women in their marketing activities by providing local marketing information, improving transportation and provision of credit and need to create women leadership in this sector by making women for example: members of Farmers Forum, Water Users Association (WUAs) etc.

**Key words: Participation, benefits, small scale aquaculture**

**INTRODUCTION**

Women comprise an average of 43 percent of the agricultural labour force<sup>i</sup> of developing countries. But this figure has considerable variation across regions and within countries according age and social class. For example:

the Southern Asian countries where the share of women in the agricultural labour force has remained steady at just over 30 percent. Like any other Agrarian society, traditionally women have been doing major tasks in different stages of agriculture in Bangladesh too. Over 11 % of total population engaged in fisheries and aquaculture and out of them about 10% is women in Bangladesh (DOF, 2013)<sup>ii</sup>. In most of

the cases women's involvement in agricultural activities are considered as extension of household subsistence work and thus their contribution and benefits are not always recognized and recorded well in many national level data sources. The nature and scope of women's participation in aquaculture practices is quite different across the country. But the evidence shows that Women involvement in all sorts of activities including planning to implementation in fisheries subsector particularly inland fisheries and fish culture in the ponds have been increasing in southwest coastal areas of Bangladesh.

Fisheries are the second sub-sector of Agriculture in Bangladesh. Increasing fish production is very important in improving the nutrition of millions of people as a very good source of protein and other micronutrient. Not only fisher families but also the rural families and household that live close to canal and rivers can fish and sell in the market. Fishes produced in the ponds are also sold in the local markets and traded far to city markets, and a substantial part of the catch may be consumed by fisher's families. Hence Small-scale fisheries play a critical role in the food security of producers and their families.

In general, women are involved in the processing part of the fish farming such as making fishing nets, deep gears, repair and maintenance of the gears, sorting of fingerlings, fish processing etc. Yet, most women in fisheries lack access to physical and capital resources, to decision-making and leadership positions, to training and formal education. Access to these critical resources and on services would improve the efficiency, profitability and sustainability of their activities.

This paper is on a study which focused on women's participation and benefits they enjoy as target beneficiary group in 'Emergency cyclone Recovery and restoration Project (ECRRP)' of FAO Bangladesh which is conducted in the south and southwest coastal areas of Bangladesh. Therefore to identify women participation in the fisheries sector improvement

program and the benefits from this participation are the main purpose of this study.

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

The ECRRP, a project which is being facilitated by FAO to recovering the damage and losses caused by Cyclone *Sidr* hit Bangladesh in 2007. Also the project is being designed from the commitment to support for long and medium term agricultural and livelihood restoration and development of south and southwestern part of Bangladesh. The work of recovery and improvement of agriculture sector with its 3 subsector- crop production livestock and fisheries are facilitated by in partnership with the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), Department of Livestock Services (DLS) and Department of Fisheries (DoF).

Along with reconstruction and rehabilitation of multipurpose shelters and coastal embankment FAO is proposed to implement crop, livestock and fisheries related components aiming at introducing agricultural technologies which will improve the resilience of communities and households to future disasters in cyclone prone areas. The project will operate in a total of 13 upazilas in two Divisions (Khulna and Barisal) affected by *Sidr* and *Aila* cyclones. For fisheries subsector, its objectives are to restore the livelihood cyclone affected coastal fisher providing aquaculture inputs to the coastal fish farmers such as fishing nets and fishing boats aquaculture packages etc. Also capacity building and development of fish farmers and their organizations are included as part of the community mobilization subcomponent of the project. In every aquaculture Farmer's Field School (FFS), there will be 25 farmers and with 5 FFS there will be one CBO. Target beneficiary groups of this project are: landless households; small and marginal farmers; small-scale livestock owners and fishers; and vulnerable groups such as poor and female-headed households- expected to have reached, directly, some 104,350 poor farmers in the selected upazilas and unions.<sup>2iii</sup> Of this total, about 71,000 are concerned with crops (including irrigated rice and horticulture), 13,650 are

involved in fisheries (capture fisheries and aquaculture) and 19,700 in livestock (goats, sheep, cattle and poultry) production.

Therefore it is about to protect and rehabilitate the lives and livelihood of cyclone affected people.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study Area

Barisal division is located in South west coastal belt of Bangladesh. In this region, majority of the people live on by agriculture and capture fisheries in the sea and river and inland fisheries. Due to frequent effect of climatic change event in this region, many of them lost their lives and livelihood and thus migrated to city to explore new options of living. Study was conducted in two villages of Barisal Sadar Upazilla.

### Methods

Both primary and secondary data were collected for this study. Field work was carried out between August and September 2013. To see how gender had been integrated or not in the project design, project documents including the result framework and other related materials were reviewed.

Semi Structured interviews were conducted with the key informants with the project managers, team leader and other staff (10 person). A questionnaire was prepared for the interviews. (Annex #1)

Focus Group discussion with the women farmers groups (A total number of 10 FGD sessions have been conducted), the groups chosen from these villages were mainly involved in pond based aquaculture activities. A guiding questionnaire was prepared to gather information about their tasks and responsibilities in fish farming, whether they are benefitted from this and even what are the challenges they face to succeeding in this sector. Annex 2



Fig: 1 map of Bangladesh showing the project areas and the study area in Yellow color

KAP Surveyed among 30 small scale farmers (men and women) to assess their knowledge about fish farming and attitude perception towards women participation and benefits in aquaculture sector.

## MAJOR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Women concerns in project design

Women's contribution to existing agricultural system, fisheries and livestock rearing and management, along with other household chore are very critical in the project area. Still the original design of the project found not much gender sensitive, nor included of men and women in the Project Logical Framework Matrix. But the idea and concept about gender and gender equality found clear among the project managers during the interview with them.

Recognizing rural women's contribution to agriculture production systems, there are now some evidences of integration of gender equality and women empowerment initiatives which have

mostly been adjusted in implementation stage by the project team. The project started to involve women farmers and member of women headed household in horticulture expansion which was very rare in southern part of Bangladesh. Initially it was designed for including 25 farmers in each Farmer Field School (FFS) educational sessions on technical and skill training in agriculture, fisheries and livestock, not mentioned whether they should be men or women. Recently, the project has changed the criteria that 25 men and 25 women must be in a FFS to give women more exposure to agricultural knowledge and skills and thus the project has been able to target 19% female headed household for fish farming group.

Objectives of this changed in the project design from gender concerns were to make individual women-headed households come together into a group, increase their mobility, social networking and speak up with their problems in the training and meetings and any other learning events as the manager mentioned.

### **Women and Fish farming**

Labor force participation of women is low by South Asian standards at about 26%. In rural areas this rate is lower than urban setting as assume, they are mainly self employed by involving them in a small scale agricultural production. Traditionally local people believe that Fishing is a men's activity, it needs courage strength and control over unexpected situations and women are short of these attributes and therefore cannot fish individually. Even in some places women are not allowed to get on a boat too. However, ECRRP project is no way encouraging women to fishing in the sea.

However, involving women in fish farming in the pond has brought higher social status in the family and in neighbors with an increase in self-esteem, so women feel encouraged involved in subsistence aquaculture through this project intervention. But their direct participation in the selling of fish is more limited, since the volume of sales is not very high and cultural sensitivity

to women access to an open market is still acute in the given areas. The income from selling fish is usually given to men or male members of the family as there is a tendency for men to dominate the key decision making in financial areas, so women have less control over the managerial and financial aspects of fish farming.

They recently conducted its midterm assessment and compared some data with the baseline and found that there was a positive trend of women to spend their money by their own what was absent in the baseline. It is expected to get more cases about women empowerment in the end line evaluation compared to midterm assessment.

In line with the question of whether project activities increased women's work burden; the managers of all component responded that, women farmer join in the projects activities with pleasure because they know how this involvement could bring positive change in their knowledge, information and skill and increase access to income generation which they can spend for their family maintenance.

Women have to work with their husband on the small scale fish farming; this arrangement offers the women little flexibility and allows them to take care of the children, when the need arises. Children and some women in some cases are also engaged in prawn or shrimp fry catching from the rivers during the spawning season, but Many are socially harassed.

Women have more knowledge in terms of the management of the production for example, scheduling, harvesting, feeding frequency, removal of unused feeds, etc. Decision about buying fingerlings, stocking and marketing of fish is jointly taken by men and women now

Recognition for women contribution has been started not always in monetary value and food for consumption, but also respect power etc. on the other hand level of fish consumption among women and children and income from this have been increased

Socio Cultural norms and values against the women's mobility particularly selling fish in the market is still not allowed for women in this rural areas.

## CONCLUSION

Women contribution and task is immense in Fish farming in the pond and other inland fisheries though capture fisheries in the sea and river is not allowed yet in this given context. Mostly women are involved in the processing work of fish farming rather than in decision making position. But there has been a started a positive change in family decision making process thus the income related decision are also impacted positively now.

Socio cultural norms and values and policy level changes are still pending for women's greater involvement in fisheries sector and benefits from it.

## RECOMMENDATION

There should have a strong follow-up mechanism in the project design to look after the issue that many women farmers wanted to engage or keep continue in aquaculture after the project support is withdrawn.

In project designing or formulation stage, all monitoring and evaluation framework needed to put more Gender sensitive indicators in monitoring and evaluation framework to measure the level of men and women's participation and how it impacts on their lives and livelihood.

Project could support women in their marketing activities by providing local marketing information, improving transportation and provision of credit. The project could even follow the concept of Women Market Section (WMS) was initiated by Local Government

Engineering Department as pilot in different areas in Bangladesh. In addition, some activities could be designed to increase women knowledge and access and control over resources like land and ponds and even cash income are very important to have by their own.

The project needed to develop the mechanism of application of the lessons learnt to future development initiatives.

Gender mainstreaming is not only for in project intervention but also needed into the Government sectoral policies is important helping in promoting a gender-sensitive agenda in the project initiative.

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**Interview with Project Managers**

Name:

Position/Title:

Roles and responsibilities:

Did you ever participate in gender training/workshop before? If yes, name some of the important content you feel

What does gender equality mean to your work? Does FAO offer enough opportunities to strengthen your knowledge of gender issues in your professional or technical area?

Whether gender is incorporated into the project concept/outline paper? Does the project provide sex disaggregated data on critical issues related to gender? Does the project consult with local women organization or groups and take into account the different needs of men and women boys and girls? Whether the project use data by sex in all baseline studies monitoring and evaluation? Do the proposed purpose and objectives seek to promote a fair share of benefits for women and men and or promote women rights?

Does the project undertake participatory rural appraisal activities that actively involve men and women at the community level in project formulation and design stage?

Do you put gender responsive budgeting into practice (e.g. resource allocation contribute to men and women benefit, prior funds for gender related training /workshop/activities, employ a gender expert to assist in gender integration, involvement of women in decision making about allocation of financial resources etc.)

What specific means have been designed to help overcome identified barriers to women's active participation in the activities? What Gender sensitive indicators including impact indicators have been or will be developed for monitoring and evaluation (Does the monitoring & evaluation system look into the effect & impact on men and women differently? (e.g. gender disaggregated reporting, gender sensitive indicators )

Do the principal partners have the commitment and capacity to manage and implement in a gender sensitive way? What does the initiative seek to build and support this capacity? And are there government offices or positions specifically concerns with improving the status of women?

How do you analyze the risk and assumption related to gender and implement strategies to mitigate them? Did you identify any negative impacts of the project on women and men?

Do you collaborate with other organizations or professionals on gender issues mainstreaming gender issues into operations? If yes how do you do it?

Does the project Increase access by men and women to financial literacy skills, training, employment opportunities, more equitable access by women to land ownership and other property, how do they address their needs and priorities? How do your project support in rural poor women in their efforts to mobilize and empower themselves?

Do you have equal representation of women and men in project management and decision making process? Do women have access to all training activities provided by the project or program? Whether integrate gender issues as part of the curriculum in all training courses.

What other gender issues may arise that have not been forecast in the project? What additional resources (human/financial) would be required to address these issues? And what is needed in order to mainstream gender more effectively into this project?

**Guiding questions for Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with Farmer groups**

What roles and responsibilities do women and men do within and outside the household and community? (Paid or unpaid labor) Why and why not?

What? Which form of work is usually recognized and valued by the community? What are the implications of gender division of labor for achieving project result?

How does the project tend to reinforce or challenge the existing division of labor? (Identify any anticipated negative impacts of the project on women and men? For example increased work load, loss of access to resources such as credit, water, land and technology)

What assets (resource and income) and opportunities do men and women have access to and how do they control over it? What are the consequences for the ways that assets are distributed, obtained and used in the community? Who will use and own any assets or good created from the project and who will gain formal or informal power or status from the project,

How does this project improve women access to employment and credit opportunity, higher income of their families? Has the greater visibility and mobility of women been resulting from project activities (with women employed in..... running shop ...social network.....participating in project decision making etc) has it had other effects on women activities in markets or the community?

What factors that limit or facilitate equal participation of men and women in food production and income? What are the gaps and opportunity to make them more participated /involved and benefited from the outcome of the project?

How do women and men enjoy limited to no benefits from extension and training in new crop varieties and technologies?

Do men and women have equal access to decision making power in the household and community level in regard to this project? Why /why not

What suggestions do you want to make to reduce gender division of labor and increase women access to resources and services in your community?



## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> the agricultural labor force include people who are working or looking for work in formal or informal jobs and in paid or unpaid Employment in agriculture. That includes self-employed women as well as women working on family farms. It does not include domestic chores such as fetching water and firewood, preparing food and caring for children and other family members( FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture: Women in Agriculture Closing the Gender Gap for development*

<sup>ii</sup> Department of Fisheries(DOF), 2013

<sup>iii</sup> Union is the lowest tier of government local administration in Bangladesh