

Women's Participation in Food for Work Program in Kapasia Upazila under Gazipur District

S. Sultana¹, M.S. I. Afrad², and F. A. Prodhan³

Abstract

The main focus of the study was to determine the extent of participation of women in the food for work program as well as to explore the relationships between the selected characteristics of the women and their participation. The study was conducted in Kapasia Upazila of Gazipur district. Data were collected by using pre-tested interview schedule. One hundred and ten respondent women were selected using simple random sampling method. Findings of the study reveal that more than three-fifth (62.72%) of the respondent women belonged medium participation category in food for work program. Women's participation was highest in clearing (57.27%) in metal road maintenance whereas 41.2 percent in grass placement in case of mud road maintenance. Results also indicate that women had lower participation in all activities of both metal and mud road preparation compared to this men counterpart. Correlation analysis evince that education and training exposure of the respondent women had positive significant and age had negative significant relationship with their participation.

Key words: Women, food for work program, participation

Introduction

Bangladesh is a small deltaic country with a population of 152.5 million in 147,570 square kilometers of area (BBS, 2012). It is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world. With a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of \$597.49 in FY2012, Bangladesh is considered as a developing country (Anonymous 2012). Nonetheless, over the past 3 decades, the country was able to achieve near self-sufficiency in rice production, overcoming its food deficiency. However, during the second half of 2007, twin floods and a destructive cyclone in Bangladesh severely affected the food security of about 25 million people. Considering that about 40 percent of the population is under the upper poverty line and 25 percent is below the lower poverty line, 50 percent price increase in rice can

significantly reduce the intake of the poor. The government is therefore faced with the challenge of strengthening its safety net programs to enable the poor and its vulnerable population to cope with increases in food prices and to ensure adequate food supply (Alderman, 2002). The social safety net is defined by the World Bank "public interventions to assist individuals, households, and communities better manage risk and to provide support to the critically poor" (World Bank, 2006). It aimed at simply raising the consumption of the poor through policy provided transfer, but more recently the focus has shifted to helping low-income households. Food for Works social safety net program is generally operated in rural areas. The beneficiaries are generally women selected by Union Parishad. Women

¹Scientific Officer, Training and Communication Division, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute, Gazipur-1701; ²Professor and ³Lecturer, Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural University (BSMRAU), Gazipur-1706

constitute nearly half of the total population in Bangladesh. In a developing country like Bangladesh it cannot be denied that underutilized rural women labor force forms a vast reservoir of human resource. When women are effectively mobilized they can contribute successfully and significantly to the economic development. Rural women are mostly underutilized, largely unrecognized though they contribute significantly to agricultural and non agricultural activities. They have been engaged in different social safety net programs like “Food for Work”, “Vulnerable Group Development”, “and Vulnerable Group Feeding” etc. programs but their participation, cooperation, and performance are not recorded properly (Ahmed *et al.*, 1995). In addition for poor households in the economically developing world, food security can be achieved only if all household members, male and female, contribute fully. It is usually women who bear most of the responsibilities for domestic work and family

care, and in addition take part in income-generating activities to ensure survival and food security, even in crisis situations (World Food Program, 2002). And these women have great contribution on food security through participation in “Food for Work” social safety net program. The work includes planting trees, digging canals, building embankments, developing ponds, road building and road maintenance. The above-mentioned discussion implies the importance of women’s participation in “Food for Work” social safety net Program. Keeping this in view the preset study was carried out with this following specific objectives to i) assess the extent of participation of women in the food for work program; ii) explore the relationship between selected characteristics of the respondent women and their participation in food for work program; and iii) identify the problems faced by the women in working with Food for Work program.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Kapasia upazila under Gazipur district. The researcher selected Kapasia upazila deliberately because its socio-demographic feature is well known to researcher and it has suitability for communication facility with the district town. Furthermore, the upazila administration has food for work program for the women. All the women involved with the Food for Work program was the target population of the study. Thus an updated list of 165 women was prepared with the help of local leaders and professional leaders like Union Parishad Chairman and local NGO workers. Finally 110 women were selected as sample of this study using simple random sampling technique and which was 66.6 percent of the total population. In order to stockpile

pertinent information, an interview schedule was prepared carefully with due patience keeping the objective of the researcher in view. Data were collected personally by the researcher herself through face to face interview by using pretested interview schedule. Participation of respondent in Food for Work activities was measured in terms of extent of their involvement in participation with mud road maintenance activities and participation with metal road maintenance activities. To measure this, each respondent was asked to indicate her extent of participation in each activity in percent. Thus, a respondent’s involvement could range from 0-100 percent where ‘0’ indicating no participant and 100 percent indicating very high participant (Tuli,

2011). Problems faced by the respondents were computed on the basis of their intensity of difficulty faced by the respondent. Problem Confrontation Index (PCI) was computed for each problems item with help of the following formula used by Sonia (2009).

$$PCI = \frac{P_{vh}X5 + P_hX4 + P_mX3 + P_lX2 + P_{vl}X1}{5}$$

Where,

PCI= Problem Confrontation Index

P_{vh} = No. of respondents faced very high problem

P_h = No. of respondents faced high problem

P_m = No. of respondents faced moderate problem

P_l = No. of respondents faced low problem

P_{vl} = No. of respondents faced very low problem

Five problems which the respondents might face in respect of women participation in Food for Work Program have been considered in this study. Thus, PCI of a problem could range from 110- 550. Data collected from the respondents were coded, compiled, tabulated, and analyzed in accordance with the objectives of the study. Co-efficient of correlation was used to find out the relationships between the selected characteristics of the women and their participation.

Findings and Discussion

Participation in Food for Work program Activities

Women contribute significantly in developing activities but it has hardly been recognized. Because of the existence of a traditional society, female generally functions as housewives, mothers and housekeepers. The situation now seems to be changed considerably due to the new technologies in rural life. Women have been entering the labor force increasingly to contribute to family survival, structural adjustment processes, financial crises and prolonged economic downturns. Respondent women's participation was measured mainly in two dimensions viz. participation in maintenance of mud road and participation in maintenance of metal road. Thus, their involvement in two dimensions has been shown below.

Participation in maintenance of metal road activities

In Food for Work program, for maintaining metal road women are mainly involved with several activities namely; brick carrying, sand

placement, *khoa* (brick piece) placement, clearing and leveling. Findings shown in Table 1 represent that women had maximum participation in clearing. In clearing women's participation range was 30 to 100 percent and average participation was 57.27 percent against 42.6 percent man's average participation whereas range was 0 to 70 percent. On the other hand, major parts of man's participate was in sand placement. The man's participation ranged in sand placement was 50 to 100 percent and the average is 85.64 percent whereas women's participation range in sand placement was 0 to 50 percent with 14.63 percent average participation. In leveling and brick piece placement women's participation range was 0 to 60 percent with 36.59 percent and 26.64 percent average participation, respectively. Alternatively in leveling man's participation range was 40 to 100 percent and the average participation was 63.32 percent. In brick placement man has 73.36 percent average participation with range 40 to 100 percent.

Table 1 Relative participation of women and men in different activities related to maintenance of metal road (N=110)

Name of the activities	Participation (%)			
	Women		Man	
	Range	Average	Range	Average
Brick carrying	00-50	18.36	50-100	81.68
Sand placement	00-50	14.63	50-100	85.64
<i>Khoa</i> (brick piece) placement	00-60	26.64	40-100	73.36
Clearing	30-100	57.27	00-70	42.60
Leveling	00-60	36.59	40-100	63.32
Others (pruning, cleanings)	30-50	42.04	50-77	59.73

In brick carrying, a woman participation range was 0 to 50 percent and average participation was 18.36 percent on the contrary men participation range was 50 to 100 percent with 81.68 percent average participation. The result shows that, in case other activities like cleaning, tree pruning etc women has 42.04 percent involvement with range 30 to 50 percent against 59.73 percent man's participation with range 50 to 77 percent. Therefore, women had lower participation in all activities except clearing of the road in metal road maintenance and preparation compared to their men counterpart. This is because all other activities rather than clearing of the road require more physical strength and naturally the man possess more physical power than the women. This might be the causes of above findings.

Participation in maintenance of mud road activities

Women engage a wide range of activities of maintenance of mud road. In Food for Work program, for maintaining mud road women are mainly involved with several activities viz. digging soil, soil placement, leveling, and placement of grass. There are other related activities besides this like weeding, leveling etc and these are done by occasionally. Findings compiled in Table 2 indicate that men are dominantly involved with these

activities against respondent women's participation.

Result shows that women had minimum participation with grass placement (42.50%) against 62.89 percent average men's participation. The range of women participation in leveling was 0 to 50 percent. In digging soil and soil placement women participation range was 30 to 50 and average was 38.6 and 39.5 percent, respectively. On the other hand, in digging soil and soil placement men had 66.2 and 64.2 percent participation, respectively. In grass leveling, women participation range was 00 to 50 percent and average participation was 42.50 percent.

Alternatively in grass placement men had 62.89 percent average involvement. In case of other activities, women had 41.02 percent participation compared with 59.10 percent men's participation. From the above findings it can be concluded that women had lower relative participation in all activities related to maintenance of mud road compared to their men counterpart. As women are physically weak and thereby mentally too, and so are neglected by the men. Furthermore the men dominated over women in all aspects because almost everywhere, gender roles function in a way that discriminates against women, in their choices in life, their access to assets, and the voice they have in making decisions. This is why women had lower

participation in all activities related to maintenance of mud road.

Table 2 Relative participation of women and men in different activities related to maintenance of mud road (N=110)

Activities	Participation (%)			
	Women		Men	
	Range	Average	Range	Average
Digging soil	30-50	38.53	50-77	66.20
Soil placement	30-50	39.50	50-77	64.20
Leveling	00-50	14.20	50-100	85.76
Grass placement	30-60	42.50	40-77	62.89
Others (weeding, leveling)	30-60	41.02	40-77	59.10

Overall participation of the respondents in the different activities related to Food for Work program

The overall participation range of the respondent in Food for Work program was 0 to 100. On the basis of their cumulative percentage of participation the respondent women are classified into three categories based on participation score following Mukta (2011) as shown Table 3. Findings presented in Table 3 show that more than three-fifth (62.72%) of the respondent women belonged medium participation category in Food for work program compared to 37.28 percent had low participation.

There was no respondent having high participation in the activities mentioned. Therefore, all the women had low to medium level participation in the food for work program. This might be due to the reason that women usually have some limitations especially to hard physical works, like digging, sand placement, brick placement etc.

Table 3 Distribution of the respondents according to their overall participation in Food for Work program (N=110)

Categories (Score)	Respondents
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	Number	Percent
Low participation (up to 35)	41	37.28
Medium participation (36-65)	69	62.72
Total	110	100

Relationship between the Selected Characteristics of the Respondent Women and Their Participation in Food for Work Program Activities

This section attempts to explain the relationships of the selected characteristics of the respondents and their participation in activities of Food for Work program. The selected independent variables were age, family size, education, farm size, annual family income, training and physical fitness were considered as independent variables of this study. The dependent variable was participation of rural women in Food for Work program. Relationships between the selected characteristics of the respondents and their participation in Food for Work activities are given in Table 4.

Table 4 Relationship between the characteristics of the rural women and their participation in Food for Work activities (N=110)

Selected personal attribute	Co-efficient of correlation (r) values
Age	-0.97**
Family size	0.04NS
Education	0.68**
Farm size	0.07NS
Family income	0.02NS
Training	0.81**
Physical fitness	0.244*

** = Significant at 1% level, * = Significant at 5% level, NS = Not significant

From findings shown in Table 4 it is evinced that age of the respondents had significant negative relationship with their participation in activities of Food for Work program. It indicates that the lower the age of the respondent, the higher their participation in Food for Work program. Participation will be decreased with increasing age. With increased age, working ability is decreased due to physical disorder. It seems that the authority considered this in selecting their participant. A similar finding was reported by Naher (2000). Education had significant positive relationship with their participation in activities. Education facilitates individuals to gain knowledge and thus increases their power of understanding and broadens their outlook. Therefore, educated women maintain communication with maximum sources and thus get involved with the Food for Work program. Azad (2003) found that there was significant relationship between education and participation in farming activities. Physical fitness showed positive significant relationship with their participation in Food for Work activities. It indicates participation will be decreased with increasing physical fitness. Training exposure had positive significant relationship with their participation in Food for Work activities. It means that the higher the exposure of the respondents, the higher their participation in

activities of Food for Work program. Hence, a trained person shows their skill in all the activities including participation in the Food for Work program. Chowdhury *et al.* (2001) mentioned that intensive training of rural women, small and marginal farmers were positively related to their effective participation. On the other hand, there were positive non significant relationships between farm size, annual family income of the women with their participation in Food for Work activities.

Problem Faced by Respondent Women in Participation at different Food for Work Program Activities

Attempt has been made to find out the problems in women participation in food for work program. Respondents were asked to mention the problems they faced. After compiling their responses different problems were documented related to participating in Food for Work activities. Out of these, most important five problems have been shown in Table 5. As women are physically weak and thereby mentally too, and so are neglected by the men. The activities related to Food for Work program is difficult to perform by the women. To have an understanding about comparative severity among the problems, Problem Confrontation Index (PCI) were measured for each problem items and arranged in rank order in Table 5.

Most vital problem faced by rural women in participating in Food for Work activities was lack of transport facilities and long distance. As the rural communication is not so good and working place is far away from the respondent's resident, the respondents have to walk a long distance. The other vital four problems were 'inadequate wage', 'irregular wage', 'lack of adequate machineries' and 'biasness in behavior'.

Table 5 Problem Face by Respondent Women in Participation at different Food for Work Program Activities

Sl. No.	Problems	PCI	Rank
1.	Lack of transport facilities and long distance	370	1
2.	Inadequate wage	330	2

3.	Irregular distribution of wage	326	3
4.	Lack of adequate machineries	318	4
5.	Biasness in behavior	287	5

Conclusion

In Bangladesh women's role are changing fast under economic pressure. Women's responsibilities are becoming manifest as role primary or secondary income earners of their household. Women participation in employment and export oriented production is expanding. But their enchained economic role has not gone hand in hand with substantial improvement in education, training, health and nutrition and access to productive resources and services. The food-for-work (FFW) program plays an important role in the reduction of rural poverty, primarily through creation of employment opportunities. The results of the study indicate that more than three-fifth (62.72%) of the respondent women belonged medium participation category in Food for work program. Women's participation is highest in clearing (57.27%) in metal road maintenance whereas 42.50 percent in grass placement in case of mud road maintenance. Age,

education and training exposure had significant relationships with women's participation in Food for Work activities. Major problems faced by majority of the respondent women were "lack of transport facilities and long distance", "inadequate wage", and "irregular delivery of wage". Therefore, it is recommended that participant women should be given opportunity to work within their living place and their working environment should be increased to ensure their maximum utilization. Allocation of activities might be rational considering women's physical capability i.e. comparatively light activities should be distributed among female workers. Food/cash provided for the Food for Work program should be increased and distribution of wages should be regular to get optimum level of calorie by the household members of the beneficiaries.

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