

Social Participation of Extreme Poor Rural Women in a Selected Upazila of Sherpur District

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Abstract

The main focus of the study was to determine the extent of social participation by the extreme poor rural women in Sherpur district of Bangladesh and to explore the relationships between rural women's extent of social participation and their selected characteristics. Data were collected from randomly selected 200 extreme poor women who were the members of the selected GOs and NGOs, using a pre-tested structured interview schedule during May to July, 2013. Fifteen selected individual characteristics of the extreme poor rural women were considered for exploring relationship with social participation. The study revealed that nearly half (49.5 percent) of the extreme poor women had low social participation compared to 42.5 percent had medium social participation. Correlation test was used to ascertain the relationships between each of the concerned variables and participation. Out of the 15 selected characteristics of the extreme poor rural women, 11 variables namely, family farm size, family annual income, training exposure, social participation, role in family decision making, aspiration, cosmopolitaness, extension media contact, attitude towards NGOs, self-confidence, and participation in IGAs showed significant positive relationships whereas, other variables (age, education, household size, and organizational participation) did not show any significant relationship with social participation.

Keywords: *Extreme poor, rural women, social participation, Sherpur*

Introduction

Around 50% of total populations of Bangladesh are women (BBS, 2011). Among the extreme poor in rural Bangladesh, systems of patrilineal descent, patrilocal residence and restrictions due to socio-cultural and religious tradition interact to isolate and subordinate women. Women are socially and economically dependent on men. Because of socio-cultural restrictions many women are confined with the homestead and the area immediately surrounding it, and their contacts with the world outside of the family are extremely limited. These social norms curtail women's involvement in market transactions and constrain their

potential to generate income, reinforcing their economic dependence. They often do not have easy access to credit and other income generation opportunities, and are still under represented at management and policy levels.

Nowadays, Bangladesh has consistently shown improvement in the human development index and falls within a medium human development country with a score of .558 as per the report of 2014, slightly lower than the value for South Asia and ranked 142 globally (UNDP, 2014). There has been steady improvement in the social and political empowerment scenario of women in Bangladesh. According to

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Bangladesh Maternal Mortality Survey (BMMS), maternal mortality declined from 322 in 2001 to 194 in 2010, a 40 per cent decline in nine years. As per the Global Gender Gap Index -2014, the gender gap was narrowed on both the educational attainment and health and survival sub-indexes. However, economic participation for women in Bangladesh is still very low compared to countries in the same income group (ADB, 2014). As per Social Progress Index, 2014 Bangladesh score was 5204 which was higher compared to Pakistan, India and Nepal (ADB, 2014). These social

indicators of women may be considered as a call to look into the issue of social participation of rural women in Bangladesh. As many researches focus on poverty and livelihoods issues of extreme poor of the country, it was of particular interest of the authors to examine the social participation issue of the extreme poor rural women. Therefore, the study sought to examine the extreme poor woman's extent of social participation as well as to explore the relationship between the selected characteristics of the extreme poor women and their extent of social participation.

Methodology

Location, population and sample of the study: The study was conducted in an area, where there were a good number of extreme poor households and different poverty alleviating activities under different organizations were available for them. Considering these criteria, Sreebardi upazila under Sherpur district was purposively selected as the study area. At first, a functional definition of the extreme poor was determined. Following the CARE's (2000) definition, the extreme poor women were defined as the women belonging to the households having up to 50 decimals land and having no regular sources of income except than selling of physical labour and involving in some kinds of income generating activities. The targeted population of the study was the women members of extreme poor household, who were involved in different income generating activities of under a number of organizations such as BRDB, PDBF, BRAC and WV. The simple random sampling procedure was followed to obtain the desired sample. Two unions of Sreebordi upazila were randomly selected out of ten unions. A list of the extreme poor women

under aforesaid organizations was prepared. Then 30 per cent of the beneficiaries were selected randomly from the list, thus the sample size was 200 IGA (income generating activities) beneficiaries. The selected respondents constituted the sample size of the study. A reserve list of respondents (2 per cent of the original population) from the selected unions was made to meet up the absence of the respondents.

Instrument and methods for data collection: A structured questionnaire was used to collect the data from the respondents. While social participation was the focus variable, the following characteristics of the women were also considered for the study: age, education, household size, family farm size, family annual income, training exposure, organizational participation, role in family decision making, aspiration, cosmopolitaness, extension media contact, attitude towards of NGOs, self-confidence, household food security, and participation in IGAs. These were measured by employing standard methods as followed by some researchers.

Social participation referred to as the degree to which the rural women were involved in different social activities such as birthday, marriage, arbitration, cultural programmes, public meeting etc. To determine the extent of the social participation score of the women, scale used by Al-Amin (2008) in her study was used with some modifications. Social participation score was measured by using seven different activities. A four point rated scale was used to determine each activity. The scoring for extent of participation was '0' for not at all participation, '1' for rare participation, '2' for less frequent participation, and '3' for frequent participation. The scores for all the

activities were added to the score of social participation of extreme poor women. The score of the respondent's was ranging from 0 to 21, 0 indicating no participation and 21 indicating very high participation in their society.

The questionnaire was pretested with 20 rural women in the study area and the same was later modified and revised in accordance with the experience of the pretesting. Data were collected by using pre-tested interview schedule during the month of May to June, 2013. The first author collected the data himself by face to face interview with the respondents.

Results and Discussion

Characteristics of the extreme poor rural women: Fifteen selected individual characteristics of the extreme poor rural women were selected as the independent

variables of the study. The salient features of the characteristics and basic statistical value of respondents have been presented in Table 1 which is self-explanatory.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and salient features of extreme poor rural women

Characteristics	Measuring Unit	Range		Mean	Standard deviation
		Possible	Observed		
Age	Actual Years	Unknown	18-60	34.40	9.25
Education	Years of Schooling	0-16	0-11	2.02	2.88
Household size	Number	Unknown	2-8	4.08	1.18
Family farm size	Decimal	0-50	0-50	32.32	17.32
Family annual income	Taka in thousand	Unknown	25.4-194.7	78.07	26.21
Training exposure	Number of days	Unknown	0-106	2.62	10.40
Organizational participation	Score	Unknown	0-80	9.67	7.80
Role in family decision making	Score	0-42	4-42	24.94	6.48
Aspiration	Score	0-32	0-28	13.04	5.79
Cosmopolitaness	Score	0-18	0-13	3.78	2.09
Extension media contact	Score	0-30	0-18	5.33	3.09
Attitude towards NGOs	Score	0-52	15-41	29.62	5.16
Self confidence	Score	0-30	3-29	17.32	4.06
Household food security	Score	0-24	0-24	16.59	5.62
Participation in IGAs	Score	0-66	0-12	4.90	2.49

Social Participation of Extreme Poor Rural women: Social participation score of the extreme poor rural women varied from 0 to 16 against the possible range from 0 to 21. The average and standard deviation

were 7.60 and 3.57, respectively. Based on the social participation scores the respondents were classified into four categories as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Distribution of extreme poor rural women according to their social participation

Categories	Respondent (n=200)		Mean	Standard deviation
	Number	Percent		
No participation (0)	5	2.5	7.60	3.57
Low participation (1-7)	99	49.5		
Medium participation (8-14)	85	42.5		
High participation (> 14)	11	5.5		

Data contained in the Table 2 indicate that the majority (49.5 percent) of the respondents of women had low social participation. However, 42.5 percent women had medium social participation, compared to 5.5 percent had high and 2.5 percent had low level of participation. Rural women, mostly spend their time in daily household activities, i.e. food preparation, nurturing children, cleaning etc. Most of the times, these women do not get invitation to any social activities. However, by any chance, if they get one, social insecurity becomes a major barrier in moving from one place to another. Many women do not attend different types of social activities because of social conservativeness, male dominance, illiteracy and also occupation in household activities. Al-Amin (2008) found that, one-third of rural women had low and the same percentage had medium social participation while one-fourth had high participation in various social events and activities. Sheheli (2012) found that the participation of rural women in social activities lay mainly

between low to medium, while a majority had low participation. Aktaruzzaman (2006) found that 71 percent of rural women in Bangladesh have low participation in social activities, while Rahman (2006) and Nazneen (2004) reported that 69 percent of rural women had medium participation. All studies, including the present study found a lack of participation in social activities that might deprive rural women to get better livelihood opportunities.

From the above findings, it can be said that social participation of the rural women usually varies between low to medium levels. All studies, including the present study found a lack of participation in social activities among women. This participation could have helped rural women get better livelihood opportunities. The situation regarding participation of the respondents (extreme poor rural women) in all individual social activities has been presented in Table 3. The rank order has been made on the basis of the average participation scores of the respondents.

Table 3 Ranks of social activities participated by the extreme poor women

Social Activities	Mean	SD	Rank
Participation in social functions such as marriage, chehnam (special prayer for the deceased), invitation etc.	1.93	.92	1
Work with people to provide voluntary help during natural hazards like tornado, fire, flood etc.	1.59	.80	2
Participation in social awareness programme/ protecting against any injustice	1.21	1.03	3
Arbitration in family quarrels of neighbours and relatives	0.91	.82	4
Participation in public meeting/community meeting	0.90	.98	5
Participation in village arbitration (<i>shalish</i>)	0.54	.78	6
Participation in cultural/folk programmes	0.50	.74	7

From the Table 3, it was found that participation in social functions such as marriage, chehnam (tradition of special prayer 40 days after death), invitation etc. is the most common area of social participation of the respondents. This is partly because everybody near about one person by social bondage, intimacy with another, religious value and tradition. Furthermore, work with people to provide voluntary support during natural hazards, such as tornado, fire, flood, etc. got the next rank because they are more empathized to other during this type of period and try to help one another. On the other hand, participation in cultural/folk programmes ranked the lowest because social and religious barrier impede people from participating in such programs. Shiree (2011) found that the majority women shared that they maintained purdah (covering the face and body by long cloths) and therefore usually did not go out to work.

Relationships between poor women's selected characteristics and their social participation: Correlation coefficient was measured to explore relationship between the extreme poor rural women's 15 selected characteristics and their extent of social

participation. The results have been shown in Table 4.

Out of 15 selected characteristics family farm size, family annual income, training exposure, role in family decision making, aspiration, cosmopolitaness, extension media contact, attitude towards of NGOs, self-confidence, household food security, and participation in IGAs were positively correlated with the extent of social participation. One the other hand, age, education, household size, and organizational participation had no significant relationship with the extent of social participation.

Extreme poor rural women having large family farm size, she has doing more farm practices and which enable her to make socially participate. This might be the reason for farm size of the extreme poor women having a positive significant relationship with their participation. Dey (2013) and Hoque (2009) found a positive significant relationship between farm size and participation in farming activities in their respective studies. Women having more family income, they have empowered socially. They got different invitation from relatives, communal people, and organization. By the way they have participating more social activities. Training

exposure is enabling women to participate more social activities. As because, they are go different locations and meet with different kinds of people, horizontally and vertically to attend the training programme. Chowdhury *et al.* (2001) mentioned that intensive training of rural women, small and marginal farmers were positively related to their effective participation. If the women contribute major role in family decision

making, she has the capacity to participate in different social activities. Extreme poor rural women having more contact with extension media are aware about different social activities and influence to attain more social activities. Dey (2013), Rashid (2006), Rahman (2010), and Zaman (2010) also observed the similar findings between extension contact and participation in their respective studies.

Table 4 Relationships between selected characteristics of the extreme poor rural women and their extent of participation

Focus variable	Selected characteristics of extreme poor women	Correlation coefficient (r) with 198 d.f.
Social participation of extreme poor rural women	Age	0.002 ^{NS}
	Education	0.125 ^{NS}
	Household size	0.057 ^{NS}
	Family farm size	.311**
	Family annual income	.340**
	Training exposure	.206**
	Organizational participation	0.117 ^{NS}
	Role in family decision making	.408**
	Aspiration	.496**
	Cosmopolitaness	.770**
	Extension media contact	.770**
	Attitude towards NGO	.351**
	Self confidence	.478**
	Household food security	.415**
	Participation in IGAs	.604**

** Significant at 0.01 level of probability, NS=Non significant

Conclusion

Social participation had the substantial contribution to improve livelihood of extreme poor women. It means that a woman having more social participation would perform better livelihood. Social participation improved as individuals: choose with whom to associate; choose employment type, social groups with whom to associate; self-advocate - they increase confidence, self-respect and self-esteem; are consulted and feel more included in

decisions concerning themselves and their community. Having diverse cultural techniques and practices also empowers women and it can reduce the level of dependents in a family hereby improving their livelihood. Social participation empowered, more women to participate in decision making, fostered asset base creation and use of natural resource management technologies.

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