

## **GET A SECOND CHANCE TO MAKE A FIRST IMPRESSION: Eradicate the Poverty Level of the Women Farmer in Bangladesh**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In the socio-economic context of Bangladesh, involvement of women in agriculture is very important. It would be easier to control rural-urban migration by engaging women in agricultural activities to a greater extent. Women play a vital role in agricultural production throughout the Bangladesh, making a significant contribution to the basic productivity of their communities. The paper argues that efforts to promote women in farming are confronted by challenges including poverty, misconception regarding education, training, farming etc. The paper also states that the utilization and development of distance education would effectively address the problem of education and training aimed at rural women.

**Keywords:** Women; farmer; distance education; training.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The economy of Bangladesh is primarily depended on agriculture. About 84% of the total population live in rural areas and are directly or indirectly engaged in a wide range of agricultural activities.

The agricultural sector plays a very important role in the economy of the country accounting for 31.6% of total GDP in 1997-1998. Poverty alleviation seems to have been the objective of successive development plans of Bangladesh. Technological transportation in agriculture has led both to increased participation of women in the labor force, and to change in people's relationship to production activity (Faulker and Lawson.1991).

The Government has therefore accorded highest priority to the agriculture sector. The commitment in this respect is reflected in the National Agriculture policy (NAP) of 1999. It gave emphasis on the Environmental Protection in Agriculture and finally involvements of women in agriculture. The majority of job seekers are in a very disadvantaged position in terms of access to rural resources and services. The government adopted some policy measures to include women as a target population for all major economic development components (Jahan et al., 1995).

These development programs aim at poverty alleviation. In the socio-economic context of Bangladesh, involvement of women in agriculture is very important. It would be easier to control rural-urban migration by engaging women in agricultural activities to a greater extent.

**Women play a vital role in agricultural production throughout the Bangladesh, making a significant contribution to the basic productivity of their communities. This contribution is seldom considered in the planning and implementation of development projects.**

**In Bangladesh, women bear the primary responsibility for subsistence agricultural production addition to their household reproductive labor and other productive activities. In the past, women's increased responsibilities were not seen to be recognized but because of other changing socio-economic factors, obliging women to take over men's, this is becoming more acceptable.**

**Earning differentials between male and female have serious implication for gender-specific poverty. A lower wage rate will not help women to raise their earnings even if they are working for longer hours. Sometimes the return from employment may not be reflected in the prevailing wage rate because these women may not be able to obtain as many hours of work as they would like. (Rahman, 1991). Poverty implies deprivation-the inability to attain a minimal standard of living.**

**The burden of poverty is seen to fall disproportionately on the female. (Quibria,1993. Rahman and Hossain, 1992). This paper attempts to underscore the relation between gender inequalities and women farmer at lower social and economic status. It examines some of the major barriers for women in farming. The paper argues that efforts to promote women in farming are confronted by challenges including poverty, misconception regarding education, training, farming etc. The paper also states that the utilization and development of distance education would effectively address the problem of education and training aimed at rural women.**

## **OBJECTIVES**

- **To identify the present role of rural women in agricultural sector.**
- **To identify the barriers for women in agriculture in terms of their knowledge and skills.**
- **To identify the scope for distance learning to serve the rural communities and to develop programs that serves the rural learners particularly women and girls.**
- **To identify the scope for communication, cooperation and collaboration for common cause.**

## **METHODOLOGY**

**As a part of qualitative method, different research studies and reports and documents were analyzed. A focus group discussion (FGD) has been done with the rural women to identify the barriers and find out their needs in terms of knowledge and skills. Besides this a set of questionnaire has been given to the persons in the respective field for drawing their expert opinion in order to develop a need based distance education program for them.**

### **Analysis of the Results of Focus Group Discussion with the Women Farmer**

**District- Rangpur**

**Union-Payraban, Mithapukur**

**Number of Respondents - 50 women farmer**

The focus group discussion has been conducted in one district; five villages were taken into consideration under one union. It was very much interesting to see that the women farmer are doing very hard job with much enjoyment. Some of them have brought their children with them and also carried food for them.

It is very encouraging to see that the women of the village are engaging in job and they do it with much comfort.

**Table: 1**  
**Age of the respondents**

<b>Age</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Number</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>

From the above table it has been observed that most of the respondents are young and the respondents from middle age are few. From the focus group discussion, it has been identified the present status, socio-cultural barriers and about their lacking in technical knowledge regarding farming. It has also been noticed that they feel the necessity of open and distance learning in this regard. The gist of the discussion:

### **FINDINGS OF THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION**

- Amongst the men and women farmer 98.56% are literate. Rest of the respondents (1.44%) is educated up to grade 5 and grade 7.
- Their main profession is vegetable gardening. Among them 4.21% are engaged in farming of others land.
- Their main source of income is farming.
- Annual income approximately 40 to 60 thousand taka. Among them the income of 76.14% women farmer is 3, 225 taka and 23.86% women farmer's income is about 5000 taka per month.
- Family members of the respondents are 4 to 6 person. Among them 97.06% women farmer have already adopted family planning program.
- 100% believes that there is no social barrier in this profession. Among them 98.90% women think that there is a social status in this profession and 1.10% kept silent.
- About 95.26% women farmer get their knowledge regarding farming from public and 4.74% women earn their knowledge from the field officers of local agricultural sector.
- All the respondents agreed that they have no knowledge about the various types of seeds. They also believe that result without proper knowledge in seed sowing is mostly not profitable.
- 100% respondents agreed that they have no proper knowledge about cultivation, seed varieties, seed bed preparation, seed sowing, seedling, transplanting, and knowledge on fertilizer application, irrigation, weed management, harvesting and post harvesting.
- 100% women farmers expressed that they are not getting proper price against their commodities. Due to proper transportation and household load, it is not possible for them to sell their commodities directly to the market. They have to sell their commodity through agent and as a result they are getting half price. So they believe that their upgrade knowledge in marketing will help them to overcome the situation.
- Among them 98.11% women farmers are interested in getting training from the non-formal program of Bangladesh Open University.
- They prefer training through audio-visual and printed materials with picture.

- **83% women farmer believes that they are inferior in technical knowledge than that of men, 17% believe that they are same as men.**
- **100% women believe that open discussion, interaction, proper training in a distance mode will increase their technical knowledge regarding farming.**
- **92% women believe that they are friendly with their profession and 8% believe that they are still unfriendly in their profession.**
- **Finally, 14% have a confidence that through this profession they will upgrade their standard of living and empower themselves in all respect, 86% have no clear conception regarding this issue. They do not know what empowerment is.**

**Analysis of the Questionnaire given to the Faculty Members of BOU related to Agricultural Field**

A set of open and close ended questionnaire has been sent to the faculty members of BOU, 20 questionnaires were collected with their valuable feedback.

**Table: 2**  
**Women Farmer is the hidden character in the economic development**

Response	No	%
Yes	14	70
No	03	15
Sometimes	03	15

In Bangladesh most of the women are working in the private field and public field. Especially in the rural areas women are doing hard job in the agricultural field to assist the male person.

As they are assisting the male person, sometimes they are not considered as the potential contributor to the economic development of the county. Among the respondent 70% agree that the women farmer were the hidden character in the economic development of the country, 15% disagree and 15% said sometimes it happen.

**Table: 3**  
**Technical Skill Development through Open and Distance Learning**

Response	No	%
Audio-visual support	02	10
Tutorial Centre	No response	00
Training to the educated person as a master trainer	No response	00
All	18	90

All the respondents agree that the training through open and distance learning will be the effective tool for the skill development of the women farmer. The women could carry out the training program through distance learning will not affect their personal life and professional life.

It will also be time consuming and cost effective for them. Among them 90% agree that all the above mentioned media will be fruitful for the technological skill development of the women farmer and only 25 believe that audio-visual support is enough for their development.

**Table: 4**  
**Non-formal education could reach the women farmer for their empowerment**

<b>Response</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Fully</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Partially</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Not at all</b>		

All the respondents believe that through non-formal education women farmer will be benefited partially because many other factors are related to their empowerment. If other factors are not fulfilled, their empowerment will be impossible.

**Type of training is needed for the implementation of the program**

- Literacy training if needed.
- Training for cultivation, marketing, co-operative, banking and other relevant things.
- Training on primary tools and technology needed.
- Training for awareness in terms of economic empowerment, agricultural works and social development.
- Modern and advance knowledge about high income value.
- After feasibility test more training area should be identified.

**Table: 5**  
**Appropriate research program is needed to identify the barriers of women farmer**

<b>Response</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>No</b>		

All the respondents believe that to identify the area of difficulties related to the women farmer, research is essential. If we go to identify their problems only through literature review, accurate result will not come.

**Table: 6**  
**Control rural urban migration by engaging women in agricultural activities with economic solvency**

<b>Response</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>00</b>	<b>00</b>

In Bangladesh rural-urban migration is a great burden to the urban area. Many women in every year (divorced, widow, separated, husband sick) for their livelihood migrated to the urban area in search of job. As they have children with them, they cannot work as a domestic helper or in public sector or in garments sector.

Many of them become prostitute and some engaged in begging. Day by day this problem is becoming grave. To stop this crisis, women should be provided with job in their own locality. It will be beneficial for both urban and rural people. All the respondents agree that this migration problem could be minimizing by engaging the rural women in farming.

**Table: 7**  
**Collaboration is needed for the implementation of the program**

<b>Response</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>00</b>	<b>00</b>

**All the respondents agree that collaboration is needed for the successful implementation of the program.**

**We know that any collaborative effort will complement each other. Among most of them believe that both national and international collaboration will work for this program. The women have little formal education and many of them are illiterate in the rural area of Bangladesh. They undertake major share of responsibilities in agricultural production and rural economy but the nation overlooked their contribution in this field. The modality of knowledge and strong networking could lead to mainstreaming rural women's consideration in sustainable agriculture. This needs strong motivation and awareness building which is possible through non-formal education given through open and distance learning.**

### **Recommendations**

- **Learning in the light of adult education principles should be taken into consideration. Thus, throughout the training emphasis should be given to the empowerment issues of the women.**
- **FAO should strengthen the efforts to make best use of Distance learning. In this regard collaboration between Agriculture ministry and Bangladesh Open University could make collaboration. FAO would be the facilitator of the program. Ministry of Women and Children Affairs could play a role of advisor to empower the women farmer in Bangladesh.**
- **Most of the women in the rural areas have little formal education and many of them are illiterate. But from the experience it has been proved that the women could quickly familiarized them with the video technology. So distance education through visual support will be an effective tool of training for them.**
- **By promoting regional inter-agency collaboration it is possible to support women farmer focused on their reality, capacity, attitude and socio-cultural backgrounds. The program should be guided by the principle of gender equity, gender equality, sustainability and linkage for technical, financial and other resources.**
- **By creating regional mechanisms that will facilitate access to technology, information and services will make the training program more fruitful.**
- **Net workings through traditional modes are becoming difficult due to cost of travel and cost of organizing meeting. Networking through communication and information technologies are the emerging modes for networking. ICT based in the village extension service centre could be a collective approach and can reduce the cost of ICT.**
- **Most of the women found young aged and some are mid age. So emphasis should be given in the time of training considering their age and capability.**
- **In our findings, it has been observed that all women farmer are literate and few are primary level pass. Training should be given to the primary education pass women as a master trainer so that they are able to teach the rest of the women farmers.**

- It is recommended to take collaborative program after feasibility test for developing and launching non-formal program through Bangladesh Open University. The curriculum should be developed based on their practical needs, resource and capabilities to develop their skills in technological side.

## CONCLUSION

In the socio-economic context of Bangladesh, involvement of women in agriculture is very important. It would be easier to control rural-urban migration by engaging in agricultural activities to a greater extent. Promoting access to productive resources and social support systems constitutes one of the fundamental building blocks in efforts to empower women in the region. Access to productive resources such as credit, technology, infrastructure, marketing links and networking facilities can significantly enlarge opportunities for women to engage in formal economic activities and improve their social status. In this regard, promoting access to new and emerging technologies, including information and communication technology has become a powerful tool for women's empowerment.

To overcome the psychological barriers which inhibit women's use of information technology, training is seen as essential. Unfortunately, training programs and materials are often not gender and/or culturally sensitive, training is expensive and it is often offered at the wrong time of day for women.

In the Asian region the role of women in sustainable rural development is a critical one to achieve the millennium goals set by the UN. The world with less people in poverty and more people in food secure position can be achieved only through realizing the goals of empowering women. Female labor has little or no bargaining power on wages. Wages paid are more or less at the employer's discretion (Kabir, 1989).

United Nations Millennium Declaration resolves, "To promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable." (United Nations, 2000).

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