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WOMEN IN FISHERIES MANAGEMENT IN THE CBFM-SSEA PROJECT, SUNAMGANJ BANGLADESH



In association with SUJON, ERA



With support from International Fund For Agricultural Development (IFAD), Italy



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1

Project Area

Sunamganj is situated in the north east region of Bangladesh, located close to the Indian Meghalaya province, is the area with the most natural resources in Bangladesh. There is a saying that “*Matshya, Pathor, Dhan Sunamganj er Pran*”, meaning “natural fish, stones and paddy are the heart of Sunamganj people’s economy”. However, this area is very prone to early flash flooding from the Indian hills which means that most of the time the mono-crop of rice is damaged in the field. During *monsoon*, the majority of people are engaged in fishing in the *haor* areas for survival. Basic information of the areas are shown in table-1. Fishing starts in May and continues until August/September. At that time the lease holders restrict fishing in their *beels*. Consequently, the fishermen start to face hard times as they have no legal access to water bodies that contain the fish.



2

Mobility

Sunamganj district is an under-developed area in Bangladesh. A lack of communication, poor education and health are the major problems of the district. There is a saying that “*Borshay Nao, Hemonte Pao*”, which means that the area (*haor*) is submerged under water for six to eight months of the year. At that time, country boats and/or engine boats are the only mode of communication in the *haor* areas. Communication is very restricted for the women and children and even during the dry season people can only communicate by traveling on foot. There is no direct linkage between the Upazila and district administration. Due to lack of education people are very conservative in their religious beliefs and practices creating barriers in respect to the mobility of women.

Now however, the situation is improving due to GO (government organization) and NGO (non government organization) intervention to develop road communication in some of the areas. NGOs organize meetings, awareness training and micro-credit for women to empower them and to improve their livelihoods.

3

Literacy

Sunamganj is surrounded by *haor*, and communication is very poor compared to the other districts of Bangladesh. For that reason education level is also very poor in this area, especially for the girls attending school. An average of 25.5% can only sign their names (Derai 35%, Biswambharpur 27% and Sadar 24%). In the CBFM-SSEA project areas, the level of literacy is only 10 -15%, because of the fewer numbers of schools and madrasas. Detailed information regarding the educational institutions in the project areas is given in table-2.



Description of the Community

The community based fisheries management -South and South East Asia (CBFM-SSEA) project works in three Upazilas under Sunamganj District: Sunamganj Sadar, Derai and Biswambharpur. In these districts Hindu and Muslim communities are almost equal in proportion. Often Muslims dominate Hindus in the community creating local conflicts. The proportion of men and women in the area is 55% to 45%.

Table 1: Basic information of the *haor* areas

Name of NGO	Total village	Total HH	Total population	Male	Female	Total Muslim HH	Total Hindu HH
ERA	16	1574	19600	10660	8940	935	639
SUJON	8	434	3155	1800	1355	148	286
Total	24	2008	22755	12460	10295	1083	925

Source: Census and Union Parishad

Table 2: Primary, secondary and higher study institution of the project areas

Name of NGO	School/College	Number	Total
ERA	College	0	14
	High	4	
	Primary	8	
	Madrassa	2	
SUJON	College	0	04
	High	0	
	Primary	3	
	Madrassa	0	
Total		18	18

Source: Upazila Education Office

In both the NGO areas a primary level education facility is available but there is no opportunity for secondary education in the ERA area. Anyone wanting secondary level education has to travel 4 -10 km to reach schools in the Upazila or district. Women have a lack of mobility due to cultural context and as such they can usually only attend school up to primary level (15-20% of population of school-going age). In the secondary level the percentage of girls' education is 2-5%.

The majority of women never went to school but some of them learnt to put their signature after joining NGOs and one woman of Gopalpur read up to class IV and is now the secretary of the group. Other groups have to depend on NGO staff or school going children of the family for recording the group activities.



4 Project Background

CBFM-SSEA has carried out its implementation in two countries (Bangladesh and Vietnam) through a partnership arrangement between the WorldFish Center and GO and NGOs, and is linked with a larger project called CBFM-2 in Bangladesh which is supported by the UK Department for International Development (DfID). In Bangladesh, the partners are two NGOs - Efforts for Rural Advancement (ERA) and Sunamganj Jonokalyan Sangstha (SUJON), the Department of Fisheries (DoF) of the Government of Bangladesh, and Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet (NARS partner). In Vietnam the partners are the An Giang Provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and Can Tho University. The project was funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and was implemented over a period of five years (2002-2007).

The project's goal was to attain sustainability and improve the livelihoods of poor people dependant on aquatic resources in South and Southeast Asia by developing, testing and assessing arrangements for user-based (community-based) fisheries management in deeply flooded inland fisheries in Bangladesh and Vietnam by informing and facilitating appropriate changes in policy. The objective of the community based approach was to generate improved inland fisheries management policies in the partner country governments and NGOs resulting in more sustainable, equitable and participatory management of resources for improved livelihoods of fishers in the selected deeply flooded areas of Bangladesh.



5 Methodology

A review of secondary literature, focus group discussion and/or PRA sessions were conducted with 16 members of three out of five women only groups of two NGOs. Five out of 10 female members of three *Bee* Management Committee (BMC) were present with the group members. Discussions with the senior staff of the project and NGO executives were also done. Two PRA tools (wealth ranking) were used to find changes in socio-economic status and the role of women in *bee* management. Individual women's opinions on the project impact were expressed by putting dots of different colors on VIPP cards with criteria of different socio-economic categories. PRA sessions were supplemented by semi-structured interviews (SSI) and focus group discussions (FGD).

6 Results

6.1 The beneficiaries that were selected by both the NGOs (SUJON and ERA) of CBFM-SSEA project represented a broad spectrum of the community, including very poor and poor women, as well as poor men. Table 3 shows improvement in socio-economic status of the beneficiaries as perceived by the women. The criteria used to define the socio-economic categories included: *own land/landless, roof/fence of house material (tin/straw), number of meals, types/availability of work, and education of children*. However, the project could be more pro-poor focused with the inclusion of women headed households identified from baseline survey/social map.

With the project interventions of micro-credit, training, access to fishing and other involvement in the *beel* management, the majority of the women of both the NGO areas felt that they had an improvement in terms of both physical and social wellbeing. One woman who was the head of her family did not have much capacity to improve due to the high numbers of dependants in relation to her income.



Table 3: Impact on Socio-Economic Status in CBFM area (women's perceptions)

SE Categories	Women's SE Status		Improvement after joining project (%)
	Before	After	
Gopalpur: SUJON			
Very poor	100	57	Decreased by 43
Poor	0	43	Increased by 43
Moderate poor	0	0	0
Average	0	0	0
Well-off	0	0	0
Total	100	100	
Chandergaon: ERA			
Very poor	50	16	Decreased by 34
Poor	34	17	Decreased by 17
Moderate poor	16	50	Increased by 34

Average	0	17	Increased by 17
Well-off	0	0	0
Total	100	100	
Very poor			
Very poor	66	0	Decreased by 66
Poor	0	66	Increased by 66
Moderate poor	34	0	Decreased by 34
Average	0	34	Increased by 34
Well-off	0	0	
Total	100	100	

The above finding might be compared with the results of the recently conducted midterm review of Sunamganj Community Based Resource Management Project (SCBRMP) sponsored by IFAD, which was being implemented in the same area with similar objectives. Table 4 shows the perceptions of women of five villages in improvement in socio-economic status according to the midterm review.

Though 'women have little involvement in open water fisheries management, tables 3 and 4, indicates that there has been significant improvement in SE status in the lowest two categories of all four villages of the two projects. In PRA wealth ranking session most women put the dots at one step above to show their present improvement in SE status than their past though they did not experience a significant increase in physical capital. They emphasized more on their social capital gain rather than physical and financial capital.

Table 4: Improvement in SE Status as Perceived by Women, CBRMP area (MTR report)

Sl no.	Name of the village and upazila	Change in percentage of women in the SE category				
		Landless/very poor	Marginal farmer/poor	Small farmer/lower middle class	Middle class	Well-off or rich
1	Harinagar/Sadar 1	Decreased by 31	No Change	Increased by 12	Increased by 19	No Change
2	Damodartapi/Sadar 2	Decreased by 6	No Change	-	Increased by 6	No Change
3	Chalbon/Bishwambarpur	Decreased by 33	Decreased by 13	Increased by 46	No Change	No Change
4	Uzan Jamalgar/Tahirpur	-	Decreased by 40	Decreased by 13	Increased by 53	No Change
5	Lambabank Purbapara/Jamalganj	Decreased by 59	Increased by 55	No Change	Increased by 4	No Change



6.2 The percentage of individual women and men participating in the different activities of *beel* development and management are shown in table 5. It shows that 56% of women (five out of nine) participated directly in different activities such as sanctuary development, guarding in the day time and other management activities table. Some women participate in the earthwork for dam preparation. All women performed the task of net repairing without the help of men. Negotiation of the price of fish was mostly done by men but women also participated in this activity. In the area of ERA, women's participation in different *beel* management activities was reduced when compared to SUJON. The participants were not able to provide any information about the sharing of profits from the income on harvested fish.

6.3 The activity of fish sorting was carried out exclusively by women (almost 100% of the women participate in this activity). This skill was earned by the women through training that was part of the project. Different species of fishes were sorted and measured, and the size was recorded. This method of fish sorting was valuable for the project participants as it enabled them to increase their profit margins.

Table 5: Participation of women and men in *Beel* / Management Activities: SUJON area

SI #	Individual woman put dots	Percentage of Activities Performed by Men and Women					
		Sanctuary	Guarding	Preparation of dam	Fish sorting	Repairing of fish net	Negotiation for sale
1	men	75	50	70	0	0	70
	women	25	50	30	100	100	30
2	men	75	50	60	0	0	75
	women	25	50	40	100	100	25
3	men	75	50	-	0	0	75
	women	25	50	-	100	100	25
4	men	25	50	-	0	0	-
	women *	75	50	-	100	100	-
5	men	-	-	-	0	0	-
	women	-	-	-	100	100	-

*Head of family

Tables 6 and 7 shows the project's impact on the women's gain in empowerment through social and physical capital gain. They can take some decisions within the family e.g. how to spend the money earned from fishing. Some of them mentioned that they are united/organized even after the discontinuation of the project. In Chandergaon women attend weekly meetings and continue to save money as before. Women in other areas have some confusion about how to manage bank account for cash deposits (save money) and the withdrawal of their savings money. In some places project community centers are used as meeting place beyond the project period.

Table 6: Achievements from the Project as Perceived by the Women: SUJON area

SI	Social capital	Physical capital
1	Courage/confidence/knowledge and skill (women), education (children)	Income increased with IGAs and savings (all)
2	Gender awareness: participation with men valued	Better food with addition of own cultivated vegetables, sometimes fish/meat/egg (all)
3	Mobility: goes to bank, attends training and meeting	Purchased shallow machine (1), land mortgaged in (3)
4	Their opinion is respected within the family and in the community/less conjugal quarrel	Better clothing/renovation of house, Purchased TV (1), cassette player (1), radio (1)
5	Can decide about IGA	Ornaments (ear rings-2)
6	Unity through group formation - supports each other	Can save some money as they do not need to buy vegetables - rather they can sell

There is a relationship between the duration of the project intervention and the social, human and physical capital achievement of women. Due to the conflict between influential and poor fishermen in the area of ERA there was a delay in handing over the *beels* and as a consequence, involvement of women was further delayed (2004). Therefore, women raised less physical and social capital in ERA (despite owning larger *beels*) compared to those of SUJON area.

Many poor men and women of the community appreciated the role of the project in accessing to *Khas land beels*, which were occupied by local influential. However they still need the support for further access to *beels*



In addition to poverty reduction, women were empowered through project intervention through actions such as forming groups; involvement in decision making savings and credit management; attending meetings and training sessions (Table 7). However, due low literacy and a lack of follow-up by NGOs, it is questionable whether the retention of knowledge and skills will continue in the long term.

Table 7: Decision making on spending the money earn from fish: SUJON area

Individual woman	Proportion (%)	
	Men	Women
Women 1	50	50
Women 2*	50	50
Women 3	75	25
Women 4	50	50
Women 5*	10	90
Women 6	66	34
Women 7	75	25
Women 8	50	50
Women 9	50	50

* Head of family

It is believed that the social capital is sustainable; forming the basis of further work, but that physical capital may be lost any time due to vulnerability. A few women mentioned that TV, radio and cassette players are not only used for recreation but also as a source of knowledge and technology. Those who could mortgage-in land are better-off - they do not need to buy rice for the family for 5 - 6 months. There is a strong feeling that a lack education is the major obstacle for any development, which they try to overcome by educating their children as much as possible.

6.4 Table 8 indicates the training activities that were provided to group members by the NGOs.

Table 8: Trainings received by the women group members

SI	Types of training	Women -SUJON	Women -ERA	Comments
1	Gender equality	✓	—	
2	Goat rearing	✓	—	
3	Vegetables	✓	✓	
4	Financial management	✓	✓	Only team leaders
5	Duck rearing	✓	✓	
6	Cow rearing	✓	—	
7	Tailoring	—	✓	From other project



Women have needs further training for alternative livelihood activities like birth attendant (little or without basic education) preparing *blocks and boutiques* for dresses and cane products. In order to train for these activities the women need credit, however, at the moment the NGO is not providing any credit. Some female group members of ERA have had tailoring training but due to lack of available of credit, they are unable to buy sewing machines and, therefore, cannot enter into business. None of the women received training on fisheries/sanctuary management like the men.

For future sustainability of the women's livelihoods, the local NGOs should coordinate their action, for example, when one NGO provides tailoring training, another could provide credit.

6.5 Micro-credit and IGA/alternative livelihood

A number of other alternative IGAs are available to women (Table 9). Many participants want to rear ducks as the activity requires low capital and maintenance costs (the ducks get natural food from *haor*). It is believed that once ducks are vaccinated there is less risk of disease and at the end of the six months growth periods, they can earn good profit. Moreover, the eggs can be sold and ducks are a good food source for the children and family. Alternatively, drying fish in small or large quantities is another possible IGA but this also requires training for quality product and management. Fish trap preparation is another common source of income in many families and, if they had capital these could be produced in larger scale.

Women feel that the amount of money available to them as loans was too low. In order to buy goats/cows/boats or to invest in any small trade they had to add more money from other sources. Credit is not need based and men get bigger loans than women. One woman bought a shallow machine taking loan from a local money lender with high interest rate but could not earn profit, so she had to sell it to repay the loan.

After the project finished, the BMC were managing a *beel* without the help of NGOs but without or poor participation of women. The *beel* management committee of ERA is planning to revolve the group savings money to provide credit to the group member. Women are also interested (all men) to join with this activity of men if there is any opportunity.

Sl	Existing IGA/livelihood	Alternative IGA/livelihood	Micro-credit/comment
SUJON area			
1	Small - trade	'Gui' - fish trap preparation	4 times- total 14,000
2	Engine boat*	'Gui' - fish trap preparation	3 times - total 10,000
3	Cultivation (land mortgaged-in)	Goat - rearing	3 times - total 6,500
4	Engine boat	Goat - rearing	3 times - total 9,000
5	Small trade*	Cow - rearing	Twice - total 4,500
6	Cow and goat	'Gui' - fish trap preparation	Twice - total 4,500
7	Engine boat	Cow' - rearing	3 times - total 7,000
8	Cow and goat	'Gui' - fish trap preparation	3 times - total 12,000
9	Engine boat	'Gui' - fish trap preparation	Twice - total 5, 000

ERA area			
1	Housemaid	Nil	Nil
2	Petty trade*	Nil	Twice - total 6,000
3	Duck rearing	Nil	NGO provided credit to 19 women to do IGA jointly with sheep rearing but did not get any profit due to mortality and poor management
4	Housewife	Nil	
5	Housewife	Nil	

* Head of family



Women's preference: Duck rearing at Haor

6.6 Vulnerability to disease/health for both humans and poultry

For most women the level of vulnerability is high. In Gopalpur one woman had a child with neonatal pneumonia, who was admitted to a tertiary level hospital. The child survived at the cost of Tk 30,000. For the treatment cost she had to sell her 100 decimal of land at lower price than it was worth. She also spent the micro-credit given by the NGO. To account for this financial loss the woman increased her labor time, however, it was not enough to improve her socio-economic status at the end of the project. Another woman had to spend a large sum of money for the treatment of her daughter who tried to commit suicide due to personal problems. Dowry for daughter's marriage is another pocket of drainage for at least half of the women. Vulnerability to natural disaster like flood is a major concern of all women and men due to loss of livelihoods.

7 Limitations/constraints

- When the project was initiated, the gender perspective was not taken into account.
- Institutional capacity for the development of women is limited due to poor representation of female in management committees (only 10 in BMC and 1 in Cluster Management Committee). Lack of clear understanding and skill of group management, female group members could not continue group activities without NGO support after the completion of the project. Lack of literacy of women has also made them dependant on others for savings/credit management and other activities. The community house constructed at the end of the project and limited use to women groups, as they were not sure how to involve themselves in savings and credit management.
- Though a baseline survey was done to categorize all households, female headed households were missed by the NGOs.
- Credit and training were not linked or needs based. As there was no collaboration between local NGOs in this regard, the mobilization of funds for providing credit to women was not visible. In general, there were very limited funds available for alternative IGAs.
- Women of BMC were not aware of what their share of profit was or how to access it.
- The NGOs did not use any phase-out strategy, or any plans for follow-up / monitoring activities to the project group members after the completion of the project.
- Women's rights issues (e.g. access and control over resources, wage discrimination, reproductive health/rights, education, etc.) were not addressed.
- A lack of health and communication facilities for poor beneficiaries within the project areas somewhat reduced achievements.



8 Recommendations

The role and representation of women

- Gender/women development issues should be clearly mentioned at all phases of the project cycle: planning (needs assessment), implementation, monitoring and evaluation and log frame.
- All reporting/monitoring formats should contain sex disaggregated data starting from the baseline survey.
- Senior project and NGO staff should have training and experience with gender issues in development. BMC, CMC and other committee members should plan and implement projects with gender equality. Women should represent at least 25% of all committees. Women should also be employed for office work.

Project design

- The baseline survey should include some qualitative data collection approaches (e.g. social mapping) to explore and prioritize needs of female headed households. PRA tools are useful for preference ranking of IGAs and prioritizing training needs. Diversified, non-traditional IGAs should be explored and promoted and women should not be ignored when it comes to manual labor like road maintenance and excavation work for *beel* and pond. Like other similar projects (SCBRMP) there is an opportunity to grow vegetables on the dyke. Training for nurturing swamp trees will also be useful as they have both nutritional and monetary value to the women, children and family members
- Collaboration/linkages between NGOs working at the local level needs to happen in order to provide integrated services (e.g. skill training, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs; adult literacy; SHOUHARDO project/CARE; health services - Sancred hospital, GOB satellite clinic, etc)
- A proper phase out plan and strategy for future development is needed to sustain project activities by the group members beyond the project implementation time (Institutionalization)