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STUDY OF WOMEN'S FOOD SECURITY AND EMPOWERMENT STATUS UNDER SPECIAL PROGRAM FOR FOOD SECURITY PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of the study was to investigate the women's food security and empowerment status under special program for food security project of the Department of Agricultural Extension, Bangladesh. The study was conducted through integration of quantitative and qualitative methods based on data from the respondents of the selected areas. Food security status of the respondents was analyzed considering food availability, access and utilization with the help of indicators. The study yielded that Majority of the respondents (63.33%) said they can feed their family all the year round without deficit and some can save money 7000 Taka per year and they are using bank for saving. Findings reflected that women farmer of the project share almost equal power to that of their spouses in family decision making in house hold. Most of the respondents (46.67 percent) have control over more than one resource which is the sign of economic security. Coping mechanism also diverse during food deficit. About 46.57% respondents said they use more than one mechanisms and 23.33% respondents said they cope with the situation by selling assets may be goat or chicken or big animal. Some also has access to credit and can borrow from relatives which means they have earned credibility about repay of the amount. In case of credit access 26.67 percent women respondents has more than one access.

Key words: *livelihood, empowerment, household food security, food access*

INTRODUCTION

Achievement of food security has been a major goal of development since Bangladesh became independent. But it remains a main problem for landless and poor women due to lack of purchasing power, distribution, lack of access of food, lack of seasonal agricultural activities and limited job opportunities in non-agricultural sectors. Food security means adequate quality and quantity of food actually available to all individual according to their needs. Food security has three pillars-Availability, Access and Utilization (www.ifad.org/gender.&USAID.1992 accessed 07/7/06). According to food monitoring survey (BBS & BIDS, 1996&2001), more than 44 percent of the people of Bangladesh lives in poverty. Acute food insecurity is reflected in endemic malnutrition. Bangladeshi women and children suffer from various nutrient deficiencies. Thus, food insecurity remains the main concern of the Government. Women play an important role as producers of food, managers of natural resources, income earners and caretaker of household food and nutrition security. Giving women the same access to natural and physical capital, human capital, social and financial capital and by providing the legal and institutional framework to guarantee their command over resources as man could increase agricultural productivity. Government of Bangladesh (GOB) has taken up a national plan of action to attain food security by the year 2010. To achieve this goal various projects are being carried out by Ministry of Agriculture. Special program for food Security (SPFS) is one of the projects which have been implemented of Agricultural Extension (DAE) under Ministry of Agriculture.

The strategy of the SPFS is to ensure genuine community participation, formation of functional groups and strengthening of community-based organizations, create sustainable food security and income generation activities, skill development and empowerment of women, linkage and networking with NGOs, GOs and other institutions and organizations for policy feedback, prevention of post-harvest loss, processing and marketing, enhancing the natural resource base of rural communities.

To achieve the goal the project provided training, technical advises, micro capital grant, credit, marketing, and activities such as home-gardening, growing of fruits, vegetables, multipurpose trees like bamboo, cane, indigenous medical plants, agro-processing, micro fishery, raising of poultry, goats, pigeon for the women. The project put special emphasis on poor women-headed households and women participants and at least 35-50% of total training and demonstration participants would be women.

The introduction of the project in the community has many impacts on food security, women empowerment for individual and between households. These impacts differ from one person of the same sex to another, for men and women, depending on the assets they can access and control, either from the project or from the community. So, now it is important to explore to impact of the project in relation to food security and women empowerment. Considering the above factors, the study was conducted with the following objectives:

- I. To estimate the status of food availability, access and utilization of respondent women's under SPFS project.
- II. To assess the women's empowerment status after involvement with SPFS project.
- III. To identify the coping strategies adopted by the respondents during food insecure condition.
- IV. To identify the factors affecting food security status of the respondent women's.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Bagha upazilla of Rajshahi District, Bangladesh. It has a population of about 1, 98,000 out of which 1, 03,000 are male and 95,000 are female having a population density of 398 per sq-km. Sample respondents were selected through random sampling technique. First District and Upazilla was selected randomly from 21Upazillas of 16 District. An update list of all farmers of the project was collected from the selected Upazilla with the help of concerned Agriculture office. Then 30 women respondents were selected from 250 women farmers and 10 women were kept in a reserve list keeping in mind if the original sample was not available during data collection. A descriptive research design is used for fact finding with adequate interpretation. The unit of analysis of this study was women farmers of the SPFS project of Bagha upazilla. Women who were working with SPFS and who received training, demonstration, credit, micro capital grant and attended meeting and field days.

For collecting relevant data two interview schedules and a check list was prepared keeping the objective of study in mind. The schedule was judged and verified. Necessary correction, additions and rearrangements were made in the schedule before the instrument was given final shape for data collection.

Data are presented in explanatory, frequency, average and percentage. After getting the data, all information contained in the interview schedule were edited. The analytical tools used are Measuring household Food Security (Revised 2000) by United States Department of Agriculture, Hashemi and Schuler (1993) model of women's empowerment measurement.

Guide to Measuring Household Food Security (Revised 2000) (By United States Department of Agriculture) In order to measure the house hold food security of women the idea was conceptualized from this guide. It is better to mention here that food security is a big and complex issue. It depends upon so many factors. In this study only a few things which are related with SPFS project and are contributing to the food security was assessed. The guide considers the three dimensions of food security. These dimensions are dynamic, interlinked and mutually reinforce at house hold level. These dimensions are as follows:

1. Food availability: In this study this dimension was measured on the basis of adequate supply of food with in house hold, food deficit coping mechanism of the house hold, food priority among the households and control over of food or food store.
2. Access: This dimension was measured on the basis of use of family income, family savings per year, food deficit, and food sufficiency for twelve months and food taking frequency per day.
3. Utilization: This dimension was assessed on the basis of food type taken by the house holds, adequate knowledge about food, food used, food processing.

It is assumed that due to the implementation of the SPFS women get various kinds of inputs (e.g. skill training, education) which make them confident, resources, coping abilities.

Hashemi and Schuler (1993) model of women's empowerment measurement.

This model mentioned six dimensions to measure women's empowerment (Annex-2 but in this study only three dimensions which are vital and related with SPFS project were used to measure women's empowerment. these are as follows:

1. Economic security: this dimension was assessed on the basis of women's landownership, access to credit, skill and knowledge which they got from the project.
2. Decision making power in the house hold: This dimension was assessed to the extent of women's ability to participate in formulating and executing decision regarding domestic, financial, child education, income use, control of savings, festival expense and house repairing.
3. Participation in non family group: This dimension was assessed on the basis of membership of the organization, position in the organization, frequency of visiting to the organization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Access to food

In case of food security (access and availability) it is seen majority of the respondents (63.33%) can feed their family all the year round from their income without deficit (Table 1). They can also save average 7000 Taka/Year. About 37 percent respondents cannot feed their family with their income.

Table 1. Food access scenario of the respondents

Can feed all the year	Respondent		Average Savings/year
	Number	Percentage	
Yes	19	63.33	7000 Taka
No	11	36.67	
Total	30	100	

Food consumption pattern

In case of food utilization, the respondents said they take food three times a day-breakfast, lunch and dinner and take at least grain and vegetables in every day meal. Due to high price of meat and fish and religion some people don't take meat and fish (Table 2).

Table 2. Food composition pattern of respondents

Food combination	Respondent	
	Number	Percentage
Grain + Vegetable	17	56.66
Grain + Veg. + Fish	08	26.66
Grain + Veg. + Fish + Meat	03	10.00
Grain + Veg. + Meat	02	6.68
Total	30	100

Women empowerment status

In case of women empowerment dimensions, it is observed that among the seven components of family budget the average score in individual items for man is 12 while women is 11.57 and both are 6.42 (Table 3) which indicates that women are enjoying almost equal power in case of decision making in the household.

Table 3. Status of women's participation in family budget

Items	Husband	Wife	Both	Total Respondents
Daily shopping expense	08 (26.66)*	14 (46.68)	08 (26.66)	30
Guest Expenditures	11(36.67)	16 (53.33)	03 (10.00)	30
Festival expense	10 (33.33)	12(40)	08(26.66)	30
Buying children items	09 (30.00)	14(46.67)	07(23.33)	30
Selection of children educational institute	14(46.66)	11(36.67)	05(16.67)	30
Expense on house building/repair	16(53.33)	03(10.000)	11(36.67)	30
Buying clothes	16(53.33)	11(36.67)	03(10.00)	30
Total score	84	81	45	210
Average score	12.00	11.57	6.42	30

*Percentage of respondents

In case of control over/power in house hold decision and family expenditure it is observed that men are enjoying decision making power in buying food, control over his income while women are enjoying power in control over food/store of food, control over wife's income and both are together enjoying decision making power in keeping family savings, final say about the use of family income. (Fig. 1).

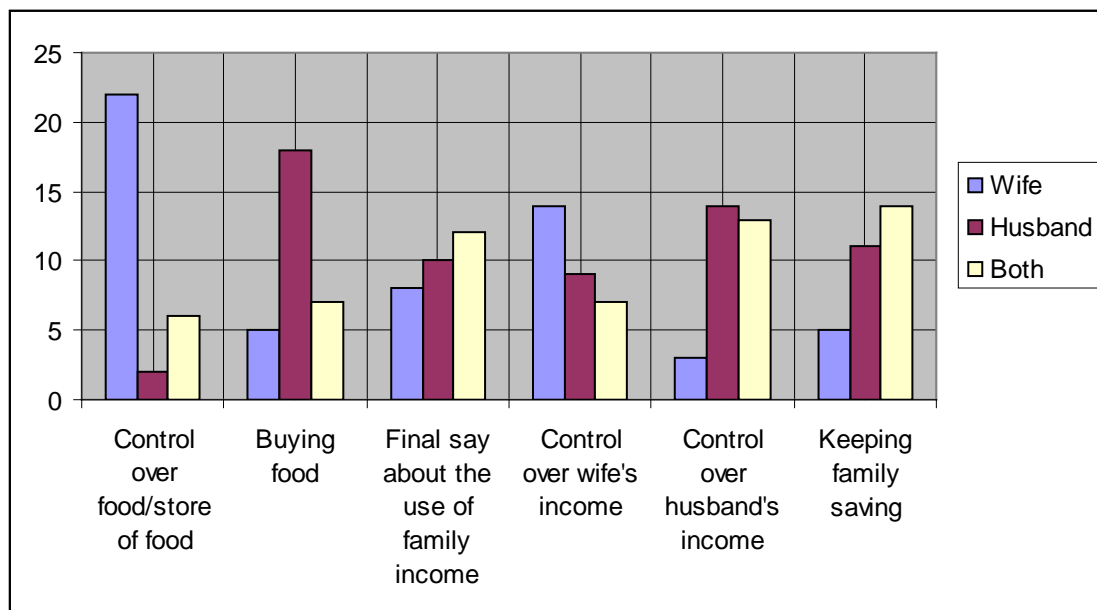


Fig. 1. Control over in household decision and family expenditure

Coping strategy to food insecurity

There is a wide variation of food deficit coping mechanism among the respondents during the lean season known as ‘‘Monga’’. 46.67% respondents use more than one way to face the situation. 23.33% respondents face the situation by selling their assets (Table 4).

Table 4. Food deficits coping mechanism

Mechanism	Respondent	
	Number	Percentage
Borrowing from relatives	05	16.67
By credit	04	13.33
By selling assets	07	23.33
Other(more then one way)	14	46.67

Access to credit

Incase of credit access 20% women has no access in any kind of financial institute even to local money lender. 10% women are taking loan from the local money lender with high interest which is alarming. But the good sign is that 26.67% women has credit access more than one institution which indicates due to project activities women are familiar with credit facilities and earn credibility to get credit.

Table 5. Access to credit

Type of organization	Respondents number
Bank	05
Micro finance Bank	04
More than one organization	08
No access	06
NGO	04
Local leaders	03
Total	30

Factors of food insecurity

It is found that the largest potion of respondents (34%) said that the reason behind food deficit is lack of job opportunity followed by lack of productive assets like land, cattle, birds, capital (23%) (Fig. 2).

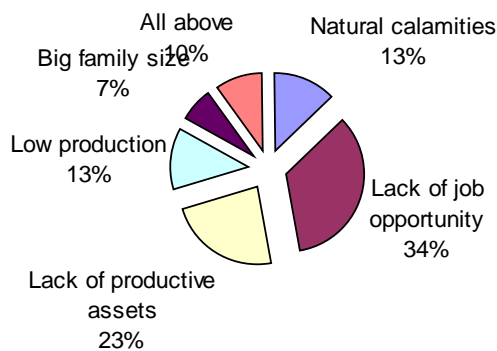


Fig. 2. Causes of food deficit

From a case study analysis, it is seen that children in the family are getting more priority to take food followed by bread earner (husband), elderly people, women and others. It is also seen that majority of the respondents said women has the control over the food store and food. 10% said both husband and wife are controlling the food and store.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that women are empowered in the fields of control over resources, bargaining power, house hold decision making power and they are more secured than earlier in terms of food access, utilization, availability, food deficit coping mechanism, access to credit and food consumption. But it is felt that the project should do more in linking women farmers with market and market information, create non farm based job opportunities for landless women farmers and should keep intra-household resource allocation and disaggregated data at the house hold level. The project should provide more training on gender issues, capacity building, resource mobilization, group formation leadership development, savings and credit and disseminate women friendly technologies which can reduce women’s work load. The project should also encourage women farmers to produce safe food and make an arrangement for them to access different media.

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