

Comparative Studies on Empowerment of Women in Fisheries Households Between Kishoreganj Haor and Daudkandi Floodplain of Bangladesh

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Abstract: The study was conducted to assess and compare the women empowerment status between the two fisheries stakeholders' groups, five haor upazilas of Kishoreganj district and floodplain-based fisheries project (FPFP) area of Daudkandi in Cumilla district. Data were collected as baseline study from the families of nine different fisheries stakeholders' groups (five from Kishoreganj haor and four from Daudkandi FPFP) in 2018. Working status, mobility, economic security, ability to make small purchase and involvement in major household decision making was the indicators used to assess and compares the women empowerment status. Ability to decision making of women of Daudkandi FPFP was found to be higher compared to those of Kishoreganj. Below 10% women in both haor and floodplain had the ability to visit relative's house without the permission of their husbands. A 24.06% woman had access to the mobile phones, while only 4% had own *BKash* account for money transfer and 30% had bank account for money transaction. About 25% women owned land in Daudkandi FPFP. Decisions towards purchasing own dress and cosmetics were found to be regulated by the male members. It was found that most of the major decisions of the family such as children's education, treatment during illness and marriage of offspring were taken jointly by women together with their husbands in both Kishoreganj and Daudkandi FPFP. Fisher's women in Daudkandi FPFP were comparatively more empowered than those of Kishoreganj haor. The study also found that women's contributions to the social and economic advancement in these areas were minimal. To empower and enhance the socioeconomic status of fishers' women in these areas, both educational status and technical skills of women should be improved by raising awareness through training and providing educational and other social mobilization supports from different government and non-government organizations.

Key words: Women in Fisheries Households • Daudkandi Floodplain Fisheries • Haor Areas of Kishoreganj • Women Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

During the last decade, Bangladesh has come up as a role model for women's emancipation. The country has been undergoing through significant social changes as a result of different attempts to empower women. Women not only play important roles in a family but also in the whole nation, as they selflessly contribute their bloods and sweats for country's development, freedom and virtue of independence [1]. The concept of women empowerment, as well as the activities in this discipline, has aided the country's development toward gender equality. Gender equality and women empowerment are

human rights that are imperative to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Despite the progress, 60% of world's poorest people are still women, less than 16% of the world's parliamentarians are women, two-thirds of children shut outside the school gates are girls and, women are the victims of abuse both in times of armed conflict and within the home [2]. Women's empowerment entails gaining a greater share of control over resources such as material things, human and intellectual aspects such as knowledge, information and ideas and financial resources such as money, as well as access to and control over decision-making in the home, community, society and nation [3].

Bangladesh has a population of 162.7 million people, with 81.3 million women and 81.4 million men, making it one of the world's most densely inhabited countries [4]. But their status has been ranked the lowest in the world on the basis of twenty indicators related to health, marriage, children, education, employment and social equality [5]. The World Bank study in Bangladesh highlights that women have limited role in household decision-making, limited access and control over household resources (physical and financial assets), low level of individual assets, heavy domestic workloads, restricted mobility and inadequate knowledge and skills that leading to women vulnerability [6]. In a country like Bangladesh men are conventionally seem to belief and practices of higher authority and dominance in most of the aspects of family and women are seem to be passive, suppressed, secluded in home making activities, lower social status and lower freedom in decision making [7, 8]. Rural dwellers are in more grave conditions with minimum freedom to make decisions as well as to engage in income generating activities [7-9]. Without the activation of the enormous female partner, the entire economy, as well as advancement, will be impossible to synchronize. World Bank (WB), United Nations (UN) and other international organizations have focused on women empowerment especially in the rural part of Bangladesh [7].

Currently women empowerment is a burning issue across the globe including Bangladesh, as women are considered as major source in the society other than it is considered as necessary condition for achieving the sustainable development [10]. Although, women in Bangladesh is improving day by day, but many women especially in the rural Bangladesh are adversely vulnerable. Although different non-government organizations are taking a lot of initiatives, still women are not gaining equal rights in the decision making process and also their condition cannot be declared one of being empowered.

Fish and Fisheries have been playing a significant role in Bangladesh, in terms of nutrition, income, employment and foreign exchange earnings [11]. More than 17 million people including about 1.4 million women depend on fisheries sector for their livelihoods through fishing, farming, fish handling and processing [12]. Bangladesh is blessed with huge water bodies in the form of rivers, canal and natural depressions (*haors* and *beels*) [13]. Most of the *haors* and *beels* are located in the districts of Kishoreganj, Sunamganj, Sylhet, Maulvibazar, Habiganj, Brahmanbaria and Netrokona. The livelihood

status of fisher women in haor and floodplain areas has been reported to be very poor. Being living with poverty, the women in these areas have been succumbing with less resource and dwindling livelihood. Thus, their social and economic empowerment has also vested into great mystery. The study is therefore aimed to identify and compare the empowerment status of the fisher women between Kishoregonj *haor* and Daudkandi FFP areas of Bangladesh. The specific objectives of this study were to measure women's economic and social empowerment in the two study areas considering dimensions with their working status, women's household decision-making power, financial autonomy and freedom of movement.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Area and Duration: The study was conducted in 10 fish landing centers in 5 *haor Upazilas* in Kishoreganj district *viz.* Chamraghat Matshya Arat, Karimganj Mach Mahal, Morichkhali Matshya Arat in Karimganj Upazila, Tarail Matshya Arat in Tarail Upazila, Chouganga Matshya Arat in Itna Upazila, Korgaon Bazar Matshya Arat, Kotiadi Matshya Arat, Dhuldia Matshya Arat in Kotiadi Upazila, Rodarpodda Matshya Arat and Nikli Notun Bazar Matshya Arat in Nikli Upazila and 10 floodplain-based culture fisheries projects *viz.* Khirai, Chargram, Prasanto, Pankowree, Shaibal, Goureepur, L K S, Shanto, Shatgram and Mitali Fisheries Limited in Daudkandi floodplain region of Cumilla district in 2018 (Figure 1).

Method of Data Collection: The study was based on collection of primary data in accordance with the objectives set for the study, while the baseline report containing original data was submitted to the Krishi Gobeshona Foundation [14]. A total of nine semi-structured questionnaire forms were developed, of which five (5) were prepared for Kishoreganj *haor*, *viz.*, i) fisherman, ii) aratdar, iii) paiker, iv) retailer and v) ice factory owner and another four (4) were prepared for Daudkandi floodplain, *viz.* i) project director (shareholder/lease owner), ii) fisher family, iii) fish handler and iv) fish trader. Women of fisheries stakeholders' groups were the main target population of this study. During survey, one focus group discussion and 3 key informant interviews were done with resource persons, like *Upazila* Fisheries officers, local leaders, non-governmental organization (NGO) officials and fisher communities in the study areas. A total of 524 individuals were interviewed, of which 252 were from Kishoreganj

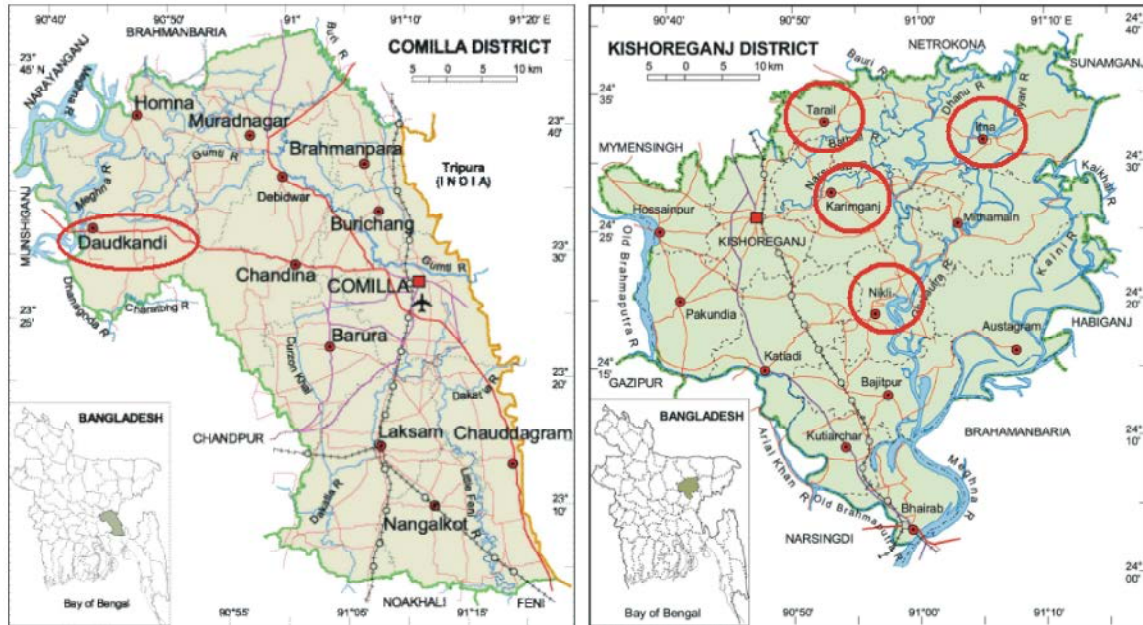


Fig. 1: Location of the study area; Daudkandi floodplain (left) and Kishoreganj haor (right)

haor (45 from aratder households (HHs), 76 from fisherman HHs, 55 from paiker HHs, 52 from retailer HHs and 24 from ice factory owner HHs) and 272 from Daudkandi floodplain (53 from project director HHs, 87 from fishers' HHs, 39 from fish trader HHs and 45 from fish handler HHs). We collected information from the fisher women directly from each stakeholder groups.

Statistical Analysis: All the collected information were accumulated and analyzed by Microsoft Excel 2016 then presented in textual and graphical forms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Women Participation (%) in Haor and Flood Plain Area:

The indicators such as working status, mobility, economic security and ability to make small purchases and involvement in major household decisions were used to find out the women empowerment of selected stakeholder household groups.

Working Status: The working status of women of different stakeholder's family in Kishoreganj haor and Daudkandi floodplain area was found to be divided into two categories as employed and unemployed. The study revealed that 100% women in both regions were unemployed/housewives. They are completely housewife without some exception and they are totally depends on

husband income. Hossain *et al.* [15] found that most of the fisher wives (97.8%) in the study area were housewives which are approximately similar to our result.

Women Mobility: Women mobility to see doctor, visit their relative house and buy medicine have been shown in the Figure 2. The following figure revealed that, the mobility of stakeholder household women of Daudkandi floodplain area is higher than Kishoreganj haor.

Access to Show Doctor: About 4.8% women in fishermen household, 7.1% women in paiker household, 15.8% women in retailer household and 5.9% women in ice factory owner household in Kishoreganj haor could show doctor without permission from their husband during illness. In addition, about 22.66% women in fish trader household and 28.5% women in lease owner household in Daudkandi floodplain area could show doctor without permission from their husband during illness. Asaduzzaman *et al.* [16] investigated more decision making process in buying health care facilities than the present studied findings.

Access to Visit Relative House: Women of fishermen, aratder, ice factory owner and paiker household had no ability to visit relative's house without permission of their husband except 3.6% women of retailer household which has mobility (Figure 3). In DFPF, 2.68%, 8.69%,

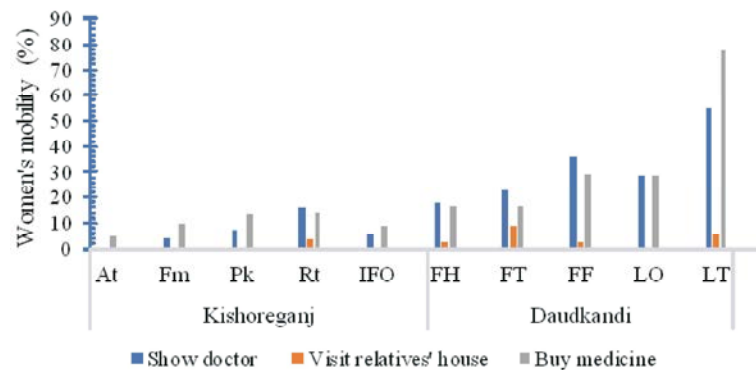


Fig. 2: Women's mobility (%) in Kishoreganj and Daudkandi

At = Aratder, Fm = Fisherman, Pr = Paiker, Rt = Retailer, IFO = Ice factory owner, FW = Fish worker; FF = Fisher's family, FT = Fish trader, LO = Land owner, FH = Fish handler, LT = Lease taker

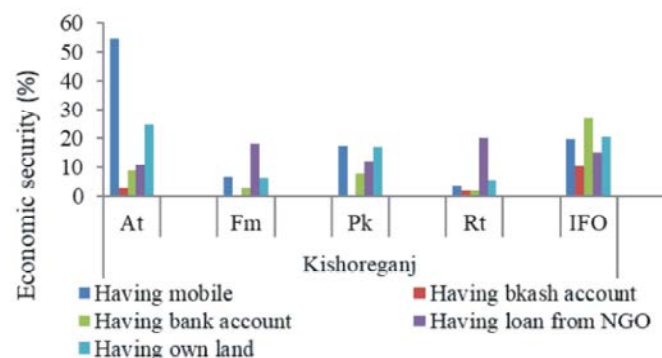


Fig. 3: Economic security of stakeholder household women in Kishoreganj haor

At = Aratder, Fm = Fisherman, Pr = Paiker, Rt = Retailer, IFO = Ice factory owner

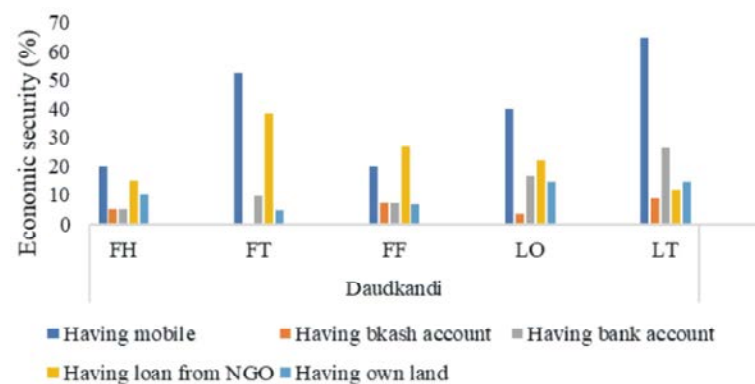


Fig. 4: Economic security of stakeholder household women in Daudkandi floodplain

FF = Fisher's family, FT = Fish trader, LO = Land owner, FH = Fish handler, LT = Lease taker

2.7%, 5.56% women of fish handler, fish trader, fisher's family and lease taker respectively has ability to visit relative house. Ability to visit relative's house of women of Daudkandi is higher than Kishoreganj haor. Asaduzzaman *et al.* [16] stated that working outside the home is much higher than the present results.

Access to Buy Medicine: About 5.0 %, 9.5%, 14.1% and 8.8% women in aratder, fishermen, retailer and ice factory owner household respectively in Kishoreganj haor had ability to buy medicine without permission from their husband during illness. In Daudkandi floodplain area, about 16.8% women in fish handler household and 28.8%

women in lease owner household had ability to buy medicine without permission from their husband during illness (Figure 3). Asaduzzaman *et al.* [16] investigated more decision making process in buying health care facilities than the present studied findings. Nowsad *et al.* [17] highlighted that about 31.3% fishers' women had ability to buy medicine without permission from their husband during illness in Kishoreganj haor which was comparatively higher than the present findings.

Economic Security of Women: Three-point was considered to the women respondent for assessing their economic security. One point from each of having her land, bank account, bkash account and an additional point for having mobile phone were used for assessing the women's economic security of stakeholder in Kishoreganj haor (Figure 3) and Daudkandi floodplain area (Figure 4).

Access to Mobile Phone: About 54.55%, 6.53%, 17.28%, 3.4% and 19.44% women in aratder, fishermen, paiker, retailer and ice factory owner household respectively in Kishoreganj haor had own mobile phone. In Daudkandi floodplain area, 20%, 52.4%, 20%, 40% and 64.7% women of fish handler, fish trader, fisher's family, land owner and lease taker respectively had access to mobile phone. Mobile phone users in fisheries household are comparatively higher in Daudkandi than Kishoreganj haor. Islam and Slack [18] showed that mobile phone users are increased and these findings comply with our result. Nowsad *et al.* [17] showed that about 16.3% fishers' women had their own cell phone which was comparatively higher than the present findings (6.53%) (Figure 3 and 4).

Access to Bkash and Bank Account: Fishermen and paiker household women in Kishoreganj haor and fish trader household women in Daudkandi floodplain area had no bKash account. Maximum 10.19% women of ice factory owner household of Kishoreganj haor have bKash account. The percentage of women having Bank Account is higher in ice factory owner's household (26.86%) and lower in retailer households (1.9%) of Kishoreganj haor. In Daudkandi, maximum 26.5% women of lease taker's household had bank account. Nowsad *et al.* [17] showed that fishers' women had no bKash account which was similar to present study (Figure 3 and 4).

Access to Loan from NGO: About 10.66%, 17.95%, 11.74%, 19.9% and 14.81% women in aratder, fishermen,

paiker, retailer and ice factory owner household respectively in Kishoreganj haor had loan from NGO. In Daudkandi floodplain area, 15%, 38.1%, 26.7%, 21.8% and 11.8% women of fish handler, fish trader, fisher's family, land owner and lease taker respectively had loan from NGO. Asaduzzaman *et al.* [16] investigated that women were participated in the NGO activities and the findings revealed that higher than the present findings.

Access to Own Land: From figure 4 and 5, it is shown that, maximum 26.49% women of aratder family had own land in both areas. Kabir and Shathi [19] found that only 9.9% had land in their own name the rest respondents had no land. Nowsad *et al.* [17] showed that about 15.5% fishers' women had their own land which was comparatively higher than the present findings (5.93%).

Ability to Make Small Purchase Decision of Woman: Decisions towards purchasing own dress and cosmetics were dominated by the male members. The following figure revealed the purchasing decision of own dresses and cosmetics of stakeholder household women in two floodplain areas (Figure 5).

Purchase Decision of Own Dress: About 46.06%, 8.94%, 14.17%, 1.6% and 26.86% women in aratder, fishermen, paiker, retailer and ice factory owner household could purchase their own dresses respectively. In addition, about 23.8%, 29.8%, 26.5% women in fish trader, lease owner lease taker household in Daudkandi floodplain area could purchase their own dress (Figure 5). Nowsad *et al.* [17] investigated that about 23.4% fishers' women had the ability to purchase their own dress, which was higher than the present findings. Kabir *et al.* [20] studied on the decision-making power of Bangladeshi women of reproductive ages and they found higher percentages then the present studied findings except ice factory owner's wife.

Purchase Decision of Own Cosmetics: About 19.55%, 9.15% 1.6% and 30.56% women in aratder, paiker, retailer and ice factory owner household could purchase their own cosmetics. In addition, about 57% and 20.6% women in fish handler and lease taker household in Daudkandi floodplain area could purchase their own cosmetics. Nowsad *et al.* [17] reported that 7.6% fishers' women (combined in *dadon* receiver and *dadon* non-receiver fishermen HHs) had the ability to purchase their own cosmetic, which was much similar to present findings (Figure 5).

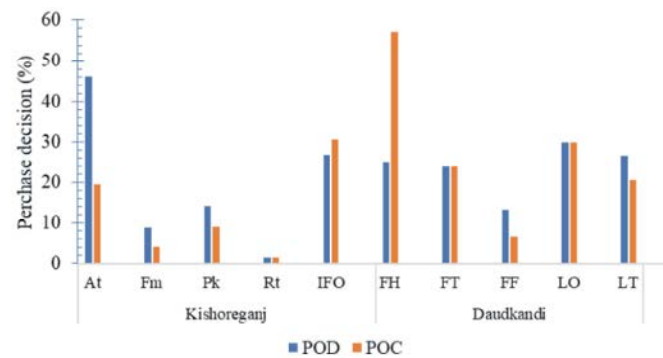


Fig. 5: Purchase decision of women (%) in Kishoreganj and Daudkandi

At = Aratder, Fm = Fisherman, Pr = Paiker, Rt = Retailer, IFO = Ice factory owner, FH = Fish handler, FT = Fish trader, FF = Fisher's family, LO = Land owner, LT = Lease taker; POD = Purchase own dress, POC = Purchase own cosmetics

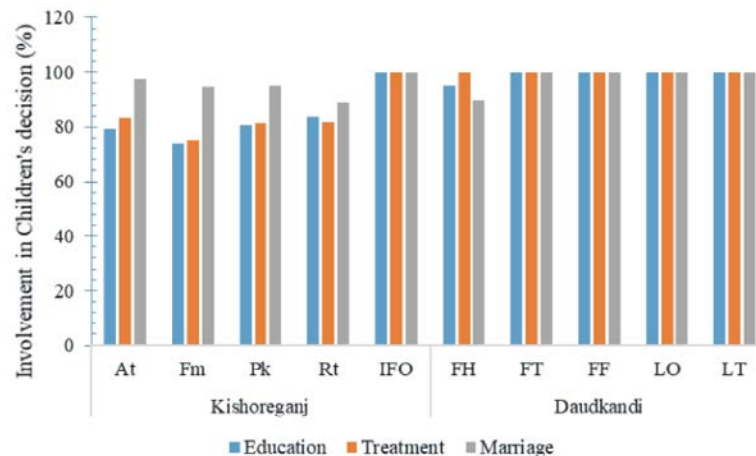


Fig. 6: Women's involvement in major household decisions (%) in Kishoreganj haor

At = Aratder, Fm = Fisherman, Pr = Paiker, Rt = Retailer, IFO = Ice factory owner, FH = Fish handler, FT = Fish trader, FF = Fisher's family, LO = Land owner, LT = Lease taker

Involvement of Women in Major Household Decisions:

Women involvement in major decisions such as children education, treatment during illness and marriage are summarized in the Figure 6. It was found that most of the major decisions (about 100%) of family were taken by women together with their husbands in both Kishoreganj haor and Daudkandi floodplain area. Titus *et al.* [21] infer that though women are empowered in urban areas, final decisions in households are taken after seeking approval from husbands or parents which is similar to the present study. Kazal *et al.* [22] reported that a very high percentage (72%) of women had active role in household decision-making jointly with their husbands in six northern districts (Sunamgonj, Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Habiganj, Kishoreganj and Netrokona). Present findings also gave evidence that fisher's women were empowered in household decision-making in both Kishoreganj haor

and DFPPs. Report on CDSP [23] showed that fisher-women took most of the decisions jointly with their husbands, which also have been confirmed by the present study.

Recommendations:

- Effective effort to empower women in these study areas especially haor area is required.
- Government and Non-government organizations should come forward to boost up the progress of empowering women

CONCLUSION

Women participation in Bangladesh is increasing day by day but it is not appreciable in the women of rural

areas especially in haor and floodplain areas. This study revealed the present condition of women in both areas. Poor attainment of primary education, low employment of females, few NGO memberships, low economic security, low decision making power are seemed to be the hindrance in women empowerment in rural areas specially in fisheries related stakeholder family plus overall development of Bangladesh as about half of the population is women. Without improving the socio-economic conditions of the fishermen families, it is difficult to attain SDG by 2030 in addition to developed Bangladesh by 2041. From ancient time, women have great contribution in almost everywhere of our society. Women work was mostly confined to the homestead due to the culture, religion and social restrictions. However, the socio-economic situation of the country is changing and the women are breaking through the traditional norms and coming forward to participate in the development activities outside their homestead. At present, women in Bangladesh have an active role in the maintenance of their families along with equal participation in different socio-economic activities like management of livestock and fisheries, crop production, post-harvest activities, poultry rearing etc. So, government and non-government organizations should be taken active initiatives to ensure the equal participation of women in every aspect of family and developmental activities from every corner of Bangladesh especially rural women. The overall conclusion based on empirical results and discussion of this study is that women participation in education and other empowerment status is not satisfactory at the fishermen households' level.

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