

Report No. 68

**WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO RURAL ECONOMIC
ACTIVITIES: MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE**

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Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)

House 40/C, Road 11, Dhanmondi R/A, GPO Box 2129, Dhaka 1209, Bangladesh

Tel: 8124770; Fax: 8130951; E-mail: cpd@bdonline.com

Website: www.cpd-bangladesh.org

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The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), established in 1993, is an innovative initiative to promote an ongoing process of dialogue between the principal partners in the decision-making and implementing process. The dialogues are designed to address important policy issues and to seek constructive solutions to these problems. The Centre has already organised a series of such major dialogues at local, regional and national levels. These dialogues have brought together Ministers, opposition frontbenchers, MPs, business leaders, NGOs, donors, professionals and other functional groups in civil society within a non-confrontational environment to promote focused discussions. The expectation of the CPD is to create a national policy consciousness where members of civil society will be made aware of critical policy issues affecting their lives and will come together in support of particular policy agendas which they feel are conducive to the well being of the country. The CPD has also organised a number of South Asian bilateral and regional dialogues as well as some international dialogues.

*In support of the dialogue process the Centre is engaged in research programmes which are both serviced by and are intended to serve as inputs for particular dialogues organised by the Centre throughout the year. Some of the major research programmes of the CPD include **The Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development (IRBD), Trade Policy Analysis and Multilateral Trading System (TPA), Governance and Policy Reforms, Regional Cooperation and Integration, Investment Promotion and Enterprise Development, Agriculture and Rural Development, Ecosystems, Environmental Studies and Social Sectors and Youth Development Programme.** The CPD also conducts periodic public perception surveys on policy issues and issues of developmental concerns.*

*As part of CPD's publication activities, a CPD Dialogue Report series is brought out in order to widely disseminate the summary of the discussions organised by the Centre. The present report contains the highlights of the dialogue on **Women's Contribution to Rural Economic Activities: Making the Invisible Visible** organised as part of its ongoing agricultural policy research and advocacy activities with the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) under the Poverty Elimination Through Rice Research Assistance (PETRRA) project. The dialogue was held at **BRAC Centre INN Auditorium, Dhaka** on April 22, 2004.*

Report Prepared by: Ms. Sanjida Shamsher Elora, Research Associate, CPD.

Assistant Editor: Dr Uttam Kumar Deb, Research Fellow, CPD.

Series Editor: Professor Rehman Sobhan, Chairman, CPD.

Dialogue on

**Women's Contribution to Rural Economic Activities:
Making the Invisible Visible**

The Dialogue

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) organised a dialogue on *Women's Contribution to Rural Economic Activities: Making the Invisible Visible* on April 22, 2004 at BRAC Centre INN Auditorium, Dhaka. The dialogue was organised as part of CPD's ongoing agricultural policy research and advocacy activities with the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) under the Poverty Elimination Through Rice Research Assistance (PETRRA) project. Dr Thelma R. Paris, Gender Specialist, Social Sciences Division and Dr Mahabub Hossain, Head of Social Sciences Division, International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), Manila, Philippines, presented the keynote papers.

Mr M K Anwar, MP, Hon'ble Minister for Agriculture, Government of Bangladesh was present as the Chief Guest of the dialogue. *Mr Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir*, MP, Hon'ble State Minister for Agriculture and *Dr Mohammad Abdur Razzaque*, MP, an Awami League lawmaker, were Special Guests at the dialogue. *Mr Fazle Hasan Abed*, Member, CPD Board of Trustees and Chairman, BRAC, chaired the session. The presentation was followed by an open floor discussion. The dialogue was attended by a cross-section of people including members of the Parliament, women activists, high-level government officials, representatives from NGOs, academics, researchers, officials from international organisations and journalists. A list of participants is annexed.

Welcome Address by Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, Executive Director of CPD

Dr Bhattacharya initiated the dialogue process by welcoming all the distinguished guests, keynote presenters and participants. He reminded the participants that the dialogue was part of the series, which CPD had initiated a couple of years back that was under the joint auspices of the Centre for Policy Dialogue and PETRRA - DoLSys Project of DFID. He acknowledged all the partners by saying "we are very grateful to our partners for giving us this opportunity to work together on such an issue for which we have not only our mind but also our heart."

He related some of CPD's recent efforts in gender-related research and advocacy; recalling positive work in the area of the feminized labour force in relation to the MFA phase-out and the recent deceleration in global trade. CPD has also extended its efforts to a more challenging, wider-ranging variety of areas like sexual harassment in the work place.

He explained to the participants that he always felt that there was a big lacuna in CPD's research programme relating to women in the rural sector, specifically women's roles in the agriculture and in the rural development process. In this connection, Dr *Bhattacharya* also said that without analysing the trends of women's participation in various economic activities in the rural sector, it would never be possible to find a satisfactory answer to the process of mainstreaming the women and also the whole issue of empowerment to that end. So, it was a very welcome coincidence that under the PETRRA-DoLSys project at CPD, Dr *Mahabub Hossain*, as well as his colleague Dr *Thelma Paris*, came forward and provided a research paper based on primary data, covering a longer period of time, bringing out the structural changes and showing the major policy implications in this area. At the outset, Dr *Bhattacharya* welcomed Dr *Mahabub Hossain*, his co-authors *Mr Manik Lal Bose* and Dr *Thelma Paris* because of their self-motivated initiative.

Dr *Bhattacharya* appreciated the presence of all the participants, mentioning that they had chosen to attend the dialogue and sacrificed their other important tasks. He looked forward to their fruitful participation in the dialogue. He invited Dr *Noel Magor*, PETRRA-DoLSys Project Director in Dhaka, to say a few words about the PETRRA project.

Statement by Dr *Noel P Magor*, Manager, PETRRA

Dr *Noel Magor* was very pleased to have such distinguished peoples around him. He welcomed all of them on behalf of PETRRA and he expressed his gratitude to *Mr Abed*, the Chairperson of the session, and both the special guests who are very committed to agricultural issues. He appreciated the contribution of Dr *Mahabub Hossain* and Dr *Thelma Paris* and mentioned that the issue of women's contribution in rural economy is an important one which was too-often neglected. He informed the participants that the PETRRA project, is sponsored by the Department for International Development (DFID), UK and managed by the IRRI with the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) as the

country host. He reported that at DFID, they have a country assistance programme which is called 'women and goals'. He expressed his interest to see how the debate and discussion addressed the issue in terms of the growing importance of women in the rural areas or the recognition in the rural areas.

Dr *Magor* pointed out one of their sub-projects "the BRAC livelihoods project", was a follow-up from the farming sector research that was conducted in Bangladesh in the 1980s and 1990s. The very strong engagement with women in the programme has improved the impact tremendously, he continued. He felt that a vast and in-depth amount of research was required for the cultivation process and how women could benefit from this process. Finally, Dr *Magor* concluded his statement with the expectation of acquiring some valuable suggestions and recommendations from the floor which will help formulating further policy in this area.

Opening Remarks by the Chairperson

In his opening remarks, *Mr Fazle Hasan Abed* stated that women's contribution in rural economic activities is not a new concept. He also mentioned that it is not a new phenomenon and it has been going on for a long time, probably decades and centuries. However, *Mr Abed* pointed out, researchers seemed to have ignored the contribution of women in the economy and only lately has some work been done on women's contribution.

He hoped that the two papers, which are to be presented at the dialogue, would provide some refined and quantified estimates of women's contribution in Bangladesh's economy, particularly in the rural economy.

Presentation of the Keynote Papers

The first paper of the two was presented by Dr *Paris* on *Changing Women's Roles in Homestead Management: Mainstreaming Women in Rural Development*. She started her presentation with a history of research on women's issues in agriculture in Bangladesh.

History of research of women's issues in agriculture in Bangladesh

She started by explaining that until the '70s, researchers in rural Bangladesh had completely ignored women and their important economic contribution in the national

economy. However since the 1980s a plethora of studies have been conducted on women's involvement in homestead production (Abdullah 1983; Abdullah 1985; Begum 1985; Halim and McCarthy 1985; Hossain *et. al*, 1988). These studies revealed that the invisibility of women farmers from official agricultural statistics and from agricultural policies and programs is primarily due to the deeply embedded social and cultural norms in *patriarchy* and *pardah*. Then women's contributions in agriculture without countries were compared and no data was found. In Bangladesh and in India, 60 to 80 per cent of women's contribution to labour comes from the rural women, particularly from the dowry cast. The reason behind the invisibility of women is because many of the works done within the homestead were unrecognized.

Methodology of the Study

The basic research questions Dr *Paris* raised were, what were the changes in women's roles? What were their constraints and opportunities? What policies and plans of action should be developed to help improve the livelihood of rural women? They identified the issues do address. One path, chosen by the economists, was purely quantitative because policy makers like numbers. The other path was qualitative information because to deal with the issues on gender or women, researchers have to consider the feelings of ordinary women, know their perceptions and status, hear the voices, which are not really heard or well understood through a structured questionnaire.

In their study, focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted separately with men and women belonging to poor and non-poor households. The information was based on a two-period (1987 and 2000) survey of a nationally representative sample of 62 villages from 57 districts. It was quite interesting to find that in the FGDs, women were surprised and sometimes even infuriated when asked questions like "Who keeps the money?" or "Who makes the decisions?" There was also difficulty in these focus group discussions because the men present sometimes wanted to answer for the women. So, the Gate Keeping method had to be used by the researchers to ensure that the women's responses were from their heart rather than dictated by the men.

Gender Roles in Homestead Management

For the qualitative analysis of her paper, Dr *Paris* explained, they asked the respondents to list what they do in the homestead. It was quite clear that cooking food for their

families and ensuring nutritional needs of the family was the major responsibility of women. Storing rice seeds for the family is also done by women more than men. In addition, they also tend to do household maintenance; reproductive activities including caring for the elderly and the sick; tutoring the children; other homestead activities like the post harvest, livestock rearing, vegetable gardening, agro-forestry, field, poultry, fish pond; and most importantly, the expenditure, savings activities.

From the results of the FGD, it was clear that women do a lot of economic activities which were invisible in previous statistics. Raising cattle and poultry in order to sell the milk, eggs and poultry itself are generally carried out by women. Rural women are also involved in constructing mud stoves for large-volume rice boiling, making baskets for storing farm produce, and making quilts to sell for extra income.

Women's Perceptions of Changes Which Affect Their Roles

Dr Paris reported the women respondents' perceptions on the changes since the 1980s in their work and also in the outside work which affect their roles. They said that they had greater participation in economic activities, not only within homestead but also outside the villages. They are heavily involved in earth moving construction work etc. However, recently there has been a reduction in the participation of very poor women in paddy husking due to the introduction of commercial rice mills which are operated by men.

The respondents also said that there is now an increasing commercialisation of poultry farming and goat rearing. Selling of these products help in overcoming financial crisis. There has been a reduction in labour allocation for animal husbandry with the spread of power tiller & thrashing machine. Now they have to spend a longer time in looking for fuel because animals were major source of manure and fuel.

Dr Paris then added that because of an increasing trend in the migration of men to urban areas, women's roles are beginning to shift from being unpaid family workers to *de facto* farm managers in cases where men are absent.

The respondents also reported that they now have developed positive attitude towards girls' education and think their daughters should be educated. NGOs who have empowered women through micro-credit basically deserve appreciation for such change.

With the introduction of micro-credit women are now self-confident and receiving recognition from their husbands. Some of them also reported that the men now give more time to their children because there is a greater regularity of work within the homestead.

Empirical Evidences of Women's Participation in Homestead Activities

Dr *Paris* then showed some examples where women's roles in various economic activities have been changed. Women are now going out from homestead and they are working as wage labourer. There are some empirical studies, done by the BIDS and IRR which show that the share in paid hours for cultivation has increased but there is a decline in the post harvest work. This was further explained by Dr *Hossain* in his presentation following the presentation by *Ms Paris*. She also reported from her study that the income share is also about 16 per cent for land owning households, and it is almost 10 per cent for those who do not have any land.

Seasonality of Women's Engagement in Economic Activities

From FGD, information was also collected on the seasonality of workload and leisure time in order to identify women's constraints and opportunities for further improvement of their role in economic activities. From the study it was seen that, in general, the months of *Baishak* and *Jaistha* are busy periods of the year as in these two months men harvest rice and women take care of post-harvest activities within the homestead. The months of *Bhadra*, *Ashwin* and *Kartik* (mid-August to mid-November) are lean periods when women sew clothes, stitch *kantha* (indigenous quilt) and make *pati* (indigenous mat) in addition to other household chores. However, in areas where *Boro* rice is the main crop, lean periods are the months of *Falgun* and *Chaitra*. The peak period for cultivating *Boro* starts from the month of *Kartik*. Farmers try to sell all the paddy in store during the months of *Magh*, *Falgun*, and *Chaitra*. Small and marginal farmers who deplete their paddy stocks within this period face serious food crisis. Many NGOs help women in landless and marginal land owning families, whose livelihoods are more at stake during these months.

Perceptions Regarding Women's Social Status

In the survey both men and women were asked what they think about women's social status. Women said that their empowerment and decision-making authority are still weak. Their husbands still do not value this contribution in home makings and in taking care of their children. Because of traditional values, when women want to go to the field to help

their husbands, they are criticised and ridiculed by their neighbours. But the women respondents also said that when they are working they have better self-esteem, and being involved in NGO's micro-credit programmes, though they owe money, they still feel empowered as a group. But according to the men, they feel pressured because they are forced to take micro-credit through their wives when they do not have cash or the harvest is poor. However, there are men from the new generation who have a positive attitude towards women and think that the women are their partners who can help in improving the livelihood of their household. This upbeat attitude also echoes the growing respect men are having for the women of their families.

Women's Constraints, Needs and Opportunities

The women respondents gave the survey team a long list while they were asked about the constraints in playing their roles as economic agents. For example, the mortality of the poultries was said to be very high, they needed vaccine, training, skill in increasing income in tailoring and so forth. Some of the other constraints they mentioned were their inaccessibility to good quality seeds of not only rice but also other crops, and lack of training to become skilled, irrespective of being poor. They also emphasized on the need for knowledge, which can be transferred, to future generation. Another constraint is the lack of knowledge and skills to manage crops within their own homestead area. Their thoughts on the need for more training and technical help reflected their awareness of the situation.

In the BRAC livelihood project, they explored and tested different approaches in extension programme, one being the Family approach for training where they included the father, the mother and children. Efforts are now being taken under PETRRA project to mainstream women's concerns into their research and extension programmes. In 45 sub projects of PETRRA, 41 per cent are women. It has been proven that women can be empowered if given equal access as men in training under extension programme such as management. Their targeted clients are the poor men and women farmers. Benefits from these approaches can be tested through application and their values should focus on poverty, gender equity, participation and partnership. So, these four values lead to the success of empowerment not only for the men but also for the women farmers in Bangladesh.

The speaker added that the strategy of PETRRA was to give women and men equal importance in setting their own priorities. This means that from the very beginning of the project women were at the centre. They were included as partners in farmer-participatory research for technology development and talked about the impact of such technology.

Dr *Paris* then stated that in addressing women's opportunities in performing their additional roles they should be provided with technical knowledge and skills. Options should be there for them to choose from various kinds of skill development trainings, such as raising seedlings, how to distinguish between pests and diseases, fertiliser use etc.

The speaker also reported that the respondents do not need to go through formal course. They learn by doing. They only need to look at the colours and learn how to remove "off-types" for better seeds and how to make decisions particularly in relation to application of nitrogen.

Knowledge and Credit: Needs of Women Respondents

The need of women and the impact of empowerment are reported below in their own words:

"We need to know what to grow, how to grow and when to grow in the fields. Now that we know how to produce healthy seeds and grow them in the fields, we now tell our husbands how to do it and they listen"

"We told our husbands that we should directly help them in cultivation of crops so that they have two hands to reap home harvests. Of course, still we need credit (from NGOs) but, perhaps, not so much as we need knowledge"

When they were asked, "why do they have to go to the field?" they said:

"Do I have a choice? If we have poor harvest my husband is under pressure and gets angry easily. So I might as well help him in the fields and also save on hiring labour. With good harvest, he is happy, we are happy and he respects me and moreover my mother-in law and my father-in law respect me."

Trends in Targeting Women in PETRRA Projects

The PETRRA Project continued the training for developing equity as women should have the equal access to opportunities such as trainings. The survey showed that in the last year and even before, almost 50 per cent of all the targeted trainee farmers were women and they were trained in monitoring seed's health, use of seed dryers in post harvest period, decision-making in overall production system, use of LCC charge and other such programmes which are conducted by IRRI, BRRI, DAE and NGOs.

In her conclusion Dr *Paris* proposed the following policy recommendations:

- ❖ Government and NGOs should have an explicit gender strategy and action plan.
- ❖ All government programme should provide equal opportunities for men and women in the rural areas.
- ❖ Agricultural research, training and extension programmes should mainstream women.
- ❖ “Knowledge is power” but this has to be shared with women and not only with male farmers.
- ❖ R & D should facilitate formation of women's groups and women-led development projects.
- ❖ Policies should consider women from various socio-economic groups.

She said that no plan is good if it is not implemented. It needs strong political will also. She concluded by saying “My mother says that we have a dream; we dream that our daughters will have better lives unlike us. That is why we want them to go to school. The question is will this dream come true?”

Presentation by Dr Mahabub Hossain

The second paper was presented by Dr *Mahabub Hossain*, Head of Social Sciences Division at IRRI on *Nature and Impact of Women's Participation in Economic Activities in Rural Bangladesh*. He started his presentation, by referring to a study which IRRI had initiated under its PETRRA Project to assess the change in rural economy in the 1990s. He presented some key findings from his paper that was co-authored by Dr *Manik Lal Bose*.

Time Allocation by Gender

According to Dr *Hossain*, the total working time in the year 2000 was estimated at 7.81

hours a day for women and 8.07 for men, indicating that men are working harder than women. The situation was opposite in 1987 when women worked for 9.00 hours a day compared to men who worked for 8.55 hours. The change in labour time from 1987-2000 in the survey indicates that both men and women have reduced their work effort, which could be a positive impact of the improvement in economic conditions. The incidence of poverty in the sample area declined from 59 per cent in 1987 to 43 per cent in 2000.

From their survey, the speaker analysed that in 1987 only 23 per cent of the total women labour was spent on economic activities, compared to 83 per cent for men. In 2000, women spent an average of 1.79 hours per day (equivalent to 82 standard eight-hour days in a year) on economic activities compared to 6.73 hrs (307 days per year) for men. During 1987-2000 there was only a marginal reduction (4 per cent) in economic labour for women, but a substantial reduction (11 per cent) for men. An important point to note is a redistribution of economic labour between agriculture and non-agricultural activities for men. Men have reduced the labour supply to agriculture by one-third over this period, while increasing the labour supply to non-agriculture by 42 per cent. The reverse is the case for women who have not only withdrawn some labour from non-agriculture, but also increased the labour supply to agricultural activities.

Various economic activities where women are heavily involved were reported as poultry raising (31 per cent), crop cultivation (22 per cent), animal husbandry (17 per cent), non-farm services (15 per cent) and homestead gardening (8 per cent) (figures within parentheses showing the per cent share of economic labour allocated to the activity in 2000). In contrast, the major economic activities where men are involved are crop cultivation (41 per cent), non-farm services (18 per cent) business and shop keeping (17 per cent) animal husbandry (7 per cent), and transport operation (6 per cent). Indeed, women spend more time in poultry raising. So poultry raising and homestead gardening appears to be exclusively in the women's working domain, and they share substantial workload on animal husbandry with men. Since these are mostly homestead-based activities, it is convenient to carry them out in between their domestic duties. The activities in which mostly educated women are involved almost full-time are non-farm services.

During 1987-2000, women have increased their labour substantially in poultry raising,

homestead gardening and non-farm services; but reduced labour in crop cultivation, animal husbandry, and cottage industries. Men have also reduced labour substantially in crop cultivation and construction works; but increased it in non-farm services and business and transport operation. The importance of cultivation in generating employment is on the downward trend due to population pressure and continuous reduction in farm size. Similarly, with the expansion of rural roads and electrification, labour is moving out from low-productive cottage industries and being engaged in higher quality urban industrial products.

Distribution of Women by Duration of Economic Work, 1987 and 2000

Dr *Hossain* pointed out that, in the context of women's participation in economic activities, an important issue is how many of them pursue these activities on a full-time basis. The duration of employment is also an important issue for men in the context of measuring the extent of under-employment. For the sake of brevity he assumed 6 hours a day (42 hours a week) as full time employment. In 2000, about 37 per cent of the women did not allocate any time to economic activities compared to 14 per cent for men. Thus a larger proportion of women are economically unemployed than men. Male workers in particular, reduced their six and above economic working hours (from 73 to 59 per cent) drastically. This situation is also true (from 87 to 74 per cent) for women, but in their case they have reduced domestic working hours. Thus, the rate of unemployment has increased over the 1987-2000 period, which is also reflected by duration of working hours in both economic and domestic labour uses.

Dr *Hossain* also observed that women are involved in economic activities mostly part-time. Only six per cent of the women allocated more than six hours a day and hence can be considered fully employed in economic pursuits. This number is almost the same as the number obtained from the answers of the respondents when asked about the primary occupation of women. It appears that women allocate time to economic activities in the spare time, after providing domestic labour and hence are only marginally involved in economic activities. About 38 per cent of the women work for upto two hours a day, and another 19 per cent, between two to six hours. Thus, almost 57 per cent of the women are under-employed if economic activities are counted. Among men, 59 per cent were fully employed and 28 per cent under-employed.

Women's Participation in Labour Market

During the study he observed that in the year 2000 about 12 per cent of the women's employment was generated in the market, compared to about 35 per cent for men. The importance of the market is, however, more for non-agricultural activities than for agriculture. Only about four per cent of women are employed in agriculture labour market and about 25 per cent for men in 2000. It is important to note that the importance of the labour market did not grow over the 1987-2000 period. In fact it shrank from 18 to 12 per cent for female and 42 to 35 per cent for men during the period. These declining trends are perhaps due to increasing rates in self-employment in different sectors.

The analysis showed considerable gender disparity in the wage earnings. For adjusting the difference in the purchasing capacity of nominal taka over the 1987-2000, the wage has been expressed in US dollars using the prevailing exchange rates. Incidentally the depreciation of the Bangladesh taka vis-à-vis US dollars was almost the same as the increase in the consumer price index. In 2000, women received on average US\$1.07 per day's work compared to US\$1.39 for men, i.e., about 30 per cent less. In specific activities the gender disparity in the wage rate was even more pronounced. In agriculture women received about a 42 per cent lower wage than men compared to 24 per cent in non-agriculture. It may be noted that for both women and men the wage rate increased substantially over 1987-2000, particularly in the business and non-farm service which are expanding sub-sectors of the rural economy. However, over time the gender disparity did not seem to have declined.

Duration of Women's Employment by Socio-economic Groups (No. of days/year)

Dr *Hossain* noted it is relatively the poor class, who are giving relatively more time for economic activities than the better-off sections in the society. The estimation of the full-time equivalent days of employment per year was done by extrapolating the four-day data for the year and converting it to standard eight-hour per person days of work. His analysis showed the estimated number of days of employment in agriculture and non-agriculture activities for households classified by major socioeconomic variables. It appeared from the numbers that it is the economically depressed households who participate more in economic activities. Women from households who considered themselves as very poor worked for 161 days a year compared to 122 days for the poor, and 115 days for those who considered themselves as self-sufficient but vulnerable to economic shocks.

However, women from economically solvent groups were engaged more in economic activities because of their involvement in full-time services.

Determinants of Women's Participation in Economic Activities

Dr *Mahabub* used Probit model to analyse factors influencing women's participation in economic activities. The dependent variable was measured by a dummy variable with value zero for households where women allocated less than two hours per day in economic activities (those with marginal involvement in economic activities), and value 1 for other households (those with substantial involvement in economic activities). The explanatory variables included some socio-economic factors and others as well.

It was hypothesised that women's labour supply would be positively influenced by the wage rate (the supply price of labour) and access to electricity (employment opportunity), and NGO membership, while it would be negatively influenced by asset ownership, technological progress, education of the household head, earnings from remittances, and income from non-farm sources. Judging from the asymptotic t-values of the estimated parameters, it appears that the most significant factor influencing women's participation in economic activities is the wage rate.

On this issue Dr *Hossain* pointed out that women's participation might increase if the labour market becomes tight, leading to an increase in the wage rate. The next important factor was found to be the development of infrastructure, measured by the availability of electricity in the village. Women's participation in economic activities is higher in households with migrant members. As male members leave the household, the women tend to take over some of their economic functions. Supply of credit by NGOs has a positive influence on women's employment. Women participate less in economic activities in households with better-educated members. However, as the productivity of labour increases with the adoption of modern technology, women tend to withdraw themselves from economic activities.

Impact on Women's Empowerment

In Dr *Hossain's* paper, the females' 'participation' in decision-making was considered as the proxy of 'empowerment' in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors in rural areas. He selected some variables to develop a Women Empowerment Index (WEI). They have

picked up the impact of absence of the male head in the household on women's empowerment, agriculture activities and livelihood. He hypothesised that the absence of a male head impinge a larger burden on females in terms of household responsibilities, but also in the absence of males, females gain relatively more empowerment than in their presence. The lowest value was assigned (=1) when, in the absence of the husband, the decision is taken by other members (rather than by the wife), i.e., women being least “empowered”. At the other extreme, the highest value was assigned (=5) where females take decisions even in the presence of their husbands, i.e., in this case the women are most “empowered”.

Test of Significance of the Association of Women's Empowerment with Their Involvement in Economic Activities

The association between women's participation in economic activities and women's empowerment was also analysed. In this study, a smaller per cent of households with no women's participation in economic activities have strong empowerment but the same is the case with households in which women are employed full-time in economic activities. Indeed, women who are marginally or moderately involved in economic activities seem to be most empowered.

Results of the groups who are marginally involved in economic activities and the other groups who are substantially involved were compared. There was only one sector where a statistically significant positive impact was seen, that is in animal and poultry raising.

Factors Influencing Women's Empowerment: Regression Estimates

Dr *Mahabub* worked out a multiple regression model to analyse factors of women's empowerment. He found out that the most important factors influencing women's empowerment are the size of landownership and the tenure status of the household. The higher the size of owned land, the more empowered the women are. The women belonging to the tenant households appeared to be more empowered compared to that of women in the owner-operated farms. Also the older women are more empowered than the younger women, as indicated by the positive coefficient of the age of the spouse. The higher the levels of education of the household members, the more empowered the women members of the households are. After controlling the effect of these other variables influencing empowerment, women's economic involvement seems to be of

significant impact on women's empowerment. The influence is however weak, as indicated by the lower t-value of the regression coefficient of these variables, compared to some other variables. The impact is positive for agricultural decision-making but negative for non-agricultural decision making.

Impact on Other Socio-economic Factors

Dr *Mahabub* focused on the control of population growth where women have an important role to play. In this connection, the education of their children and its impact on fertility reduction are brought into focus too. One indicator to assess the impact on socio-economic factors is child - women ratio, because this is an indicator of fertility. The ratio is much higher for the women who are not involved in economic activities, and over time the ratio declines as more and more gets involved in economic activities. This is a positive signal.

In Dr *Hossain's* study, another indicator was the proportion of children up to 10 years of age as a proportion of total population, because, reduction in younger population means an improvement in fertility reduction. Here, he noted that in 1987, there was no change; but in the year 2000, the reduction in the younger population is seen to be much more pronounced, from 36 per cent to 22 per cent. This is a great contribution of women to the economy because if the proportion of younger population reduces, the nation will need less expenditure for health, education and other things, so resources will be released for development activities.

Similarly, the impact on education of children can be measured by two more indicators: one is the proportion of the student population in the general population and the other is the secondary school participation rate. Dr *Mahabub Hossain* mentioned that in the primary school, participation rate was already high and therefore, did not show much changes, and that is why secondary school participation rate was considered in this study. He indicated that in 1987, the surveyed households have participated in economic activities and there are a smaller proportion of children going to secondary school which indicates poor households where the women are participating in economic activity. But the change of time is taken for those households where the women participate in economic activities. The secondary school proportion has almost doubled 29 per cent to 58 per cent, compared to the other groups. The increase is about only 18 per cent; from 62

to 60 per cent so both groups are seen as having tremendously positive effect on that factor.

Policy Issues

Dr *Hossain* concluded his presentation with some policy recommendations. They are as follows:

- Government and NGOs must formulate an explicit gender strategy and action plan
- All government programmes must target rural women as equal stakeholders as men
- Technology development research should be sensitive to women's increasing role in agriculture
- "Knowledge is power". The government should initiate a special project for training women on improved agricultural technologies programme and livestock management
- "Money is power". Agricultural credit should be channelled through women
- The pilot project of family approach in extension, should be replicated nationwide
- Programmes for supporting women's income generation activities around homestead should be expanded for both poor and non-poor households

Open Floor Discussion

Economic Activities Influencing Empowerment

Dr *Meghna Guhothakurta*, Professor, Department of International Relations, Dhaka University, talked about the economic activities of tribal or the *adibashi* women who play a very important role in economic activities and in the subsistence economy. It might not be related to agriculture per se but these women definitely are engaged in livestock rearing. She also pointed out the changes occurring in recent times, where cash economy is injected in areas such as shrimp cultivation, is taking over agriculture and the role of women is drastically changing. She felt the need to bring that into focus. She suggested that policy recommendations should be put forward considering the different types of agricultural activities in mind, and she cited an example of Satkhira area where the government is taking a position to encourage the shrimp cultivation as a source of foreign exchange earning. But it is contributing to the de-peasantisation of the economy as well. So, she felt that the government's policy should be such that it encourages both agriculture and shrimp cultivation.

Mr G M Quader, Member of Parliament referred to the survey of *Dr Mahabub Hossain's* team that women's participation in crop cultivation along with men's has declined and pointed out that there are other sectors such as poultry raising where participation has increased from 12 per cent in 1987 to 31 per cent in 2000. So, women are participating in all kinds of economic activities, and in all spheres of life in rural areas. About the empowerment of women, *Mr Quader* noted that in the village areas the outlook of women has changed a lot, they are much more confident, they are now participating in all the sectors side by side with men. More and more women are taking interest in education and sports. In some cases women folks are doing better than men. In this context, it can be said that our country has progressed in empowering women, *Mr Quader* added. Bangladesh cannot be compared with the level of women empowerment of developed nations like Europe or America. But as compared to the neighbouring states, Bangladeshi women have higher empowerment level.

Women's Political Participation

Dr Sadeka Halim, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Dhaka University, commented that the analysis of the presentation was from economic perspective only and it was uni-dimensional touching on women's empowerment issue alone. So, the question of women's political participation in the village level was missed out, even though at present women are directly elected in the union parishads. But what about the role of general women in the *Shalish*? How much impact do they have in the *Shalish*? Here, the major concerns regarding the women's decision making power and the patriarchy issue seem to be missing.

Ms. Roushan Jahan, Member, Women for Women expressed the same concern and suggested the speaker to consider whether these women take part just for votes or do they have any ambition in taking part in the UP election in subsequent days.

Ambassador *M.M. Rezaul Karim*, Member, Advisory Committee, Bangladesh Nationalist Party reported that their party has recently taken various measures so that women can be well represented in the decision-making body of village and in the union parishad level with hopes that they can communicate with authority with the local people of their constituency. He also said that at the top level they have women representatives who play very important roles in running the community.

Gender Related Strategy and Action Plan

Dr *Salma Chaudhuyi Zohir*, Research Fellow, (BIDS), opined that every project should have a gender specialist to ensure that the gender issues are properly addressed. There are national action plans for women in all the Ministries, such as agriculture, livestock, fisheries, and environment. The reason, she thinks, behind the action plans not being implemented is that there is less donor pressure. So donors should have their gender action plan and it will then only be implemented. She informed that the Asian Development Bank has their own gender action plan and that's how they think that gets translated into implementation.

Dr *Bhakti Majumder*, Senior Assistant Chief, Planning Commission, drew attention to some particular issues related to agriculture and quality seed availability. She appreciated Dr Paris's presentation and was happy to learn that there are training facilities for women on seed preservation. The ratio that is given by the presenter was a total of 30 participants, 25 men and 5 women, but since women are mainly responsible for seed preservation and processing, more women should have been included in the training programme.

Dr *Majumder* informed that they had conducted five participatory consultation meetings in 5 regions of the country. And they learned from the stakeholders that there is a lack of quality seeds for all types of crops. So she wanted to draw the attention of the Hon'ble Minister for Agriculture so that necessary measures are taken to ensure the availability of better quality seeds. She emphasised on the importance of bringing women into seed preservation and processing activities. The rural women should be provided with better training on technical knowledge about how to preserve seeds, so that better quality seeds are used by the farmers on time.

Mr *Md Tariq Hassan*, Director (FSW), Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), cited some examples to elaborate on the extent to which efforts were taken to mainstream women by the DAE. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is targeting 35 per cent of the farmers in as many as 22000 upazillas, and in next phase the rest of the upazillas will be covered. In one of the projects of ADP, 60 per cent of women farmers are targeted to be engaged in IG activities and 16 per cent Crop Diversification Project (CDP). A horticulture development project specially designed for homestead, household, food

security and value addition addresses 60 per cent of the women folks. So, the situation is changing and it is changing more towards positive direction.

Knowledge is Power for Rural Women

Dr *Rushidan Islam Rahman*, Research Director, BIDS felt that the analysis should really be extended to see whether the impact of economic activity or earning has been the result of education. She noted that with higher education, women's earnings will be higher and that should empower women according to our common notion. Further in-depth analysis in this area is also desired.

She referred to data from a recent research study and said that there has been a very high unemployment rate among the young educated girls, specially those with secondary education, and this rate is increasing. If the unemployment rate among the educated goes up, obviously there will be less incentive to educate the girls. Responding to Dr *Paris*'s query about whether the daughters will be successful in achieving a better life through education, she said, just education is not sufficient. The educated women must be provided with employment, which is not currently happening and that may require some modification in the curriculum of education. There is need for improvement in the quality of education and there is need for introducing some special skill generation along with just literacy, numeracy etc.

Dr *Salma Chaudhury Zohir*, started with a note of appreciation that the economists are now looking at gender. She said that now women's advancement and rights are being integrated in the PRSP as the root factor of poverty reduction and women are addressed in all dimensions of poverty including income poverty. To reduce income poverty her suggestions was to include improvement of agricultural technology and she welcomed IRRI to give some policy suggestion in this regard. Dr *Salma Zohir* appreciated the concept of family approach in extension programme and said she might as well include it in her work on PRSP. She however disagreed with the idea of giving agricultural loan through women, as it would only make them defaulters. Rather she suggested to encourage women in small and medium enterprise along with required training.

Ms Ferdousi Sultana, Gender Specialist, ADB, expressed her concern by saying that whatever training is being given and technology is being transferred, in most cases it is

related to production. She suggested that there is a need for research which will not only identify the problems related to technology but also will talk about dissemination and about how to integrate the women in that process.

Ambassador *M.M. Rezaul Karim*, talked about including women in the field of education and health. He suggested the government should not only encourage, but also ensure full and active participation of women in teaching, nursing, in family planning activities.

Focusing on the point “The knowledge is power” *Mr G M Quader*, MP, commented that government should initiate a special project for training women on improved agricultural technology and livestock management.

Skill Development and Introducing Projects Targeting Women as Employers

Dr *Rushidan Islam Rahman* of BIDS, commented that without specific skills the young girls may not yet employment, and she felt such employment needs to be generated not only through self initiative but also through creating increased demand for hired employment. The young girls are unlikely to engage in self employment as they do not have the managerial capacity. Rather, they would prefer hired employment. Without an expansion of demand for hired employment, women’s employment cannot be expected to have an empowering impact on younger women and some actions must be taken in this area.

Dr *Salma Chaudhuri Zohir* of BIDS stressed on the need for one-stop services for women. Women need not only credit but also training for skill development, access to technology and marketing opportunities and there should be one-stop services available for them. She also said that there are too many training programmes being organised by different agencies but there is no coordination among them.

Ms. Ferdousi Sultana made some observations on the recommendations of the papers. She emphasised on the changing scenario in a rural economy by saying that people are no longer interested in paddy cultivation. Through various projects high value crops, crops diversifications are being introduced. Many activities are targeting women and therefore providing a lot of training, particularly in the area of production. As a result the participation of women is increasing at the field level. But regrettably *Ms. Sultana*

mentioned that it is still men who are dominating the field based activities. Women are being targeted and being trained but most of the actual work is done by men. So, how much of the improved technology is actually reaching the field and how much of the benefit is going to the actual stakeholders are issues to be looked into, she added.

Mr Md Tariq Hassan, Director, referred to the question raised as to what extent DAE is playing its role in ensuring women's participation in seed preservation. On this issue he opined that the contribution of the women in the value addition at the homestead level have probably been overlooked in both the papers. Women also contributed a lot in horticultural crops and in the field crops. The DAE Director informed that the Department is implementing new areas of extension policy where in most of the projects, as minimum as 35 per cent to 60 per cent women are targeted to be given training on skill development. But it requires further strengthening and streamlining, because the project has been designed long 2-3 or 4 years back. Recently, the project pro forma was approved by the Planning Commission, but until it is revised, the integration of new elements is not possible.

Market Access to Women in Rural Areas

Ms Tahera Jabeen, Health & Social Development Expert Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Services (NICARE), highlighted the issue of women's access to market, an area she thought was important but overlooked in the discussion.

Dr Salehuddin Ahmed, Managing Director, PKSF also focused on the market access issue. He recognised the role that women are playing in both pre-harvest activities and in the post harvest loss prevention. In Bangladesh, women do not play role in marketing agricultural products. *Dr Ahmed*, however, did not think that women's not having any role in marketing has really much to do with their economic empowerment. Just getting money to women through market access will not necessarily empower them, he added. There are also some non-economic factors such as family relationship, family dynamics which influence the empowerment issue to a large extent.

Ms. Khushi Kabir, Coordinator, Nijera Kori and Member, CPD Board of Trustees opined that these days people do not look at women as mere housewives any more. Also there was a time when people used to think that women's contribution to economic activity

only relates to agriculture. But with globalisation and changes that occurred thereafter women's role has changed also. They are extensively involved in industrial sector. She added that the study could also look at other large scale commercial productions of shrimp or tobacco, and the impact they had on women.

Dr *Bhakti Majumder*, Senior Assistant Chief, Planning Commission, drew attention to the fact that the main advantages of quality seed use are that it will restore the genetic qualities of the agricultural varieties, improve germination of the increased seeds and improve the marketable surplus of the crops. She said that it will enhance agriculture production and will also improve women's participation in the agriculture activities.

Ownership of the Property and Rural Women

Ms. Tahera Jabeen addressed the issue of ownership of property. She requested the researchers and the policy makers to find out how to give ownership to the women and enquired whether it is possible to distribute the khas land to the marginalised women's groups. The issue of their ownership of property need to address as well.

Dr *Sadeka Halim*, shared similar view and requested for some challenging policy recommendations from both of the presenters regarding the ownership of the property. She added that actually the policy makers, the donors, even the NGOs were always avoiding this issue. When this question comes up, they say that they do not want to start a gender war in the rural areas or at the household level. But this is an issue that should be faced with courage and it deserve serious attention, she added.

Gender Equality and Empowerment

Referring to Dr *Mahabub Hossain's* presentation, Dr *Khaleda Salahuddin*, Former Professor of Economics, Dhaka University asked why the author considered business and service activities to be the domain of men? Over time, men have allocated more time to non-agricultural activities in which earnings are higher which tends to influence women's participation in agricultural activities. But why are the businesses or other higher income activities not given to women?

In response to that Dr *Hossain* answered that he only stated the facts but did not say that this should be logically under the domain of men or women. They have seen while

surveying that only a small fraction of women were involved in business and service activities, for example, in college. It may be because of lack of access to finance or some other reason that more men worked in those areas said Dr *Hossain*. They were not making any judgment, only tried to say that at present, more number of men are involved in those activities.

Ms Khushi Kabir of Nijera Kori added a point on the issue of wages. She said that “there are strong organisational movements for increasing women’s wages as well. “It is not just women’s economic participation, which we are trying to look into. I think organisational movements and social mobilizations are necessary for pursuing women’s empowerment and emancipation of women and also for their equal wages”

Money is Power: Access to Money

Drawing attention to Dr *Mahabub*’s presentation where he said that there is not much empowerment through micro-credit alone, but there are other factors as well. Dr *Salahuddin Ahmed* agreed with the keynote presenter on the point that credit is not enough. But then added that “it reminded him of the great economist Adam Smith. More than 200 years back Adam Smith specified the same thing. Money brings money. If you get little, then it is very easy to get more, but it is very difficult to get this little.”

Dr *Ahmed* felt that the micro credit concept fits into that scenario, because micro credit is providing the poor people access to that little money. He continued that in Bangladesh, rural women have been empowered to some extent. The face of rural women has definitely been changed not only because of their economic empowerment, but because of other factors as well.

Salehuddin mentioned that among the women micro-credit borrowers, about 30 per cent engaged have invested the money in agricultural activities. Sometimes people say that most of the micro-credit goes to non-farm activities, which is not really true. In fact, in the farming sector women do use their micro-credit for agricultural needs which broadly include crop production, poultry and livestock.

Dr *Ahmed* expressed his view on the concept of empowerment of women. Whether women are empowered or not cannot be judged by taking a few indicators on the right of

women to take decisions or not. In many urban households, the husbands do not take the decision either. In some cases, the wife takes all the money from husband. It cannot be said whether these women are empowered or not just because they are handling money. There are also non-economic factors involved in this. Finally, females in almost all sectors of Bangladesh - agriculture, non-agriculture, rural, urban, peri-urban, small towns - are playing increasingly important roles. In some villages, the survival strategies are being worked out by the women alone. Women must be taken into account in order to bring the family far above the poverty line. This is the challenge for Bangladesh and should be of the highest importance to the government or NGOs. Women's contribution is essential to bring the family above the poverty line in the fastest possible way.

Responding to the above comments, Dr Hossain said that they did not say that micro-credit did not contribute to the empowerment measurement. Whatever empowerment measurement is there, it is mostly because of the micro-credit and micro-credit variables do show statistically positive affect on empowerment

Ms. Ferdousi Sultana, Gender Specialist, ADB, commented on this and addressed the empowerment issue from a different perspective. She said, there are situations when agricultural credit is given to women which is used to buy the land in the name of husband. On the one hand, we are saying that money is power and if women handle money they would be empowered; but on the other hand, they are not utilising the money they are receiving though they are being the guarantor of that credit. She requested the development practitioners to at least consider how to match these two things together.

Ambassador M.M. Rezaul Karim, Member of the Advisory Committee, BNP shared his experience with an NGO dealing with, among other things, micro-credit. He emphasised that since it is the experience of all NGOs dealing with micro-credit that women pay very timely and therefore they were to be trusted then they can also be trusted with agricultural credit. Some of the women also own land and they should be given the agricultural credit or at least be considered for it.

Commenting on this micro-credit issue, Dr *Mahabub Hossain* said, "We know that the NGOs are supplying the micro-credit without any collateral. I think we can also deliver the agricultural credit to women without any collateral, because if the NGO credit or

micro-credit can do that why can't the agricultural credit." He also mentioned that the issue here is not whether the women will use that credit or not whether they are cultivators or whether they are owners. The issue is if credit is given through women they will try to ensure that it is better utilized whoever is utilizing it. This has been demonstrated by micro-credit.

Mr G M Quader, MP of Jatiya Party, voiced his opinion on "the money is power." He argued about the agricultural credit channelled through women and said if women get the credit for farming purposes then maybe the husband would make the women the scapegoat and try not to pay the money. On the other hand if money is given to the woman for supporting her income generation activities in a farm then I believe the lender will have no problem in getting the money back in time.

Women's Decisions in Health Issues

Ms. Naaz Farhana Ahmed, Vice President, Women Entrepreneurs' Association of Bangladesh and Managing Director, KANAK, pointed out that the whole health issue was overlooked in this study. She expressed that it is really sad to see that women are subject to various kinds of health-related problems but there is no provision for any health insurance. Even in the urban areas, the real picture is very poor and women are subject to all kinds of viral diseases, such as HIV. She added that when we are talking about making the invisible visible, we should not have a clear picture regarding the health issue of these invisibles?

Ms. Roushan Jahan, Member, Women for Women, raised a query as to why in the nine intra-household indicators which include children's education, the study missed women's health issue. It is an important consideration in measuring the level of women's empowerment - who takes the decisions as regards their health and how they are taken.

Ambassador M.M. Rezaul Karim, Member, Advisory Committee, Bangladesh Nationalist Party, suggested that we should try to have more doctors, more nurses, and more field workers in the family planning from our women folks. The government should not only encourage, but also ensure that this be done.

Ms. Khushi Kabir raised a point by saying that since the population growth rate has

decreased then there will be less expenditure on health, the paper should take into account the rise in Bangladesh's higher age growth. Putting this in the picture would show there isn't currently a correlation between the population growth rate and health expenditure.

In response Dr *Mahabub Hossain* commented that the population growth rate is going down and therefore the burden on the government on account of health and education is also going down. It is true that we are also having more member of aging population (over 60),but proportion is not to the extent of the reduction of the child population. "We know that in developed society now a days, this is a big problem, how to take care of the elderly because the number is becoming large, but I do not think that Bangladesh has still come to that stage," he said.

Remarks by the Special Guest, *Dr Mohhammad Abdur Razzaque, MP*

Dr *Mohhammad Abdur Razzaque*, MP started his speech by thanking the Chair of the session, the Chief Guest and the Special Guests of the seminar. He also thanked CPD for showing the good gesture by inviting the members of the Parliament from the opposition. He expressed that the ruling and opposition party MPs do not sit and work together and this has become a part of our political culture and also said that our politicians should learn something from the civil society.

The Member of the Parliament opined that the subject of the dialogue was important and that the gender issue has been a topic of discussion for the last 10 – 20 years. He added that CPD usually choose a subject of special interest, not necessarily a popular or well-discussed or well-reformed topic. This time they have chosen a subject which has been in discussion since the inception of Bangladesh. Dr *Razzaque* recalled from Dr *Paris's* presentation that there are a plethora of studies done on women's role in homestead and agricultural production. There were many recommendations as well. He mentioned that Bangladesh has made good progress in poverty alleviation and women were beneficiaries as well. One tremendous achievement which should be mentioned is the advances made in enrolling girl students in the primary and high schools. The mortality rate of under-five-years-old children was brought down and other social sectors also gained some achievements. But he pointed out that the advances still did not bring them up to the desired level. Women are really poor and discriminated against in the society.

Dr *Razzaque* pointed out that women are playing a vital role in doing homestead activities as well as in raising poultry, livestock and processing agricultural crops. He questioned the recognition of women's contribution in economic activities, and felt that there should be a division of labour when it comes to taking care of children. In the rural areas, even if the women want, they cannot contribute to the society as much as they can in urban areas. In general, rural areas tend to stick to the traditional ideas.

The Special Guest gave examples of some technologies, which have been developed and could contribute to upgrading the women's economic and social status. One such technology was "homestead gardening." In a 6x6 meter field, women can grow vegetables round the year which can meet the requirement of a 5-member family and also have some surplus. He reported a case study in Lalmonirhat which was funded by USAID. The farmers of that area were given seeds plus 200/- Taka cash for making fences and one bucket for irrigation. They said that if they get support, they would love to continue this homestead gardening.

Dr Razzaque narrated the story of a widow's economic progress. She was provided with some technology, seeds and some ideas to help her increase her income. With that support, she started to cultivate fish in her small pond. Later she had set up a nursery and started rearing poultry. Within two years, she could build her house with tin shed. The lady was later brought to Bangladesh television (BTV) 3 or 4 times. The main point *Dr Razzaque* was trying to make was that since last 10-15 years we are hearing that women are deprived, they are suffering most, they are marginalised and so on; but to really change their economic status, these successful cases could be replicated and specific programmes should be undertaken targeting women. There are huge demands from the farmers for quality seed. If the target is set provide 20 per cent of the total quality seed required involving women, then it will increase the involvement of women in economic activities in the rural areas.

He agreed with the presenter that "money is power" and "education is power" such power is important, and more required by women. Women are now more educated than ever before, as it is seen in some high schools that there are more girl students than boys. Education is power and where 50 per cent of Bangladeshi people are women, they should be educated. That would be the key factor in upgrading and improving the well-being of

women. He mentioned here a programme which they had in their regime, “One house One Farm” (*Ekti Bari Ekti Khamar*). Each house should be considered as a farm unit and efforts should be taken to increase productivity in that unit whether it is of livestock, fisheries, gardening or anything else. This would change the farmer’s economic condition. He concluded his speech by making a commitment on behalf of his party for improving the well-being of the women.

Remarks by the Special Guest, Mr Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, MP

Hon’ble State Minister for Agriculture *Mr Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir*, MP started his speech by thanking CPD for inviting him as a Special Guest of the dialogue. He hoped both the papers presented in the dialogue would be useful for even further research in this area. “I found two things very interesting from Dr *Mahabub Hossain’s* paper,” he said. “One, the figures where Dr *Hossain* showed that the males were contributing 85 per cent in rural economy in 2000 and the females were contributing only 6.3 per cent in the same year, but the rate of contribution of males in rural economy was 93 per cent and 8.8 per cent for the female population in the year 1987. It was also mentioned that the poverty incidence which was 59 per cent in 1987 has come down to 43 per cent in the year 2000. From these figures, it can be said that some work has been done in the rural economy and because of that the poverty situation has improved. Some infrastructural development works were done, some economic activities have been initiated to reduce the poverty level in rural Bangladesh.”

He pointed out that the rural women perform a lot of works with their male counterparts, particularly in health care, food processing and child care besides spending a lot of time doing the household chores. Recently women are involving themselves doing post-harvesting works, and attending to poultry and livestock. Some NGOs are also trying to empower the rural women by involving them in some of their activities. *Mr Alamgir* noted that in the union parishads, women are taking part in direct election; and that is a positive impact.

The Member of Parliament opined that the situation of the rural area is not necessarily worse. Rather, there are many positive sides and particularly for the women folks, there are many opportunities. It has been seen in the Northern and Southern parts of Bangladesh that girls are going to schools with their uniforms and they are very clean and organised. The NGO employees are working at their fields and going around with their

bicycles, women are going to the market with their products. Women are even working in the primary schools efficiently and competently now. So, it can be said that women have more opportunities open to them up and that we have given them more power which they can use in empowering them. He also stressed the fact that there are many opportunities for women to work in the recently initiated projects such as women market project, women empowerment entrepreneurship project, NCDB project, seed processing projects, Barendra Irrigation project, plantation project etc.

He concluded his speech by saying that their government has created various scopes for educating women. He said “I personally believe that if we can empower women, and create employment for them; they can generate some income by themselves. Then we can achieve our expected goal and also can make the country economically solvent”.

Address by the Chief Guest

The Hon’ble Minister for Agriculture, Government of Bangladesh, *Mr M. K. Anwar*, MP started his speech by thanking CPD for organising this discussion on a very vital and important subject. He pointed out that the paper included a large number of statistics. He added that there were times when it was very difficult to digest all the statistical data. Women’s average daily work was down to 7 to 8 hours from 9 hours. Women work less hours now as per *Dr Mahabub’s* 1997 – 2000 statistics where the reason is also given by the author. Difficult works of male have decreased to 3.50 hours from 5.2, which is almost half. However, only about 6 per cent of women are fully involved in economic activities. Lot of other statistics were given in the paper, which would be very useful for economists.

The Minister emphasized on the issue of empowerment of women and he mentioned that is a need to link education with women’s empowerment. In this connection he expressed his satisfaction that there were separate girls’ schools, schools where girls are majority in co-education schools in rural areas he visited earlier. He also gave much importance to have reservations of jobs in the education sector for women.

The Chief Guest realised that the government does not obey 100 per cent of what the projects dictates, but something should be done to monitor the projects so as to maximise their benefit from them. He opined that reservation of seats by the local council,

reservation of seats in educational institutions for the women such as, medical college, technical colleges etc. should be strictly maintained. According to the Minister, family is not a public limited company or a statutory corporation. It is not a question of who decides major things in the family. In that respect, it will not be a fair analysis, and there are lots of other things in between. It is a question of whether the best intentions of the family have been reflected.

Mr Anwar pointed out that the question about quality seeds is very important. It is a very important issue for rural people as well as for government, as has been pointed during the discussion. For the development of agriculture, it is necessary to provide quality seeds to the farmers. It should be explored how the private sector can contribute in this area. In this context *Mr Anwar* said that the government is reviewing this fact. He concluded his presentation by inviting CPD to initiate a discussion on the seed issue which will be a major contribution from the civil society.

Concluding Remarks by the Chair

The Chairman of the session concluded the session by thanking the participants, presenters, chief guest and special guests of the seminar.

List of Participants

Names have been categorised in alphabetical order

| | |
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| <i>Dr M Zainul Abedin</i> | Farming Systems Specialists, SSD, International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) |
| <i>Dr Salehuddin Ahmed</i> | Managing Director, Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) |
| <i>Ms. Naaz Farhana Ahmed</i> | Vice President, Women Entrepreneurs' Association of Bangladesh and Managing Director, KANAK |
| <i>Dr Yeameen Akbory</i> | Project Director, Empowerment and Protection of Children and Women Project, Department of Women's Affairs, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs |
| <i>Mr Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, MP</i> | Hon'ble Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture Government of Bangladesh |
| <i>M.r S M Al-Husainy</i> | Former Chairman, Public Service Commission (PSC) and Chairman, Swanirvar Bangladesh |
| <i>Mr M K Anwar, MP</i> | Hon'ble Minister for Agriculture, Government of Bangladesh |
| <i>Ms. Maleka Begum</i> | Gender Specialist and Researcher, Women's Rights Movement |
| <i>Dr Manik Lal Bose</i> | Project Scientist, IRRI, Philippines |
| <i>Mr Alamgir Chowdhury</i> | Director, Socio-Consult Ltd. |
| <i>Mr Bijon Lal Dev</i> | PRO to the Minister for Agriculture, Government of Bangladesh |
| <i>Ms. Catalina Diag</i> | Assistant Scientist, IRRI |
| <i>Ms Sabina Easmin</i> | Senior Officer (Training), Bangladesh National Women's Lawyers Association (BNWLA) |
| <i>Mr Francisco Elazegui</i> | Researcher, IRRI |
| <i>Dr S. M. Elias</i> | Agricultural Economist, Agricultural Research Initiative, Department for International Development (DFID) |
| <i>Dr Md Abdul Ghani</i> | Manager, Research Administration, PETRRA, IRRI |
| <i>Dr Meghna Guhothakurta</i> | Professor, Department of International Relations Dhaka University (DU) |
| <i>Dr Sadeka Halim</i> | Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, DU |
| <i>Dr Eric Hanley</i> | Senior Social Development Adviser, DFID |
| <i>Dr Md. Emdadul Haque</i> | Executive Director, Center for Development Service (CDS) |
| <i>Mr Mamunul Haque</i> | Assistant Manager, Communication, PETRRA-IRRI |
| <i>Mr Mahmud (Milu)</i> | Program Director (Pally Tathya), D-Net |
| <i>Mr Md Tariq Hasan</i> | Director (FSW), Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) |
| <i>Mr Gerard Hendriksen</i> | Team Leader, DFID |
| <i>Dr M Sahadat Hussain</i> | Director General, Bangladesh Jute Research Institute (BJRI) |
| <i>Professor A M Muazzam Hussain</i> | Chairperson, Department of Economics and Social Sciences, BRAC University |
| <i>Mr Safiqul Islam</i> | Programme Head, PACE, BRAC |
| <i>Ms. Tahera Jabeen</i> | Health/Social Development Expert, Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Services (NICARE) |

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| <i>Ms. Roushan Jahan</i> | Member, Women for Women |
| <i>Ms. Khushi Kabir</i> | Member, CPD Board of Trustees and Coordinator, Nijera Kori |
| <i>Ms. Rokeya Kabir</i> | Executive Director, Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS) |
| <i>Ambassador M.M. Rezaul Karim</i> | Member, Advisory Committee, Bangladesh Nationalist Party |
| <i>Dr Jahangir Alam Khan</i> | Member Director (Agri-economics), Bangladesh Agriculture Research Council (BARC) |
| <i>Mr Duncan King</i> | Rural Livelihood Advisor, DFID |
| <i>Ms Denab Latif</i> | BDA, South Asia Enterprise Development Facility (SEDF) |
| <i>Dr Noel P Magor</i> | Manager, PETRRA, IRRI |
| <i>Professor Nazmunnesa Mahtab</i> | Chairman, Department of Women Studies, DU |
| <i>Dr Bhakti Majumder</i> | Senior Assistant Chief, Planning Commission |
| <i>Professor M A Sattar Mandal</i> | Department of Agri-Economics, Bangladesh Agricultural University Mymensingh |
| <i>Mr G M Quader, MP</i> | Jatiya Party Lawmaker |
| <i>Dr Rushidan Islam Rahman</i> | Research Director, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) |
| <i>Dr Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, MP</i> | Member of the Parliament, Bangladesh |
| <i>Dr Arun Kumar Saha</i> | Bangladesh Resident Mission, Asian Development Bank (ADB) |
| <i>Dr Khaleda Salahuddin</i> | Former Professor of Economics |
| <i>Mr Ahmad Salahuddin</i> | Manager, Research Program, PETRRA, IRRI |
| <i>Mr Akhter Hossain Shaheen</i> | APS to the Minister for Agriculture, Government of Bangladesh |
| <i>Ms. Ferdousi Sultana</i> | Gender Specialist, ADB |
| <i>Mr Md Shafi Uddin</i> | Former Secretary, GoB and Adviser, Dhaka Ahsania Mission |
| <i>Dr Riffat Zaman</i> | Economist, SouthAsia Enterprise Development Facility (SEDF) |
| <i>Dr Salma Chaudhuri Zohir</i> | Research Fellow, BIDS |

List of Journalists

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <i>Mr Zia Rahman</i> | The Sangbad |
| <i>Mr Reaz Ahmad</i> | The Daily Star |
| <i>Mr Biplob Shahid</i> | International Television Channel Ltd. (NTV) |
| <i>Mr Masud Parvez Milon</i> | The Financial Express |
| <i>Mr Md Momenur Rahman</i> | Alpha TV Bangla |
| <i>Mr Dewan Hanif Mahmud</i> | Prothom Alo |
| <i>Mr Towfiq Uddin</i> | The Manabzamin |
| <i>Mr Syeed Shukur Ali</i> | The Daily News Today |
| <i>Mr Md Mustafizur Rahman</i> | The Bangladesh Today |
| <i>Mr Shapon</i> | Purbanchol |
| <i>Mr Jahed</i> | The New Age |
| <i>Mr Syadul Islam</i> | The Daily Ittefaq |
| <i>Mr Salim Reza Real</i> | Khas Khabar |
| <i>Mr G M Masood</i> | Daily Lal Sabuj |
| <i>Mr Asjadul Kibria</i> | The New Age |
| <i>Mr S R Ratan</i> | News Network of Bangladesh (NNB) |
| <i>Mr Saiful Islam Shamim</i> | BSS |
| <i>Mr Humayun Kabir</i> | Alpha TV Bangla |
| <i>Mr Enamul Haque</i> | The Daily Independent |
| <i>Mr Rakib Hasanul Sumon</i> | The Daily Janakantha |
| <i>Mr A. K. M. Rashidul Hasan</i> | The Bhorer Kagoj |
| <i>Mr Shujan Mahmud</i> | The Daily Ajker Kagoj |