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# Rapid assessment on gender dynamics: Barriers, opportunities and risks in aquaculture and agriculture sector in northwest Bangladesh

Scoping study technical report

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PROGRAM ON  
Fish  
Led by WorldFish

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

DoF	Department of Fisheries
FGD(s)	focus group discussion(s)
HH	household
IDI(s)	in-depth interview(s)
kg	kilogram
KII(s)	key informant interview(s)
LSP(s)	local service provider(s)
NGO(s)	non-governmental organization(s) participatory
PRA	rural appraisal
SRA	social relations approach
SSC	secondary school certificate
t	metric ton
WF	WorldFish (Center)

# Executive summary

In Bangladesh, the aquaculture sector has potential to improve the lives of all – women, men, youth, children and the elderly. Aquaculture has grown significantly in recent years and Bangladesh is a fish-eating country. Forecasting models on fish supply–demand indicate that Bangladesh's *per capita* fish consumption is likely to rise from 18 kilograms (kg) in 2010 to 30 kg by 2030. This high consumption warrants aquaculture investment by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. This technical research report contributes to the pool of knowledge to design appropriate and informed interventions for women's empowerment in the project, *The Aquaculture: Increasing income, diversifying diets, and empowering women in Bangladesh*.

Aquaculture and agriculture systems are complex, multi-layered, interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral, involving actors on multiple fronts. These actors range from farm-input producers, providers and sellers; producers of aquaculture and agriculture food products; processors and marketers of food products; to sellers and consumers. Aquaculture and agriculture are highly dynamic, constantly forming and reforming. The challenge in this fluid environment is to understand how gender dynamics can create opportunities, barriers and risks for women and men. This study seeks to understand current gender norms and practices in northwestern Bangladesh, and how they provide opportunity for—or impede—women and men from involvement in agriculture and aquaculture, and their reaping benefits from the same. The study examines gender dynamics and relations focusing on three main themes (i) production (ii) farming groups and (iii) markets. It compares the present with the scenario 10 years ago through a rapid qualitative scoping assessment in eight villages in Rangpur and Rajshahi Divisions. Summarized findings are as follows below.

For some of the women, their involvement in *productive work* has dramatically increased over the last 10 years. Much of this is attributed to increased earnings and

savings. Education and awareness-raising by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have aided women to enter the workforce as teachers, NGO workers and entrepreneurs, despite stereotypes and limited options for the advancement of women. Men recognize the importance of women providing economically for their families. Due to an increase in women's productive roles, in some cases (not all), women also have more power in household decision-making. However, women's continued reproductive roles and the additional productive roles increase their burden, which constrains their capacity to innovate.

Agriculture and aquaculture are more challenging in view of increased land pressure, climate change and environmental factors. Consequently, men are increasingly valuing work that is not land-based. This means *men are seeking alternative business opportunities above production level along the aquaculture and agriculture value chain*. In contrast—with the exception of a few outliers—women's involvement in aquaculture remains limited. And even then, their roles are mostly feeding the fish and pond management, especially when the pond is close to the home. Men fish farmers in the study area reported they depend on women to manage their fish ponds, especially when they are away. Women participate in aquaculture if they have laborers at their disposal for the work women are deemed incapable of doing, or that is considered inappropriate for women. Study participants however acknowledged that more women will participate in aquaculture if they are trained and the family consents. Family consent—especially by husbands—emerged as very important for women's involvement in aquaculture farming and its value chain. Indeed, other than a few outliers buying and selling fish, market access for women is a major problem. Reputation and security are the two key factors behind women's limited access to markets. A solution is farm-gate marketing services which allow women to engage in aquaculture and agriculture while remaining at home.

Women belong to NGO groups which provide micro-credit and skills training. However, whilst women have access to micro-loans, they do not usually make decisions about how the loan is spent. Often, loans are taken at the behest of husbands, who also control the loans. The study however revealed positively deviating women entrepreneurs who have taken and used their micro-credit loans for their own businesses.

Overall, *gender norms and stereotypes* are prevalent, hindering women's full involvement in aquaculture and its benefits. Stereotypes and entrenched structural systems of women's subordination to men prevent men from helping women in their reproductive roles, unless women are sick or away. The cultural norms and belief systems (Islam and Hindu) on women's abilities hinder their full participation in aquaculture. Reputation related to societal ideals on masculinity and femininity further determine what men and women can and cannot do. For example, a man who allows a woman to go to the market may be seen as less of a man. And despite women's increased direct contribution to household income, their abilities are still not seen as at par with men. However, there is a growing recognition of women's support and their income-earning for family

wellbeing. As the demand for education and educated wives rises, women are making more informed choices and venturing into business.

The study proposes several recommendations for building women empowerment in aquaculture. These include supporting women entrepreneurs through accelerator programs from organizations such as LightCastle Partners, and getting women involved in the aquaculture value chain. Another way is by building women's production capacity through information, knowledge and training. Women fish-farming groups (producer groups) should be established and registered with the government. Women's groups for bulk-selling at the farm gate would attract market actors and supply-chain market participants. Enabling market conditions for women are needed. A special focus could be poorer women who, besides being in greatest need, also have fewer constraints for work and income-earning. Gender-transformative approaches are needed on prevailing notions of masculinity and negative, gender-based stereotypes.



**FISH** ———  
IS PRIMARY ANIMAL-  
SOURCE FOOD FOR  
**1 BILLION**  
PEOPLE



ACCOUNTS FOR  
**20%**  
OF THE ANIMAL  
PROTEIN INTAKE FOR  
**3.2 BILLION**  
PEOPLE



**89%**  
AQUACULTURE  
PRODUCTION IN  
ASIA

2010



**18KG**

2030



**30KG**

EXPECTED INCREASE IN  
BANGLADESH'S PER CAPITA  
FISH CONSUMPTION

**1**

**INTRODUCTION**



# 1. Introduction

Globally, there is increasing recognition of the importance of fish, in the world's food systems. Fish is highly nutritious and healthy. It is the primary animal-source food for 1 billion people and accounts for 20 percent or more of the animal protein intake for 3.2 billion people.

At 89 percent in 2015, Asia dominates aquaculture production. Bangladesh is a fish-eating country whose aquaculture has grown significantly in recent years. Forecasting models for fish supply–demand indicate that Bangladesh's *per capita* fish consumption is likely to increase from 18 kg in 2010 to 30 kg by 2030. Significant improvements in aquaculture productivity along with greater efficiency and quality differentiation in the value chain remain critical challenges for continued sustainable and inclusive aquaculture sector growth that does not leave women or men behind.

Women are often systematically disadvantaged in access to favorable livelihood opportunities across various segments of aquaculture value chains. They are often hidden, performing unappreciated and underpaid roles not limited to processing. Although the trend is changing, gender barriers in Bangladesh remain substantial. The benefits of development continue to be unevenly distributed between women and men (FAO 2017).

This technical report on gender dynamics, barriers, opportunities and risks in targeted areas provides important information on the barriers faced by women and men in entering into—and benefitting equitably from—aquaculture and agriculture in northwest Bangladesh. For Bangladesh, the report is a foundational component of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation investment led by WorldFish (WF), entitled : *The Aquaculture: Increasing Income, Diversifying Diets and Empowering Women in Bangladesh*.

We put special emphasis on understanding the level of involvement of and relations between men and women in production, decision-making, income sharing, farming groups and markets. We also study gender barriers and opportunities in the aquaculture and agriculture sector. The project aims to empower women by increasing income through innovation and technological interventions in the aquaculture value chain. Therefore, this study examines the barriers, challenges and structural obstacles that hinder women as effective value-chain actors. We explore a complex web of interwoven relationships caused and reinforced by a set of interlinked factors including but not limited to sex, gender division of labor, gender roles, patriarchal norms, class and religion.

## The specific objectives are to:



Identify gender norms and practices in northwest Bangladesh and the resulting roles that women and men take up in aquaculture and agriculture. This will be accomplished by examining gender relations and dynamics at home, community and commercial level (production, group and market), and by assessing how gender relations connect and overlap with intersectionality.



Examine the positive and negative effects of women's economic activities (e.g. on workload) and women's empowerment (e.g. backlash), and the risks underlying women's empowerment.



Discover the enabling and hindering factors behind women's involvement and gain from agriculture and aquaculture, including norms and mind-sets.



Understand the perceived levels of empowerment of women (resource access, decision-making, mobility), tracing the changes through time as well as the causes.



Map the trend of adopting innovation and new technology among men and women to improve livelihoods. Why do they adopt or not adopt?

## Findings will:



Provide recommendations for incorporating gender into the methodological approaches and mainstreaming it into project objectives. This enables well-founded assessments of appropriate interventions and gender strategies right from the planning stage. In this way, the project will avoid any negative or gender-reinforcing outcomes, and instead contribute to promoting gender equality to empower women.



Establish a baseline for informed monitoring of the interventions, setting future targets and understanding any changes in the course of the project, responding to the changes as may be necessary.



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**METHODS**

## 2. METHODS




### 2.1 Conceptual framework

To understand the gender relations between men and women and how these relations shape the barriers and opportunities for women and men to engage in and benefit from aquaculture and agriculture, the study uses Naila Kabeer's concept, the social relations approach (SRA). Kabeer's SRA differs from other gender-analysis frameworks, which focus on roles and responsibilities. It has a strong focus on power relations and a deliberately feminist approach. SRA aims to capture the complexity of gender–power relations, the gendered nature of institutions, and the interactions between policies and practices at different institutional locations (Hillenbrand et al. 2014). In the SRA, Kabeer argues that institutions produce, reinforce and reproduce social difference and inequalities (March et al. 1999). SRA notes the need to examine societal changes over time, reflecting on the immediate, intermediate and structural causes of inequalities at different institutional levels.

This study also aims to identify different roles and responsibilities of men and women, their different status and capacity imposed by the society because of their biological identity as man or woman and the change in the relationships of women and men in terms of resource distribution, roles, responsibilities and identities over the past 10 years. Since SRA focuses on gender biases and norms at the state, market, community and family or household level (Hillenbrand et al. 2014) it provides an appropriate gender analysis framework for this study. More on the SRA can be found in Kabeer's seminal work, *Reversed Realities* (Kabeer 1994). It employs five key concepts to capture the complex power dynamics (see Table 1).

Overall the goal of the SRA is to help design programs and policies that enable women to be agents of their own development (March et al. 1999). However, even though SRA is theoretically sound, it has been found to be challenging for practitioners to apply.

Table 1. Kabeer's key concepts and links with current study.

	Dimensions of social relationship	Link with the current study
	<b>1. Rules:</b> How things get done; do they enable or constrain? Rules may be written or unwritten, formal or informal.	Who has easier access to market? How do social institutions and practices create inequalities for men and women?
	<b>2. Activities:</b> Who does what, who gets what, and who can claim what. Activities may be productive, regulative, or distributive.	What kind of income-generating activities do men and women usually do? Who spends more time in unpaid care work?
	<b>3. Resources:</b> What is used and what is produced, including human (labor, education), material (food, assets, capital), or intangible resources (goodwill, information, networks).	Who has more involvement with productive resources? Who usually owns the land or pond?
	<b>4. People:</b> Who is in, who is out, and who does what. Institutions are selective in the way they include or exclude people, assign them resources and responsibilities, and position them in the hierarchy.	Whose income matters? Who has easier access to extension services?
	<b>5. Power:</b> Who decides, and whose interests are served.	Who controls the income generated from household (HH) production? What matters in decision-making?

Source: Kabeer's seminal work, *Reversed Realities* (1994)

## 2.2 Data collection

To understand the current gender dynamics in northwest Bangladesh and how these shape the barriers and opportunities for women and men to engage in and benefit from aquaculture and agriculture, we employed a mixed and integrated qualitative methods approach. We used:

- Semi-structured key informant interviews (KIs) with community leaders including Union Parishad members and Chairman; informal leaders (social leaders, especially the elderly people, influential due to wealth and political position etc.), school teachers; and NGO staff.
- Sex-disaggregated focus group discussions (FGDs) with men and women residents of the communities under study.

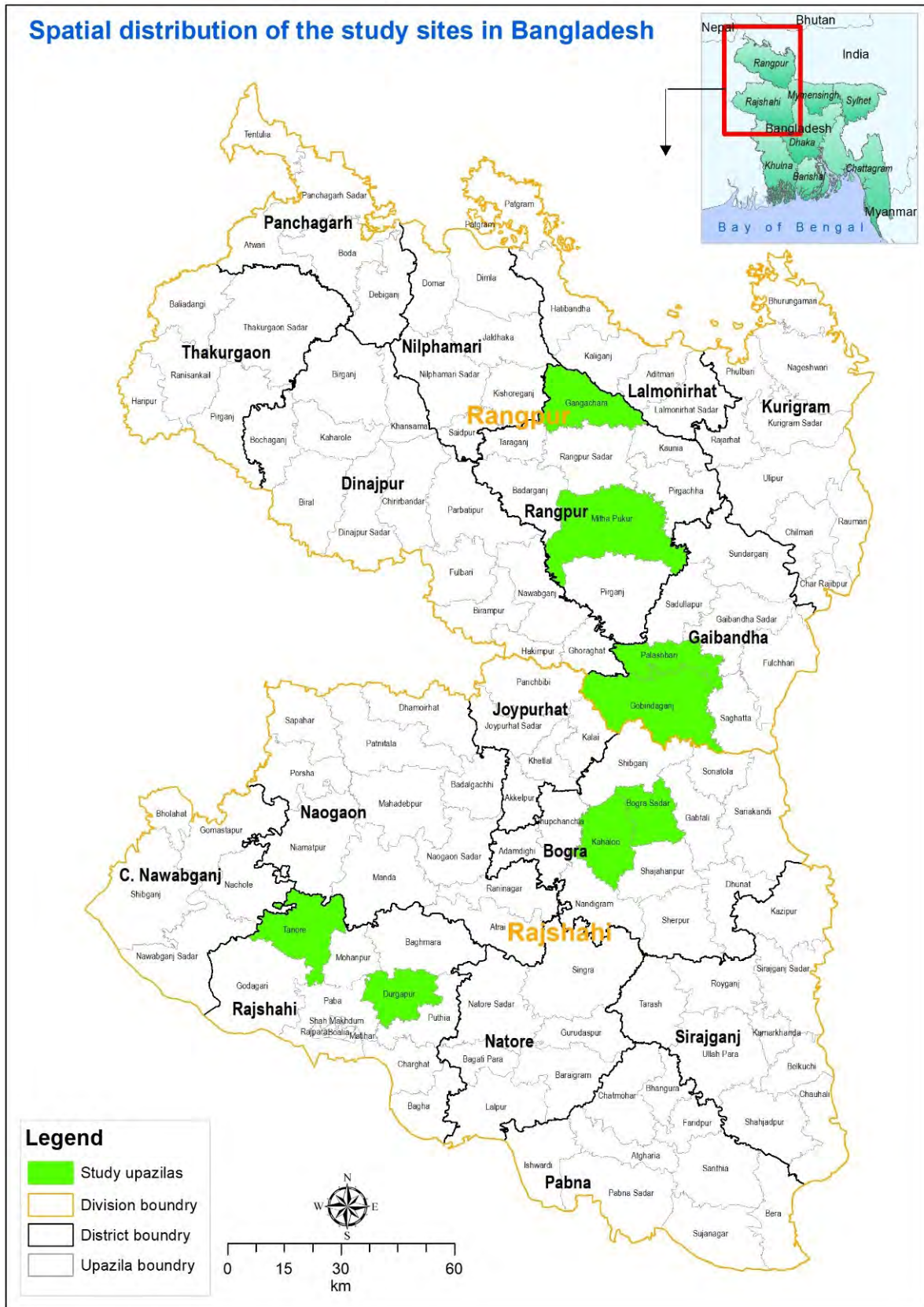
- Structured in-depth interviews (IDIs) with men and women residents of the communities under study.

The mixed qualitative methods allowed us to capture the multi-faceted perspectives of various community members, thus providing rich information of changes in gender dynamics over the past 10 years. The KIs, FGDs and IDIs were carried out in eight villages and four districts (Table 2 and Figure 1) from July to August 2019. Information on sampling of data collection locations and respondents is in section 2.3 Data sampling.

Table 2. Qualitative data collection.

Village, Upazilla, District	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Sub-total
Palsha, Durgapur, Rajshahi	1	1	9	9	1	2	23
Bagsara, Tanore, Rajshahi	1	1	9	4	2	2	19
Gokul, Sadar, Bogura	1	1	12	11	2	2	29
Basudebbati, Kahalu, Bogura	1	1	4	10	2	1	19
Kashipur, Mithapukur, Rangpur	1	1	8	10	2	2	24
Thanapara, Gangachara, Rangpur	1	1	6	7	2	2	19
Udaysagor, Polashbari, Gaibandha	1	1	9	8	2	2	23
Chakrahimpur, Gobindaganj, Gaibandha	1	0	8	10	2	2	23
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>179</b>

Figure 1. Selected research areas in northwest Bangladesh.



Source: Data collection from the field study

We conducted a total of 15 KIIs in eight villages (eight men and seven women). The purpose of the KII was to (i) understand gender relations at community and institutional levels; (ii) identify potential households for data collection in FGDs and IDIs; (iii) know perceptions on low- and middle-income households; and (iv) get an overview on local livelihoods. We also conducted 16 FGDs in eight villages.

Separate FGDs were held for men and women in each village (16 in total). The purpose of FGDs was to understand (i) gender norms and practices; (ii) decision-making patterns or behavior on aquaculture; and (iii) gender-related agricultural practices.

For gender norms and practices, we collected information on attributes of a good spouse and farmer, the changing notion of ideal manhood and womanhood, and the reasons behind the changing notions on norms and practices. To understand the pattern of decision-making, we collected data to determine the following: decisions made by women solely, decisions made jointly, decisions made by men solely, decisions women are forced to make, decisions imposed on women, factors behind decision-making status, and the changing scenario of decision-making status of men and women.

To understand the gender relations of production and aquaculture, we examined the nature of the relationship between men and women engaged in farming, and access to and control over the means of production by women and men. We identified the role of men and women in farming-related production activities, and the opportunities and constraints.

We conducted 32 IDIs in eight villages. The purpose of IDIs were to (i) determine the labor activity calendar (daily-activity clocks), and (ii) provide numerical and narrative data on perceptions of the capacities of local men and women to exercise agency and make major decisions in their lives. For this, we used the ladder of power and freedom data collection tool. The daily-activity clock revealed the predominant gender dynamics by delineating gender division of labor. It showed the level of engagement of men and women in unpaid care work and production. The ladder of power and freedom data collection tool explores levels of agency, ranging from having little power and freedom on step 1 to having power and freedom to make most major decisions on step 5. The tool also explored perceptions of whether and how agency and decision-making processes have changed over time, and the reasons for these changes.





## 2.3 Data sampling

WordFish implementing the project in Rangpur and Rajshahi Divisions in northwest Bangladesh. This is the primary geographic focus for the project. Situated by the Ganga, Jamuna and Brahmaputra Rivers, the agro-ecologies and farming systems are suitable for enhanced productivity of fish production systems for smallholder farmers. The two divisions are home to 34 million people, nearly a quarter (24 percent) of the country's population. Poverty and undernutrition are high, particularly among women and children. In selecting districts, the major criterion was the level of fish production, and within that, inland water fish production.

To identify, compare and contrast the context and conditions of fish culture, we collected data from the highest fish-producing district, a relatively high fish-producing district and the bottom two districts. On this

basis, Rajshahi Sadar District was selected representing Rajshahi Division. At 70,366 metric tons in 2016–2017 (DoF 2017), the district produces the highest amount of inland-water fish. For Rangpur Division, Bogra District was selected having produced 69,561 t of fish (DoF 2017). It is the third-largest fish producer in the division and in northern Bangladesh. The second- and fourth-highest fish producer in Rangpur Division are Rangpur District (29,713 t) and Gaibandha District (24,724 t) (DoF 2017).

To enable comparisons, we collected data from two villages in each of the four selected districts. The eight villages were selected to ensure contrasting conditions. In each district, one village was close to the district headquarters (C) while the second village was a remote one, far (F) from the district headquarters. Where possible, religious diversity was observed in selecting the villages. Table 3 provides an overview of the characteristics of the study sites.

Table 3. Characteristics of the study sites.

District	Upazila	Village	Major religion	Ratio of educated Male: Female (up to SSC)	Proximity to Upazila town	Major livelihood
Rajshahi	Durgapur	Palsha	Islam	50:50	Far	Aquaculture
	Tanore	Bagsara	Islam	40:60	Close	Aquaculture
Bogra	Bogra Sadar	Gokul	Islam	50:50	Close	Aquaculture
	Nandi gram	Basudevhati	Islam	50:50	Far	Aquaculture
Rangpur	Mithapukur	Kashipur	Islam	50:50	Far	Agriculture
	Gangachara	Thanapara	Islam	50:50	Very close	Aquaculture
Gaibandha	Gobindogonj	Chakrahimpur	Hindu	40:60	Far	Dairy
	Palashbari	Udaysagar	Islam	70:30	Very close	Business

Source: Men and women FGDs and IDIs

Respondents were selected from farming households using purposive sampling methods. We made sure that there was equal 50:50 representations of male and female voices. Respondent characteristics were as follows (i) most of the respondents have not studied beyond 10th grade; (ii) aged 30–60 years; and (iii)

IDI and FGD respondents were drawn from different socioeconomic levels: poor and medium wealth group (self-ascribed), though few of the KIIs were socially influential and their wealth status was middle or upper-middle class.

## 2.4 Data analysis

We coded the sex-disaggregated IDIs and FGDs using NVivo version 12 Pro software. Qualitative data from the IDIs and FGDs was coded for textual analysis. The data was recorded, translated, transcribed verbatim and validated by the researchers. Transcripts were analyzed using NVivo software. The two lead researchers co-developed a coding framework, classifying different themes that were used to manually code the data in NVivo.

The major themes for the parent node classification included agency, aspirations, changes in gender relations, decision-making, gender roles, good farmer, good spouse, innovations, intersectionality, livelihoods, mobility, resource use and control and social problems.

- *Agency* includes their perception of their step on the power and freedom ladder, now and 10 years ago (i.e. women's empowerment).
- *Aspirations* include aspirations around work, marriage, aquaculture and livelihoods.
- *Decision-making* includes all aspects of the decision-making process, who decides, whether women are consulted and whose decision prevails.
- *Gender roles* include productive, reproductive and perceptions about men's and women's roles.

- *Good farmer and good spouse* include examining the characteristics now and in the past, and perceptions about these changes.
- *Innovations* include new agriculture or aquaculture innovations in the past 10 years and enabling and constraining factors affecting capacity to innovate.
- *Livelihoods* include on- and off-farm opportunities and challenges, reasons for changes and successful women in the community.
- *Mobility* includes perceptions about women's mobility, women's mobility in the market and community.
- *Resource use and control* – access, limiting factors, benefits and usage (access and control over credit, group membership).

Each code was separated for men and women. For example, resources women have control over and resources men have control over were two separate child nodes under resources use and control. After coding, the data was further broadly categorized into gender dynamics, women's empowerment, production, groups and markets. This report also follows this categorization. To protect the respondents' anonymity, study participants' names were not used.



3

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**STUDY  
FINDINGS**

# 3. STUDY FINDINGS

## 3.1 Gender dynamics

### 3.1.1 Overall dynamics

**The data indicates overall positive changes in gender dynamics in three key areas:**



1. increased appreciation of women's work contributions, both productive and reproductive;



2. increased importance of family solidarity; and



3. improved voice of women in asserting their rights.

**However, women's decision-making still lags behind as women are still expected to obtain permission for majority of the activities they want to pursue.**

Respondents reported positive changes in gender relations and this has mostly been attributed to women earning income from work. Men are valuing women's work as income-generating, even when it is indirect. They are increasingly recognizing women's economic contributions. All the respondents acknowledged that women are either earning directly or supporting the process of earning. A participant in the Gokul men FGD said "Every woman is involved in income generation. Suppose you are working outside and she is looking after livestock and farm?" Another man FGD participant from Thanapara explained why a wife's help is essential "If a husband goes to the cornfields, so does his wife. If labor is hired for the field, the wife supervises. It's impossible to run the family without my wife's help."

Some men in two study sites (Bagsara and Thanapara) reported how women's reproductive role helps them run their productive roles efficiently: "This morning I told

my wife, 'I am going outside earlier'. Then she made food for me that's why my day started smoothly" (Bagsara men FGD participant).

Overall, there is a strong sense of companionship, understanding and togetherness indicated by the study respondents across study sites as fundamental for a family to succeed. As noted by a Gokul man IDI respondent, "Those families [that do not work together] will not hold together for long." A Gokul woman FGD respondent explained that a common understanding between couples helps them make decisions together: "If the husband and wife have a good understanding, then they will discuss and make joint decisions." A Palsha IDI respondent was grateful to his wife "I was frustrated and demoralized by everyone else. My wife was the only person who gave me hope."

Since women are helping men in their economic

activities, a few women are unusually also getting increasingly involved in decision-making. A Palsha IDI man respondent explained why he consults his wife in decision-making: *"I must give her importance. She helps me a lot."* In a number of FGDs, women said they can now dare to assert their rights more with their husbands, knowing their children will back them up. This is often taken negatively by men to mean women have been "poisoned" by some outsider to fight their husbands. A Thanapara woman FGD participant explained why: *"Previously, women used to get married at a very young age, have children early and got abused by their husbands. They could not speak up. But women are more aware now, so it is not that easy."* Yet, there was broad consensus across all the study sites that women still need permission from men before they take up any ventures. A Basudevhati man FGD participant speaking for others explained why: *"It's a social problem. Our society is patriarchal. Women are obliged to listen to the man and he has the last word."*

To understand some of the positive changes for women over the years, several intersectional elements are important. Older educated women have more courage to speak up. Women who have been married longer and gained more experience in managing productive household activities reported their husbands entrusting them with productive responsibilities and involving them in decision-making. These changes surfaced in both Rangpur and Rajshahi Divisions. Findings are presented in the sections which follow.

### 3.1.2 Masculinities and femininities

The data indicates men are under pressure to provide for the family and therefore feel insecure about women working, or venturing out. Men said the bride's family finds them more appealing if they have a fixed income and are not solely dependent on agriculture. A man from Gokul explained how he would feel if his wife were to earn a direct income herself, *"I will feel like an incapable man. In our society, the level of income defines the man; how successful he is!"*

Women and men reported men's insecurities about women venturing out for further education or to earn an income. A man IDI respondent from Udaysagar even self-analyzed his past insecurities and regretted not

having allowed his wife to pursue higher education: *"I didn't allow her to go for further studies. We had love in our marriage. I was concerned about our relationship. If she got more education and socialized with more men, there was a chance she could leave me .... I now regret feeling that way then."* Similarly, a woman FGD participant from Gokul, speaking for others, explained: *Husbands do not like to see their wives working or in business with other unknown men, and communicating with them."* Men's insecurities about women venturing out was expressed in Gaibanda District, particularly Udaysagar village and in Bogra District, especially, Gokul village.

Men participants in the Thanapara FGD highlighted the pressure men feel to provide for their families and justified how women's lack of understanding of their plight often leads to violence and tension in the household. A man FGD participant noted: *"If the children cry when husbands are having lunch or dinner the husbands beat the women. Husbands deal with many issues outside. That's why they are short-tempered. They need peace at home."* They explained men's frustrations can even lead to suicide. A man FGD participant said: *"Some wives don't argue but many wives bring it [men's incompetence] to light. The husbands then get frustrated. Sometimes they commit suicide. But the society doesn't take time to understand in-depth what led to the incident."*

Men and women have certain expectations from women, with repercussions if they do not conform. These expectations include unpaid care work, i.e. cooking, cleaning and taking care of children and family. There were no intersectional differences. Finally, across all sites, men were expected to provide for the family and be "the man of the house".

### 3.1.3 Characteristics of a good spouse

To better understand the social expectations and perceptions of a good husband and a good wife, FGD study participants were asked to reflect on the characteristics of a good husband and good wife and to assess the changes from around 10 years ago. This data is consolidated from all the women FGDs in Table 4.

Women listed two types of characteristics: those they aspire for husbands to have and those that society deems as good. Aspirations include a man who helps

with household work, who loves his wife, includes her in decision-making and who gives her freedom. Attributes of a good husband include typical ownership of assets (e.g. land) and having a source of income (e.g. having his own business). A good wife always asks for permission from her husband for everything and thinks twice before speaking.

Intersectional differences among women respondents were noticeable. For example, many of the older women asserted the importance of a good wife being able to cook and care for her husband. Asking permission for everything was noted by all types of women as a normative expectation, but many of the younger women described this alternatively as sharing their plans and ideas with their husbands. Younger women expressed gender-normative aspirational characteristics of a good husband, such as the husband doing unpaid care work.

Only women in Rajshahi District (Palsha and Bagsara villages) and Bogra District (Basudevhati village), both in the Rajshahi Division, emphasized the importance of religion and purdah as good wife characteristics and being religious as a good husband characteristic. Women in these sites refrained from mentioning any aspirational characteristic that challenges current gender norms, be this for women or men. This perhaps suggests these two areas may be more religious and conservative than the others, with Islam being the predominant religion. The characteristics they mentioned were mostly normative (e.g. cooks to please husband) and restrictive of women's freedom (e.g. not making phone calls to prevent infidelity).



Table 4. Characteristics of a good spouse today: Women respondents across all sites

Good wife	Good husband	Good wife	Good husband
Veils/covers herself/ observes purdah	Decent/no drug addictions	Her father must have a good financial status	Does not ask for dowry
Good behavior/character	Good behavior/ character/honest	Considering husband's financial status before making demands; not quarrelling, not short-tempered	Doesn't beat wife, does not abuse or murder wife
Good attitude	Good in all aspects/ good attitude	Thinks before talking	
Family-oriented	Family-oriented	Keeps everything neat and tidy	
Discusses all family-related matters			
Understanding toward husband			Owns land
Asking permission for everything and sharing	Gives freedom to wife/ shares with wife/allows wife to work		Does not smoke
Able to run the household	Able to run the household		Has own business
Can cook well/cooks to please husband	Helps his wife with cooking and other household chores when she is having trouble		Knows how to do farming
Trying to earn/knows work such as cow-rearing, sewing/hardworking/can earn from home	Hardworking/income earner/has a job/ Good income; able to take financial responsibility		Good family environment/ background/good family
Working by husband's side, stays close to husband	Stays close to wife, does not stay out for too long		Gives importance to education
Religious: prays, knows hadith (Islamic traditions)	Religious: prays regularly		Keeps record of income and expenditures
Aware and knows how to nurture and raise children	Takes care of children		Not staying with anyone else at night/no extra-marital affair
Educated/able to tutor children	Educated (enough to get a job)		Supports wife's family in times of need
Not making phone calls (to prevent infidelity)			Pays his wife for her dower (obligation money or possession to pay bride in Islamic marriages) on the day of marriage
Takes care of husband			Does good deeds
"good" complexion/skin tone (fair)/beautiful	Tall/good looking/		Loves wife
			Takes care of medical treatment
			Makes mutual decisions with wife

Source: Women FGDs



Table 5 shows the responses from men FGD participants on good characteristics for both husbands and wives, with commonalities shown. For the men, a good wife performs household duties, pleases her family members and takes care of the children. Good wives have a job but it must be a white- or pink-collar job, i.e. NGO, school, etc. Intersectional differences were few. Young men mostly emphasized the importance of respecting in-laws and obeying guardians.

Across all sites, men expressed the importance of an educated wife. Apart from education, men in

Rangpur District (Kashipur and Thanapara villages) and Gaibandha District (Udaysagar village), both in Rangpur Division expressed gender-equal attitudes like mutual decision-making and helping the wife. In alignment with the findings from the women, men in Rajshahi District expressed mostly conservative normative perceptions on how a good wife or good husband should be (i.e. cooking on time, performing household chores, controls family).





Table 5. Characteristics of a good spouse today: Men respondents across all sites

Good wife	Good husband	Good wife	Good husband
Good-looking/attractive/ has beautiful hair	Good physical condition/ attractive/has hair	Takes care of husband, does not torture husband	Does not torture wife
Well-educated	Well-educated/ intelligent	Patient, gentle/virtuous	Does not get angry easily, patient
Good family background		Pleases others with her work	
Responsible, careful		Marriage age 20–22	Marriage age 25–30
Thinks about household wellbeing, maintains household	Maintains family income	Have love, understanding and take decisions together	Have love, understanding and take decisions together
Takes care of children, educates children, looks after children’s health	Takes care of children and bears their expenses		Does not take dowry
Has leadership qualities			Has a business
Good relations with neighbors	Good social background		Enthusiastic about work/ hardworking
Good behavior and character	Well-mannered, good person, trustworthy		Avoids wrongdoing
Respectful to in-laws			Controls the family
Inoffensive			Gives good advice to family members
Knows and performs household chores	Fulfills demands of wife/family		Helps wife
Obeys guardians			Doesn’t take drugs
Knows embroidery work			Good farmer
Has a job	Self-dependent/has a job/independent		
Cooks on time, applies salt accurately			



Source: Men FGDs

### 3.1.3.1 Changes in good wife characteristics

Two main changes in what is expected of a good wife today, compared to 10 years ago are: education and a pink-collar job. Women and men respondents alike from a number of sites also reported differences in the stringent expectations from a dutiful wife, from what it was 10 years ago and currently.

An educated wife was valued across all sites. A woman in the Basudevhati FGD explained, *“Before, all they wanted was a bride who can do household work. Education and other qualities did not matter. Big feet, big hands were not acceptable.”* Men respondents also explained why an educated wife is important. A man in the Thanapara FGD observed, *“It doesn’t matter because even if they don’t get jobs, they will be a good mother in future. They will be aware about the environment and health issues.”* Similarly, a man in the Palsha FGD explained: *“An educated mother will be able to take better care of her child, compared to an uneducated mother.”* Education is also seen as a future investment and pathway out of poverty: an educated mother can contribute to her child’s education. A man in the Gokul FGD explained, *“... [it is important] to keep in step with the era and the country. Everyone is trying to educate their children because they do not have enough capital.”*

Another change is the demand for women with jobs. For example, in the Palsha men FGD, a participant,

speaking for the others, noted that in the past *“No one wanted to marry working women. Now, people are instead looking for women with jobs.”* As previously noted, there are stereotypes on the type of job a good wife should have (pink collar, teaching or working in an NGO).

Overall, the respondents noted that a good wife in the past was expected to never voice her opinion, be extremely obedient and only focus on her household reproductive roles. In the women’s FGD in Kashipur, a woman explained that in the past, a good wife was expected to *“Give food, be afraid of her husband, obey him, not do anything against his will, cook twice a day, always veil her head, not speak up even if she gets beaten and not go back to her father’s house out of anger.”* Similarly, in the women’s FGD in Thanapara, a respondent reported: *“She would have to love her in-laws’ house, not talk back or argue, be very patient, obtain permission from parents-in-law before going outside, greet father-in-law with salaam [Islamic salutation wishing peace upon others] and get permission before eating.”*

Men reported similar changes but begrudgingly. They explained that these changes are happening because women have become more aware and intelligent. A respondent in the men’s Basudevhati FGD explained, speaking for others: *“Women are becoming more modern and men are becoming aggressive. Women are becoming more educated than men. Mobile phones and TV are affecting relationships. Talented [intelligent] women move swiftly from divorce to their next marriage.”*

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*An educated mother will be able to take better care of her child, compared to an uneducated mother.*

A man in the Palsha FGD

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*In the past, no one wanted to marry working women. Now, people are instead looking for women with jobs.*

A man in the Palsha FGD

There were intersectional differences in attitudes on these changes. While demand for education was widely accepted, older men and women expressed a yearning for past expectations of a dutiful wife who did as she was told. Men from the Rajshahi Division (Rajshahi and Bogra Districts) mostly expressed dissatisfaction with the changes in good wife characteristics, especially around the expectations from a dutiful wife.

### 3.1.3.2 Changes in good husband characteristics

The data reveals changes in the livelihood, family background and knowledge expectations of a good husband. With increasing drug problems in some communities, women respondents deemed not being a drug addict a good husband characteristic.

Across all study sites, women and men generally reported that men who solely depend on agriculture are no longer good prospective husbands. Men with jobs rather than land are preferred. A man's family background has also lost its charm. However, in the past, agricultural land, pond, farming equipment, productive yield and family lineage were very important. A woman in the Kashipur FGD, speaking for others, explained, *"Back then, having a job was not that important; whether he has a house and land is what mattered more ... people used to think if a man has land, cows, and so on, then he will be able to survive by farming, even if he does not have a job."*

Linked to this, in the past, knowledge on farming was deemed more important than formal education. This

has now changed as parents seek educated husbands with jobs for their daughters. *"Education and jobs were not priorities at that time. Good family background was the main requirement"* explained a man in the Gokul FGD.

Drug addiction has emerged as a problem which is why families now seek bridegrooms without addiction problems. A woman in the Thanapara FGD explained: *"Back then, drug addiction was not very common, but now drug addiction is increasing."*

Overall, older women and men respondents perceived technology (i.e. mobile phones, social media) as influencing the youth to choose their own life partners, contrary to their parents' wishes. This leads to women sometimes choosing the wrong life-partner who does not have the income to provide for her. A woman in Udaysagar FGD reported: *"Now there are more love marriages. ... nowadays, it's like "fashion" for young boys. They will put on earphones, carry a mobile phone, wear sunglasses. Girls get impressed. Only after marriage do they realize what kind of men they married. They marry the man because they find him good-looking. But after marriage when the husband does not bring food home or provide everything, they regret it. That's when the conflicts between husband and wife start. Also, as the woman's lifestyle changes before and after marriage, she starts getting frustrated."*

Women in Rajshahi District (Bagsara village), Bogura District (Gokul village), Rangpur District (Thanapara village) and Gaibanda District (Chakrahimpur and Udaysagar villages) mentioned problems of drug addiction among men. It is unclear from the data what

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*Back then, having a job was not that important; whether he has a house and land is what mattered more...*

A woman in the Kashipur FGD

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*Education and jobs were not priorities at that time. Good family background was the main requirement.*

A man in the Gokul FGD

kinds of drug addiction the respondents are referring to. Job and education were deemed important for men across all study sites and they seemed to help men to refrain from drug addiction.

### 3.1.3.3 Perceptions regarding women's and men's work

The data suggests an enhanced appreciation of women's work and their economic contributions to the household. But stereotyped notions persist on where and in what role a woman is to work. These stereotypes are different and further segmented by intersectional identities.

Men and women respondents across most study sites agreed that women's work helps run the household better, and increases economic returns. A woman in the Thanapara FGD explained, "... since both men and women work and earn, there is less poverty". A man in the same location appreciated his wife's support: "... It's impossible to run the family without my wife's help."

There were some contrary views as well, especially on valuing women's reproductive work. A woman in Udaysagar, speaking for other women, was frustrated by men not recognizing or valuing their workload at home, "Men say things like 'Try working outside and earning instead of sitting at home.' Men do not realize that staying at home and maintaining the household is not

an easy task. If they knew how hard it is, they would never say such things to their wives." Some men did recognize that women's reproductive roles are essential to sustain family economic livelihoods efficiently.

Certain types of work are seen as mainly the preserve of women. For example, a man in the Basudevhati FGD explained: "Poultry, cow-rearing, making sacks for plants etc. are female-dominated. Women's involvement in these occupations is high because these occupations are home-based and women have become skillful in them."

Women who dare to venture into "non-woman" work face repercussions. For example, a woman who took up fish farming in Bagsara said in an IDI, "No one accepts it. Do you think anyone can accept that women will work? Even if let's say it was a formal job in an institution, not everyone would find it acceptable." A woman in the Palsha FGD explained how breaking stereotypes leads to gossiping, "They will gossip. But if I have ability to do what I'm doing, then it doesn't matter because I am earning money for myself."

Regarding men's work, the data reveals strong stereotypes despite the perception that men need their wife's supplemental income to run the family. Men in the Kashipur FGD explained how stereotypes inhibit men from reproductive work. Doing so erodes a man's standing, respect and reputation. "It's all about social beliefs. People believe that women should not work outside.

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... since both men and women work and earn, there is less poverty.

A woman in the Thanapara FGD

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Wives do work and contribute to family and husbands are dependent on their wives' income.

A woman in the Gokul FGD

*Men don't clean the yard, don't wash the dishes and don't cook due to beliefs these are tasks for women." A Thanapara men FGD participant noted, "It's difficult for a husband to maintain an educated woman. Sometimes an educated woman asks her husband to cook. It's disrespectful to a man. Later, it creates problems in conjugal life."*

Some women reported men are actually dependent on their wife's income contribution. A woman in the Gokul FGD, in agreement with others, reported: *"Wives do work and contribute to family and husbands are dependent on their wives' income."*

Intersectional aspects of wealth and marital status influence perceptions on women's work, and acceptance of it. Widows and wives of migrants are allowed to work in the field, and poor women to work in factories, but not other wives. A man in the Basudevhati FGD reported: *"Only widows can cultivate land either themselves or by labor. Women whose husbands are rich can go to the field though people criticize it sometimes. . . A very small number of women who are really poor and helpless work in factories"*. Women from households with better wealth status face work restrictions unlike women from poor households.

There were no significant differences across sites. Participants were positive on women's work especially in contributing to the economic welfare of the household. The only negative perception was on women going outside the household to work, especially in non-pink collar jobs and in jobs where they have to interact with other men. This was common in most study sites. Stereotyped notions of women's and men's work were also common across sites.

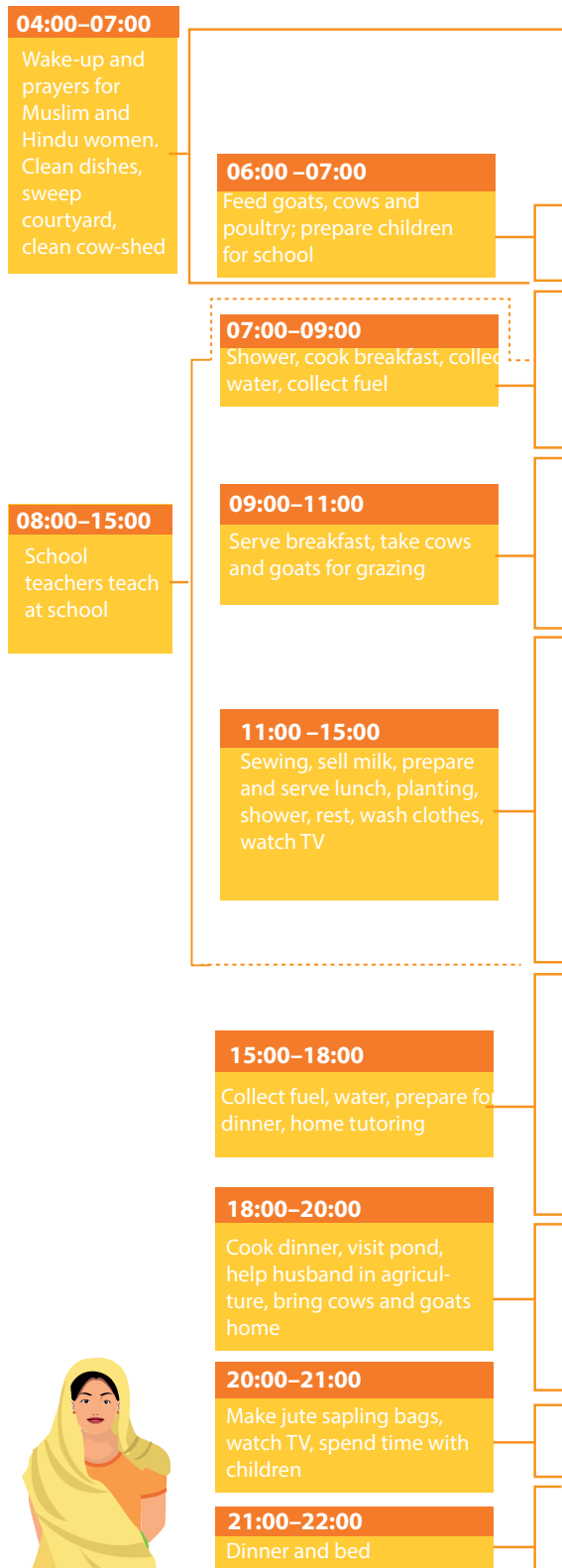
### 3.1.4 Gender division of labor in the household

A daily-activity clock exercise (Figure 2) was conducted with men and women respondents during the IDIs. This gives insight into the gendered division of labor in rural agricultural households. There are some time overlaps as data was consolidated across a number of households with different livelihoods, routines and religion. On a daily basis, women have a wider range of responsibilities than men. This is due to the household responsibilities of cooking, cleaning and taking care of children in which men do not necessarily participate. Women usually perform these activities in addition to their productive roles, giving them a double burden.



Figure 2. Typical daily activity clocks for women and men.

## Woman



## Man



Source: Men and women IDIs

Table 6 covers an intersection of men and women across different livelihoods and religions (i.e. Hindu and Muslim). Men and women across the study sites engage in a wide range of income-earning activities. Many men work on agriculture and aquaculture while having other businesses and jobs. Women too work in many capacities whilst balancing their household responsibilities, supporting their husbands and engaging in their own economic activities. Women's double work burdens were evident across all sites. Men's reproductive labor contributions are minimal except when women are sick or away from home.

### 3.1.5 Decision-making

The data reveals varying trends in the decision-making process and the underlying gender normative reasons. A strong and common thread is that men have the final say in decision-making and women need permission before any action. However, women are consulted or their opinions given importance over resources they use, oversee, own or provide labor for. Sole decision-making by women is still uncommon. Knowledge, attitudes towards women's abilities and trust all have a bearing on the power of women to make decisions.

There was consensus across participants and sites that men have the final say in decisions. A woman, speaking for others in the Gokul FGD explained, *"Generally, women are the ones who have to compromise in case of disagreement."* A woman in the Chakrahimpur FGD explained why: *"A husband's decision prevails because*

*a wife's views are generally given less importance."* In Bagsara, women explained how they have to obey their husbands' orders in fish farming, *"A wife cannot make any decisions on her own regarding fish farming. If the husband says that fish feed is needed, then she can prepare and make fish feed ready but she cannot physically go to the pond. After fish is harvested, it is sent home with another man. Women are not allowed to visit the pond at all."*

Women have some say in decision-making over resources they look after. *"Women usually look after the cows and goats so they are allowed to make decisions. However, in case of disagreements, the husband's decision prevails,"* explained women during an FGD in Basudevhati.

Respondents deemed ownership as an important factor influencing decision-making power. *"Women don't own the land; their husbands own the land or ponds which is why it is difficult for women to do it [take decisions] solely"* explained a woman in Gokul during an FGD. Women can however make decisions over resources they own and which men do not use, like poultry and sewing machines.

Women across sites acknowledged that compared to 10 years ago, they have more decision-making power than before because they are more involved in productive work than in the past. Their labor contributions, support to household livelihood activities and their own income contributions help them gain the skills, knowledge and respect necessary to make informed decisions. In

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*Generally, women are the ones who have to compromise in case of disagreement.*

A woman in the Gokul FGD

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*Women don't own the land; their husbands own the land or ponds which is why it is difficult for women to do it [take decisions] solely*

A woman in the Gokul FGD

an IDI in Chakrahimpur, a man respondent explained why he pays heed to his wife's opinions, *"I must give her importance. She helps me a lot."*

Men across a number of FGDs acknowledged joint decision-making as important for a family's success. For example, in Palsha, a man, speaking for others, explained, *"I think couples who discuss, make joint decisions and work together will definitely be successful."* A man, during an IDI in Basudevhati reflected on this norm of decision-making by men alone, *"A woman can't take decisions [by] herself but a man can. Man and woman should take the decisions together. If he takes the decision alone then it leads to a mess."*

However, gendered attitudes linger on women's decision-making ability. Some men and women believe that women don't have the requisite knowledge or that emotions may interfere with logic. A man from Gokul explained during an IDI, *"I take the decisions most of the time because she doesn't know more than me."* In a men's FGD in Thanapara, discussants mentioned that they take women's decisions into account because if they don't, women get emotional. Other men in the same village noted that in some cases it is better that they keep information to themselves. Men said they only share vital issues with their wives. A man respondent in the Thanapara FGD noted, *"Sometimes sharing everything with them [women] creates problems."*

Participants—mostly women—pointed out the problems with women's lack of resource control and decision-making power. Women in Kashipur noted: *"A wife needs to manage all the family expenses within the budget provided. Sometimes it is burden for a woman because the husband is not very conversant on family matters."* This is why women said they sometimes have to use subterfuge to get money from their husbands, even though they do not use the money for themselves. As was explained by women in the Udaysagar FGD, *"Some women get money from their husbands by lying. Husbands do not give any pocket money to wives. But they spend money for their child's education, or on whatever their children want from them."* This means that if their husbands did give them pocket money, they would have spent on their children and not themselves but they still have to struggle to get money and therefore sometimes they have to resort to lying. So they are forced into deception to get money from their husbands for family expenses.

Age, position in the family, resource ownership, knowledge or education and how long they have been married all influence women's decision-making abilities. A woman in an IDI in Bagsara explained: *"I have more decision-making power now. Because now I have children and grandchildren. I look after the family and their upbringing."* There were no substantial site-specific differences in decision-making trends.

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*I think couples who discuss, make joint decisions and work together will definitely be successful.*

A man in the Gokul FGD

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*I have more decision-making power now. Because now I have children and grandchildren.*

A woman in an IDI in Bagsara



### 3.1.6 Mobility (general)

Women face mobility constraints from men and family members. Any external movement usually requires permission. Market mobility (discussed in section 3.5.2) and work outside the home are especially problematic. The underlying reasons behind these mobility constraints include household responsibilities, religious norms around purdah and male insecurities on women interacting with other men, even for utilitarian needs. Men in an FGD in Udaysagar summarized the normative and attitudinal problems surrounding women's mobility, "Muslim parents don't allow wives to work outside as a religious rule ... It's the problem of our mentality. Even now, the society still controls women's mobility."

In Basudevhati, the men said, "Divorce is very common nowadays." while the women said, "They [men] don't like their wives going outdoors too much, so that she does not cheat on him ... if a husband does not trust his wife, then he will not allow [her mobility]." Generally, women are not allowed to work outside the home to protect family reputation. When they are allowed to, it is only for jobs that society deems respectful and that conform to accepted norms for women. A Gokul man explained in an IDI: "It's a social problem here. Women are not allowed to work outside but if they work as a teacher or other respectful job then it's okay." Women also have household work which further limits their mobility. Child-care and unpaid care work hinder their ability to seek work outside.

Respondents reported women's mobility decreases after marriage. Men in the Chakrahimpur FGD explained: "They go to school before marriage, but when they marry they don't know how it will be taken if she goes outside." However, older women, widows, women with absent or sick husbands and poor women have more mobility.

### 3.1.7 Resource access and control

The data reveals gendered differences in resource access and control for men and women. Women do not necessarily control the resources they have access to, while men have greater access and control over all resources. During the FGDs, men and women were asked to list the resources that they and the opposite sex have access to and control over. Using a word-frequency query on NVivo, the word-cloud figures below paint a picture of the differentials for men and women in resource access and control.

Figure 3 depicts the top resources men and women have deemed women as having access to and control over. Women have access to loans, cows, ducks, education, family, fish, chicken, goats and feed. However, the top resources women control are cows, chickens, goats, family, children, ponds, feed, fish, sewing, farming and jewelry. These are ordered by frequency of mention. Women have access to but lack control over loans and their education.

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*It's a social problem here. Women are not allowed to work outside but if they work as a teacher or other respectful job then it's okay.*

A man in an IDI in Gokul

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*They go to school before marriage, but when they marry they don't know how it will be taken if she goes outside.*

Men in the Chakrahimpur FGD



## 3.2 Women and men empowerment assessment

For a self-assessment of their own empowerment, IDI respondents were asked to place themselves on a ladder twice: empowerment now, and empowerment 10 years ago.

Figure 5. Ladder of power and freedom



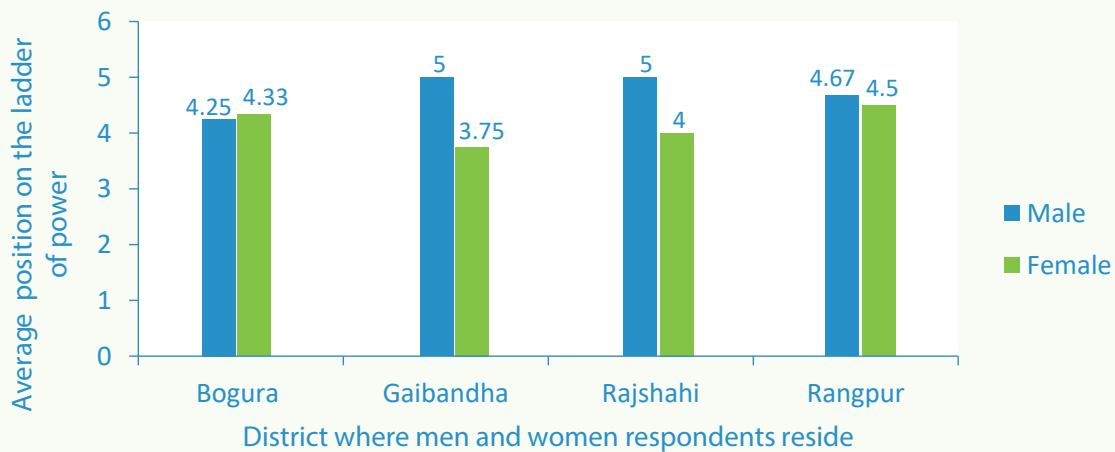
Source: Petesch, Badstue, Prain (2018)

### 3.2.1 Empowerment now, and 10 years ago

Sex is not the only determinant for position on the ladder. Figure 6 shows that although men are usually

higher up in the ladder, women place themselves not far behind. There were site-specific differences. In Bogura women perceive themselves as slightly more empowered than the men.

Figure 6. Men and women's average position on ladder of power and freedom now, by district.

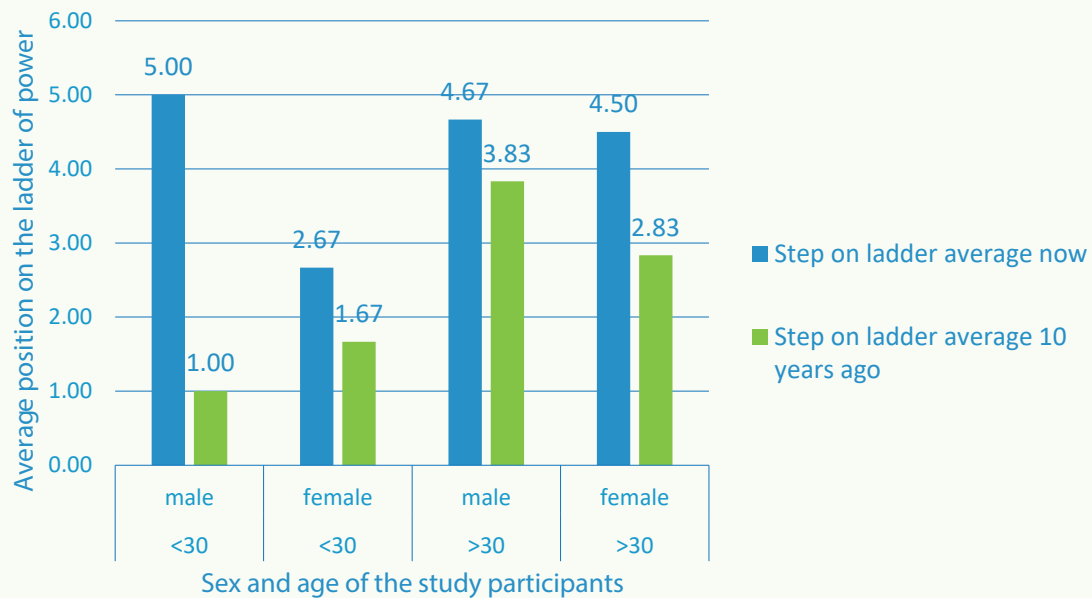


Source: Men and women IDIs

Figure 7 shows that both men and women perceive their empowerment to have increased from 10 years ago. Age played a major role for both men and women in their position on the ladder. In their youth (below 30),

men experienced a great increase in their perception of power and freedom, and then a milder increase in later years. Women did not feel very empowered until their later years.

Figure 7. Men and women's position on ladder today, and 10 years ago, by age.



Source: Men and women IDIs

Both men and women saw intersectional factors influencing their position on the ladder, including ownership and control over assets, level of education, mobility, physical health, having a male child (especially for women), years of marriage, and “hard work”. For example, women from educated families experienced higher levels of freedom and decision-making. A woman from Udaysar said during an IDI, *“My husband and his father are educated. So they always ask for my opinions and discuss with me.”* Old age and sickness also influence empowerment. *“I am economically poor and physically sick. So, I can’t make any good decisions,”* said a man IDI respondent from Bogra. There were mixed feelings about freedom before and after marriage. Many of the women IDI respondents got married at a young age, without their formal consent and without having first met their husbands-to-be. They therefore believe they have more freedom after marriage.

A woman respondent from Basudevhati described how her power and freedom changed over the years. *“I got married when I was 11 years old ... I was married to someone who already had a wife. She was very ill, so he left her and married me. He was from a very poor background. He worked as a day laborer at 40-taka rate. My father was well off, he had 40 bigha land. He was worried that no one would marry me because I am dark. My husband showed interest in marrying me, so they agreed. I couldn’t disagree*

*with my parents. But I am doing well now.”* She was so young when she got married that she did not know about childbirth. *“I got married at a very young age. Right after marriage, I had a miscarriage. And then years later, I had my son. When I had the miscarriage, I did not know how children are born.”* She explained that over the years her life improved and she is now able to make small decisions because she earns an income by making jute sacks. Her husband, being old and a day laborer, did not earn enough but does not take her money. She even managed to take a loan and buy land in her own and her son’s name.

A second female respondent from Udaysagar reported two different perspectives on the different types of power and freedom she experienced before and after marriage. *“Unmarried life is much better than married life. When you are unmarried, you can do whatever you want. But after marriage you have to get approval from everyone and satisfy everyone’s demands...”* The same respondent explained that before marriage *“It’s easier to do things for your own self. But now there’s more freedom to make decisions to improve the family’s financial condition, think of new sources of income, plan for our children’s future.”*

## 3.3. Production

### 3.3.1 Production-related norms (‘good farmer’)

For a better understanding of the gendered social expectations of farmers and production-related norms, participants were asked to reflect on the characteristics of a good woman and a good man farmer. This data is consolidated from all the women FGDs in Table 6 and for all men FGDs in Table 7.

In determining the characteristics of a good woman farmer, women respondents set out the criteria needed

for a woman to be a good farmer. Not surprisingly, these revolve around their gendered limitations on mobility and decision-making. They include men providing the required inputs for women, the pond, land, training close to home, not being required to go to market and requiring husband’s permission. They also mentioned ignoring rumors and gossip. Interestingly, women also mentioned their supportive role towards their husband as a good woman farmer characteristic, even though supportive roles are not always deemed as farmer roles.

Table 6. Women's perspectives on characteristics of a good man and a good woman farmer.

Good woman farmer	Good man farmer	Good woman farmer	Good man farmer
Good attitude	Good attitude	Supports husband financially	
Savings, capital	Good income, savings		Required inputs brought by husband
Proper use of money	Not wasting money	Experienced	Experienced
Makes profit	Make sufficient income	Ignore village rumors and gossip	
Trustworthy, reliable and social, well-behaved	Good networks, well-behaved, trustworthy		Not abusing drugs
Knowledgeable and teaches others	Knowledgeable		Able to take loans
Supportive towards husband	Supports wife's		Education
Good communication			Not lazy
Trained	Trained		Makes plans
Knows how to cook			Physical ability to work
Seeks husband's support and permission			Owns and care for land and pond
Willingness, determination			Familiar with the technology
Taking care of the pond, taking care of the land, gets agricultural related training close to home		Knows about the technology	
Not required to go to market			Able to tolerate sunlight

Source: Women FGDs



Interestingly, in listing out the characteristics, the men respondents revealed how they perceive women doing agricultural work, i.e. supporting the husband by storing the seeds and crops, processing and even cooking. This indicates the level to which men perceive women as farmers, which is bracketed by their stereotypes regarding gender roles. Furthermore, women urged about the importance of communicating with the market so that buyers can be contacted during harvests and can buy their produce from the farm gate thus not

having to go to the market themselves and addressing their mobility constraints. Both men and women emphasized support from the family or husband as essential for women to be good farmers. Knowledge was important for both groups. Men specified the types of knowledge required. Interestingly, the men felt women's knowledge on quality seeds and fingerlings was enough whereas for themselves (i.e. men) women, this extended to water, disease, fertilizer, among others.



Table 7. Men's perspectives on characteristics of a good man and a good woman farmer.

Good woman farmer	Good man farmer
	Ensures quality inputs
Helps the male farmer	
Knowledgeable about quality seeds and fingerlings	Knowledgeable about seeds, water, disease, composts, fertilizer, seasons, marketing
Keeping time/punctuality e.g., cooks on time	Keeping time/punctuality
	Good lands
	Knows how to use technology
Capital	Capital
Trained	Trained
Takes care/looks after the household and children when husband is away	Good caretaker
Industrious	Industrious
	Experienced
	Intelligent
Support from family or husband	
Saves crops from animals	
Stores seeds, crops	
Thrashes and processes the paddy	
Raises livestock	

Source: Men FGDs





There were no observed intersectional differences. Women across all sites mentioned husband's permission as essential. Men across all sites emphasized the need for a husband's support to be a good woman farmer. Men and women in Rangpur District (Thanapara and Kashipur villages) and Gaibanda District (Udaysagar and Chakrahimpur villages) expressed household work and cooking as important for women to be good farmers. A man in Palsha said, speaking for other FGD respondents, remarked how women's training and enhanced aquaculture knowledge could be beneficial for men, "Let's say if I am not at home and all of a sudden there is a problem in a pond, then she can be asked to look after the issue if she is smart and knowledgeable." As is discussed in section 3.3.2, more men across study sites acknowledged women's support and knowledge in agriculture as important for their (men's) success.

### 3.3.2 Gendered innovation

This section looks at the innovations men and women avail themselves of, and the enabling and constraining factors behind innovation uptake.

#### 3.3.2.1 Patterns: New Innovations for men and women

The data reveals gender-differentiated new agricultural practices across the study sites, predominantly for men. Cow-raising and multi-cropping were the only two new practices that were identified for women. Figure 8 lists these new practices for men.

Figure 8. New agricultural practices for men over the last 10 years



Source: Men and women FGDs

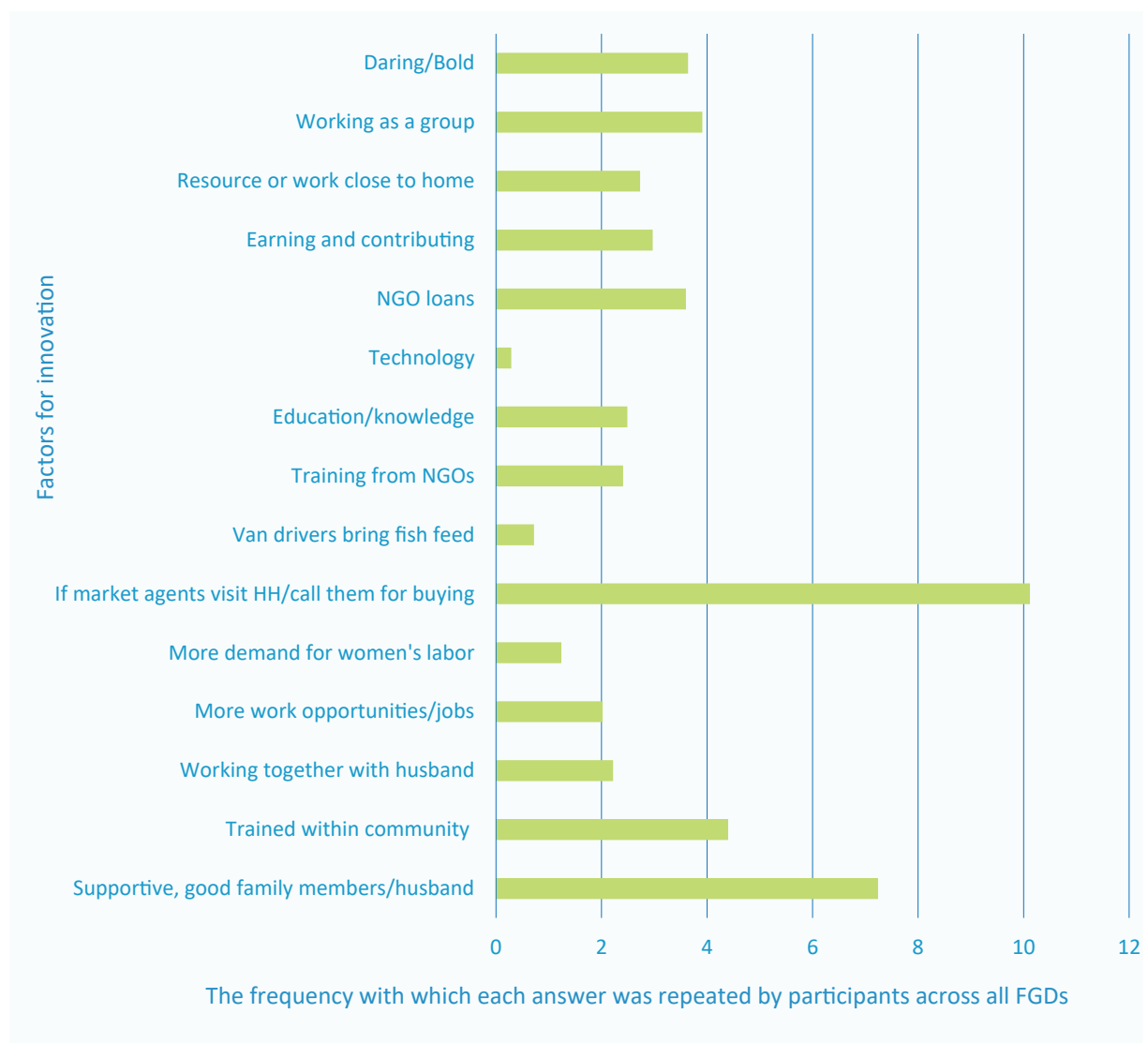
There were some geographical variations. New agricultural practices for women were only reported in Gaibanda (multi-cropping) while men in Gaibandha reported cow-raising for women. Gaibanda had the largest number of new innovations for men.

frequency of each enabling factor reported by women across study sites. The top factors for women are: (i) market agents buying their produce from the farm gate, and (ii) a supportive family and/or husband.

### 3.3.2.2 Enabling and constraining factors for men and women to innovate

Women and men reported innovation enablers at household production level. Figure 9 shows the

Figure 9. Enabling factors for women to innovate, as reported by women.

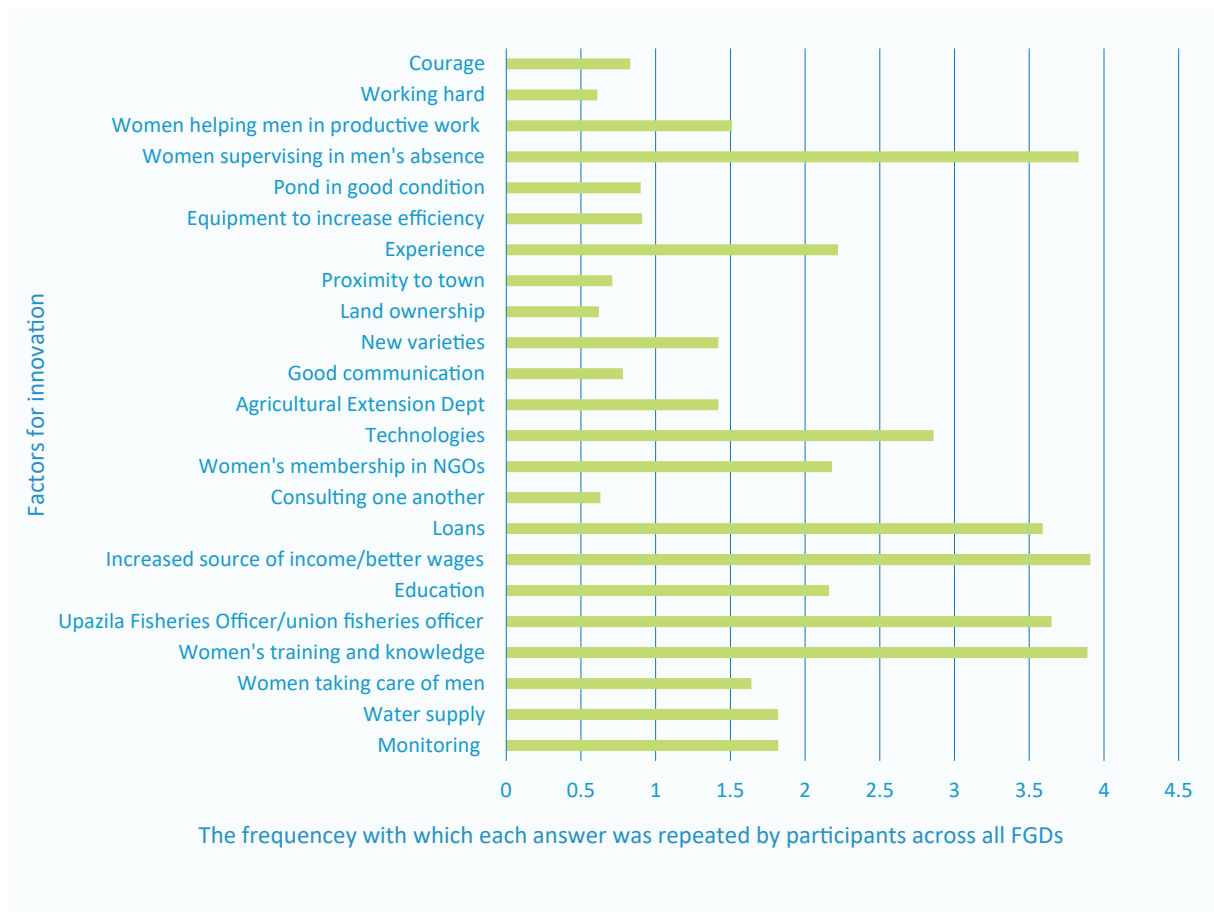


Source: Women FGDs

Figure 10 shows the frequency of each enabling factor that was reported by men across study sites. Men attributed women's assistance as their top enabling factor. Other factors included women helping to supervise in men's absence, women's training and

knowledge, and women helping men in their productive work. Apart from women supervising, men's top enabling factors are more sources of income, support from fisheries officers and loans.

Figure 10. Enabling factors for men to innovate, as reported by men.

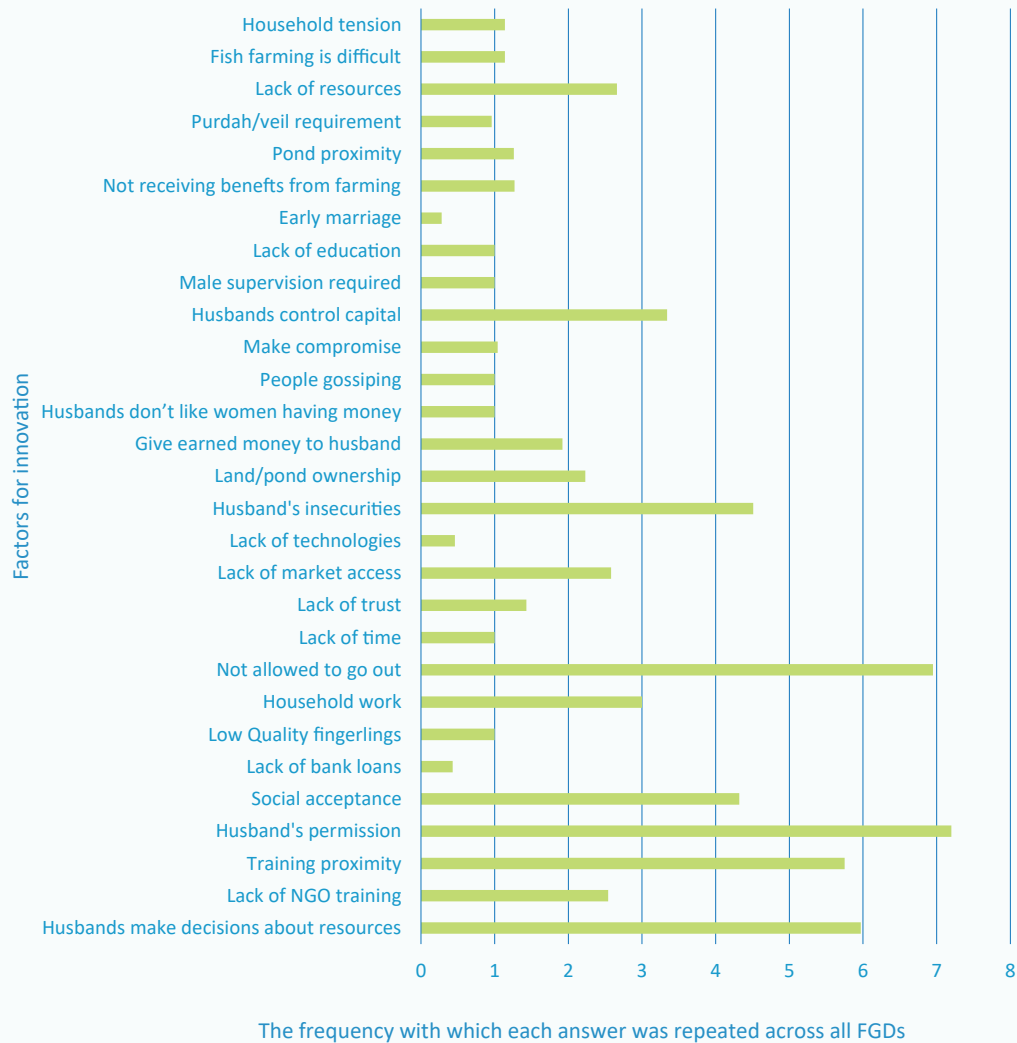


Source: Men FGDs

Figure 11 shows the frequency across all study sites of each constraining factor for women, reported by the women themselves. Many of the inhibitors are gender-related. The top inhibitor is the requirement for husband's permission, followed by lack of mobility to pursue external work or businesses. Social acceptance, husband's controlling the capital and lack of resources were also commonly mentioned as major

constraining factors. Men in Chakrahimpur explained the consequences of women's disobedience: "If she doesn't obey her husband, then it will cause chaos in their conjugal life." The constraints above are closely followed by men's insecurities for women interacting with other men accompanied by fear of women cheating on them.

Figure 11. Constraining factors for women to innovate, as reported by women.

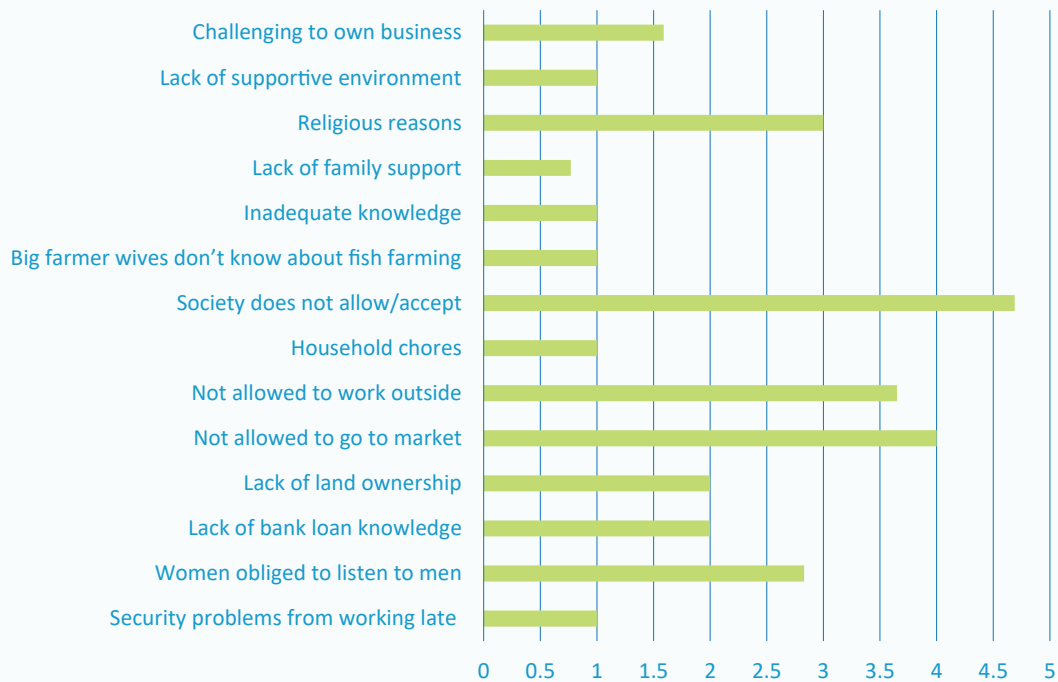


Source: Women FGDs

Figure 12 below shows the frequency across all study sites of each constraining factor for women that has been reported by men. The biggest constraining factor for women reported by men is that society will not allow or accept for women to perform or take up non-

traditional roles or innovations. Other prohibitive factors were religion and not being allowed to work outside or go to the market.

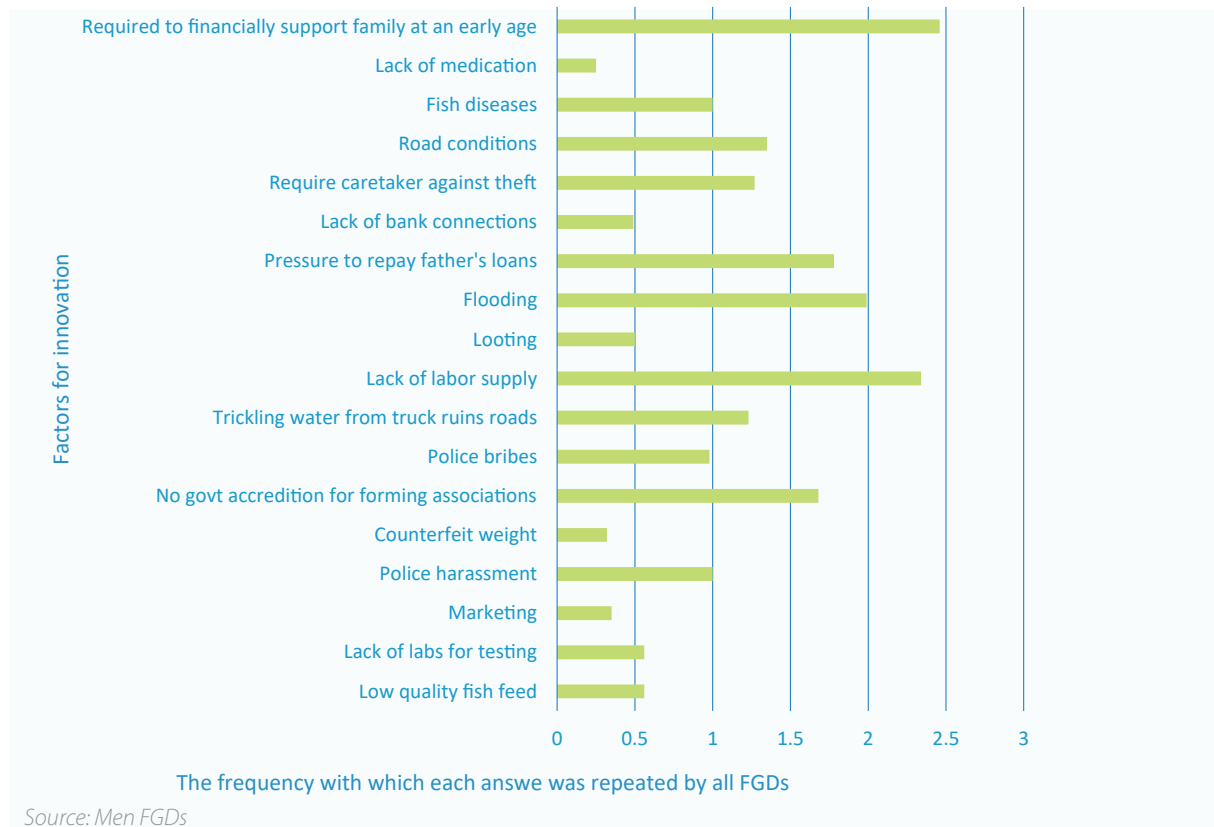
Figure 12. Constraining factors for women, as reported by men.



Source: Men FGDs

Figure 13 shows the frequency across all study sites of each constraining factor for men that was reported by men. The main constraint is the requirement to financially support their families at an early age, often at the expense of their own education. Men also lack labor supply, are hindered by flooding and lack the ability to form formal groups or associations to protect themselves from market corruption.

Figure 13. Constraining factors for men, as reported by men.



Source: Men FGDs

For women, social norms and gender relations greatly influence enabling and constraining factors at the household production level. For men, there was a general acknowledgement across sites that women's support is essential for their ability to innovate at the household production level. There are intersectional differences in enabling and constraining factors for both men and women: wealth status, means of earning a living, education, age and marital status. There were no prominent site-specific differences.

## 3.4 Groups

The data revealed two major groups arising from NGO activity in the study sites: training and micro-credit facilities. These groups provide skills and loans.

NGOs were present across all study sites. Women noted the dramatic rise of NGO presence in the last 10 years and the benefits they have brought to rural women. Goat- and cow-rearing, and sewing and stitching are the two main skills women were trained in by NGOs. This enhanced their skills and gave them better control over their livelihoods (see section 3.1.6). The skills group and NGO presence are a rallying point that helps them

consult one another or with the NGO to discuss and solve problems. Women in the study areas are more confident in pursuing economic activities when in a group with other women.

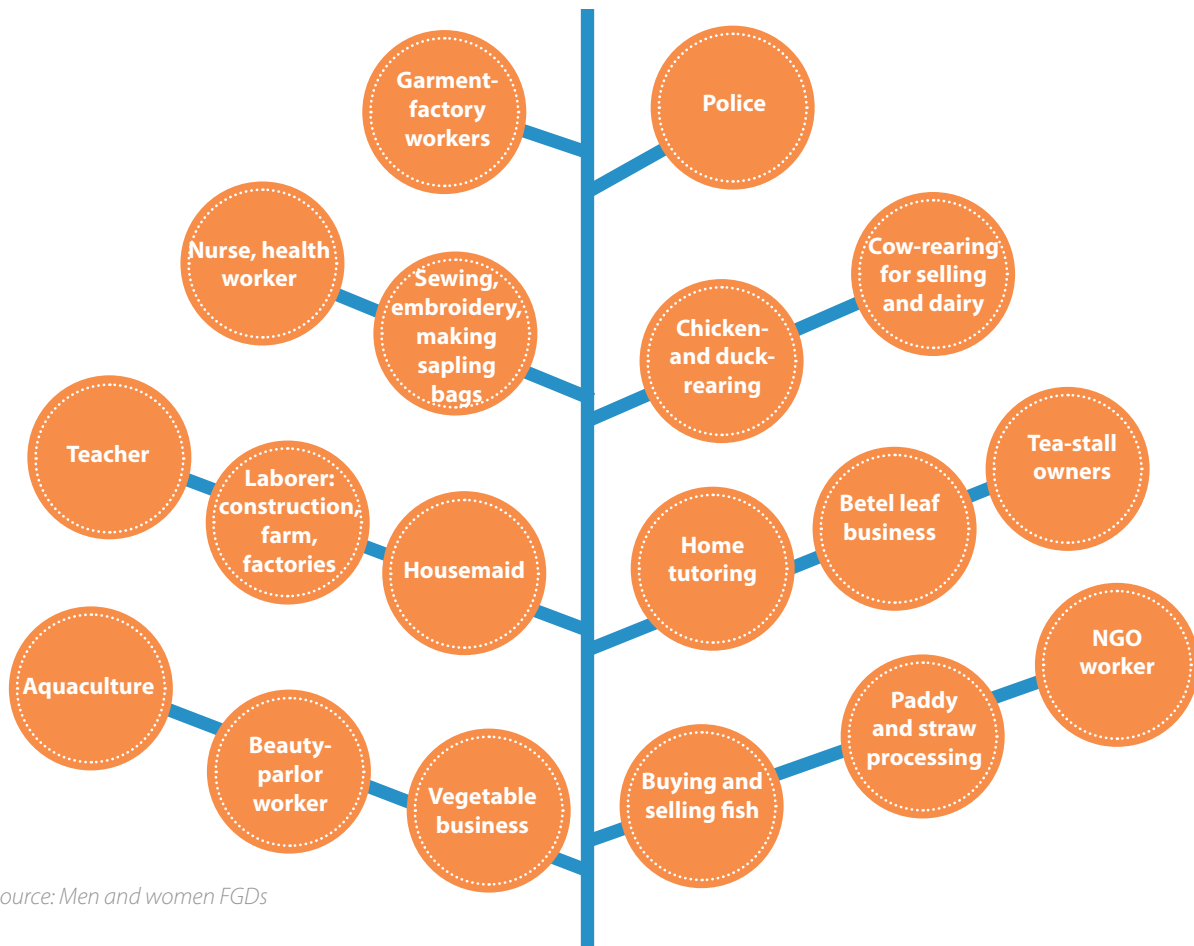
The men appreciate the loans these NGOs provide to their spouses through micro-credit facilities. Men convince or coerce their spouses to join micro-credit groups so that they can take loans. This is further discussed in section 3.5.3 (Credit). In contrast, men find it difficult to form formal groups or associations to protect themselves from market corruption.

## 3.5 Markets

### 3.5.1 Gendered job or entrepreneurial opportunities

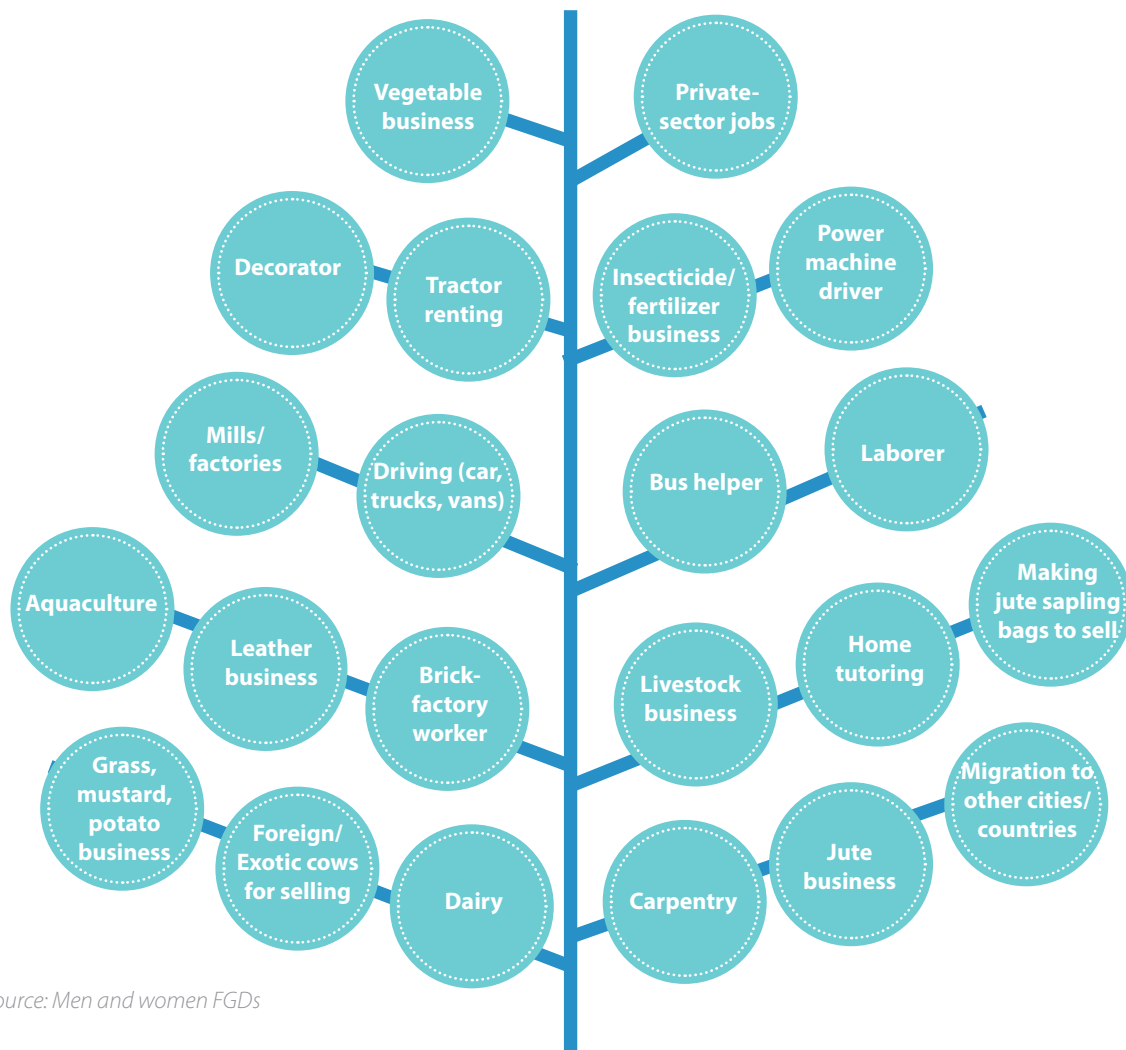
The data reveals stereotypical gender differences in existing job and entrepreneurial opportunities for men and women and how these opportunities have changed over the past 10 years. Figures 14 a and b below depicts the job and entrepreneurial opportunities that are currently available for men and women across study sites.

Figure 14 a. Current job/entrepreneurial opportunities for women



Source: Men and women FGDs

Figure 14 b. Current job/entrepreneurial opportunities for men



Source: Men and women FGDs

Participants reflected on the changes in these job and entrepreneurial opportunities compared to 10 years ago. With landholdings continually shrinking, the biggest change for men is that they are now valuing opportunities that depend less on land. They are thus taking up more opportunities along the agricultural value chain—in transportation, input and other businesses, and private-sector jobs. The biggest change for women is that they mostly handled household domestic responsibilities in the past but are now more engaged in income-earning activities.

However, with more women entering the workforce and with less opportunities for women in general, the increasing supply of willing women workers means

they are often exploited. Women are paid less than men. For example, in Bagsara, the women FGD participants reported, “More women are hired as day laborers because they are paid a lower wage.” Confirming this, a man in the Thanapara FGD explained why he hires women laborers, “Women and men don’t get the same remuneration for many types of work. Men workers get 350 taka and women workers get 250 taka for the same work. Even as women workers typically work harder than men.” This finding underscores the need for stronger labor laws that ensure equal pay for equal work for men and women.

Respondents also reflected on the reasons for changes in job opportunities. For women, while education and awareness (helped by NGOs) were major causes for the

changes in job opportunities, one common thread was the economic imperative to contribute and provide for family and children. A woman in the Kashipur FGD explained, *“There was more struggle before because husbands were the main earner in the family; we cannot depend entirely on our husbands to provide for us... Even if my husband does not provide... I will be able to manage.”* For men, technology played a great part in this change. Climate risks (droughts, floods) have also been mitigated through new technologies. Fish farming and related businesses are also more profitable livelihood prospects now.

There are intersectional differences in the job opportunities that men and women avail themselves of. Poorer women seek jobs as laborers and in factories. Educated women take up teaching or NGO jobs. The agricultural and non-agricultural entrepreneurial opportunities are usually taken up by women in the homestead. Some women have broken with tradition/norms and sell fish (e.g. in Bagsara) or engage in aquaculture production. There are site-specific differences in job opportunities and entrepreneurs. For example, although not many, the data revealed positive-deviating women entrepreneurs in most sites, e.g. Bagsara and Chakrahimppur.

### 3.5.2 Market mobility: patterns, enablers, constraints

Market mobility is a major hindrance for women’s access. However, there were mixed positive and negative responses on women going to the market, with

variations across sites. Reasons for market immobility range from the market being a difficult environment for women to navigate, to women going to the market not being socially acceptable. Nevertheless, respondents provided solutions for women to access and benefit from markets.

A unique woman fish farmer from Bagsara explained her market mobility: *“I take the fish to the market and sell them. I do everything myself. My husband has never gone to the market these past three years. I go to the market every Friday. I sell most of the fish at Durgapur Bazar from 2 to 2.30 pm. I always try to go on the first trip with the pick-up van [public transport].”*

She ignores the ramifications on her reputation: *“People can think whatever they want; I do not worry about it. My dignity is up to me. I live with my husband. What others think is none of my business. A lot of people backbite me and gossip. People will always do that. But it does not make any difference to me.”*

On a brighter note, women respondents across sites explained how the market is a much safer place compared to the past. Accordingly, a woman in Gokul explained on women venturing out: *“... it [security issues] is not very common now. Even teasing, catcalling, and such have reduced. Women are now brave. There are no security issues.”*



*There was more struggle before because husbands were the main earner in the family; we cannot depend entirely on our husbands to provide for us*

*A woman in the Kashipur FGD*



Respondents—especially the men—emphasized that the market is no place for women. Various reasons were given.

**Hard environment:** with which women and old people cannot cope. A man from Bagsara said in an IDI, *“They can’t do this because we sell fish in Dhaka and go there by truck. It is tough for the elderly and women.”* Another man IDI respondent from Thanapara explained, *“Many women are interested to work outside. In that case, they can do office jobs. But doing business in the market is a bit challenging.”*

**Women feel insecure in the market:** A man from Chakrahimpur said in an IDI, *“I think it is in the marketplace [that women feel insecure].”*

**Society will not accept a middle-class woman in the marketplace:** Only the poor. A man from Thanapara said in an IDI, *“Women are running small shops like tea stalls, but they are poor. Middle-class women will not be able to run their own business as society will not accept this. According to our culture, we can’t allow our women to be part of the bazar (market).”*

**Husbands will not allow women to go to the market:** because they will have to interact with unknown men. A woman key informant from Gokul said, *“They can [earn] if their husbands sell it [what the women produce] in the market. Husbands will not allow them to go to the market.”*

**Women do not have time to go to the market:** as reported by a woman from Gokul in an IDI, *“If they can stay home, it would be better. There are a lot of household responsibilities. It is difficult to find time to go to the market.”*

**It is not the norm for women to go the market:** A man FGD participant from Palsha said, *“There are responsible men or women who want to get involved but we do not have such practice in our area. If I am not here, then there will automatically be someone as backup who will be able to take care of the matter. The women can get the work done through another person (man). Women don’t go to the market in our area. There is no such system so we don’t consider it.”*

**Distance:** A Basudevhati woman FGD participant explained, *“Women can buy fish feed and other inputs if the shops are not too far and commuting easy.”*



## Respondent solutions to lack of market mobility for women are:



**Market access with the village** by the vans bringing feed to the village. A Kashipur woman FGD participant explained, *“They sell fish feed in a van, we buy from the van. Everything is done within the village and we do not physically go to the market.”*



**Market proximity:** Women can access the market better if it is close to the village. A woman in a Gokul female FGD explained, *“The first thing she needs is support from her husband. Then, everything (land, ponds, training, market etc.) should be within a certain distance close to their homes.”*



**Market actors buying fish from the farm,** as explained by a woman from Kashipur in an IDI, *“The market agents come to the village to buy fish from us. We call them and they come to see the fish. They check the size, then bargain the price and buy in cash ... I sit with a pen and paper to make all the calculations.”* Another woman from the same village participating in the FGD noted, *“Market agents visit village homes and buy from us... The price is bargained and fixed at market prior to selling. So we don't make any loss.”*



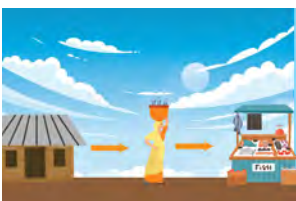
**Interacting with trusted, known men, and market actors:** A Gokul woman FGD participant said, *“Husbands do not like to see their wives working or doing business with other unknown men and interacting with them.”*



**Work together with husbands and their intermediaries:** A man from Kashipur said in an IDI, *“When the fishermen come, I fix a rate to sell the fish. Then I go to the field. My wife supervises the process, weighs the fish, and collects the money from them [fishermen].”* A man in the Palsha FGD reported that, *“Let's say I went away to Dhaka and I am in need of money, say 2 lakh taka. If I don't have the money and need to sell fish to get the money, I would tell her [wife] what size of fish to send to the market, through any man from home or our area. Things can be done this way. In such cases, there is no need for women to go to the marketplace.”*



**Working in Groups:** Women reported that working with other women would make it possible to sell fish in the market as a group, even though they expressed worries of getting the right prices or sharing the profits. *“If we do that [work in groups] with other women, it is possible [to sell fish in the market] but it will be tough to get the profit money in our hands. It will be tough without male supervision. But if society accepts this then it will be not a big deal.”* Palsha Female FGD.



**Women working as Faria's (buy from farmers and sell in local mkt):** Men in Bagsara felt women could become Faria's as they already have a woman faria in their village. *“She buys fish from us and sell them in other local markets... there are no problems in our area in the case of women's mobility.”* Reported the men in Bagsara. This could possibly be the case with poorer women with lesser mobility constraints. These women Faria's can help women farmers sell fish in the market.

Intersectional differences were noted in the types of women able to access the market with societal approval. They are widows and women whose husbands are absent and who usually have no alternative, and poor women for whom economic needs override reputation concerns. There were site-specific differences in perceptions on market mobility. In Rajshahi District (Palsha and Bagsara villages), men expressed positive perceptions about women's market mobility. Women in Bogra District (Gokul and Basudevhati villages) had the most negative perceptions. There were further geographical variations in areas where participants reported the restrictions as more relaxed. For example, even though most men reported negative perceptions about women's market mobility, women in Thanapara, Rangpur and Kashipur in Bogra District explained that market mobility is not an issue in their villages and that most women buy almost everything from the market. It could however become an issue when it is a matter of selling rather than buying at the market. However, there was a positively deviating woman *faria* in Bagsara village where the men reported no issues with women's market mobility. A *faria* buys fish from farmers and sells them in the local market. However, it may be because these women are from a poorer socio-economic class.

### 3.5.3 Credit

The data revealed that most of the respondents have taken loans for various purposes. Micro-credit loans are the most common but are provided exclusively to women. The study however revealed that despite this exclusivity, ultimately, men mostly control how the loans will be used. Common loaning institutions are Grameen Bank, Grameen Shakti, TMMS, Islamic Bank, GUK, Manobik and Udoyon. Many of these institutions only provide loans to women. But to qualify, women must be members of NGO micro-credit groups, they must sign for the loan, and in most cases the husband must also co-sign the loan. However, husbands cannot alone access these loans and the loans are in the woman's names. There is a common belief that NGOs provide loans only to women. This is because women are home most of the time and therefore more readily available, thus providing an opportune for the NGO loan collectors to come to pick up the installments. This is

perhaps because women are resident and therefore more readily available for NGO activities. A man from Thanapara explained in an IDI, *"Because women stay home, they are available to repay the loan. Men work outside the home in most cases. That's why NGOs don't take them [men] as a member."*

A major problem for women is being forced by their husbands to take loans. A woman in the Kashipur FGD explained, *"Some husbands force her to take loans. It's not the same for everyone. If a woman has an income, then the husband will not force her to [take loans]."* Across all sites, men control the loans. A woman in the Thanapara FGD explains, *"Men make the decision and control the money. But women take the loans."* Even though micro-credit programs are aimed at women's empowerment, a woman key informant in Thanapara explained, *"You can take a loan for your husband. But without his permission, you cannot take any loans at all. A husband's signature is required. It's best if both husband and wife discuss and make decisions."* A woman in the Chakrahimpur FGD asserted that women do not take any loans for themselves saying, *"Women take the loans for their husbands."* Women and men in several sites additionally explained that the reason women do not usually take their own loans is because it is the men who earn money and pay off the loans. A woman key informant from Thanapara explained the risks in men taking loans in women's names: *"If he is a good husband, then he will pay. Or else he will not pay ... It's best if women take the loans when their husbands are good and don't spend that money elsewhere."*

There are exceptions. A woman from Chakrahimpur started her own successful cow-rearing business by taking loans from NGOs. She explained, *"I took a good amount of loans from NGOs. No one restricted me but they had less confidence in me. I was brave enough to do something on my own."* Similarly, another woman from Bagsara took loans to lease ponds and start fish production. Both these women are educated schoolteachers. Some of the enterprises and causes that loans were taken for by men and women are listed in Figure 15.

Figure 15. Loan usage by men and women.




Source: Men and women FGDs

For women, taking loans from non-micro credit institutions like banks is complicated. "Men are the ones who take loans from banks. We [women] do not understand this [bank loans] and cannot do it," explained a woman in the Bagsara FGD. Similarly, men in Basudevhati explained, "Usually women do not take loans from banks as they don't know how to deal with banks, and they don't have connections." Women can only get small loan amounts. In the same FGD, male respondents explained, "A man can get 3 to 4 lakhs which is a big loan. Less than 1

lakh is treated as a small loan which women can get."

There were intersectional differences in the women who were able to make decisions on how to use the loans. It was mostly educated women who started their own businesses with their loans. Site-specific differences were also apparent in how the loans were used. However, even though few, there were positively deviating women entrepreneurs who used their loans to start their businesses across most sites.

A photograph of a man and a woman fishing in a river. The man, shirtless and wearing a blue and black patterned sarong, is standing on a rock in the water, holding a large wooden fishing net. The woman, wearing a vibrant red and blue floral sarong and a red headscarf, is crouching on a rock, holding a red plastic basket. The background shows a steep, vegetated bank. A large blue diamond-shaped graphic is overlaid on the bottom left of the image.

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**DISCUSSION**

## 4. DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to understand the current gender norms and practices in northwestern Bangladesh, and how those cultural and institutional norms enable or impede involvement by women and men in agriculture and aquaculture, and their benefitting from that involvement. The study therefore examines gender dynamics and relations focusing on three main themes: (i) production, (ii) farming groups, and (iii) markets, comparing the present to the scenario a decade ago.

Common trends are that educated women earning an income through traditionally acceptable means are valued and perceived as good wives, and that women now express their opinions and assert their rights more than they did in the past. Men and women realize the value of working together, and men increasingly value the contribution of women.

However, women still perform the bulk of the unpaid care work. Job options for women are limited due to stereotypes and intersectional differences (e.g. labor jobs are usually for poor women, middle-class women can only work in NGOs and as teachers). Women are often exploited, being paid lower wages than men. And while women are consulted more as a result of their economic contribution, men still make most of the final decisions and control household resource. It can therefore be inferred that although a few women have advanced by being able to secure a job outside the confines of their homes and earn a living, the majority of the women are still lagging behind. These women are being held back by gender biases and social norms in their families, villages and broader society.

At the farm production scale, women are now playing a larger role, with increased recognition and value for their contributions from their male counterparts. Men and women value each other's support as key to family success. The key limitations for women farmers are mobility and decision-making. Women supporting men in their productive role—including cooking for them—

also emerged as important, although supporting roles still do not carry the value of a productive role.

On good farmer characteristics, men considered women knowing quality farm inputs sufficient. In contrast, for men to be perceived by women as good farmers, they must additionally have good knowledge of farm production activities, physical strength and be able to access loans. This again reveals the structural inequalities at institutional, household and community level. The input provided by women is considered a supporting role, but not accorded the same importance as that of men. This is not a new finding, nor is it unique to northwestern Bangladesh. Despite being the fundamental base of household productivity and wellbeing, unpaid care work and household work done by women are undervalued across the world. In aquaculture, men reported their wives' help as the key enabling factor, including supervising the pond in the absence of men, and women having—and acquiring—new knowledge. This opens a viable opportunity for the project to train women on aquaculture, with men's support. For women, the top enabling factors are a supportive husband, family and market agents buying their produce from home. The project should involve the family in the new innovations that will be introduced to women.

Interestingly, new agricultural practices for women were only reported in Gaibanda (multi-cropping and cow raising). This finding points out the need to understand the factors that have led to Gaibanda being ahead of other districts in the study area for women taking up new agricultural practices. All other new practices listed were for men (leasing ponds, intensified commercial aquaculture). Perhaps there were lots of NGOs working with women and men farmers in Gaibanda for quite some time, introducing new agricultural practices for both sexes. Or perhaps there were more inclusive and gender-accommodative approaches. Gaibanda is an outlier: the overall finding of this study reveals that

women lack access to extension services, which limits their knowledge, and they thus get left behind. To ensure women do not lag behind, extension services should be tailored to women's needs and circumstances, using social networks to spread agricultural knowledge. Other means to bring agricultural training and advice to their doorstep is through farmer field schools and mobile phone applications, and identifying volunteer women farm advisors to spread information within women's pre-existing social networks.

At the farming community scale, the study did not generate sufficient data to give us a nuanced understanding of group gender dynamics, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the outcomes of group memberships for men and women. This is because the study participants—especially men—did not report the existence of such groups in the study areas. The study however revealed that women mostly belong to NGO groups that provide them with training and micro-credit facilities. Men mentioned women's membership in these NGO groups as an enabling factor for men's innovation: men utilize women's micro-credit loans for their own productive purposes. The study data also revealed the gender dynamics behind membership in micro-credit groups and that women generally have no control over the loans they receive. Men mentioned their lack of government support in creating groups or associations as a key constraining factor. Therefore, in addition to working to empower women, the project needs to also accommodate men's needs. This includes raising men's profile so that NGOs that are closely working with women also work with men through forming groups or associations that will be able to address their needs. The rising number of NGOs has provided women with new skills, especially on cow-raising and sewing. Being in NGO groups has given women confidence to pursue new livelihoods. The project needs to tap into this large NGO network to build women's aquaculture groups and skills, as well as be able to address the needs that have been raised by some men who feel left behind for not being included in the groups or associations formed by NGOs.

At the market level, women and men now have more job and entrepreneurial opportunities than they did 10 years ago. With land being scarce, men are valuing

non-land based opportunities along the agriculture and aquaculture value chain, including transportation and inputs. Fish farming and related enterprise are profitable. For women, economic need has enabled them to take up job and entrepreneurial opportunities further aided by education and training/awareness by NGOs. Markets remain male-dominated institutions with the general perception that they are no place for women. The study however revealed more tolerance for women to buy rather than sell in markets. Study participants recommended market agents for farm-gate sales, as is already the case in some of the study villages. Site-specific and intersectional differences were apparent. In areas like Bagsara, Rajshahi, where there is a woman *faria* (person who collects fish from household to household to sell in the market), men respondents were more positive towards women's market mobility. Poorer women have greater market mobility than middle-class or richer women. To overcome women's mobility constraints for market access and training, the project could consider farm-gate bulk sales through women producer groups, and offer training closer to homes. Working with local partners, the project can explore additional gender-accommodative options to tackle women's mobility constraints. These include easy village access to farm inputs through vans, women interacting with known trusted male actors, market agents buying from the farm-gate, and women working in groups. Working with positive deviating women like the woman *faria* in Bagsara or the women fish entrepreneur in Chakrahimpur could bring broader acceptance of women taking up such roles.

Wealth, age, education and number of years of marriage were important variables affecting women's livelihood opportunities and benefits. Poorer women have greater mobility, market access and job opportunities. But they are often exploited. Older women and women who have been married longer have more decision-making power while educated women are more empowered and have more autonomy in utilizing their loans and in entrepreneurship. Gender norms around mobility and stereotyped jobs are more tolerant toward widows.

In conclusion, it is important to take into account the gender-related risks that the study has revealed, and which project interventions need to pay attention to.

At farm level, there are risks on women's reputation and tensions in the household around women's time allocation. As the project engages women in aquaculture, the project must strive to ensure the family is on board and that women's time and household responsibilities are respected. Through its gender-transformative strategy, the project will endeavor to engage men in reproductive roles, and to change mind-sets on the gender division of labor, especially unpaid care work. To mitigate the risks on women's reputation, the project will strive to build community acceptance of women's engagement in aquaculture. This will require gender-transformative strategies where community members, and formal and informal leaders, are engaged in social consciousness and awareness-raising exercises that show the benefits of women's engagement, and encourage and uphold positive deviators. At village level, the data has revealed that men often coerce women to engage in NGO groups so that men can access and control the micro-credit loans given to women. It is important to ensure that men support—but do not

take over—women's endeavors. The project should work with national banks to build loan mechanisms for women and men without compromising intra-family harmony and support. Furthermore, there is a need to help women access larger loans from banks. There are special bank packages for women entrepreneurs that some women are not aware of.

The greatest resistance will be at market level. Based on recommendations from study participants, the project can start in a gender-accommodating manner, gradually working to mitigate the perceived risks of women's market engagement. For this, the project would work with partners like CARE, Bangladesh (e.g. Shomosti project) to build enabling market conditions for women and to challenge misconceptions on market safety and stereotypes. The project may need to take more accommodating approaches in areas like Bogra which appear to be more conservative on the role and place of women.







5

RECOMMENDATIONS

# 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study provides insights into the social and gender dynamics of selected rural communities in northwest Bangladesh. We have clustered the recommendations for the project into five broad categories: general, empowerment, production, groups and markets, elaborated further below.

## General



Bringing about gender transformation of norms and practices in the region: Build gender-transformative approaches to tackle negative masculinity and stereotypes. This includes: (a) building acceptance of men performing reproductive roles (b) women engaging in non-traditional aquaculture roles and (c) incorporating gender-transformative social consciousness and awareness raising into NGO aquaculture training packages.



Building awareness of getting women involved in the aquaculture: Television is a common information and communication channel that men and women engage with. For this reason, produce videos and programs on gender equality in aquaculture, and easy-to-showcase gender-equity videos for local service providers (LSPs) to use for training.

## Empowerment



Building on existing or creating new women entrepreneurs: Build women as entrepreneurs through accelerator programs provided by organizations such as LightCastle Partners, and link women with entrepreneurship networks and groups.



Getting women involved in the fish value chain: Partner with existing NGOs like D-net to explore using their network of women extension agents, formerly known as info ladies. The project can similarly explore the possibility of setting up women with online selling and transportation platforms such as Amar Desh Amar Gram and Truck Lagbe.

## Production



Women's access to information, knowledge and training: Obtain permission from household head before engaging women in any activities. It is a must to include men and other powerful household members in extension. For implementation, partner with NGOs for training within the community, with training sessions well-aligned to women's daily tasks.



Encouraging women to be entrepreneurs: Use success stories on women and men who are positive deviators. In addition, facilitate and build capacity of LSPs from the women in the study engaged in aquaculture.



## Groups

Establish and strengthen women producer groups: Men are more inclined to allow women to engage in areas where other women are involved. Engage with NGOs to create aquaculture groups. While NGO groups exist and are easier to create, the project may consider formalizing women's producer groups and registering them with the government.

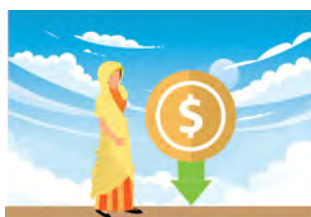


Forming women's groups to sell in bulk at the farm gate will help attract market actors and supply chain market participants, for the economies of scale and lower transaction costs the groups will offer.



## Markets

Creating conducive market conditions for women: Work with partners (e.g. CARE's Shomosti project), link women to farm-gate market services, and engage men as partners.



Working with women from poorer socio-economic status: Poorer women have fewer gender constraints for work and earning an income, and simultaneously also have the greatest needs for income. Thus the project may target these women for work and business opportunities along the value chain. There is opportunity to engage with them as basic needs override higher-order needs of reputation and status. These women can also act as market agents for farm-gate sales for women who suffer mobility constraints.



Changing the social norms and practices with regard to women being sellers in the market: Craft and disseminate gender-transformative approaches on perceptions of masculinity, and cultivate acceptance of women engaging in the market despite the presence of able men. This can be done through generating and disseminating short videos and posters on women empowerment in finance, group membership, decision-making and sharing the empowerment messages through digital platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp groups, among others. In addition, the project can carry out gender-transformative training for women and men farmers on various issues such as finances, input purchase, farm management and amicable joint decision-making.

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# ANNEXES

## Annex 1: Consent form

Name of participant/participants:

Consent of respondents

Good morning/afternoon. Our names are ..... and ..... and we are conducting a study for WF Bangladesh to help us to better understand the fish-related activities men and women engage in in the area as well as their wellbeing. The questions cover topics such as your family background, roles in aquaculture, the costs and benefits, decision-making, access to resources and enabling and constraining factors among other topics. We will be conducting group discussions about these topics as well as some interviews with some of you. This information will help us understand your aquaculture livelihoods better so that we can inform a larger audience who can improve aquaculture-related programs in the future. You have been chosen because of your engagement with aquaculture in this locality.

We are inviting you to be participants in this study. We value your opinions and there are no wrong answers to the questions we are asking. The study will take approximately 2 days to complete and we will need to speak with the women and men separately. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, you are free to withdraw your consent, to skip any questions you do not want to answer and discontinue participation in the study at any time.

Any information we obtain from you during the study will be kept confidential and your responses will not affect your access to any services that we or others provide. When we analyze data we will only not use your names. We will leave one copy of this form for you so that you will have record of this contact information and about the study.

Do you agree to participate in this survey? --

The researcher read to me orally the consent form and explained to me its meaning. I agree to take part in the research. I understand that I am free to discontinue participation at any time if I so choose and that the investigator will gladly answer any questions that arise during the course of the research.

Consent Given? [ ] Yes [ ] No

Signature of interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_ Date /\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/

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## Annex 2: Research question

### A. Gender dynamics and empowerment across all scales:

#### A1. Gender dynamics and norms:

1. What are the predominant gender dynamics and relations in the given context at present (in the 3 scales/ levels)? How do these differ for different socio-economic groups?
2. What are trends in gender dynamics over time in the context and factors shaping these?
3. Are there 'outliers'? E.g., examples of groups or activities that are more gender-equitable than the general context, and if so what can be learned from these?
4. What are the predominant gender norms in the given context (including features associated with ideal manhood and womanhood)? How do these shape each of the below? What are the risks or repercussions for individuals that stretch predominant gender norms?

#### A2. Women's empowerment:

1. How do different women and men perceive their own and each other's levels of empowerment at present and what do they see as constraining or enabling factors?
2. How much power do women have over their strategic life choices, including mobility, working outside the home and control over own income?
3. How have these changed over time and why?

### B. Scale-specific questions:

#### B1. Production (household production and small-scale commercial production)

1. How do innovation and technology influence the livelihoods of small-scale producers of this locality?
2. Who adopts innovation and new technology for the improvement of livelihoods? Why do they adopt/not adopt?
3. What are the main patterns in the gender division of labor in households in this region?
4. What are the main patterns in gender division of labor in small-scale production process in this region?
5. What changes if any took place in your area in the last 10 years? Why did those changes took place?
6. What are the enabling and constraining factors associated with men's and women's involvement in household and small-scale commercial production processes? How have various innovations affected (addressed or reinforced) these constraints?
7. What are the benefits and costs from production processes? How are these distributed? What influences how these are distributed? (link back to gendered division of labor above)

8. Who is the decision-maker on the following issues at the household level? Why are they the decision-maker?
  - earning of the household
  - participation in paid work
  - spending the income of the family
    - Women's mobility
    - Women's and children's health care exercising voting rights
    - Involvement in social, professional groups

## **B2. Farming groups (production and processing, marketing, savings)**

What kinds of farmer group exist in this community? Are women included in those groups (mixed-gender, single-gender groups?) What roles do these groups play?

1. What proportion of farming group members are women versus men (from which socio-economic and age groups)? Does this vary by context or group type (e.g. farmer groups for training versus for accessing inputs, versus for selling to markets) or other factor? Why?
2. How and to what extent do women versus men (from different socio-economic and age groups) engage in the different (higher and lower return and status) tasks/activities or opportunities of different farming groups?
3. How and to what extent do women versus men (from different socio-econ/age groups) engage in the different roles or positions of different farming groups? (eg committee positions)
4. What factors enable and constrain engagement in the above and to what extent are these gendered?
5. How do women and men within the groups perceive the experience, benefits and costs of being a group member? How do they see the distribution of these benefits and costs, and why?
6. To what extent do women who are not currently members of farmer groups aspire (or not) to become members of farmers groups or other types of groups? Which women, which groups and why/why not? What are the constraining and enabling factors?
  - Documenting the gender division of labor (roles) of men and women in the household, aquaculture, and income generation
  - Accessibility of men and women to extension services
  - Benefits of men and women from aquaculture / agriculture}
  - Costs (economic and social cost) from aquaculture

## **B3. Markets (input supply, selling)**

- Market committees (ratio of men and women's positions; which positions – eg. leadership positions)?
- What is the current pattern in terms of gendered engagement in and division of labor in relation to input and output fish [aquaculture] markets? What are the enabling and constraining factors? What institutions control market behavior, infrastructure and facilities? How gender-equitable are these institutions?



- To what extent are different markets (and niches) seen as available or not available to women as consumers or sellers? Why? Include if women have any particular needs and if these are met. Any special facilities for women in this market?
- Any special facilities for women in this market? Their suggestions in this regard.
  - When women do engage in markets, what are their experiences (positive/negative)?
  - What are different women's aspirations in relation to market engagement (themselves, their children/ie the future)?
- Who accesses and controls which benefits from being engaged in fish-related markets (above)? Who bears risks or costs? Why/what factors shape this?
- What do women and men identify as opportunities/strategies for more gender-equal access to and benefits from markets?
- What are the goods and services men and women avail themselves of from the market? Men or women? Why?

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<sup>1</sup>It is also spelled Pardah, Hindi Parida ("screen," or "veil"), practice that was inaugurated by Muslims and later adopted by various Hindus, especially in India, and that involves the seclusion of women from public observation by means of concealing clothing (including the veil) and by the use of high-walled enclosures, screens, and curtains within the home. (Citation from: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/purdah>. Accessed [5th of April, 2020]).

<sup>2</sup>Popularized by Louise Kapp Howe to signify stereotyped women's care jobs such as nurses, secretaries, and elementary school teachers.

<sup>3</sup>There were a few examples of women involved in aquaculture either as own initiative or as part of family business

<sup>4</sup>This was mentioned in only one village as a woman faria operates there.

<sup>5</sup>Loans used for cows by women was the most mentioned. The rest were mentioned by one woman each in IDIs.

### **About WorldFish**

WorldFish is a nonprofit research and innovation institution that creates, advances and translates scientific research on aquatic food systems into scalable solutions with transformational impact on human well-being and the environment. Our research data, evidence and insights shape better practices, policies and investment decisions for sustainable development in low- and middle-income countries.

We have a global presence across 20 countries in Asia, Africa and the Pacific with 460 staff of 30 nationalities deployed where the greatest sustainable development challenges can be addressed through holistic aquatic food systems solutions.

Our research and innovation work spans climate change, food security and nutrition, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, the blue economy and ocean governance, One Health, genetics and AgriTech, and it integrates evidence and perspectives on gender, youth and social inclusion. Our approach empowers people for change over the long term: research excellence and engagement with national and international partners are at the heart of our efforts to set new agendas, build capacities and support better decision-making on the critical issues of our times.

WorldFish is part of One CGIAR, the world's largest agricultural innovation network.

For more information, please visit [www.worldfishcenter.org](http://www.worldfishcenter.org)