

Women's Participation in Income Generation Through Jute Handicrafts Production in Selected Area of Bangladesh

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Abstract: Women from both urban and rural areas are coming out of their houses and trying to get them involved in diversified on-farm and off-farm activities for survival. Increasing trend of landlessness and many other socio-economic reasons compel them to do so. This study focussed on the performance of income generating activities of a group of destitute women of Kurigram district of Bangladesh. The women are organized for working under supervision of two non-government organizations working in the locality. Under these organizations they are engaged in jute and allied fiber based handicrafts production. Now it become an important source of income for them and provides substantial support to their family covering about 12 % of the total income. However, in operating the craft, both the women and organizations faced some major problems like capital deficiency, price and marketing constraints, unavailability of inputs/implements, lack of knowledge on modern techniques, malnutrition and illiteracy, etc. In this regard, credit arrangement, improvement of marketing facilities, availability of production inputs/implements, training on technical and managerial skills, creation of diversified employment opportunities and educational programmes need to be undertaken for further development of the sector.

Key words: Handicrafts, destitute women, participation, income generation

Introduction

Women constitute more or less half of the population of Bangladesh. In general, they are involved in almost all activities in and around the homestead. With the passage of time, the traditional division of labour between male and female has been changed significantly. Now a days a large number of female family members are found to be engaged in different outdoor income generating activities along with their male members of the family (Ahsan, 1994). Increasing trend of landlessness and many other socio-economic forces compel them to take part in the labour force mainly to supplement household incomes and to improve family welfare. Now a days the national development issues are often addressed emphasizing on women's development. In this regard, the Government and non-governmental organizations working in this field are implementing a range of programmes. The general objectives of such programmes are to involve women in a process of comprehensive development of the community and thus the country as a whole by giving them appropriate knowledge and skill, creating opportunities and thereby encouraging them to undertake greater responsibilities in the society (Kabir, 1994).

Handicrafts making is an age-old traditional off-farm production activity of women specially of low-income families of Bangladesh. From time immemorial, handicrafts made of jute and allied fibers are being produced and used by the rural farm families. In the this study, a modest attempt has been made to study the performance of women engaged in handicrafts production with the two community development organizations of Kurigram district. The two organizations, Kurigram Development Service (KDS) and Parash Handicrafts Women Development Organization (PHWDO) were established with the main objectives to organize landless, assetless and vulnerable people, mainly women, into viable economic force. With these aim in view, both the agencies have organized a number of destitute women of the locality as their members/participants and provide them with training on handicrafts making. After completion of training they received different inputs from the organizations to prepare handicrafts. In exchange, the organizations paid them certain amount of money as making charge for each item they prepared.

Considering all the facts, this study has been undertaken with the following objectives:

- To find out the socio-economic status of women engaged in handicraft production.

- To evaluate production cost of handicrafts, related benefits and income generation to the women involved in handicraft making and problems there off.

Materials and Methods

Information of this report was collected both from primary and secondary sources. Local non-governmental organizations and related offices served as the secondary sources. A total of 60 women members/participants of KDS and PHWDO were the sources of primary data. Informations were collected through interviews conducted by a structured questionnaire prepared for this purposes. The survey was conducted in the months of June and July in 2000. The data collected as above was compiled, analyzed and interpreted according to the objectives of the study.

Results and Discussion

Socio-economic profile of the handicrafts producing women: In a prevailing subsistence agricultural economy, the socio-economic condition of the rural households has a great importance in the national economic development. Improvement of agriculture is to increase the human productivity and the resource potentialities needed to develop the socio-economic environment of the rural households (Hussain *et al.*, 1988). In this part, the status of respondent's women in relation to the composition and size of family, literacy, occupation, housing structure, asset position etc. has been discussed elaborately.

Age and family size: The average age of women respondents was 33 years on average (range 20-52 years) (Table 1). The family size was 4.57, which was 22.54 % lower than that of national average (5.60) of the country (BBS, 1991). Adult male and female constituted 26.70 % and 27.35 per cent of the total size of the family, respectively. The percentage of children (below 14 years) in the family were 25.60 and 20.35 for male and female children, respectively. About 93.33 % respondents are married. In fact, women were active female labour force of the family. It was noted that 6.67 % respondents, were widows with an average age of 44 years.

Literacy: The average literacy rate of the respondents was 40.00 (Table 2). The rate was much higher in comparison to the national average of 24.92 (BBS, 1991). Among the total literate respondents, 20.00 % had education up to primary level and 16.67 per cent up to secondary level. Only 3.33 % had gone up to the higher secondary level. A large number of respondents

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Table 1: Age and family size of respondents

Average age (years)	Average number per family				
	Adult male	Adult female	Children (below 14 years)		
			Male	Female	Total
33 (20-52)	1.22 (26.70)	1.25 (27.35)	1.17 (25.60)	0.93 (20.35)	4.57 (100.00)

Table 2: Educational status of respondents

Educational level (percentage)						
Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Above Higher Secondary	Write name only	No education	Total
20.00	16.67	3.33	-	41.67	18.33	100.00

Table 3: Housing situation of respondents

Average number of living house		
Straw/Bamboo made with straw roof	Tin shed	Total
0.90 (50.34)	0.62 (40.66)	1.52 (100.00)

Table 4: Ownership pattern of livestock and poultry

Average number of poultry and livestock			
Hen and duck	Pigeon	Cow	Goat
0.17	2.28	0.32	0.20

Table 5: Ownership pattern of household assets

Average number of household assets				
Radio / TV	Sewing machine	Bi-cycle	Rickshaw van	Pulling van
0.22	0.07	0.20	0.03	0.02

Table 6: Cost and benefit in handicraft production of respondents

Name of products	Average production cost (Tk. per piece) (A)	Sale price (Tk. per piece) (B)	Return (Tk. per piece) (A-B)
Round vanity bag	65.80	80.00	14.25
Camera bag	58.60	70.00	11.40
File bag	92.36	100.00	7.64
Covered vanity bag	93.35	100.00	6.65
Lalon bag	80.16	90.00	9.84
Shopping bag	148.70	180.00	31.30
College bag	104.50	115.00	10.50
Diary bag	60.20	70.00	9.80
Jhuri vanity bag	82.75	90.00	7.25
Travel bag	241.40	250.00	8.60
Money bag	17.25	25.00	7.75
Tuni bag	10.65	15.00	4.45
Handpass bag	23.50	30.00	6.50
Garden bag	187.65	200.00	12.35
School bag	91.70	100.00	8.30
Bazar bag	41.50	70.00	28.50

41.67 %) we found to be able to write their names only. On the Other hand, 18.33% had no education at all.

Housing structure: Average number of houses of the respondents was 1.52 of which 0.90 were made of straw/bamboo wall with straw roof and 0.62 having tin shed (Table 3). Of the total houses, 59.34 % had straw/bamboo made wall with straw roof and the rest 40.66% had tin sheds. Separate kitchen was almost uncommon in the study area. Some of the respondents family had sanitary latrine at their homes.

Ownership pattern of animal and household assets: During survey, respondents were asked to provide information regarding ownership of livestock, poultry and household assets like radio/TV, bicycle, rickshaw van etc. (Table 4, 5). A small number of respondents were found to own livestock, poultry and some

other household assets including rickshaw van pulling van etc. Male members of the family generally use these for income generation. A few respondents owned some simple household equipments like sickle, spade, etc.

Cost and benefit in handicraft production: Information provided in this part described productivity and economic performance of (handicrafts making by women in the study area.

Production of handicrafts, cost and earnings: Different types of handicrafts are made by the respondent women in the study area. Beside making common items like Sika, Jali, etc. varieties of non-traditional items like file bag, shopping bag, college bag, dairy bag, vanity bag etc. are being prepared by the women. In preparation of these items different types of inputs including jute and cotton made cloths, jute thread, ribbon, chains, bocrom etc. are needed and those are generally supplied by the organizations to the women. Some small size items like tuni bag, moneybag, handbags have low production costs ranging from Tk. 10 to 25 per piece. The production cost of most of the items including bazar bag, Diary bag, lalon bag, covered vanity bag etc. ranged from Tk.40 to 100 per piece. A few items such as traveling bag, garden bag and shopping bag have higher production cost. All these products are sold to the buyers keeping a margin of Tk.5-20 over production costs.

Income generation form handicrafts production and other sources: Handicrafts making become an important source of income and provided substantial support to these destitute women in the community. Besides handicrafts preparation, members of the respondents' families are compelled to take up other income generating activities. Male members generally worked as day labourers and also engaged in petty business, rickshaw/van pulling, fishing and fish sale etc. (Table 7). Day labour is the major source of income constituting 56.65 % of the total income. Income from handicraft making covered 12.05% of the income of the respondent family. In addition, 11.48 % of the total income comes from occasional petty business, 4.50% from fishing and fish sale and another 4.50% from rickshaw/van pulling and the rest 3.17% from petty services. Besides participating in the handicrafts activities, the female members are also engaged in some other miscellaneous activities like rice husking, pop corn preparation to support the family. It was also observed that some families were exclusively dependent on the income of the female members and others were dependent on the joint income of both male and female members.

In the light of the information collected from the sample respondents, it may be concluded that the involvement of women in income generating activities raises the earnings of the family as a whole.

Problems involved in handicrafts production: Women respondents expressed that before joining the organizations as a member/participants, majority of them was unemployed and some of them moved here and there looking for jobs to maintain their family. According to them unavailability of proper job opportunity

Table 7: Sources and level of income of the respondents

Sources and level (percentage) of income							
Handicraft preparation	Petty business	Petty service	Fishing and fish sale	Rickshaw or Van pulling	Day labour	Misc. activities *	Total
12.05	11.48	3.17	4.33	4.67	56.65	7.65	100.00

* Miscellaneous activities include rice husking, popcorn making etc. On the other hand, 18.33 per cent had no education at all.

was a major problem in the locality. Besides, lack of knowledge and skill, illiteracy also restricted their opportunity and made them more vulnerable to discrimination. However, they agreed that the organizations provided them with training as well as work. They are more or less benefited from the system and feel optimistic about their ability and future. Even so, there are many problems in the handicraft sector. This study summarizes the major problems of the sector encountered by the women and the organization as a whole. Attempts were made to identify the nature of those problems in relation to the production and marketing aspects. The major problems indicated by the women and the organizations refer to the following areas.

Lack of capital: Financial incapability appeared to be the major problem to the women involved in handicrafts making. Due to the fact that they came from families with very low financial capability or resource base. The related organizations initiated the income generating activities mainly with their own fund or borrowed money. Such funds were very small in amount and it made them dependent on external assistance. Very limited financial help came from the Government agencies like Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation or Social Welfare Directorate.

Price and marketing problems: Major portion of handicrafts products are usually sold outside of the locality (Rangpur, Dhaka and elsewhere). In most cases, buyers paid lower price for the products and their payment system was very irregular. Such factors caused severe problems and restricted proper functioning of the organizations.

Unavailability of raw materials and implements: A number of inputs including chemical colours, bleaching materials, jute thread and misc. items are required in production process. Some times these materials were found to be very expensive and scarce at the time of need. Implements used in training and handicrafts preparation like sewing machines or handlooms are also rare in the organizations.

Lack of knowledge and skill of modern techniques: Process of operation regarding bleaching, colouring etc., is found to be very traditional in nature, besides, due to lack of knowledge on modern design, forms or other related aspects, handicraft products are becoming old fashioned and losing the interest of buyers.

Conclusions and recommendations: The following conclusions and recommendations (on the basis of policy implication) could be made as the basis for further development of the handicraft sector in the study area.

- Sources of finance are very limited for both the women engaged in handicrafts production and the development agencies as well. They are not much exposed to the commercial financial institutions. Credit worthiness of those women and the organizations and credit accessibility is very essential factors. In this regard, arrangement of credit facilities with minimum interest and easy access is recommended.
- Pricing and marketing of handicrafts products remain as a crucial issue. Development of better marketing facilities will be helpful for both women and the organizations as a whole. Local and international support in getting orders for the handicrafts products is also essential.

- Raw materials used in handicraft making are generally collected from the local market. Sometimes the required inputs or implements become scarce and very expensive. Hence, facilities should be developed for easy procurement of the necessary items of production at the time of need at reasonable price and of desired quality.
- Training facilities regarding technical and managerial skills and knowledge on handicraft preparation including improved techniques of bleaching and colouring, modernization of design, cuttings and sewing are recommended to improve the situation. Based on the findings of a survey on field experience in Bangladesh, Gerard *et al.* (1997) suggested that existing income generating activities such as preparation of handicrafts, paddy processing etc. could be made more productive if these are better coordinated among women groups and between local service agencies. They also emphasized on production, marketing and quality control. The government in collaboration with the local NGOs should take such initiatives.
- As mentioned earlier by women, lack of suitable sources of income prevailing in the area. Hence, making them more active, diversified employment opportunities need to be created both in public and private sectors in the locality.
- Strengthening the formal and non-formal education including family planning, health and nutrition, child care etc. for the destitute women are very essential. Self-awareness and self-mobilization programmes also need to be undertaken.

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