



# Recognition of Women's Role in Agriculture

Acknowledge Women's Unaccounted Contribution  
in Agricultural Economy

# **Policy Brief on**

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## Context for recognizing women's contribution in rural and agricultural economy:

Rural women have been playing important role in agriculture, in the conservation of bio-diversity and the environment for ages. Mostly communities of rural women have propagated and carried forward local traditional and practices of agriculture. However, because of pervasive patriarchal norms in rural Bangladesh, women generally face deep rooted social-cultural barriers and economic constraints which reduce their labour productivity. Not only that the household and care work responsibilities prevent women from participating in the labour market at a higher rate. The study<sup>1</sup> revealed that the theoretical grounds for recognizing women's contribution, drawing from the theoretical contribution of gender economics and the more applied aspects of estimating their economic contribution through the SNA. Where, the national accounting system does not incorporate household services for consumption purposes within the household, although it considers such services to be productive work, which mostly associated with agricultural works including poultry, livestock, fishing, homestead gardening.

Women in agriculture and rural areas have one thing in common across Bangladesh: they have less access than men to productive resources and opportunities.

The gender gap is found for many assets, inputs and services— land, livestock, labour, education, extension and financial services, and technology – and it imposes costs on the agriculture sector, the broader economy, and society as well as on women themselves. So, the general overview of the extent of female force participation in labour market to which women are engaged mainstream economy activities besides household work. The total work force of the country is 5 crores 67 lakhs. Of this, 47.6 percent is engaged in agriculture and of that 64.8 percent is constituted of women<sup>2</sup>

5 crores 67 lakh

The total work force of the country

47.6%

Engaged in agriculture

64.8%

Percent is constituted of women

<sup>1</sup>Estimating Women's Contribution to the Economy: A case of Bangladesh, 2015, conducted by CPD and MJF

<sup>2</sup>According to the 2010 labour force survey of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics



In rice production, there are 23 steps, from sowing of seed to bringing paddy home. Out of these, 17 are performed by women. The same situation prevails in other sectors of food production. However, it is unfortunate that society does not recognize this important contribution of women

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# Rights of Women in Agriculture

## Current Policy Scenario or Rights of women in agriculture or Women farmers in international and national laws

The labour of female farmers has not been taken into the country's agricultural policy and strategy. Agricultural work is always associated with men while women are only thought of as helpers. But the truth is, that the labour provided by women in agriculture has not been made evident. It is important to identify and understand the contribution of women in agriculture. As long as all work related to agriculture are not brought under the agricultural development planning or the agricultural policy, the recognition of women's labour in the field will not be possible.

### International Charters

The targets embedded in UN SDGs 2 and 5 also highlight the critical need for recognizing and empowering rural women in the agricultural sectors. SDG target 5.A has put forth targets of securing ownership and rights over agricultural land for women. SDG 2.3 targets to double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, in order to ensure global food security.

International policies have also recognized the importance of enhancing and cultivating women's crucial role in agriculture. CEDAW (Convention of Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women) 1979:

- CEDAW Article 14 clearly defined the social security, training and vocational expertise, agro loans and distributions of arable land for rural women.
- Beijing Platform for Action 1995: The Beijing Platform for Action has proclaimed to increase training in technical, managerial, agricultural extension and marketing areas for women in agriculture to increase income-generating opportunities and women's participation in economic decision-making.
- The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Articles 27,28,29,32, 38 stated that every citizen of country should get the same rights and same services. In relation to fundamental principles of State Policy, the State shall adopt effective measures to bring about a radical transformation in the rural areas through the promotion of an agricultural revolution etc.



## National Lawa Policies

### The **National Women Development Policy (NWDP)**

**2011** has made provisions in Part II Chapters 26, 30, 31, 36 and 37 to ensure women's rights in farming, food security, and agricultural economy. NWDP states that the women labor as farming hands contributing in the national economy need recognition. NWDP commits to extend support and assistance to ensure equal wages for the same job and to remove wages discrimination for women in agriculture, and to take steps to ensure the farming women have equal opportunity and access to resources and assets.

### The **National Agricultural Extension Policy (NAEP) 2012**

considers women's participation to be vital and has committed to enhancing women's agriculture related activities, establishing and managing cottage industries based on locally produced agricultural commodities that are suitable for women. NAEP Pillar 18 emphasizes mainstreaming women in agriculture. One of the guiding principles of the NAEP is to ensure special needs of women farmers through tailor made extension approaches and packages. Article 18 of the National Agricultural Policy 1999 highlights training programs to be conducted and capital support to be provided to encourage women's interest and improve their skill in agricultural activities. The NAP also commits to undertaking research programs to identify constraints about women's participation in agriculture and measures to be taken to remove those barriers.

The **National Food Policy 2006** acknowledges women's vital role in ensuring food security, especially, rural women. In Strategy 2.3 and Objective 3, it recognizes the necessity to initiate women-focused development programs like improving women's participation in all kinds of

activities in agricultural sector and providing the opportunity and tools for rural women to improve their productivity in production, processing and marketing activities in the rural agriculture.

The gender equality and women's empowerment agenda for the **7th Five Year Plan** set out in Chapter 14.6, is based on pursuing strategies and actions that not only enhance women's capabilities and access to resources and opportunities but also address the control over resources, decision making, reducing the barriers in structures and institutions and aim at changing social norms and protecting their rights.

### Chapter 3 on Promoting Human Development in the **Perspective Plan of Bangladesh (2010-2021)**

emphasizes the importance of training both men and women in modern agricultural techniques and technologies. This policy document inculcates training women farmers to become educated and self-sufficient.



## Silent Agriculture Work Treated as Unpaid Household Work

Women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in Bangladesh. Women's roles vary considerably across areas and are changing rapidly based on current contexts, where economic and social forces are rapidly transforming the agricultural sector. Women's activities typically include producing agricultural crops, rearing animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes. Many of these activities are not defined as 'economically active employment' in national accounts but they are essential to the well-being of households. It is common that women are highly engaged in feeding and collecting grass and fodder for domestic animals, putting to and taking out of shelter, cleaning sheds, offering water to animals and selling eggs and milk. However, when it comes to selling or marketing, males step in and play the key role suppressing women.

Although the constitution of Bangladesh calls for eradicating any discrimination on the basis of gender, in reality the status of women in Bangladesh is still not fair and equitable. According to a research conducted by the Centre for Policy Dialogue, women spend 16 hours on average per day in household chores, including informal agricultural work. In addition, Bangladesh National Women Development Policy 2011, called for properly recognizing works of women in social and economic field for their development, but female agriculture workers are yet to get any legal identity.





## Women's position in the agricultural economy

In most cases women aren't landowners. They are not seen in the everyday supervision of fields but they are present during the work. Women are usually absent in the weekly markets but recently more are making an appearance in search of a livelihoods. However, the extra items produced by women such as eggs, milk, vegetables, chili and dried fish are sold in the village huts. However, the buying and selling is controlled by their husbands. He collects the monetary value of these products and decides how they are used. Since the husband takes care of the livelihood for the family, it is presumed that he is entitled to the money. In reality, the labour and time put in by these women for the earnings for the family is disregarded and neglected while technically they are just as entitled to decision making in households.

### Recognize

Acknowledge the agricultural activities performed by women as work – a type of production that creates real value and recognize it in relevant policies, regulations, and frameworks.

### Reduce

Provide supporting infrastructure to rural women such as water, electricity, and agricultural technology & tools that decrease the total number of hours needed to be spent on unpaid care task.

### Redistribute

Catalyze social and behavioral change in norms so that the total amount of unpaid care work is more evenly apportioned among family members, and shift some of the cost and responsibility associated with unpaid care work to the public and private sector.

### Represent

Create avenues for rural agricultural women to share their concerns and to raise their voices and influence budgets, policies, and decisions that impact their lives.

### Research evidence

women's contribution both paid and unpaid work. As a part of this campaign, MJF started an advocacy initiative to 'recognize women's unaccounted work in GDP' in which recognition of women's role in agriculture is one of the major areas of significance. MJF wants to bring the issue to the attention of policymakers and show why it is important to recognize and reflect women's agricultural silent work in GDP.

*Changes in the labour force composition in Bangladesh* pation rate, implying that the share of female labour in relation to that of male labour has been increasing in Bangladesh. While the proportion was just above 25% in 1991, it increased to about 45% in 2019 i.e. as much as 20% point increase in the share of female labour occurred in Bangladesh over a period of three decades. Changes in female labour force (293.61%) in rural area was higher compared to male labour force (28.61%) during the last 25 years.



## Estimation of the share of women labour in agricultural works

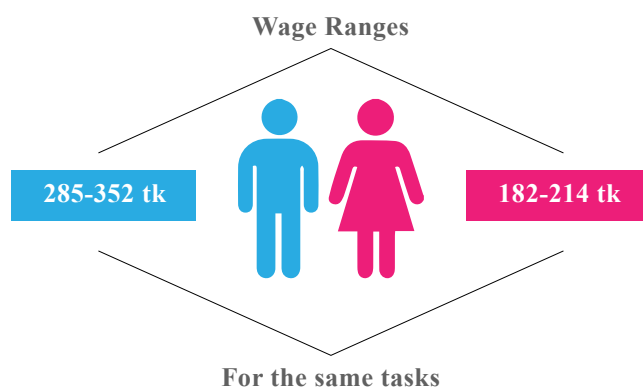
Women's response about the economic activities they participate in are categorized into six broad headings:



Surveys conducted demonstrate that rural women are engaged in all six categories of economic activities with livestock rearing having the highest occurrence (71% participants). Rural Bangladeshi women are also considerably engaged in food crop farming (59% participants).

The key concern is the share of women engaged in salaried jobs; only close to 15% of rural women are engaged in waged or salaried employment. The over representation of women's participation in livestock rearing and food crop production may reflect the fact that scope of women's work in the formal sector in rural areas is still inadequate and whatever scope exists is mostly concentrated in these two sectors.

## Gender wage differentials in rural Bangladesh



While male laborers' wage ranges between Tk. 285 and Tk. 352 on average; female laborers' wage varies between Tk. 182 and Tk. 214 for the same tasks. This is indeed a sharp discrimination against women.

Not only is the wage of female laborers low but the spread of wage across farm tasks is also low for female. This signifies the relative weak bargaining power of female workers in the agriculture sector in Bangladesh.



## Understanding rural women's time allocation pattern

Findings show a sharp contrast in the pattern of time allocation between male and female across productive and non-productive activities. Data makes it apparent that time spent on productive works by men is much greater than time spent by women. In the case of non-productive works, there is a mixed scenario. Most noticeable is the difference in domestic tasks, caregiving, and cooking, which are culturally imposed on women.

Activities	Comparison		
	Male	Female	Difference
<b>A. Productive works:</b>			
(i) School (also Homework)	2.18	1.35	0.83
(ii) Work as employed	8.05	6.1	1.95
(iii) Own Business work	8.08	3.25	4.83
(iv) Farming	4.75	1.69	3.06
<b>B. Non-Productive Work:</b>			
(i) Sleeping and Resting	9.55	9.42	0.13
(ii) Eating and Drinking	1.35	1.48	-0.13
(iii) Personal care	1.19	1.26	-0.07
(iv) Shopping/getting Service	1.77	1.19	0.58
(v) Weaving/Sewing/Textile care	2.08	2.29	-0.21
(vi) Cooking	1.83	2.51	-0.68
(vii) Domestic work	2.33	3.48	-1.15
(viii) Care of children/adults/elderly	1.09	1.77	-0.68
(ix) Travelling	1.44	1.29	0.15
(x) Watching TV/listening to radio	1.85	1.92	-0.07
(xi) Exercising	1.44	1.14	0.3
(xii) Social Activities	3.12	2.5	0.62
(xiii) Religious activities	1.76	1.78	-0.02
(xiv) Others	3.98	2.2	1.78

## Role in house hold decision-making around production and income generation

The share of women tends to be higher in the case of having inputs in some decisions concerning use of income generated from -

Food crop farming	(35.17%)
cash crop farming	(32.74%)
Fishing or fish culture	(32.74%),
Wage and salary employment	(30.85%)
Non-farm economic activities	(31.98%)

On the other hand, in the case of use of income generated from livestock raising, women tend to have most inputs in the decision-making. This is so possibly because livestock raising tends to be an exclusive economic activity for the majority of the rural women. Impressively nearly one-fifth of the women seem to have input into all decisions, which can be regarded a sign of women's empowerment. The other problems are mostly related to agricultural production and marketing. Some of these include limited access to productive inputs, lack of ownership and control of assets, limited access to training facilities, workplace distance, lack of market access, inadequate funds for farm investment, less bargaining power, limited access to agricultural credit, less expertise in agricultural technology adoption, lack of physical security, limited access to market information.



## Context that hinders women's labour force participation

From the problem confrontation index (PCI) analysis, the major problem that women mentioned was raising children as it takes most of their daytime and is treated as the most responsibility of a woman in her life. The second confrontation that hinders a woman from participation in the labour market was social norms or stigma and seasonal work. The third problem was low wage or income for women compared to men which is always unjustifiable in the labour market.

### Problem confrontation index of women's participation in the labour force:

Identified problems	Rank order
Conservative social structure (religious culture or community culture)	4
Limited access to productive inputs (seed, fertilizer, insecticide, water etc.)	9
Traditional belief that women should not be involved in work beyond the boundaries of their house.	8
Low literacy and technical skills of women	11
Lack of ownership and control of assets	11
Form of unpaid family labor in farm produce	12
Limited access to training facilities	12
Workplace distance (farm, field, pond, market, training center etc.)	12
Lack of market access (product sale)	7
No control over use of farm income	12

Inadequate funds for farm investment	14
Less bargaining power to fix selling price and quantity	18
Limited access to agricultural credit	15
Less expertise in agricultural technology adoption	13
Institutional issues such as weak monitoring and implementation of government policies on child marriage, etc	17
Safety at social and workplace	10
Social norms or Social stigma	2
Lack of specialized transport for women	16
lack of availability of sufficient jobs suitable for women	18
Seasonal work	2
Low wage or income for women	3
Preference of male labour in the farm	10
Lack of security in the society (farm, market or street)	13
Lack of security in the society (farm, market or street)	13
Limited access to market information (demand, supply, location, price, time)	12
Raising children	1
Larger household size	6
Unable to take decision in the family	12
Male dominated household	-
Household works	5
Long working time inside the home	11

## Social and Economic Perspective

There is a general tendency of neglecting women which is founded on the fact that women's household contributions remain unacknowledged. The most critical issue regarding valuation of women's unpaid work is deep-rooted in the fact that the method of GDP calculation, which is based on an internationally agreed method known as System of National Accounts (SNA), does not take into account women's unpaid activities. This is because SNA does not recognize work that does not go into the market. Since women's household works are not traded in markets, it does not have any exchange value. Women's works at home are both reproductive and productive in nature, which do not have monetary values

This avoidance of women's chores in GDP calculation further undermines social perception about women in our country which is already a strong patriarchal society. Notwithstanding it does not necessarily imply women are less worthy than their male counterparts in our society. It is advocated that more wage-based work opportunities in the formal sector would help the society to understand the opportunity cost of women's time and thereby societal perception about women's worth would change. It has been argued that the estimated value of women's unpaid household work in Bangladesh is about 78–87% of the monetary value of the national GDP.



## GDP calculation with women unpaid work

### Calculation Barriers

- Two-third of women who are aged 15 years or above are still outside the labour market.
- There is limited wage or salaried employment for women.
- Women's human resource development initiatives are not well extended as man.
- Most of the work for women in rural areas is informal and unpaid.
- It is difficult to calculate time and monetary value of domestic.

### Achievement after calculation

- Women's socioeconomic status will be raised .
- Household poverty reduction will be reduced.
- It will help to bridge the gap in the share of male-female labour in Bangladesh.
- It will contribute to the achievement of other broad development goals in Bangladesh.

## Message for Policymakers and Recommendations

- 1) Adequate attention should be given for the human resource development (training, education etc.) of women in rural areas of Bangladesh.
- 2) Opportunities for higher education should be followed by provision of employment for rural women - agro-processing plants, commercial dairy, and poultry farms.
- 3). Make childcare facilities available and accessible at community level so that women labour force participation is not obstructed due to childbearing.
- 4) End all forms of gender-based discrimination in earning – set clear and specific policy guideline for determining wage rate for types of works both in agricultural and non-agricultural sectors.
- 5) Macroeconomics experts and socio-economic scientists may play vital roles in developing methods capable of incorporating women's unpaid work in the calculation of GDP.
- 6) Use of media and information technology (IT) may have profound effect on changing social norms – awareness campaigns and accessible mobile banking facilities for women.
- 7) Mechanization of agricultural production and post-harvest activities may be adopted for efficiency gain in the agriculture. However, care should be taken so that such adoption does not result in women laborers being jobless.
- 8) Microfinance institutes and NGOs should support small and medium scale entrepreneurship for women at the rural areas.
- 9) Community leaders, religious leaders, cultural organizations, and other social leaders must act collectively to create an enabling and safe environment for women.
- 10) A long-term strong political commitment from all parties should be held in order to remove barriers of women's labour force participation and ensuring their empowerment.





# Policy Brief

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