

Literature Review on Gender and Wider Social Norms in South West Bangladesh

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Executive Summary

The literature review finds that there is considerable information on the impacts of climate change, commercial aquaculture, and other forms of change acting upon women and men dependent on agricultural livelihoods in southwest Bangladesh. A few studies focus explicitly on mapping and understanding specific population groups, including women, disabled people, and ethnic minorities. However, much of this work, excellent though it is, fails to fully capture the relational aspect of gender and how gender relations are mutating and changing in response to almost complete ecological collapse. It is vital for WorldFish, if it is to work successfully on gender transformational approaches in agricultural development in this region, to understand how women and men, particularly among the most poor, are expressing and working with agency.

Sometimes it would appear that the use of the term 'norm' in some of the literature in itself restricts analysis of change, since the term implicitly suggests an equilibrium state, to which women and men, shocked into new modes of behaviour under crisis, wish to return. More understanding is needed of how women and men work to subvert widely held norms, either openly or secretly, and the extent to which 'progressive' norms (which remain to be identified; so much of the analysis assumes norms in Bangladesh are negative) already extant in society can be built upon. Variation between norms also needs to be captured more accurately, between regions and between socio-economic groups. Such understandings will provide entry points, and legitimization, for the work of WorldFish.

There is no shortage of data suggesting that southwest Bangladesh is in the grip of a crisis of monstrous proportions. The impacts on women, particularly, are fairly well documented. Far less understanding is available on how various religious minorities, ethnic minorities, disabled people, and other categories including the very young and the very old (and gender relations within these groups), are coping with and responding to this crisis. Men's livelihood strategies *per se* are rarely explored, although it appears that men in the poorest categories have for decades faced intense exploitation and, in the case of deep sea fishers, acute danger in pursuing their livelihoods. World Fish has plenty of scope for adding immeasurable value to existing data and understandings of gender relations in southwest Bangladesh by conducting in-depth research on how gender interacts with other markers of identity, and wider forces of change. It is not clear, for instance, how remoteness may work on establishing relative freedom for women from restrictive social norms extant in wider society.

1 Introduction

Bangladesh is the most climatically vulnerable country in the world and is highly vulnerable to disasters including floods, cyclones, tornadoes, tidal and storm surges, river bank and coastal erosion, and droughts (Nokrek and Alam, 2011). The South West coastal belt is particularly badly affected. Ecologically inappropriate farming methods, particularly shrimp farming, are resulting in increased salinization of water and soil. This is undermining the resilience of local populations, particularly that of the most poor, since alternative agricultural-based livelihoods are increasingly difficult to pursue (Nokrek and Alam, 2011). Increased vulnerability has been met with escalating rates of male out-migration. This in turn is resulting in ever-more women becoming heads of 'male-absent' households, responsible for generating an income alongside managing care and household tasks. Important percentages of the extreme poor are disabled, with disability either a cause, or a consequence, of poverty. Ethnicity is another mechanism of social marginalization, with Dalit communities counting amongst the most poor.

Macro-economic, climatic and ecological changes interact with local level variables such as gender, ethnicity and disability in complex ways to create differing coping strategies, and differential abilities to cope. The ability of rural people in Southwest Bangladesh to innovate in the face of extreme and complex change will be critical to their ability to survive, and to create decent livelihood portfolios, over the next few decades. The ability to adapt and innovate is contingent on doing things differently. However, gender and wider social norms in Bangladesh appear, on balance, to contribute to Bangladesh's poor performance in the Gender Inequality Index and the Inequality in Human Development Index (UNDP, 2013). Both these indices record 'losses' in human development due to social and gender inequality. Is it possible for such norms to shift quickly enough to enable people to adapt to, manage, and innovate in conditions very different to those they grew up with?

WorldFish is increasingly pursuing research and development practices which take a gender-transformative approach to design, implement and learn from agricultural development interventions which empower women and other marginalized groups in society. The purpose of this literature review is to provide WorldFish with basic information on the gender and wider social norms which influence the ability of women and men, boys and girls to take up various livelihood choices in Southwest Bangladesh. This will inform a planned qualitative situational analysis focused on obtaining a deeper understanding gender norms and their inter-relationship with the capacities of women and men to innovate and adapt to climate change and other factors. The review contributes to the development of a community sampling strategy through identifying the characteristics which drive differences in social and gender norms, and their intensity, within Southwest Bangladesh.

Fostering gender transformation is far from simple, as the following two examples in Box 1 show. They show just how complex working to improve resilience, and to empower women, will be in Bangladesh.

Box 1: Complex Interactions between Project Initiatives and Women's Empowerment

Save the Children UK (SCUK), following Cyclone Aila in 2009, engaged 15 000 vulnerable extreme poor households to strengthen their income sources, diversify their assets and build their awareness on how to cope with floods. A sober appraisal of its work following the tidal surge in late 2010 showed that this multi-dimensional programme to create resilience, despite apparently doing everything 'right', failed to prevent asset loss and damage (Nokrek and Alam, 2011).

BRAC's Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction- Targeting the Ultra-Poor (CFPR-TUP) programme built on insights from gender economics that increasing the control by women over assets can improve their intra-household bargaining power. This, it is thought, can have important consequences for wider development outcomes, leading to improvements in education, health and nutrition for children, for example. The CFPR-TUP programme therefore targeted asset transfer, primarily cattle, to women in very poor households with the aim of strengthening the entire household's livelihood. An evaluation of the CFPR-TUP showed that although women tended to maintain control over the transferred asset, including the right to buy and sell the animal, men appeared to compensate by increasing their direct control /sole ownership over many other household assets. These included agricultural productive assets, non-agricultural productive assets, consumer durables, and land. Women experienced a decrease in intra-household decision-making power as well, including weakened control over their own income, purchases for themselves, and decisions regarding household budgets. The CFPR-TUP also directly resulted in lowering women's mobility since it shifted work from outside to inside the homestead. However, women themselves viewed the CFPR-TUP positively. They appreciated the fact that cattle now belonged to them, and welcomed the associated training and support. They felt responsible for helping to shift their households out of extreme poverty and they took part in more community activities. They felt less ashamed of their clothing and homes. Although their mobility was reduced, work outside the home was in any case considered stigmatizing. Despite having less voice at home, they felt they were contributing more to household well-being (Das *et al.* 2013).

2 Data Quality and Interpretation

There are important data limitations to this literature review. There is a vast amount of research on the ecological collapse of much of southwest Bangladesh, together with tangential attempts to address gender relations within such analyses. Such analyses, however, often fail to adequately explore the interactions between gender, ethnicity, climate change, ecology, economic opportunities and other variables. Of critical importance to World Fish's intention to work on gender transformation is the fact that an understanding of the most poor, including women, as active agents of their development is largely absent. A consideration that gender and social norms may actually work to empower women is also lacking. The basic orthodoxy in the gender literature on Bangladesh is that poverty and crises enable women to circumvent constricting norms to move into new roles and expand their decision-making power. This may be so, but it is not likely to be the whole story. Taken together, the limited work on agency and norms hampers the identification of entry points for WorldFish to build upon. Conversely, impacts are much better documented and these also provide good entry points for further research.

2.1 National Data Quality

The data produced by the 2011 census is contested, partly because it proved difficult to conduct in urban areas (www.bdnews24.com). This makes it difficult to understand exactly what is happening across the country, let alone in regions, across sector areas such as education and health.

2.2 Religio-Ethnic Minority Communities

It is particularly difficult to obtain useful data on religious and ethnic minority communities. This is partly because available data is locked into small-scale research reports and is not always fully analyzed or comparable with other data. More fundamentally, research on many minority groups appears never to have been conducted. In some cases, ethnographical data may exist but may not have been placed online. Some available data is directed more to the tourist market and not helpful. The terminology of 'religio-ethnic minority' communities is difficult to work with since complex socio-cultural phenomena are bundled under one aggregate heading. There appear to be, in the literature, unspoken taboos around discussing some issues clearly enough for outside readers to understand, and perhaps indeed the researchers themselves may have found certain topics difficult to broach with respondents. Several reports, including some reports focused on the situation of women, are laced with pity and horror at the situation of the study group. This hampers attempts to obtain a clear understanding of their agency.

What is certain is that 'lazy' associations between ethnicity, religion, socio-economic class, gender norms, and so forth must be avoided. Much more research is needed on cross-cutting socio-cultural variables in interaction with local ecologies and livelihood opportunities. Navedet *al.* (2011) shows that no easy associations between gender norms and specific gender characteristics can be made. For example, Baliadangi, Bhandardoho, and Satkhira score highly on gender equity, yet two of these communities are Muslim-dominated and the third is Hindu. At the same time, Khalishpuand Katakhalia are noted to be the least gender-equitable, and are Muslim. Remoteness, exemplified by access to road or water communication infrastructure, may play some role, with high to moderate levels of gender equity in communities with poor access. However, the least gender equitable communities are found in both poorly and moderately well linked communities. Electrification, and major livelihood strategy, also do not associate clearly with gender equity. It is therefore critical to appreciate that no single variable can account for differing levels of gender equity or equality. Communities need to be assessed on a case by case basis to understand how variables combine to produce differing levels of equity.

Table 1. Problematic Associations between Religious Affiliation, Gender Equity, and Other Variables

Characteristics	Villages							
	Baliadangi Thakurgan	Bhandardoho Thakurgan	Katakhalia, Bagerhat	Gobindokati Satkhira	Kabirkathhi Patuakhali	Dariabad Barisal	Mirzanagar Jessore	Khalishpur Noakhali
Major Crop	Rice, Wheat, Maize, Potato, Vegetables	Rice, wheat, maize, Potato, Vegetables	Gher-based fish, Betel leaf	Gher-based shrimp	Rice	Rice	Rice	Rice, Fish

Electricity	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	-
Communication by road/water	Poor	Poor	Good	Very poor	Poor	Poor	Good	Moderate
Religious Composition	Muslim Dominated	Muslim Dominated	Muslim only	Hindu only	Muslim only	Muslim and Hindu	Muslim Dominated	Muslim only
Gender norms+	Most gender equitable	Most gender equitable	Least gender equitable	Most gender equitable	Least gender equitable	Moderately gender equitable	Moderately gender equitable	Least gender equitable

+In terms of women's mobility, role in decision making, and perceived status

2.3 Interpreting and Measuring Women's Empowerment

It is clear that the jury is out, so to say, on the progress made towards women's empowerment in Bangladesh. It is frequently observed that women have made progress at different rates in various sectors, for example that they achieve well at school but are weakly represented in politics. However, obtaining a clear understanding of why this should be so, through analyzing gender and wider social norms, is very challenging. There appear to be significant discrepancies between the expression of normative values, and actual respondent practice. Looking at the literature as a whole, it seems likely that in some cases research design failed to elucidate sufficient information on what is actually happening, or indeed what people 'really' think, as opposed to saying what they believe they should say. The relative conservatism of women's views, and the relative liberalism of male views in some instances, may be reflections of respondent interest in trying to please the survey team, and, possibly, listeners from the community or household. It is imperative for any study by WorldFish to pull out actual practice (what is done), as well as assessing how gender and cultural norms (what is said) still continue to frame what is 'possible' and indeed is culturally framed as a 'desirable' state to aspire towards, or return to. It is possible that this desirable state may not be 'gender-transformative'.

Some papers, not explored in this review, discuss the meaning of the word 'empowerment' in the Bangladesh context (Nazneen *et al.* 2011). This is an important and fascinating discussion and requires more exploration. However, of more moment to this report are the findings of the Women in Agriculture Empowerment Index (WEAI) which contrast sharply with almost all other reports. The majority of such reports frame women in the southwest as 'victims', both of male neglect as symptomized by their outmigration or failure to help with domestic tasks in times of extreme hardship, and of wider ecological change. However, the WEAI for southwestern Bangladesh claims, using the 5DE sub-index, that 31.9 percent of women are empowered. The remaining 'unempowered' 68.1 percent have adequate achievements in 60.7 of the survey domains. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) shows that 59.8 per cent of women enjoy gender parity with the primary male in their household (Sraboniet *al.* 2013).

A baseline survey for Uttaran in part of the same region on the extreme poor (survey size: 10,843 households) shows that of land-owner households - such landholdings incidentally are microscopic, being less than 5 decimals including pond and ditch/71 per cent of households are absolute landless -, 15.7 per cent of land is owned by women. Women own one quarter of other productive assets, and a further quarter of all houses surveyed. At the same time, 98 per cent of women do not control the money they earn, 26 per cent of women do not go to hospital, and 18 per cent do not visit relatives (Rahman, 2011).

The difficulty lies in the conclusions to draw from such data. By all objective measures, the extreme poor score poorly across all indicators including health, education and food and nutrition security. Uttaran's *raison d'être* is indeed its work to alleviate the perceived extreme poverty and powerlessness of these people.

This literature review does not come to conclusions on how to understand and measure 'empowerment'. However, it highlights these issues to show that work on gender transformation must get a grip on how to define, and measure, empowerment using both subjective and objective indicators. It has to ask itself searching and complex questions, such as: Can the extreme poor ever be considered empowered by any metric? It is certainly possible that they can be according to subjective indicators, but how would one then weight objective indicators which show poor health, nutrition and education outcomes? It would be useful to pose these, and many other questions, at the outset of a detailed socio-economic study. A careful analysis of the WEAI findings would be a useful exercise, too, since it contrasts so sharply with other analyses yet may reveal a deeper understanding of empowerment.

2.4 Country Overview

In 2013 the estimated population of Bangladesh was 163.6 million, the median age was 24.4 years, the population growth rate 1.59 per cent and the sex ratio, overall, was 0.95 male/1.0 female (estimates, Index Mundi, 2013). The **Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI)** defines multiple deprivations in the same households in education, health, and standard of living. According to the most recent data (2007), 57.8 per cent of the population lived in multi-dimensional poverty despite important improvements in some human development indicators over the past three decades. An additional 21.2 per cent were vulnerable to multiple deprivations. The MPI shows that measuring income poverty (the percentage of the population living below PPP \$1.25 USD/day) does not present a full picture of poverty. The MPI in Bangladesh is 14.5 percentage points higher than income poverty. This suggests that households living above the income poverty line may nevertheless suffer deprivations in health, education and other living conditions (HDI, 2013).

Bangladesh is a low human development country. The **Human Development Index 2012**, which measures a long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and a decent standard of living, rated Bangladesh as 0.515. This placed it above the average for countries in this group, but below the average rating for countries in South Asia. The country is positioned at 146 out of 187 countries. Between 1980 and 2012 life expectancy at birth increased by 14 years, mean years of schooling increased by 2.8 years, and expected years of schooling by 3.7. Gross national income per capita increased by approximately 175 per cent (HDI, 2013).

Since the HDI measures averages across a country, it can mask inequalities in the distribution of human development in a population. The **Inequality in Human Development Index** (IHDI) was introduced in 2010. This reveals a 'loss' in human development caused by inequalities; it is arrived at by considering the differences between the HDI and the IHDI. When the IHDI is brought to bear, the Bangladesh HDI falls to 0.374. This is a loss of 27.4 per cent due to inequality (HDI, 2013).

The **Gender Inequality Index** (GII) nuances the HDI and IHDI still further. It examines gender-based inequalities in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity. Reproductive health is measured by maternal mortality and adolescent fertility rates. Empowerment is measured by the share of parliamentary seats held by each gender, and attainment at secondary and higher education by each gender. Economic activity is measured by labour market participation by each gender. The GII shows the loss in human development due to inequalities in male and female achievements in these dimensions. Bangladesh has a GII value of 0.518, ranking it 111 out of 148 countries in 2012 (HDI, 2013). Box 2 highlights under-nutrition, because this graphically expresses the lack of correlation between poverty and gender inequality. Food may be available within the household, but it may not necessarily be equitably consumed.

Bangladesh ranks 63rd out of 86 countries included in the OECD's 2012 Social Institutions and Gender Index (<http://genderindex.org/country/bangladesh>). This index assesses country performance in five areas related to the enabling environment for social and gender equality: the family code, physical integrity, son bias, resources and entitlements and civil liberties.

The family code relates to norms and laws around marriage and inheritance. In Bangladesh legal age of marriage for women is 18 years and for men it is 21 year which is not equally practice in all the places an in all communities. Data from different agencies demonstrate this. For example, United Nations data from 2004 report that 48% of all girls between 15 and 19 years were married, divorced or widowed. Marriage decisions are perceived to be largely the role of the family, not individual women or men though the majority in a 2007 Pew Global Attitudes survey believes that the parties to the marriage should be involved in family decisions. Dowry is illegal but marriage without dowry is rare. Inheritance in Hindu and Muslim law is discriminatory. In Muslim law daughters inherit half as much as sons, while in Hindu law daughters have no inheritance rights. In Christian law there is equal inheritance for daughter and son.

Prevalence of all sorts of violence against women in both the places outside and inside home is high in Bangladesh. Though there is good number of laws such as the prevention of cruelty against women and children act, 2000; the domestic violence (prevention and protection) became law in 2010. However, as many as 87 per cent of currently married women have experienced some form of violence by their current husband. Ninety-eight per cent have faced violence from their current or previous husband. Among the different types of violence reported, psychological violence is most common followed by physical violence (Violence against Women Survey, 2011). Elevated sex ratio at birth and in juvenile age groups indicate that Bangladesh is a country of concern for missing women although there has been improvement in recent years.

Women's access to resources tends to be lower than men's, including their direct access to and ownership of agricultural land and related productive resources. In regards to civil liberties, while there are no laws limiting women's access to public space, social norms regarding women's mobility place limits on freedom of movement in practice. This affects the range of occupations and work locations available and acceptable to women, though poverty can drive women and their families to act outside of these prescriptions.

Box 2. Undernutrition

Under-nutrition and underweight rates in Bangladesh are among the highest in the world, firmly placing it among the 'Asian enigma' countries which have higher malnutrition rates than many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa despite enjoying overall better development indicators. Based on 2006/07 data, an estimated 30 per cent of Bangladeshi women are underweight (50 per cent in 1996/7). The share of underweight women in the upper wealth bracket was 27 per cent, not significantly lower than the overall rate. Overall, 34 per cent of women suffer from chronic energy deficiency. This rises to 47 per cent of women in the lowest wealth quintile, and is still at 17 per cent for women in the wealthiest income bracket (Kantor, 2014; World Bank, 2010; USAID, 2010; World Bank, 2008). The data shows that gender inequalities in health outcomes cannot be ascribed to poverty, but rather to deep underlying norms that discriminate against women regardless of socio-economic class. Inequalities in intra-household food distribution are a key cause of female under-nutrition.

Ethnicity and Religion. It is difficult to source consistent data on ethnic communities and religious affiliation. According to Index Mundi, which draws on census data, the bulk of the population is Bengali at 98 per cent. The remaining 2 per cent includes minority ethnic communities and non-Bengali Muslims. Religious affiliations are Muslim 89.5 per cent, Hindu 9.6 per cent, other 0.9 per cent. Adivasis (scheduled tribes) living close to the Sunderbans rely partly on resource extraction from the Sunderbans for their livelihoods. They are also involved in labour within fisheries, honey collection, etc. Many are hired at the entrance to the Sunderbans on a daily basis. Hindus are defined as 'uncategorized' and as 'Dalits' (scheduled castes). Dalit Hindus tend to be extremely poor due their exclusion from, and discrimination within, mainstream political, economic and civic life. They gain livelihoods through sweeping, scavenging, and tiny handicraft businesses. One source maintains they are not allowed to fish (Solidarités International, 2012).

There are approximately 20 religio-ethnic minority communities in Southwest Bangladesh. Typically, they are extremely poor. In many cases, minority ethnic peoples maintain the same occupations they have had for generations. A study by Uttaran (Rahman, 2011) covering 10,483 households across Satkhira and Khulna Districts showed that, among the extreme poor, 74 per cent were Muslim, 25 per cent are Hindus, and 1 per cent are Christian, Buddhist or adhere to another religion. Overall, 9 per cent of the extreme poor population are classified as religio-ethnic minorities. In other words, their representation among the extreme poor significantly outstrips their percentage of the total population.

Disability. Approximately 12 percent of extremely poor people in Southwest Bangladesh experience some form of disability, either from birth or acquired through an accident/ increasing ill health. Of these

about one third suffer a physical disability; 13 percent reported a visual impairment; 9 percent experienced hearing and speech difficulties and 9 percent had learning difficulties. About 33 percent of disabled people in the study had multiple impairments. The high frequency of disability amongst the extreme poor draws attention to the fact that efforts to reduce extreme poverty must include measures to protect and support disabled people (Nokrek *et al.* 2013).

3 Gender and Social Norms

3.1 Marriage Practices

In Bangladesh, marriage and the family are 'the boundaries within which women's lives are ordained' (World Bank, 2008). The composition and structure of women's conjugal family impact upon the ways in which women access health care, exploit opportunities for work, exercise mobility, act on nutrition information, and participate in other aspects of intra-household decision-making.

Some elements of marriage have remained stable whilst others have undergone significant shifts over the past few years. For example, the majority of women (approximately 56 per cent of ever-married women) marry under the age of 18, even though the legal age is 18 for women and 21 for men (World Bank, 2008). In younger age groups, including 20-24 and 25-29, over 10 per cent of married women married below the age of 15, and about 50 per cent of them were married below age 18 (UNFPA, 2011). Underage marriages occur even though people are widely aware of the legal age of marriage for women and men (CCRIP, 2012).

Some ethnic minority communities are deeply patriarchal with severe restrictions placed on women's rights, mobility and freedom, particularly in relation to marriage. For example, there is believed to be a high prevalence of child marriage, particularly girls, among Hindu Dalits. This is because Bangladeshi laws do not require this group to register marriages and thus the age of the bride is not controlled. Dalit women are widely expected to marry within their own religious group (Bhumija Foundation, no date). Furthermore, Dalit communities rarely sanction remarriage for women, leaving divorced, abandoned or widowed women largely to fend for themselves. Dalit women who are permitted to work due to economic necessity engage in a limited number of occupations, such as sweeping and cleaning. They face regular abuse from employers and the wider public (Uttaran, 2011; Bhumija Foundation).

There are strong associations between the occurrence of disasters, such as flooding and erosion, and the ability to marry. One homeless father trying to arrange his daughter's marriage said, *'Those who do not go through this would never understand the true meaning of being an erosion victim. It is better perhaps to die'*. Women victims of erosion lose social status and respect. One woman said, *'You cannot force a mainland woman to marry someone living in a char land. She would rather die ... If she does accept (the marriage proposal) she knows she would lose her dignity forever. Living in a char land and facing erosion are synonymous'* (Bastob, 2008). It is not clear if all people living in charlands are equally vulnerable to flooding and erosion; this, and factors leading to potentially increased vulnerability among specific groups, requires more research.

3.2 Dowry

A major concern for the women's rights movement in Bangladesh is the increasing practice of dowry, both in terms of the spiraling amount paid, and with respect to the spread of this practice to Muslim communities (Davis, 2011; USAID, 2010; World Bank, 2008). There is no clear explanation for why this shift has happened. Some theories relate it to increased competition for 'high quality' grooms as a means of upward mobility; another theory relates it to a devaluation of rural women's labour in light of declining landholding and lower demand for on-farm labor (World Bank, 2008). World Bank data show that only 7.7 per cent of women from the 45–60 year old cohort report the payment of dowry in their marriage, compared to 46.4 per cent of those in the 15–25 age cohort (World Bank, 2008).

Dowry has long been a Hindu practice and can be explained by the fact that since Hindu daughters do not inherit property, their parents need to provide them with valuable items when they enter marriage. However, in Islam the groom traditionally paid bride price to the wife's family. This shift from bride price to dowry in the Muslim community has occurred over the past thirty years or so. One Muslim woman from a poor background in Satkhira remarked on the change thus, '*No dowry was required in my marriage but for my daughter's marriage a motor-cycle has been demanded as dowry*' (World Bank 2008).

Poor people perceive dowry and marriage expenses as a key cause of impoverishment, along with illness and medical expenses. Given that they already struggle to meet their basic needs the payment of dowry heightens their vulnerability still further. A study conducted in southwestern Bangladesh showed that only young women from extremely poor families are married to disabled men since only a low dowry is required in such cases. Such women can face acute stigmatization and lack of respect. They also must engage in various forms of work to support their husband and children. Conversely, many disabled women are only marriageable when their families provide unusually large dowries of cash, other assets, or land. Such women are particularly vulnerable to abandonment or separation should they become ill or their condition decline further (Nokreket *al.* 2013).

Wealthier families appear to have little difficulty paying dowry since they pay from their surplus (CCRIP, 2012; Davis, 2011; World Bank 2008). Recipients of dowry - the groom's household - use it to help pay for weddings, repair homes, or purchase productive assets (World Bank, 2011).

3.3 Associations between Female-Headedness and Collapse in Male Livelihood Strategies

In Bangladesh, women-headed households are often referred to as 'male-absent' households. This terminology obscures what is actually happening and requires disaggregation and nuancing. Information is needed regarding their ability to command resources in their own or absent husband's name, to take own account decisions, develop social capital, and so forth.

In southwest Bangladesh, the erosion, and sometimes total collapse, of male livelihood strategies is leading to ever increasing numbers of men migrating permanently or seasonally out of the area. A precise understanding of numbers and the nature of outmigration seems to be lacking, as does the

impact of male remittances upon households. However, it is clear that men who had previously engaged in agriculture as well as fishing are affected. Agriculture is becoming increasingly difficult due to salinization and the increase in land area devoted to commercial aquaculture (Solidarités International, 2012; Bastob, 2008), and fishing is becoming increasingly dangerous as weather patterns change (Islam *et al.* 2013). The entry costs into shrimp culture are very high (Terry, 2014; Solidarités International, 2012). Some locations are entirely controlled by elites - mahajans - who own and manage almost all resources and thus determine employment opportunities, wage rates and so forth. Mahajans are sometimes the only source of credit with which to finance a livelihood. Fishers and farmers alike are increasingly liable to incur severe debt with prohibitive interest because wider socio-economic and ecological change is rendering these livelihoods less successful (Bastob, 2008). Research into understanding and supporting male livelihoods, particularly among the most poor, is desperately needed.

Overall, research shows that women are finding it extremely difficult to cope with this situation, especially in areas suffering acute water-logging over many months of the year. In the absence of men, particularly during the wet season, women are responsible for safeguarding all valuables, and perishables. This can impede their willingness to seek shelter when cyclone warnings are given since they fear theft. Furthermore, they also fear sexual harassment in the shelters without male protection. Although women are often forced to generate a livelihood, maintaining purdah can make this very difficult. Indeed, some women fish at night to avoid censure. Taking care of livestock, a central and accepted female livelihood activity, is extremely difficult in wet or waterlogged conditions since the animals require food and freshwater. Childcare is also problematic since women often have to spend many hours a day locating fuel and water. Some report they have no alternative to tying their children to poles, leaving them unattended, or taking them with them. Sending children to school is also difficult during prolonged water-logging, as is keeping their schoolbooks dry. Women report that since collecting water is so time consuming, they do not have time to: take care of themselves or their elders, wash clothes, clean and cook. They also suffer gynaecological problems related to maintaining menstrual hygiene in saline conditions. In Jessore, where water logging condition has been a feature of life for many years, women 'live in the water world' in hopeless circumstances. One young woman from Keshabpur said, *'We do not cope, we just try to survive. Who wants to live like this?'* The dry season brings issues of its own. For example, a lack of suitable drinking water becomes an acute problem for affected communities. Women and adolescent girls fetch drinking water from distant sources, sometimes as far as 5-6 kilometers away, each day (Ahmed, 2008).

3.4 Gender-based Violence

The prevalence of domestic violence against women is very high in Bangladesh (USAID, 2010; World Bank, 2008). As many as 87 per cent of currently married women have experienced some form of violence by their current husband. Ninety-eight per cent have faced violence from their current or previous husband. Among the different types of violence reported, psychological violence is most common followed by physical violence (Violence against Women Survey, 2011).

Some studies link the payment of dowry to an increase in gender-based violence. A World Bank (2008) study showed that the payment of dowry was associated with a higher likelihood that a woman would experience violence in the household, and that she would agree that this violence was acceptable. Payment of dowry was also linked to women having less voice in decisions relating to the home and family.

Interesting, some studies show that women find violence towards them more acceptable than do their husbands or mothers-in-law (HKI, 2011; World Bank, 2008). However, such findings are very complex, since women's attitudes appear to be conditioned partly by the likelihood of them actually experiencing violence. Women identifying spousal violence as acceptable and holding more conservative gender norms report lower levels of actual violence than do women with more liberal gender norms. It is possible that more liberal women are more willing to report violence should they experience it, and/or that their male partners are finding their liberalization hard to accept. These findings suggest that it is critical to engage men, and community leaders, alongside women in work against violence, particularly in locations which appear to be liberalizing swiftly (World Bank, 2008; BRAC, no date).

Religio-ethnic minority community girls and women face a combination of gender and caste-based discrimination and violence from men in wider society, as well as risk of gender-based violence from men within their own communities (Uttaran, 2011; Bhumija Foundation, no date). A study conducted in Jessore District shows that low caste Hindu groups in the study area depend almost entirely on fisheries for their livelihood with male Hindus traditionally taking on the work of their fathers. Men lack good alternative occupations in the off-season, though almost all practice crop farming and two percent have businesses (Islam *et al.* 2013). In the Jaladash (fisher) community, a sub-set of low caste Hindus, men go to sea for about 5 to 6 months. During that period, no male resides in the community unless he is incapacitated. Women are acutely vulnerable to physical and sexual harassment from outsiders who know that no males are present (Bastob, 2008).

The study area is also at risk from natural disasters, with religio-ethnic identity intensifying women's vulnerability. For instance in the study area, not one family had a brick house, making the women particularly vulnerable to storm surges which frequently wash away their homes. Jaladash women are rarely warned about the imminence of a cyclonic storm surge, and if they try to seek shelter in cyclone shelters they are vulnerable to abuse from non-minority people likewise seeking shelter. Some women reported seeking refuge in toilets because they were refused entry to cyclone shelters (Bastob, 2008).

4 Intra-household Decision-Making

Broadly speaking, women still have a weak voice in intra-household decision making despite their increasing role in income generation and higher educational levels (HKI, 2011; World Bank, 2008; Sethuraman *et al.* 2006). An HKI (2011) study in Barisal shows strongly different perceptions on the appropriate status of husbands and wives in the family. An overwhelming majority of husbands, wives, and mothers-in-law agree that husbands always deserve respect from wives and children, irrespective of what he does; that a wife's duty is to serve her husband; and - to a lesser extent, that women are inferior to men in the Creator's eyes. Interestingly, more wives and mothers-in-law agreed with the final

statement than husbands. Given that women's inferiority, or subservience to men, appears to be largely uncontested belief among respondents, this belief potentially forms an important barrier to women's ability to develop, aspire to, or realize a wider range of ambitions, including those that may contribute to household resilience, livelihood diversification, and well-being.

A survey by HKI on gender attitudes in Barisal included questions on intra-household decision-making adds some explanatory value to wider statistical reports by asking both spouses about the decision making process (HKI, 2011). Key points made include:

- The purchase of daily household necessities is the only area where a significant - though still low, share of women report having decision-making autonomy (21 per cent). Husbands are less likely to report that women have this authority.
- Husbands report greater autonomy for women to spend their own earnings than the women themselves do, though in both cases the number of those reporting that women decide independently is low.
- Women and men both strongly agree that women have little voice in deciding on their own access to health care. The majority of respondents said this was a man's decision.
- Women and men disagree about what shared decision-making around children's health care and women's visits to relatives actually means. Men are more likely to report such decisions as joint than women.
- Large numbers of both women and men report shared decision-making with respect to major and minor household purchases and children's health care.
- Nuclear family structures were found to offer more opportunities to women for involvement in decision-making than collective family structures within which other adult males and mothers-in-law may be present.

4.1.1 Intra-household Decision-Making in Relation to Education and Housework

The upbringing of children is an area where women typically have a strong say, which is not surprising given women's approved roles as mothers. In a World Bank study (2008), a larger percentage of both older and younger women reported being consulted in decisions about children's schooling, medical care, and discipline than in decisions over their own work for income, major household expenditures, and their own mobility. Post-primary education is positively associated with consultation in major consumption decisions for both older and younger women, while for older women, being employed doubles their likelihood of being consulted in these decisions, demonstrating the status women achieve through the combination of seniority and employment (World Bank, 2008). The WEAI (Sabroni *et al.* 2013) diverges somewhat from these findings. In its sample from southwestern Bangladesh there was little difference in empowerment scores between women in agriculture who had a primary education, or less than a primary education. Women with a secondary or higher education were also not notably empowered. The WEAI also found that 28 per cent of women felt little decision-making power over the purchase, sale, or transfer of assets. Unsurprisingly, men reported very little disempowerment in control over income and in decision-making around agricultural production and income generation.

An HKI survey (2011) explored attitudes about women's and men's roles and capacities as parents and in wider domestic work. There was almost total agreement among respondents that the source of women's happiness is their roles as wives and mothers, and widespread agreement that men who provide monetarily are good fathers. Over 90 per cent of women (both wives and mothers-in-law) agreed that taking care of children is as valuable an activity as earning income, compared to 69 per cent of husbands who agreed with this statement. These findings highlight traditional role allocations: men as breadwinners and women are caregivers to children and husbands. Nevertheless, fully 49 per cent of men argued they could care for children as well as women could, and 81 per cent of men disagreed that it is embarrassing for men to help with household work. However, women tended to disagree with men on these points. This may signal a desire among women to protect their own sphere of control. A study by Uttaran, an NGO working in Southwest Bangladesh, found that male members of its community based primary organizations help their wives with housework, and that women participate actively in intra-household decision-making (Uttaran, 2011). However, it is not clear whether this is due to the project intervention or to wider social norms in that area.

It is possible that there are differences between religious communities with respect to the strength of women's voice in intra-household decision-making. According to one report, men in Hindu communities, for instance, appear to take key decisions pertaining to their children's education and marriage alone. Around one third of the Hindu women and men surveyed considered that mothers had no role to play in marriage arrangements (CARE Bangladesh, 2003). Such findings require further exploration and verification.

4.1.2 Intra-household Decision-Making in Relation to Food and Nutrition Security

Data shows that women can suffer marked food discrimination in households, regardless of wealth class (HKI, 2011; World Bank, 2010). Women's low status, lack of mobility and voice, and poor access to information, and overall perceptions of women's low decision-making capacity, combine to make it problematic for women to influence food purchase decisions or to implement recommended changes in nutrition behavior. Women beneficiaries of the J-e-J program found it hard to implement their training on nutrition due to the influence of husbands and mothers-in-law, who typically draw from past experience and tradition and reject new information (Sethuraman *et al.* 2006). The WEAI findings corroborate these findings: 36 per cent of women aged 26 to 55 were empowered in relation to food, in contrast to less than 26 per cent in younger and older age categories. The WEAI report authors suggest this reflects the relative lack of power of young women, who are typically daughters-in-law, and of much older women who may be dependent on their sons for support (Sraboni *et al.* 2013).

An interview with HKI staff in Dhaka attempted to unpack this challenge. Many nutrition programs focus on delivering nutrition messages, often to mothers. However, women frequently report that they already know the messages, having received information from many such programs. The issue is that they have limited ability to act on them (Kantor, 2012).

Overall, study data on intra-household decision-making does not create a very clear picture. It is possible that respondents to many surveys provide normative responses which simultaneously privilege male decision-making whilst recognizing the importance of women in taking decisions. For example, the HKI

(2011) study showed that almost all wives, husbands, and mothers-in-law surveyed agreed that husbands and wives should decide together how to spend money and disagreed that men who consult their wives on decisions appear weak. However, the majority of respondents in all categories also agreed that men should always have the final say in decisions in their homes. A first step is to refine understandings of what the term 'joint' actually means to researchers as well as respondents. A second step is to map what actually happens in practice. A third step is to obtain a much deeper and more nuanced understanding of intra-household decision-making by ethnic group and by social class.

5 Women in Formal Leadership Structures

There is no automatic correlation between women's role in intra-household decision-making, and their decision-making roles in formal and informal community level groups. It is clear that women, in general, are weakly organized. The WEAI reports that over half the women in its survey did not belong to any group. Interestingly, though, a lack of leadership and influence in the community contributes much more to men's disempowerment. Almost half (49 per cent) of men reported feeling uncomfortable speaking in public, versus 32 per cent of women (Sraboni *et al.* 2013).

With respect to promoting women in formal structures, women have had three reserved seats in each Union Parishad (a local government structure) since 1997. Today there are about 12,828 elected women members in the 4,198 Union Parishads throughout the country. Since 2009, the position of vice-chair in Upazillas (Sub-Districts) has been reserved for women and in parliament, 50 seats are set aside for women. Overall, creating quotas for women has enhanced their public visibility (World Bank, 2008). This said, many elected female representatives face strong resistance and face capacity gaps. Furthermore, women representatives in reserved seats have to work very hard. In Union Parishads non-reserved members are elected from single wards. However, women members in reserved seats have to answer to three wards. They therefore have to campaign across a larger area and be accountable to a much larger number of voters than men representing single wards (World Bank, 2010). Women members in Union Parishads have not had, until recently, clear job descriptions or resources. As a result, they have to function mostly through negotiation with the Chairman and other members. Recognizing this, the government has now assigned functions to women members, but the legal framework is still unclear regarding their role in the regular functions of the Union Parishad. Empirical evidence on the extent to which these seat reservations have changed the local political landscape is poor and patchy although some studies suggest that there is a positive change in local government, especially when combined with the advocacy work of NGOs. In Khulna District in southwestern Bangladesh the total number of women Union Parishad members is currently 204. Nine women have been elected to Upazillas. There is only one female member of parliament from Khulna.

However, regardless of capacity, many people exhibit strong resistance to the idea that women can be capable leaders. One study in Barisal (HKI, 2011) showed that 46 per cent of husbands, 33 per cent of wives, and 60 per cent of mothers-in-law do not think women can be capable leaders. In Barisal, respondents in small group discussions gave a number of reasons as to why women were less effective

decision-makers. Interestingly, many reasons relate more to women's gender-based constraints than to perceived 'innate' gaps (Save the Children, 2011). For example:

- Domestic and care work burdens, and family restrictions on interactions, limit women's abilities to engage in the face-to-face interactions expected of leaders.
- Teasing and ostracism. Women face teasing by their families if they consider taking on a leadership position. Husbands face teasing from their families and wider communities if their wives become leaders.
- Women are considered to be experienced only in the domains of nutrition and health; they are felt to lack knowledge of other important domains. They are also considered to lack experience of handling money.
- Men in particular feel that women lack the capacity to learn, or to become knowledgeable.

Even if elected, women are rarely fully representative of their communities. Women with existing family connections to politics or village development activities are more likely to seek election. Poor and marginalized women largely remain marginalized, though some NGOs, such as Nijera Kori which is active in southwest Bangladesh, specifically focus on empowering the most poor and marginalized through developing parallel mechanisms to enhance their participation. Uttaran has facilitated the participation of 872 women in various decision-making committees, such as school management committees, land committees, market committees and water committees. Sixty-seven women from Uttaran primary organizations have been elected to the Union Parishad (Uttaran, 2012).

More understanding is needed of the intersectionalities between poverty and the ability to articulate one's voice. Poor men, as well as poor women, appear to face immense difficulties in this regard. The ways in which ethnicity and religious affiliation cross-cut with gender also need to be explored.

5.1 Women in Disaster Management and Climate Change Response Bodies

Women have become engaged in various disaster management committees, particularly those operating at the community level. Such committees have been initiated by the government, Red Cross, and various NGOs. However, their participation often remains tokenistic, with women reporting that they often do not properly participate in decision-making. This can mean that women-specific issues, and potential solutions, are overlooked (Alam *et al.* 2008).

At the broader, non-emergency response level, it appears that women fail to be recognized as actors by a number of development partners working on climate change. Women are poorly represented in the planning and decision-making processes involved in developing climate change policies and strategies. This limits understanding of how such strategies may (adversely) affect their coping strategies. Their indigenous technical knowledge on their local ecosystems and their strategies, experiences and skills for coping with natural disasters and water shortages, are often overlooked (Government of Bangladesh, 2008).

Disaster affects traditional socio-cultural norms in different ways. Prior to the Sidr and Aila cyclones, for example, women in Koyra and Dacope Upazila from Khulna and Shyamnagar Upazila from Satkhira

explained that they maintained purdah and did not go out to work. Following the cyclones, however, they were engaged in road construction work. Even so, they attempted to maintain purdah by wearing the burkha, even though this made their work very difficult, particularly in hot weather. With respect to sourcing water, women and children were largely responsible (70 per cent) for obtaining water prior to the cyclones. Following the disasters, there was only a marginal increase in male willingness to assist with water collection, even though longer distances had to be travelled, with almost 10 per cent walking more than 5 km (Bala *et al.* no date).

6 Women in Agriculture and Rural Livelihood Activities

The women's movement, government policies, and development partner initiatives have all worked to improve the status of women. However, it is important to recognize that 'gender-transformation' also can be assisted through changes to physical infrastructure and strategic government priorities. For instance, in Bangladesh the famine in 1974 catalyzed change in two ways. First, from 1975 onwards, famine prevention emerged as a key national priority. The state invested heavily in rural infrastructure, funding off-season employment to create temporary and then durable rural roads. These have had an enormous impact on women's physical mobility and upon their access to health care, education, markets, and information. Second, famine relief efforts unleashed and legitimized the NGO process which has played such an important role in social change in Bangladesh over the past forty years.

6.1 Associations between Mobility Norms and Productive Work

Broadly speaking, attitudes across Bangladesh relating to women's freedom of movement in general and to women working outside the home remain conservative, as exemplified in the baseline survey on gender norms and attitudes that HKI (2011) conducted in Barisal and a country-wide World Bank (2008) survey on gender norms. In the former, there was high level of agreement among the wives, husbands, and mothers-in-law surveyed regarding the correctness of a woman not leaving the home without her husband's permission and of a married woman not working outside of the home if her husband earns sufficient income. Only a small proportion of respondents to the World Bank survey agreed that women need to be involved in decisions about their social visits to neighbors and their participation in community or political activities.

Evidence from a 2006 gender analysis of the outcomes of Save the Children USA (SC-USA) and HKI's Joban-e-Jibika (J-e-J) program in Barisal (the pre-cursor to the current Nobo Jibon program) indicates that husbands and mothers-in-law are the gatekeepers of women's mobility. Their permission is necessary to obtain junior women's participation in program activities (Sethuraman *et al.* 2006). This situation has implications for outreach strategies aimed at mobilizing development program participation and for any campaigns targeting changes in gender norms and attitudes.

These findings do not mean that gender norms regarding women's mobility are immune to change, nor that they are universally held. In Barisal, almost two thirds of married women (60 per cent) in one study agreed or strongly agreed that women have the same right as men to work outside the home. This

contrasts sharply with the one third of husbands (32 per cent) and mothers-in-law (38 per cent) who agreed. It is unclear how this situation is resolved in practice. However, a small study conducted in Southwest Bangladesh as long ago as 2003 (CARE Bangladesh, 2003) revealed that over half the women experienced moderate to high levels of mobility, particularly in regard to visiting relatives and neighbors. Only 3 per cent (10 individuals) of the women were unable to pay visits. Of these, seven were Muslim, two were Hindu, and one was Munda (tribal, Adivasi group). A further six women indicated significant restrictions in visiting neighbors; of these five were Muslim and one was Hindu.

Hindu and Muslim women in the greater Barisal area are relatively free to purchase at local markets and shops. Indeed, in some locations such women run their own shops either within, or close to, the main market center. School and college girls purchase their own stationery, clothing, cosmetics and shoes from the market. Broadly speaking, since Hindu communities do not practice Purdah Hindu women experience more freedom of movement, and are more active in markets (IFAD, 2005)

The growing acceptability of women working outside the home in the readymade garments industry and in the public sector fields of education and health care demonstrates that long-held mobility norms are flexible, particularly in the face of economic change. It should be noted, however, that these changes in norms apply particularly to women in urban centers, where new employment opportunities have been concentrated. The 'role model' effect is thus concentrated there rather than in the rural hinterlands. Moreover, such economic opportunities are typically taken up by young, single women who often leave work upon marriage (World Bank, 2008).

The introduction of micro-credit has undoubtedly contributed to increased female mobility since women need to move out of the homestead to attend meetings and training courses. These are typically hosted in someone's house. Increasingly, women are able to attend training courses in urban centers or at NGO headquarters. It has become essential for women to visit their daughter's school in order to receive stipends awarded for over a decade by the GoB to encourage girls in rural areas to attend schools (Kelkar *et al.* 2004).

6.2 Women's Involvement in Commercial Aquaculture, and as Fishers

Economic status strongly affects adherence to norms around women's mobility. Poor women often have more space to act counter to these norms due to economic need. Women from poor households have long been involved in fisheries in the coastal parts of Bangladesh, for instance (Halim, 2004). However, this state of affairs does not mean that such actions are either free from social costs or are necessarily empowering for the women involved (HKI, 2011; Kabeer, 2000).

Mono-culture commercial aquaculture farming is increasing exponentially, particularly in terms of land used. Whilst in 1979-80, shrimp farming was conducted on 20,000 hectares of land across the country, in 2006-07 it was conducted on 265,275 ha. By 2010 the area devoted to commercial aquaculture was 265,275 ha (Gurung *et al.*, 2014). This expansion has taken in traditional backyard fish ponds and has largely displaced rice farming in many areas. Large numbers of women and children work in commercial aquaculture. However, there are large differences in women's and men's earnings for the same type of

activity. For example, women earn approximately 64 per cent of men's earnings as fry catchers and sorters and between 60 to 80 per cent of men's earnings as shrimp processors (Gammage *et al.* 2006; Delapp and Lugg, 2000). Female fry fishers are particularly disadvantaged due to their low mobility, having to sell on the shore or from their homes, rendering them dependent on local businessmen. Male fry fishers can travel to local markets and choose between buyers. In some cases, women are coerced into accepting low prices due to threats of sexual violence (Halim, 2004; Verite, n.d.).

Many commercial aquaculture farms prefer to import laborers from other areas rather than employ local people (Guhathakurta, 2011). This has potentially negative effects for women. For instance, the Guhathakurta study found that in Shymnagar, Satkhira District, 18 married women were living as heads of 'male-absent' household. Three of them had lost their husbands to tigers in the forest, but the remaining 15 had either been divorced or deserted by their husbands. These men had been unable to find work as laborers in aquaculture due to preferential hiring of outsider laborers. They had preferred to leave for good rather than maintain their families in some way, for instance by sending remittances (Guhathakurta, 2011).

Whilst men dominate coastal fisheries, many destitute women in Baniashanta (a union of Dakopupazilla in Khulna) earn their livelihoods for six months by fishing from the river. Fishing starts in late February or early March when the water is comparatively less cold. They spend a considerable amount of time in the water. During the three month fish breeding period (March-May) fishing is prohibited to protect stocks. However, women fish at night to avoid being caught by the coast guards. For the remainder of the year they have few opportunities to generate income (ADB-KFW-IFAD, 2012).

6.3 Other Agricultural-Based Livelihood Strategies

Traditionally, women have been less involved in rice production than men, particularly in the field-based stages. However, according to one study their roles and responsibilities have started to increase largely due to male out-migration within Bangladesh, or abroad. They are becoming involved in all aspects of production, whilst at the same time finding it difficult to recruit sufficient hired labor in the peak transplanting and harvesting season (Gurung *et al.* 2014). This said, it is difficult to know how widespread changes in the gender division of labor in agriculture actually are. A rapid gender assessment in agriculture (Naved *et al.* 2011), which included several locations in southwestern Bangladesh, did not reveal much change in roles and responsibilities. Table 2 summarizes the key findings.

Table 2. Typical gender roles and responsibilities in farming

Agricultural activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are economically involved in activities performed in and around the home. These include the pre-production and post-harvest stages of major field crops. They are also the major producers of small-scale, home-grown vegetables, poultry and livestock. Women-produced items are typically directed towards home consumption. • Men produced field crops are destined for the market.
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women may sell goods they have produced themselves at the farm gate if

	<p>the amount involved is tiny. However, men are involved if quantities are larger, and usually keep the proceeds.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men are almost entirely responsible for marketing.
Associations between poverty, wealth, and agricultural activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women from the largest households are the least involved in agricultural activities. Women from small farm and landless households undertake value chain activities, whether home based or not. Nevertheless, they rarely engage in marketing.
Credit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small holder and landless women have access to micro-credit whereas men have access to institutional sources of credit
Associations between technology and economic activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women tend to work on low-technology activities whereas men undertake high technology activities. These technologies are typically designed for use in the fields, where women are rarely active. Even if the technology is used in the household compound it is usually used by men, due to strongly held beliefs that women cannot operate machinery. This argument is prevalent even though female wage laborers frequently use such machines. Men tend to own all machinery.
Associations between information and economic activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men have access to more sources of information, and they are better reached by the extension services.
Agricultural Decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regardless of social status, men dominate all decisions about the use of land, and crop selection. Even if women are consulted men take the final decision. Men typically decide how to use micro-credit, even if procured by women. • Women may take decisions on small scale poultry and livestock. In a few cases, women who own larger poultry units may be key decision-makers. This said, male support is critical to their enterprise. • In small farms and landless households men tend to decide whether women can take up work as daily laborers, and define the terms of their engagement.

Increasing salinity, partly as a result of the expansion of shrimp production, is resulting in declining agricultural productivity in many locations and is also limiting the range of crops being grown (ADB-KFW-IFAD, no date). There are important knock on effects for livestock management - a key livelihood strategy for many women, with reductions in areas for cattle to graze and difficulties in providing sweet water. Aquatic biodiversity is falling with knock on effects for women engaged in wild fisheries. To catch one tiger prawn fry, 14 other types of shrimp fries, 21 types of fish fries and 1600 zooplankton is caught and then discarded (Bela, 2009).

Farmers, including women, are responding by diversifying into new crops that can manage saline conditions. These include palm, betel nut, and sofeda. In Satkhira, due to the prevalence of *gher* fisheries, women raise ducks. Farmers also grow jute, fruits and vegetables, mustard seed and oil seed, coconut, sugarcane and *goalpata* palm, from which a molasses product is made, in the increasingly short rainy season where salinity is not a major issue.

It is imperative that further research is carried out into the constraints and opportunities facing women and men in their 'traditional' roles and responsibilities in agriculture and fisheries. At the same time, evidence of slippage in these roles needs to be sought. If women are increasingly taking on 'male roles', how are they managing? Are they facing specific gender-based constraints additional to those that men face in the same roles? If they are, how are they addressing these constraints? What penalties, if any, are they facing through transgressing gender norms? Are, indeed, men taking on new roles?

6.4 Vending

Throughout Bangladesh, women rarely enter markets either as vendors or as sellers, since this is considered to pollute their honor (Govind *et al.* 2004). However, many poor women in South West Bangladesh do enter markets on their own without male accompaniment. Many of these women are elderly, or single, and do not have an able-bodied man in the family. They thus have more 'space' to act counter to social and gender norms due to their widely recognized need to do so. They typically sell their own agricultural produce such as vegetables and eggs. This is possible because the quantities involved are small, and because women are considered the owners of chickens and ducks (CCRIP, 2012; HKI, 2011)

A few women run small trading enterprises, selling, for example, bangles, cosmetics, sarees and other accessories. Some sell from shops and others travel from village to village. Some women operate restaurant businesses, teashops, confectionary shops, grocery shops or tailoring businesses. A few such businesses are run from women's homes. Some women also produce handicrafts, for example mats using local materials. However, many poor women cannot buy the raw materials to produce mats and thus excluded from the earning activities, or work on a contract basis, receiving materials from 'employers' (ADB-KFW-IFAD 2012; pers. comm lead author).

Other women are engaged as agricultural laborers, in road construction - particularly earth works, as domestic workers and in factories. However, laboring work is not available across the year. Since there are very few well off households at the rural level, only very few women obtain positions as domestic help. The poor state of rural infrastructure in Southwest Bangladesh means that few offices and other commercial businesses operate there, thus restricting employment opportunities.

7 Implications of the Study for WorldFish' Further Research

The literature review shows that it is difficult to move away from generalizations about women in Bangladesh to achieve specific, rich insights. There is some superb study data, but in some reports there is ample analytic confusion between what people say is happening, and what is actually happening. This said, some studies stand out in their work to unpack the dynamism in gender relations, among them the work by IFPRI, Helen Keller International, the World Bank, and some others.

A deeper understanding is needed of any specificity in gender and social norms among ethnic minority communities and by affiliation to particular religions, and how these specific norms interact with and are

influenced by wider gender and social norms. Given that wider society can be exclusionary towards specific ethnic and religious groups, and disabled women and men, what is the scope for people in wider society themselves to challenge their own norms?

The impacts of climate change, ecological collapse, the advent of widespread commercial aquaculture, and economic change upon women in southwest Bangladesh is well reported. More understanding of how women and men, within and across communities, respond to and attempt to exploit these challenges is required. In other words, how do women and men express and act upon their agency? Some, but presumably not all, men have an exit strategy. However, the degree to which such men continue to support their families is unclear. And, are women also leaving? If so, who, and do they maintain contact with, and support, family members left behind?

In some cases, people seem absolutely disempowered, particularly in areas facing prolonged waterlogging. It seems as though coping is hardly an appropriate term for people living completely marginalized lives. It would be useful to understand any glimmers of agency here; for example, solidarity and reciprocity networks between women, or between men and women, and whether attempts by NGOs and others working with such people to improve their livelihoods are showing signs of increasing self-reliance. This would provide entry points to build upon.

Much literature, only partly explored here, focuses on the opportunities and challenges women, men and children face in various forms of commercial aquaculture, whether as employees or when trying to run their own businesses. Work is emerging on how other agricultural systems are being adapted, including traditional rice systems and attempts to grow new, saline-resistant plants and trees. More understanding needs to be gained of these processes and how gender norms and agency interact with them.

The authors of this paper did not study the role of children in southwest Bangladesh and how they are affected by such rapid change on all levels. Some studies of commercial aquaculture have noted that they can be strongly involved in the lower, poorly paid echelons of work. In studies focused on women, children are more often conceptualized as a responsibility of women, rather than as actors in their own right, with visions of their own. It would be very useful to conduct small group discussions and other work into children and youth, disaggregated by gender, to understand more about their lives.

7.1 Community Sampling Frame

Southwest Bangladesh covers a large area. It would be useful to sample very different areas, including paying attention to locations and people (particular ethnic / religious groups) which have scarcely been surveyed by other agencies. Annex 1 provides some information on one ethnic community, the Rishis, to help frame basic understandings of such communities and the nature of future research required. In terms of developing a community sampling frame, WorldFish needs to ensure:

1. Variation by ethnic group/religious affiliation (including sampling various ethnic/religious groups within same geographic community)

2. Variation by aquaculture-based livelihood strategy: fishers in open water and in rivers (for wild caught fish); own account shrimp production in khers; employed in commercial shrimp aquaculture.
3. Variation by land-based livelihood strategy: farmers dependent on various forms of rice production; farmers engaging in adaptive farming by selecting saline-resistant crops; farmers working with various kinds of livestock including large livestock such as cattle, ducks and poultry.
4. Variation by geographic location: urban centres and immediate hinterland; remote, difficult to reach communities, and communities based in the charlands.
5. Variation in terms of levels of male outmigration.

Given that so much literature focuses on the female experience rather than upon gender relations, it is important to balance investigation into male and female livelihood strategies, assess how they interact and support each other, and whether they mutually conflict or undermine each other. Many interpretative questions can be asked. For instance: What limits do gender norms pose to potential growth and increase in income generation? Do changes in gender norms imposed by economic necessity settle into becoming a 'new norm'? Are there any examples of gender norms, or their transgression, leading directly to higher adaptability and innovation?

Given that children are hardly ever targeted in their own right, it would be useful to include them in the sampling frame, with children in each of the four broad groups above included in specially designed small group discussions etc.

Disabled women and men form a significant proportion of the poor and thus also need to be specifically included.

A clear understanding of female headship needs to be developed and applied to ensure sufficient members from this /these categories are included. Female headship is often referred to as male-absent households. Presumably some households are effectively 'abandoned' by men, others may receive significant remittances, and in others men may migrate on a seasonal basis.

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9 Annex 1: Caste System And The Rishi Community Of South West Bangladesh

Source: <http://dalitbangladesh.wordpress.com/dalit-2/past-and-present-of-the-caste-system-a-brief-introduction/>

A baseline survey, 'Religious Ethnic Minority Groups of South west Bangladesh, conducted by Reza Shamsur Rahman (sponsored by Uttaran in 1993) revealed that there are at least 20 such minority groups in Khulna and Satkhira districts. These groups are the Bajondars, the Beharas, the Bhagobenees, the Bunos, the Dias, the Dhopas, the Hazams, the Jeles, the Kaiputras (or Kaortas), the Namasudras, the Nikaris, the PandraKshatrias, the Parois, the Patnis, the Rajbangshirs, the Rishis , the Fosua, the Shahjee, the Shikaris, the Tele and others. Among them the Rishis and the Namasudras constitute the major part of their total population. Caste system has literally out-casted these small groups of people who are popularly known as Muchi or, less derogatorily, Rishi.

They usually live at the edge of villages. Since they are still considered unclean, they live separately from other 'clean' groups in their own village. They might live next to either Hindu or Muslim neighbourhoods, but they are only allowed to live in the most undesirable areas, which nobody else covets. However, small groups have migrated to towns in an attempt to find better livelihoods. Access to drinking water is also restricted if not denied to Rishi communities in some areas. Rishis are not allowed to take food on the same plate which is served for "higher" caste people in many local restaurants. Education for the Rishis is a difficult and sometime painful experience. Their children are not welcomed into neighbourhoods or schools as they are considered polluted and polluting. Shame, guilt and trauma are the way of living for many young learners of the Rishi community. Their elders are illiterate and thus not aware of the importance of education. To many, education is a luxury. Girls are particularly the worst victims of illiteracy. Female dropout rate from primary school is relatively higher among Rishi people.

The economic situation of most Rishi families is vulnerable. Their job opportunities are limited. They hardly possess any land. Their occupational skills, except for few trades, are poor. They are not often hired as agricultural labourers because often they are not skilled in the tasks. Earth cutting, loading and unloading goods, pulling rickshaws or vans, shoe shining, making bamboo and cane furniture etc. are the main activities of the Rishi. Employment opportunities for Rishi communities are gradually shrinking due to commercial production of commodities that they previously produced. Even some services offered by Rishi people in the near past are now taken over by non-Rishi people by investing more capital and introducing modern machineries and equipment. As a whole the Rishi communities have failed to adapt with the changing economic scenario, becoming poorer. A recent study, "THE RISHI COMMUNITY OF SATKHIRA" conducted by Caritas Development Institute depicts the same picture. In the sample of 1990 Rishi households selected from 87 villages of 33 unions of Ashasuni, Kaligonj and Kalaroathanas of Satkhiradistrict, it was found that agriculture contributed to 3.75% of the Rishi total annual income while other non-agricultural activities contributed to 96.24% of their total annual income. Seasonal unemployment mostly for 2-3 months in the rainy season was another finding. The asset base of the Rishi people came out to be very limited. Fifty percent of the respondents had some savings but mostly below Tk. 500. Most of the sampled households received loans from NGO groups and local moneylenders within the range of Tk. 500 and 5000 and mainly for purchasing bamboo and cane and sustaining thus household expenditure.

The literacy rate was found to be of only 30% (male 36.31%, female 23.15%), that is, half the national literacy rate. Development interventions by both GOs and NGOs were found to be extremely inadequate, except for some credit programmes by some NGOs. Last but not least, the Rishi people were deprived of social and legal rights. They had no social participation and were not given access to social functions by the majority community. Early marriages and dowry were prevalent in the Rishi community. Local influential men, Hindu or Muslim, dominated the Rishi people. Sometimes they grabbed their lands and/or threatened to evict them.