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A Study of Women Empowerment: Decision Making and Participation in Farm & Household Economic Activities

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ABSTRACT

Women empowerment especially economic empowerment is very important as it gives security to a woman. It is very crucial for progress of the society. Women plays a pivotal and potentially benefiting role in all-round growth of resource-poor farm families. But often they are neglected in decision making on farm and household matters which are mostly managed by them. Participation in decision making process especially in economic activities is an indication of empowerment. The present study attempts to investigate the level of women economic empowerment in resource-poor farm families by analyzing their extent of participation in decision making on farm and household related economic activities. The study was conducted in six agro-climatic zones of West Bengal taking a random sample of 120 resource-poor farm families. Both husband and wife of the families were personally interviewed by pretested structured interview schedule. Spearman's rank-difference correlation was used to measure the extent of agreement between husband's and wife's responses. The study revealed that wives played a major role to jointly decide purchasing or hiring of land (43.33-47.50 %), selling of produce (35.00-35.83 %) and borrowing for agriculture (26.67-30.00 %). Decisions for milking and processing of milk, utilization of dung and sale of milk and milk products were dominantly taken by wives (72.50 per cent, 54.67 per cent and 40.83 per cent, respectively), where purchase and sale of animals, type and number of animals to be kept and adoption of new animal husbandry practices were mainly decided jointly (32.50-37.50 per cent, 31.67-36.67 per cent and 24.17-27.50 per cent, respectively). Household economic decisions on building new house, household purchasing, education of children, selection of occupation for children and financial activities were mainly taken jointly (38.33-41.67 per cent, 32.50-35.83 per cent, 25.00-27.50 per cent, 25.83-30.00 per cent and 24.17-27.50 per cent, respectively). The findings of the study indicated higher level of women economic empowerment in animal husbandry and household sectors.

Key words: Women economic empowerment, decision making, resource-poor farm family, spearman's rank-difference correlation

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment is a process of delegating power to an individual so that the person can take his/her own decision without the influence of others. It is a psychological feeling and provides a sense of power to a human to live freely, think freely and act freely for his/her own benefit without disturbing others. Empowerment is a relative term and it varies among societies, persons, ages, genders, positions and situations. There are several domains of empowerment *viz.* social empowerment, economic empowerment; cultural empowerment, political empowerment, technological empowerment, knowledge empowerment, health empowerment and more which are still emerging. Among these domains economic empowerment is most important as it gives the most wanted security to an individual. Women empowerment is a much discussed issue. It is a continuing process of giving power and recognition to women what they deserve for. Women play pivotal roles in every spheres of society. But their contribution is often overlooked by the male dominated society when the question of control and share over resources comes. This is not a natural justice. Every society is judged on the basis of position and situation of women in that society. So women empowerment in various domains is very important for progress of the society.

It is not an exaggeration that women play an active role in farming, whether it is crop cultivation or animal husbandry. They are the backbone of rural economy. It was reported that of the 310 million rural workforces, 199 million are male and 111 million are female (Tikoo, 2006). The role of women members of resource-poor farm families is a matter of concern as the distribution of farm holdings in India is dominated by resource- poor small and marginal farmers. In India, 63 per cent of total operational holdings were of size less than 1 hectare (*i.e.,*

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marginal holding) and 18.88 per cent were having small holdings between 1-2 hectares [Agricultural Census Report, India (2000-01)]. These percentages are still increasing. Kerala is having the smallest holding size followed by West Bengal. In West Bengal, 81.17 percent and 14.38 percent of total operational holding fell in marginal and small operational holding category, respectively [Agricultural Census Report, West Bengal (2005-06)].

A resource-poor farmer cannot be entirely dependent on outside labourers to work in his farm, instead all the able family members including the females of the family have to be involved themselves in various farming practices. Though women bear a crucial and potentially benefiting role in all-round growth of resource-poor farm families, they face indirect negligence and economic insecurity rendering their very simple but necessary wants to fulfill. Sometimes the hard and committed works done by the rural women are being overlooked in face of insurmountable gender bias and gender oppression (Sarkar and Pradhan, 2004). Often, they are not asked to take any decision in farm and household matters which are mostly managed by them. Participation in decision making especially in economic matters is a clear indication of empowerment. In the present study, an attempt has been made to investigate the level of women economic empowerment in resource-poor farm families by analyzing their extent of participation in decision making on farm and household related economic activities.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in all the six agro-climatic zones of West Bengal *viz.* hill zone, terai zone, old alluvial zone, new alluvial zone, lateritic & red soil zone and coastal saline soil zone. Two blocks were selected randomly from each agro-climatic zone. Districts were not selected, because most of the districts have parts in more than one agro-climatic zone. Thus a total of 12 blocks were selected from six agro-climatic zones. One village from each block was selected randomly. Ten resource-poor farm families were selected randomly from 12 villages. Thus a total of 120 farm families were selected for the purpose of the study. Husband and wife of each selected farm household were taken as respondents. So 120 husbands and 120 wives of 120 farm families constituted a total sample size of 240 respondents for the present study. A comprehensive list of important economic activities pertaining to farm (crop cultivation and animal husbandry) and household activities was prepared in consultation with the experts, available literature and farmers of non-sampling area. The possible combinations taken for decision making were husband (H), wife (W), along with spouse (HW) and in consultation with others (a/others) including children, family members and relatives, neighbourers and fellow progressive farmers and experts. Data were collected with the help of a pretested structured interview schedule by personal interview method. Appropriate statistical tools were used for analysis of data. In order to measure the extent of association or agreement between husband's and wife's responses, Spearman's rank-difference correlation was used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the present study, participation of wives of the selected farm families in decision making on crop cultivation, animal husbandry and household related economic activities was delineated by taking into consideration both husband's and wife's responses. The values of Spearman's rank difference correlation coefficient for husband's responses about decision making pattern in crop cultivation, animal husbandry and household related economic activities were found as 0.923, 0.968 and 0.965, respectively. Similarly, these values for wife's responses were calculated as 0.937, 0.854 and 0.951, respectively. The values were found significant at 1per cent level. It indicates that there was high degree of agreement in the responses of husbands and wives. For this reason, husband's responses were considered for participation of husband only and wife's responses were considered for participation of wife only in the description of results. An overall picture of decision making pattern reported in the study area regarding crop cultivation, animal husbandry and household related economic activities is described first and then variations observed in zones are pointed out.

Women participation in decision making on crop cultivation related economic activities

There are many decisions involved in crop cultivation related economic activities starting from selection of cropping pattern and cultivars to adoption of innovation. The data presented in Table 1 and Table 2 reveal an overall picture of decision making pattern observed in farm households.

Decision regarding selection of cropping pattern and cultivars was found mostly taken by husband (52.50%). Capital allocation to different crops was reported mainly decided by husband (47.50%) followed by both husband and wife (30.83-31.67%). Decision regarding procurement of inputs (type of inputs to be procured and the source of procurement of input) was found mainly taken by husband (45.00%). Decisions related to selling

of produce like place of sale and quantities of sale were mainly taken jointly (35.00-35.83%) followed by husband alone (27.50%).

The individual husband decision was observed lower in this case, because it was reported as the most important decision taken by the resource-poor farm families as profit is involved in this decision and collective decision used to be beneficial in this case. Purchasing or hiring of land was mostly decided jointly (43.33-47.50%) followed by husband alone (28.33%). Decisions pertaining to borrowing for agriculture (source, quantity, mode of repayment involved etc.) were predominantly taken jointly (26.67-30.00%) followed by husband alone (27.50%). Adoption of innovations regarding improved farming practices was mainly decided in consultation with others (61.67-66.66%). The major finding coming out from the above results is the higher degree of collectivity in decision making pattern (as the percentages of individual decisions rarely gets clear majority *i.e.* above 50.00%) and this will increase the degree of rationality in decisions which is most important for the resource-poor farm families.

Some deviations were found in zones regarding decision making pattern of farm households in crop cultivation related economic activities. Husband and wife joint participation in taking decision regarding selection of cropping pattern and cultivars was mostly found in hill zone. It is justified by relatively higher involvement of wives in crop cultivation activities in hill zone.

In terai zone, decision regarding capital allocation to different crops was found mostly taken jointly. Husbands in old alluvial zone and coastal saline soil zone mainly took decisions regarding borrowing for agriculture and adoption of innovation. In lateritic and red soil zone, husband-wife joint decision were found predominant in case of procurement of inputs.

Table 1: Decision making pattern in crop cultivation related economic activities

[Husband's response (n=120)]

Activities	H		W		HW		a/others	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Selection of cropping pattern and Cultivars	63	52.50	0	0.00	5	4.17	52	43.33
Capital allocation to different crop(s)	57	47.50	2	1.67	38	31.67	23	19.16
Procurement of inputs	54	45.00	1	0.83	11	9.17	54	45.00
Selling of produce	33	27.50	4	3.33	42	35.00	41	34.17
Purchasing or hiring of land	34	28.33	2	1.67	57	47.50	27	22.50
Borrowing for agriculture	33	27.50	1	0.83	32	26.67	54	45.00
Adoption of innovation	23	19.17	0	0.00	17	14.17	80	66.66

ρ = 0.923**, significant at 1% level

Table 2: Decision making pattern in crop cultivation related economic activities

[Wife's response (n=120)]

Activities	H		W		HW		a/others	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Selection of cropping pattern and cultivars	51	42.50	4	3.33	12	10.00	53	44.16
Capital allocation to different crop(s)	53	44.17	5	4.17	37	30.83	25	20.84
Procurement of inputs	45	37.50	3	2.50	18	15.00	54	45.00
Selling of produce	31	25.83	8	6.67	43	35.83	38	31.67
Purchasing or hiring of land	34	28.33	5	4.17	52	43.33	29	24.16
Borrowing for agriculture	32	26.67	1	0.83	36	30.00	51	42.50
Adoption of innovation	21	17.50	2	1.67	23	19.17	74	61.67

ρ = 0.927**, significant at 1% level

The overall finding of the study regarding decision making pattern in crop cultivation related economic activities finds some correspondence with the previous researches. Bala *et al.* (1993) reported higher extent of joint decision making in case of hiring of land. Dhaka *et al.* (1994) and Devi *et al.* (2002) found negligible participation of women alone in decision making process of various crop production activities. Ozkan *et al.* (2000) revealed relatively less role of farm women in the decision making process regarding buying inputs, planting crops or planning the budget.

Women participation in decision making on animal husbandry related economic activities

Data presented in Table 3 and Table 4 give an idea about decision making pattern in animal husbandry related economic activities. It can be concluded that wives relatively dominated their spouses in decision making on this part. They mainly took decisions regarding milking and processing of milk by deciding type and quantity of milk processing (72.50%) followed by utilization of dung in terms of quantity and type (51.67%) and quantity and place of sale of milk and milk products (40.83%). Majority of the wives reported that milk is the major nutritional source in their family and milk products like ghee is mainly prepared for family consumption. Feeding of children and other family members was entirely taken care of by wives. As a consequence, the wives mainly used to decide how much quantities of milk and ghee should be retained for family consumption and how much quantities of these should be given for sale. The greater involvement of wives in animal husbandry activities increased their economic decision making ability. Joint decision was found predominant in case of purchase and sale of animals which deals with type and number of animals to be purchased/sale (32.50-37.50%) followed by adoption of new animal husbandry farming practices which includes adoption, rejection, discontinue etc. (24.17-27.50%). Individual husband decision was

observed predominant in case of type, quantity and place of purchasing of feed, concentrates, dairy utensils etc. (30.83%). Consultation of others was mostly taken in case of adoption of new animal husbandry practices (40.80-43.33 %).

The decision making pattern in animal husbandry related economic activities varies from zone to zone. In hill zone, joint decision was taken in case of purchase of feed and concentrates, sale of milk and milk products. It was observed in the terai zone that decisions pertaining to type of animal to be kept were mainly decided by the husband and joint decisions were mainly taken in the area of sale of milk & milk products. In old alluvial zone, husbands were found mostly decided type of animal to be kept. In lateritic & red soil zone and coastal saline soil zone, wives mainly decided purchase of feed and concentrates.

Table 3: Decision making pattern in animal husbandry related economic activities

[Husband's response (n=120)]

Activities	H		W		HW		a/others	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Type and number of animals to be kept	34	28.33	25	20.83	38	31.67	23	19.17
Milking and processing of milk	14	11.67	83	69.17	16	13.33	7	5.83
Purchase of feed, dairy utensils, concentrates, etc.	37	30.83	34	28.33	33	27.50	16	13.33
Purchase and sale of animals	33	27.50	30	25.00	45	37.50	12	9.99
Sale of milk and milk product	36	30.00	49	40.83	31	25.83	4	3.33
Utilization of dung	19	15.83	68	56.67	33	27.50	0	0.00
Adoption of new animal husbandry practices	20	16.67	18	15.00	33	27.50	49	40.80

ρ = 0.968**, significant at 1% level

Table 4: Decision making pattern in animal husbandry related economic activities

[Wife's response (n=120)]

Activities	H		W		HW		a/others	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Type and number of animals to be kept	29	24.17	23	19.17	44	36.67	24	19.99
Milking and processing of milk	11	9.16	87	72.50	15	12.50	7	5.83
Purchase of feed, dairy utensils, concentrates etc.	35	29.17	32	26.67	37	30.83	16	13.33
Purchase and sale of animals	32	26.67	34	28.33	39	32.50	15	12.5
Sale of milk and milk product	34	28.33	49	40.83	32	26.67	5	4.16
Utilization of dung	21	17.50	62	51.67	36	30.00	1	0.83
Adoption of new animal husbandry practices	20	16.67	19	15.83	29	24.17	52	43.33

ρ = 0.954**, significant at 1% level

The overall finding of the study regarding decision making pattern in animal husbandry related economic activities shows communality with some findings of the earlier researchers. Dhaka et al. (1994) observed female's domination in decision making regarding selling of milk and milk products, retention and utilization of milk and milk products, feeding of concentrates and predominant joint participation in decision making regarding type of livestock to be raised and in purchase and sale of animals. Kumari (1999) and Upadhayay and Intodia (2007) also reported predominant join participation in deciding type and number of livestock to be kept. Shetter *et al.* (2005) observed that decision pertaining to the number of animals to be reared was mostly made by both men and women. Pandey *et al.* (2006) reported that females mainly decided the type and quantity of milk products to be prepared.

Women participation in decision making on household related economic activities

It can be observed from Table 5 and Table 6 that individual husband participation in decision making on household related economic activities was not found predominant in any activity and their relatively higher involvement was observed in taking decision regarding household purchasing (28.33%). Husband-wife joint participation was found predominant in decision making regarding building of new house that deals with deciding place, process, type, renovation, *etc.* (38.33-41.67%) followed by household purchasing which includes type, place of purchase, mode of payment, *etc.* (32.50-35.83%); selection of occupation for children which involves deciding type of occupation, place of occupation, *etc.* (25.83-30.00%); education of children in term of selection of school, selection of private teacher, level of education to be given, *etc.* (25.00-27.50%) and financial activities related to saving, borrowing, repayment, *etc.* (24.17-27.50%). Marriage of the children was found mainly decided in consultation with others involving family members and relatives (43.30-46.60%). However some inter-zonal variations were reported in decision making pattern regarding household related economic activities. It has been found in terai zone that decisions pertaining to education and marriage of children were mainly taken in consultation with children. In new alluvial zone, decisions regarding education and selection of occupation for children were mainly taken in consultation with children. In lateritic and red soil zone, decisions regarding education and selection of occupation for children were mainly taken with the help of experts and decisions pertaining to financial activities (saving, borrowing, repayment, *etc.*) were mainly taken by wives. Husbands of Coastal saline soil zone mainly took the

decisions regarding building new house and wives mainly took the decisions regarding education of children.

Table 5: Decision making pattern in household related economic activities

[Husband's response (n=120)]

Activities	H		W		HW		a/others	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Building new house	33	27.50	22	18.33	46	38.33	19	15.80
Household purchasing	34	28.33	35	29.17	39	32.50	12	10.00
Education of children	20	16.67	25	20.83	30	25.00	45	37.54
Selection of occupation for children	16	13.33	27	22.50	31	25.83	46	38.37
Marriage of the children	16	13.33	18	15.00	30	25.00	56	46.70
Financial activities	31	25.83	22	18.33	29	24.17	38	31.64

ρ = 0.965**, significant at 1% level

Table 6: Decision making pattern in household related economic activities

[Wife's response (n=120)]

Activities	H		W		HW		a/others	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Building new house	30	25.00	24	20.00	50	41.67	16	13.30
Household purchasing	28	23.33	38	31.67	43	35.83	11	9.17
Education of children	18	15.00	25	20.83	33	27.50	44	36.73
Selection of occupation for children	16	13.33	24	20.00	36	30.00	44	36.64
Marriage of the children	15	12.50	24	20.00	29	24.17	52	43.30
Financial activities	26	21.67	22	18.33	33	27.50	39	32.54

ρ = 0.951**, significant at 1% level

The findings of the study are in conformity with some findings of earlier researchers like Awal *et al.* (2000), Masur (2000) and Kunwar (2004).

CONCLUSION

There are many matters where rational decisions are sought. These matters include establishment matters, farm management matters; child related matters, social and religious matters as well as financial matters like saving, borrowing, repayment, etc. If the rational and proper decisions are not taken in these matters, a family may face problem, which adversely affects the family living. Again, analysis of decision making pattern in household activities reveals a clear picture of the position and importance of every member in the family and identifies the key decision maker of the family in household related activities. Analysis of women participation in decision making on farm and household related economic activities of a resource-poor farm family is essential to delineate the level of women economic empowerment in that family. Here an attempt had been taken in this direction. From the present study it can be summarized that males were dominant decision maker in the areas of selection of cropping pattern and cultivars, capital allocation to different crops and procurement of inputs whereas decisions were mainly taken jointly in case of purchasing or hiring of land, selling of produce and borrowing for agriculture. Most of the decisions related to animal husbandry were taken either by wives or jointly. Decisions regarding milking and processing of milk, utilization of dung and sale of milk and milk products were dominantly taken by wives, where purchase and sale of animals, type and number of animals to be kept and adoption of new animal husbandry practices were mainly decided jointly. Decisions for building new house, household purchasing, education of children, selection of occupation for children and financial activities were mainly taken jointly by husband and wife. Considering the extent of involvement of female members of the family in decision making process of farm and household related economic activities, it can be inferred that there is satisfactory level of women economic empowerment in resource-poor farm families and the findings of the study imply the necessity of training and capacity building of the women folk in the areas where they are key decision maker so that they can make right decisions.

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