

## Gender Analysis and Impact in Patuakhali

### Summary of the report of the PSTU Master Students – version 16 July 2018

**Full title of the report:** Gender Analysis and Impact Assessment in BGP Area (Patuakhali); the final report was received on 15 April 2018

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**Background:** The Blue Gold Program (BGP) commissioned a study on the gender situation and the impact of BGP on gender equality and women's empowerment. The study was conducted by a team of four students in the context of their internship as part of their Master Study at PSTU. The students compared the situation of women in old polders (43/1A and 43/2F) with the situation of women in new polders (47/3 and 47/4) of BGP<sup>1</sup>. They conducted 52 FGDs (with 453 participants in total), 52 interviews (KII) with individual persons / key informants, and collected 40 case studies in November and December 2017. After a draft report, they submitted a second version of their joint report on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018, which formed the basis for this summary. The students will also prepare individual reports as part of their study.

The Terms of Reference for this study had been prepared by BGP. An internship agreement was signed by BGP (TL) and the University (the Vice Chancellor). BGP's zonal and polder level staff assisted the students in organizing the FGDs and KIIS; BGP's gender coordinator played a vital role in facilitating the study by provided backstopping to the students and liaising with PSTU.

The selection of FGD participants and interviewees was by BGP field staff. The selection method was rather purposely (i.e. no ad random scientific sampling). Most FGD groups consisted of women who were somehow involved in Blue Gold interventions, i.e. members of Water Management Groups (WMGs), including of Executive Committee members, participants of Farmer Field Schools (FFS, including MFS), members of LCS groups and members of Community Water Management groups. Several FGD groups consisted of 'community members' who were not necessarily involved in WMG interventions; also some UP representatives participated. The students analysed their findings separately for the old and the new polders, but not for the different categories of FGD participants.

#### Summarized findings of the study:

The study found significant differences between the situation of women in old polders, where BGP interventions have been implemented over the last four years, and the new polders, where BGP interventions only started since January 2017. The students were convinced that the main encountered differences between the position of women in old en new polders could be attributed to BGP interventions.

#### Quantitative findings:

Determinative	Old polders (in % of women FGD participants)	New polders (in % of women FGD participants)
Participation of women in WMG meetings	53% (155 of 287 women)	30% (50 of 166 women)

<sup>1</sup> Old polders are those in which Blue Gold started working from the start of the program (2013); new polders are those where Blue Gold started working in 2017.

Active participation in decision making process of women who participate in WMG meetings	68% (105 of 155 women)	25% (13 of 50 women)
Women's involvement in income generating activities (such as farming, homestead gardening, livestock or poultry)	78% (of 287)	39% (of 166)
Husbands contributing to household activities, such as fetching water during cooking and child care.	48% (of 287)	13% (of 166)
Women involved in decision-making within the household	62% (of 287)	19% (of 166)
Women's mobility	81% (of 287)	27% (of 166)
Women reported to have savings	79% (of 287)	20% (of 166)
Women's involvement in CBOs (including WMGs)	More	Few
Women's leadership	Higher than in new polders; accepted by men	Low; and misconception about the possibility of women's leadership.

NB: the students' report does not describe how the various 'determinatives' had been defined by them (e.g. involvement in decision-making); however, it is assumed that they used similar criteria for both the old and the new polders.

#### Qualitative findings from the report:

- Both men and women joined WMGs to learn about new farming technologies, about proper water management, to improve their economic condition and to develop their community.
- Women tend to feel shy to speak out in front of men because many men consider a woman "as a fool". Instead, women used to discuss issues among themselves. In the context of FFS and WMGs, however, women are encouraged to speak out for themselves.
- Women's participation in intra-household decision-making remains often partial. For example, they can participate in decision-making on child education (and contribute to its costs), but rarely about child marriage, especially in case of daughters.
- In new polders relatively few women participate in decision-making (19%). And if women take decisions without their husband's permission, they are often beaten by them. Poverty and drug use (especially locally brewed alcohol) are mentioned as main underlying reasons. Women in the new polders with some own income give it often to their husbands.
- When women spend income, it is mainly on household items and children's education; some women invest their income in agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilizer, livestock and poultry.
- Women in the old polders can much easier than women in new polders go for marketing, to neighbours, to the Union Parishad, and to hospital. Apparently women's membership of WMGs and/or FFS contributed to this increased mobility as such membership requires them to leave their homes to participate in WMG meetings and/or FFS sessions.
- Few women in both old and new polders have access to government services such as DAE handouts and services. However, they are often engaged with NGOs as BRAC, Uddipon, Nobojeebon, Sushilon and/or others, receiving training and financial support (which apparently is microcredit).
- Especially in the old polders women have savings, e.g. with Grameen Bank or ASHA, as well as with WMGs.

- In old polders it is largely accepted that WMGs have also female leaders. All WMGs have women leaders (i.e. the female EC members) who are supported by their community. In new polders there are people who think that female leadership is not possible.
- The students concluded that “after joining BGP” (in fact, after joining WMGs, FFSs, etc) women became more empowered, including more respected by their family and society, largely because they became successfully involved in income generating work.
- The students also stated that the involvement of women in agricultural and infrastructural improvements by BGP helped to increase crop production, improve financial conditions and the consumption of more nutritious food, thus improving the overall way of living of the people. In the new polders, however, the students could not yet observe such benefits.
- The students wrote that in the new polders, however, saline water damages the crops and “they have no idea how to overcome this problem”. Less women in new polders are involved in productive work as compared to the old polders, but comparatively more women were found to be beaten by their husband. Also diseases in poultry and livestock were more frequently found in the new polders.

**The main recommendations of the study are:**

- Strategies to combat the lack of empowerment must not only address the immediate needs of rural women (practical gender needs), but must also focus on the root causes of women’s powerlessness (strategic gender needs).
- Income generating training is important; the study refers to a broad range of agriculture related subjects, but also to embroidery as a subject for such training.
- Awareness raising about gender and conducting workshops with local communities, village councils and religious leaders on addressing gender discrimination.
- Government extension agents should also spread messages on gender awareness.
- Electronic media should play a more pro-active role in raising awareness, as well as drama, folk songs and advertisements.
- The report also recommends the establishment of women’s self-help groups as vehicles for female empowerment in rural areas.

**Comment from BGP’s gender experts:** the recommendations are in principle all valid, but they seem not very tailored to the Blue Gold Program. Still, many of the recommendations are somehow already addressed by BGP, such as aiming for a change in gender norms (also of men) by the Gender and Leadership Development training and Court Yard Sessions on gender awareness; providing training on income generating activities through FFS<sup>2</sup>; working with BWDB and DAE to promote their staff also incorporates gender issues in their work; and by previous and planned interactions with Union Parishads related to gender.

**Examples of individual women from the students’ report:**

- Shahana Banu, WMA member, could earlier not raise her voice in front of men. Gradually she realized the importance of raising her voice, because if she would not talk to anyone, she would not learn anything. Then she started to give her opinion at meetings. Now other WMA members value her decisions and also respect her a lot.

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<sup>2</sup> The option of embroidery training seems to fall outside the scope of BGP, also because embroidery as income generating activity can only be successful if the entire value chain is addressed, including marketing.

- Rabeya Khatun participated in a beef fattening FFS member in a new polder. Then she bought a cow at 25,000 BDT, and sold it after 6 months at 40,000 BDT, which she sees as a great achievement.
- Peyara Begum, a successful woman in an old polder, observed that when husband and wife work together, the financial condition of the family improves. When she started income generating activities such as poultry keeping, her husband supported her, helped her in the household, and he now respects her a lot.
- Manjuma Begum said that the financial position of her family was not good and her husband used to beat her. Now that she is involved in productive activities and contributes to the family's income, her husband respects her and does not beat her anymore.

**Quotes:**

- Hosneara (member of FFS in old polder): *"BGP has improved our economic condition"*
- Mayalokkhi (member of LCS group in old polder): *"BGP made us self-dependent"*
- Zakia (EC member of WMG in old polder): *"The quality of life has changed very quickly with the help of BGP"*
- Abdul Matin (male LCS member in old polder): *"Women should be a leader because they can handle any matter easily"*
- Golenur Begum (FFS member in old polder): *"It is more important to gather knowledge than getting something".*
- Rashida Begum (FFS member old polder): *"We get more honour in the family than before".*
- Abdur Rahum (male FFS member old polder): *"Our rice production doubled due to BGP infrastructural improvements"*
- A.B.M. Humayun Kabir (UP chairman): *"Blue Gold will cause a revolution in agricultural activities by digging canal and BGP is a blessing for the area".*

This summary was prepared by Roksana Begum and Kitty Bentvelsen