

OPINION OF WOMEN LEADERS ON WOMEN LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES TOWARD RURAL WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to determine and describe the extent of activities of women leaders for empowering rural women. The study was conducted in Dumuria Upazila under Khulna district. Data were collected from 60 rural women leaders through personal interview using an interview schedule during 8-27 July, 2009. Women leadership activities for empowering rural women was the dependent variable of the study where as leadership experience, awareness of women right, motivation, time spent for social work, extent of contact with rural women, and personality were independent variables. Twenty five leadership activities were identified and from the analysis all were found to be effective for empowering rural women. From the leadership activities score it was found that extent of women leadership for empowering rural women ranged from medium (16.7%) to very high (51.7%). However, an overwhelming majority (83.3%) of the women leaders had empowering capacity ranged from high (31.6%) to very high. Relationship between dependent and independent variables were explored. All the independent variables had significant relationships ranged from high to very high with dependent variable at 0.01 levels.

Key words: Women, opinion, leadership, rural empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Women in Bangladesh are in disadvantageous state in comparison to men even though they constitute about half of the total population. It is evident that no society in the world approves equal status to women as men enjoy. Traditionally women in Bangladesh villages have few rights, and little choice, about the courses of their lives and almost no way to change their situations. Most of them have little or no access to positions of influence as they are mostly illiterate. Women are neglected after their birth and unfortunately this situation continues till death. As women cannot generate income independently, they are therefore, constrained to acquire assets themselves. Land is the most coveted and valuable asset. By law they have right to inherit paternal land property but as the society being patriarchal the men's role is dominant and do not share land ownership with women inherits (Islam, 1971). Women play significant and crucial roles in the development of families and societies (Samanta, 2005). Women contribute a lot in agricultural production, food processing, animal husbandry, and other activities including post harvest operations and marketing. Besides, they spend 10 to 12 hours per day in doing household chores. Nowadays various government and non-government organizations are chalking out programs for empowering rural women. Women leaders are voluntarily involved or employed in those organizations, who play a pivotal role for empowering rural women. Ninety four per cent of agricultural extension agents worldwide are male (FAO, 1993). Some studies reported that male extension agents deliver their services to men only (Fleck, 1994; World Bank, 1992; FAO, 1993). To ensure a balance socioeconomic development of the country, empowerment of women is a precondition. This may be achieved only when women become aware about the importance of their empowerment, which could be built up through women leadership. Under these considerations an empirical study entitled, "Opinion of women leaders on women leadership activities toward rural women empowerment" has been undertaken to determine and describe the activities of women leadership empowering rural women; identify and describe some selected characteristics of women leaders.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was purposively conducted in Dumuria Upazila under Khulna district. The Upazila has 14 unions, viz. Rangpur, Rodaghora, Kharina, Raghunathpur, Ghonia, Atlia, Sarappur, Magurkhali, Bhandarpara, Dumuria, Gutudia, Dhamalia, Maguraghona and Sahas. Sixty women leaders of different types, viz. one Women UP Chairman, 42 Women UP Members, 5 Women Organization Leaders, and 12 Women NGO Workers constituted the population of the study. As the population size was small, all the 60 women leaders were brought under the sample size. In order to collect relevant data from the women leaders an interview schedule was prepared keeping in view the objective of the study. Closed forms of questions were included in the schedule. Appropriate scales were developed to measure both dependent and independent variables. To measure empowering rural women through women leadership 25 women leadership activities were identified against which scores were assigned as 1, 2, 3, and 4 according to the degree of empowerment or influencing affinity to the empowerment as very low, low, moderate and high respectively. The possible score would range from 25 to 100.

The measurement procedures of independent variables were as below:

Leadership experience: Leadership experience was measured by multiplying the years of leadership and leadership capacity (UP Chairman 5, UP Member 4, irrespective of capacity involvement with other organizations scored one for one year but not exceeding 5).

Awareness of women rights: Awareness of women rights were measured by asking questions containing 12 items against which scores were assigned as 1, 2, 3, and 4 according to the degree of awareness very low aware, low aware, moderate aware, and high aware respectively.

Motivation: Motivation regarding women empowerment of women leadership was measured by assigning weights against 10 motivation items as 1, 2, 3, and 4 according to the degree of motivation very low, low, medium, and high respectively.

Time spent for social work: Time spent for social work was measured by asking questions "How much time she spent for social work per day." Per hour time was scored one and thus time spent for social work ranged from 1 - 6 hours, which were categorized into low time spent, medium time spent, and high time spent.

Extent of contact with rural women: Extent of contact with rural women was measured by the frequency of meeting with rural women. The extent of contact was categorized into four categories: regularly, frequently, occasionally, and rarely. Each category was assigned score as 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively.

Personality: Personality of a woman leader was measured by asking opinion against 10 personality statements. Extent of personality was categorized into excellent, good, fair, and not bad assigning score as 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively.

To explore the relationship between women leadership activities and their selected characteristics Pearson's Co-efficient of Correlation was used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results and discussion deals with the analyses of (i) "Women Leadership Activities Empowering Rural Women", (ii) selected characteristics of respondent women leaders, and (iii) relationship between women leadership activities and their selected characteristics. These are discussed below with findings, evidence and interpretations.

Women leadership activities empowering rural women

Women leadership activities are comprised of a series of behavior exclusively designed for women empowerment and development. In this study the woman who works absolutely for awareness of rural women rights, their capacity building leading to decision making, and overall empowerment of rural women is termed as woman leader. In Bangladesh approximately half (48.78%) of the total population are women. They contribute in the socioeconomic development equally as their male counterpart. Previously it was believed that only the post harvest operations are being done by women. But

nowadays it has been accepted that in one way or another, women are involved in the total crop cultivation process including food processing and home management. Albeit their contributions in the socio-economic process, most of the times women become the victims of hostile attitude of their male counterparts. To get rid of this situation, Government of Bangladesh and NGOs have created some opportunities in the society for women leadership development who can in turn work for empowering other rural women.

In this study twenty five women leadership activities were identified that are really conducive for empowering rural women. The activities are: protest against eve-teasing, protest against dowry, organizing meetings for women rights, organize women groups, protest against early marriage, mitigate family and conjugal conflicts, help widow to get their just share, establish equal rights in the family, encourage women education, encourage income generating activities, protest against physical torturing, help in family planning, encourage to be economically self sufficient, organize homestead gardening training, help to get VGD and VGF, encourage adult learning, encourage to take vaccines for health reason, create scope for participating in food for work program, give Gynaecological suggestions, create awareness about decision making, help women about their property right, help single mother about their rights in the society, help divorcee women, and work against polygamy and so on.

Total women leadership activities empowering rural women score were obtained by summing up scores obtained against each of the activities. A woman leader's total possible empowerment score could range from 25 to 100. However, the obtained score ranged from 37 to 88 with 70.93 and 14.04 mean and standard deviation respectively. On the basis of the obtained score the women leaders were categorized into three categories viz. medium leadership activities toward empowering rural women (Up to 50), high leadership activities toward empowering rural women (51 to 75), and very high leadership activities empowering rural women (above 75) as shown in the Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of women leaders according to their leadership activities toward empowering rural women

Women leadership categories	Number of women leaders	Percent	Mean	Standard deviation
Medium leadership activities	10	16.7	70.39	14.04
High leadership activities	19	31.6		
Very high leadership activities	31	51.7		
Total	60	100		

Data contained in the Table 1 reveal that all the respondent women leaders had leadership activities toward empowering rural women ranged from medium (16.7%) to very high (51.7%). Majority (51.7%) of the respondent women leaders had very high leadership activities toward empowering rural women. That is, an overwhelming majority (83.3%) of the women leaders had high and very high leadership activities.

A tree is known by its fruits. Similarly a leader is known by her/his benevolent activities dedicated for the people of the society. It is well known that directly or indirectly women all over the world are being oppressed by their male counterparts and even often by women as well. In the patriarchal society like Bangladesh women in childhood are depended on father/brother, in young age depended upon husbands, and in the old age depended on sons. Throughout her life a woman remains subservient to father/husband/sons. This meager condition of women should be leaps and bounds at the earliest time.

But in the study area it was found that occupying the leadership positions as UP Chairman, UP Members, NGO Workers, and School Teachers women leaders are helping rural women to return their dues. Actually, it is women who can salvage women from the suicidal heinous social value of the society. Reasonably, women leaders of study area had commitment to protect women from any kind of deceptive actions committed by male or female. The men-folk must realize that women are the key persons of the family and society. If women-folk remain down trodden the entire society or nation is

bound to be down trodden in respects of education, culture, socio-economic and psychological development. It is revealed from the study that women leaders developed 'conscientization' about the necessity of empowering rural women.

Characteristics of women leaders

A women leader may have a number of characteristics but in this study seven important characteristics that are very much related to leadership functions have been selected, viz. Leadership experience, awareness about women rights, motivation, attitude toward women empowerment, time spent for social work, extent of contact with rural women, and personality. In the Table 2, the characteristics are stated with their categories, number of women leaders, percent, mean and standard deviation. In sequential order, each of the characteristics is discussed below:

Table 2. Distribution of women leaders according to the categories of their characteristics

Categories of leadership characteristics		Number	Percent	Mean	Standard deviation
Leadership Experience	Low experience (10 - 16)	14	23.3	22.2	5.99
	Medium experience (17 - 24)	17	28.3		
	High experience (above 24)	29	48.4		
Total		60	100		
Awareness of women rights	Low awareness (23-30)	5	8.3	40.4	5.19
	Medium awareness (31-38)	8	13.3		
	High awareness (above 38)	47	78.4		
Total		60	100		
Motivation	Medium motivation (20-25)	11	18.3	30.34	4.73
	High motivation (26-31)	15	25		
	Very high motivation (Above 31)	34	56.7		
Total		60	100		
Time spent for social work	Low time spent (1-2)	6	10	3.55	.709
	Medium time spent (3)	26	43.3		
	High time spent (4)	28	46.7		
Total		60	100		
Extent of contact with rural women	Low contact (2)	5	8.3	3.67	.62
	Medium contact (3)	10	16.7		
	High contact (4)	45	75		
Total		60	100		
Personality	Medium personality (Up to 26)	15	25	32.40	6.31
	High personality (27-33)	7	11.7		
	Very high personality (above 33)	38	63.3		
Total		60	100		

Leadership experience

Leadership experience is an important pre-requisite to work for the socioeconomic and cultural development of ordinary people or for the establishment of social or human rights for particular gender-issue like women. It is obvious that more the leadership experience more the realization of human rights. Women leaders in Bangladesh are the valid guardian of total women-folk. The well being of the rural women largely depends upon how experience how effective the women leaders are. Although women in Bangladesh are busy with household works ranged from socialization to income generation, which they perform from dawn to dusk but their contribution is not well recognized in the society and even by the family. In fact socioeconomic development of a family is not possible without direct women participation. But culturally they are deceived from power exercise including decision

making of important family affairs. Only the experienced women leader is supposed to be empathetic to empower rural women.

The leadership experience score of the women leaders ranged from 10 to 32 with mean and standard deviation of 22.2 and 5.99 respectively. Based on the computed score women leaders were categorized into 'low experienced (10-16)', 'medium experienced (17-24)' and 'high experienced (above 24)'.

Data contained in the table 2 reveal that majority (48.4%) of the women leaders had high leadership experience compared to 23.3% and 28.3% low and medium experience respectively. More precisely it can be concluded that more than three-fourths of the women leader had high to medium leadership experience. Most of the women leaders of the study area were elected leaders or professional leaders and they were involved in different organizations and women groups as well.

Awareness of women rights

Awareness of women rights means preliminary knowledge of women leaders about how to establish women rights to different socioeconomic aspects in the rural society. An individual achieve nothing unless s/he desires and aware of his/her personal and socio-psychological needs. There is no doubt that women are deceived from many fundamental rights compared to men as because women in general are not aware of their social rights. However, women leaders as women representative must be aware of.

In most of the families in Bangladesh husband and wife do not share equal rights, boys and girls are not equally treated, economic decisions are made by women alone, they cannot be married off without dowry, and forbidden to participate in social activities. Table. 2 show how women leaders of the study area are aware of women rights.

The scores of awareness of women rights ranged from 23 to 45 with a mean and standard deviation 40.4 and 5.19, respectively against the possible score 12 to 48. Based on the awareness of women rights women leaders were classified into three categories, viz. low awareness (23-30), medium awareness (31-38) and high awareness (above 38). The distribution of women leaders according to their awareness of women rights has been presented in Table 2.

Data in the Table 2 indicate that an overwhelming majority (78.4%) of the women leaders had high awareness compared to 8.3 per cent low and 13.3 per cent medium awareness. Thus it could be concluded that awareness level of women leaders of the study area is quite satisfactory. This might be due to the fact that all the women leaders were well educated. If women leaders devote themselves they can bring changes establishing women rights in the society.

Motivation

Motivation is the intrinsic and extrinsic forces that urge people to work and reach desired goal and objectives. Generally people work intrinsically to meet their basic needs such as food, sleep safety etc. But there are other needs of which people are not aware of unless they are informed extrinsically. Extrinsic motivation always deals with individual and community development. Empowering women needs both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Motivation for empowering women includes social security, women education, peer feeling, employment opportunity, wage-equity, group affiliation, income generation and so forth. Women in general may not have such needs but women leaders who work for women must have those needs. In fact, it is the duty of women leaders to create interest among women-folk for empowerment, education, income generation, social participation, men-women equity etc. Data in the table 2 show the extent of motivation of women leaders to work for women empowerment involving themselves with above mentioned empowerment issues.

The scores of motivation of women leaders ranged from 20 to 38 against the possible score 10 to 40 with a mean and standard deviation of 30.43 and 4.73 respectively. Considering the computed score of motivation of women leaders they were categorized into three viz. 'medium motivation' (20-25), 'high motivation' (26-31) and 'very high motivation' (above 31).

Data in the table 2 reveal that more than half of the respondents had very high motivation compared to 25% high and 18.3% medium level of motivation. Thus, the motivation level of the women leaders of the study area was quite satisfactory. Motivation of women leadership found to be both extrinsic and intrinsic. Due to extrinsic motivation, women leader response to the problematic circumstances of women in particular in one hand and due to intrinsic motivation they visit door to door to share joy and

sorrow of their same kind on the other. Motivation is the prerequisite condition to women leadership development.

Time spent for social work

Women leadership sustains if leaders work and spend some time for the welfare of rural women. The women leader must visit homes and residents of rural women. She must talk with the victim of the situation, must keep information of oppressed and distressed families. If she does not spend time how could she be a women leader? In this study it was found that women leaders spent sufficient time for social work.

The score of time spent for social work by women leaders ranged from 1 to 4 with a mean and standard deviation 3.35 and 0.709 respectively. Based on their time spent for social work women leaders were categorized into three viz. low time spent (1-2), medium time spent (2) and high time spent (4). The distribution of women leadership according to time spent has been presented in Table 2.

Data contained in the table 2 reveal that the women leaders spent time for social work ranged from one hour to four hours. An overwhelming majority of the respondents (90%) spent medium to high time, i.e. 3 to 4 hours per day. It is difficult to make convenient time for rural women to work for other rural women. Nevertheless spending time 1 to 4 hours by women leaders for social work is very much important.

Extent of contact with rural women

Extent of contact with rural women means how frequently a women leader communicates with her fellow women. How women in the society pass their daily life, who teases whom, why dispute appeared in a conjugal life, why girl child of a particular family was not sent to school, why mother-in-laws abuse their daughter-in-laws, why some women were prevented from involving in income generation etc. Women leaders must keep informed themselves about these social happenings. Women leaders personally visit the houses or they have some squealers who supply social information on the basis of which they take decision about their course of action.

In this study it was observed that women leaders contacted with their fellow women regularly, frequently, occasionally and rarely. The score of extent of contact with rural women ranged from 2 to 4 with a mean and standard deviation of 3.67 and 0.62, respectively. Based on the obtained score women leaders were categorized into three, viz. 'low contact' (2 times/month), 'medium contact' (3 times/month) and 'high contact' (4 times/ month). The distribution of women leaders according to their extent of contact has been presented in Table 2.

It was revealed from the data contained in the Table 2 that an overwhelming majority (91.7%) of women leaders had medium to high contact with rural women, whereas only 8.3% had low contact. As the women leaders of the study area had local origin they also had opportunity to contact with the fellow women. Most of women leaders were elected and had commitment to work for the benefit of rural women. So, contact with rural women is considered to be obligatory as they constitute their client system and voters as well. It could be concluded that women leaders of the study area performed their leadership functions properly.

Personality

Personality is the total quality of an individual's behavior. Allport (1961) said, "Personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine her/his unique adjustments to her/his environment". In fact one's personality is determined by her/his personal and social activities. In this study personality of women leaders was determined by extent of performance some activities, which included leadership behavior, social interaction, communication behavior, acceptance of challenge, stand against anti-social activities, knowledge about women rights, group participation, empathy, hard worker and perseverance, and combat any odd situation *courageously*.

Personality score of the women leaders ranged from 20 to 40 with a mean and standard deviation of 32.4 and 6.31, respectively. Based on their personality score women leaders were classified into three, viz. 'medium personality', (up to 26) 'high personality' (27-33) and 'very high personality' (above 33) (Table 2).

The findings of the Table 2 indicate that absolutely three fourths (75%) of the women leaders had personality high and very high, while one fourth of them had medium level of personality. It could be concluded that women leaders of the study area had sufficient personality exposure, because they were more literate and aware of women rights.

Relationship of selected characteristics of women leaders with leadership activities toward empowering rural women

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to explore the relationship between the concerned variables. A null hypothesis was formulated to determine the significant or non-significant relationship between the variables. The null hypothesis is, "There is no relationship between women leader characteristics and women leadership activities toward empowering rural women". In Table 3 the correlation between dependent and independent variables has been shown. On the basis of 0.05 level of probability the null hypothesis was accepted or rejected.

Table 3. Correlation coefficient showing relationship between dependent and independent variables

Dependent Variable	Independent Variables	Value of correlation of coefficient (Computed)	Value of correlation of coefficient (Tabulated)
Women leadership activities empowering rural women	Leadership experience	0.774**	0.25
	Awareness of women rights	0.837**	0.25
	motivation	0.657**	0.25
	Attitude toward women empowerment	0.371**	0.25
	Time spent for social work	0.394**	0.25
	Extent of contact with rural women	0.704**	0.25
	Personality	0.941**	0.25

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels

Table 3 expresses the findings of relationships between dependent variable - women leadership activities and independent variables - leadership experience, awareness of women rights, motivation, attitude toward women empowerment, time for social work, extent of contact with rural women, and personality. The correlation of coefficient between dependent variable and all the independent variables were found to be medium to very high significant relationships at 0.01 level. This means that empowering rural women obviously depends upon certain qualities of women leadership as mentioned above.

The findings revealed that leadership experience, awareness toward women rights, motivation, attitude toward women empowerment, contact with rural women, and personality are the important constituents of quality women leadership. Appropriate use of these qualities can help enhance women empowerment. In fact, women in Bangladesh contribute more in socio-economic development through their respective families but return from their families is quite negligible. A woman starts household works at dawn and continues till midnight. Yet she cannot satisfy her family members. Nobody in the society recognize her contribution. The in-laws most often torture her. Recently the national dailies of Bangladesh (13 - 24 June, 2010) described how Rita and her children were oppressed and killed (suicide) by husband and in-laws at Jurain of Dhaka city. This incident suggests that the importance of women leadership to stand against oppression on women. The research findings would inspire development of women leadership to work against anti-women heinous acts and the oppressed women for establishing their rights in the society.

From the findings of the study it was revealed that women play an important role in enhancing socio-economic development of a country. But in most societies women do not have access to power structure and in decision making process even in the family. It may be concluded on the basis of the



findings that women leadership activities can help empowering women particularly the rural women. In order to empower rural women motivation and training to develop leadership qualities should be intensified. In addition, women should be included in the local government set up to facilitate their empowerment.

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