

Developing Gender Awareness among Rural Women through Micro-credit Programmes in Bangladesh

(The United Graduate School of Agricultural Sciences, Tottori University) Mahmuda Hoque

(Faculty of Agriculture, Yamaguchi University) Yoshihito Itohara

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Women constitute half of the total population in Bangladesh (BBS, 2006) and they are traditionally dominated by men in all spheres of their lives. The women in Bangladesh work hard all day long in the households and sometimes also in outside of home. But they are the most deprived section considering education, income earning, scope of employment; decision making etc. Gender awareness is the recognition of different needs, expectations and life experiences of women and men that often create inequality between them but these are subject to change (Musokotwane and Siwale 2001). But in this study gender awareness refers to the ability of women to identify problems arising from gender inequality and discrimination, which affect their ability to have access to and control over resources. The development partners and the donor agencies recommend to involve the women in all sorts of activities for reducing gender inequalities and empowering them to achieve sustainable development. Through developing gender awareness it is possible to make the women conscious about their rights and dignity in the society which will reduce the inequality among men and women to some extent and ultimately improve the empowerment of women in the family and in the society. The empowerment of the women can make sure more opportunity for them in participation in income generating activities and eventually livelihoods improvement of the household. A few studies have so far been conducted on gender awareness but no studies have been reported yet on developing gender awareness through micro-credit programmes. Hence an attempt had been made to study to know the extent of their gender awareness and factors related to it. The practical data for the study were collected from 180 women of Rampur village of Palashbari upazila (sub district) under Gaibandha district. Among the respondent women 50 percent were the members of the micro-credit NGOs (namely Grameen Bank, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee and Thengamara Mohila Sabuj Sangha) and rest of them were housewives having no relations with the micro-credit NGOs. The results of the study showed that the extent of gender awareness of the responded women ranged from 5 to 28 with an average of 16.24. It also showed that half of them had medium level gender awareness while, a quarter of them had high level gender awareness. The result of the paired t-test showed that members of the micro-credit NGOs (mostly from landless, marginal and small farm families) had relatively better gender awareness compare to independent housewives. The result of the regression analysis showed that five factors (i.e. institutional participation, formal education, spatial mobility, media exposure and duration of marriage) have significant influence on developing gender awareness among the rural women and all these factors combinedly can explain 71 % variability in the extent of gender awareness of the women.