

# Gendered Livelihood Strategies among Char Dwellers of Rangpur Region in Bangladesh

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## Abstract

This study explored the livelihood strategies adopted by char dwellers to cope with the adverse situation of floods. These new livelihood strategies are also adopted following the private-public dichotomy. This study followed a qualitative methodology by conducting semi-structured interviews among the different age groups of the couple and unstructured observations among the char dwellers. This study identified how char dwellers are trying to adapt to flooding situations diversifying their livelihood strategies and playing different gender roles. As most of the char dwellers are mainly dependent on agriculture, their livelihood diversification is also related to agriculture-related activities though some of them are trying to explore different kinds of work by migrating to other places. However, women are not migrating much in comparison with men as their mobility is controlled in char areas. Though this study explored changing livelihood strategies of women, pre-existing gendered inequalities limit the opportunities for livelihood diversification of women. If women want to diversify their livelihood, they have to do it by maintaining their stereotypical gender role, keeping a balance between productive and reproductive roles facing the community people who possess patriarchal ideologies, and adjusting with their hypermasculine or hegemonic male partner. Those who have a non-hegemonic male partner, share their responsibilities both in the household and field and also take part in the decision-making process. The theory of feminist political ecology enriched this study to segregate the experiences of men and women char dwellers to choose different livelihood options. This study also unveiled how the geographical location of char areas controlled women's mobilities and created an impact on choosing different livelihood options.

**Keywords:** Livelihood Diversification, Gender Role, Agricultural Activities, Pre-existing Inequality, Gendered Livelihood Strategies, Feminist Political Ecology

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## I. Introduction

The recent pattern of climate change is a necessary concern for its socioeconomic and climate-sensitive sectors which are agriculture and food production. Bangladesh is one of the nations that are facing the impacts of climate change in a very bad way. Furthermore, the household members of char areas are more vulnerable to climate change because of their proximity to the river. The char areas are not only disaster-prone but also risky for sustainable settlement. As char dwellers are mainly dependent on agriculture so the livelihood of char is also in need of agricultural production. Though the char dwellers have various kinds of professions, most of them are in the profession of agriculture. Climate change adaptation strategies from a multidimensional context consist of planning and decision-making processes. These kinds of actions are normally taken to deal with environmental hazards, risks, and opportunities. The char dwellers are highly vulnerable to climate change as they are regularly affected by climatic events (Ahmed et al., 2021).

The char dwellers not only adopt different types of crop diversification approaches but also try to find out other non-farming-related livelihood diversification or adaptation strategies to adapt to the climate crisis. These also include migration, the choice of new plant varieties, agricultural credit, crop insurance, non-farm employment, etc. The adaptation strategies could be gendered as men and women adopt different kinds of adaptation strategies to adapt to disaster situations. Though disasters affect both men and women, the evidence shows

because of women's unequal access to resources or being hindered by gender norms restrict their mobility (Naz et al., 2018).

The catastrophe of flood creates a severe impact on livelihood. The char dwellers try to adapt to the flooding situation diversifying their livelihood. During and after the flooding situation, char dwellers almost lose everything. These people are always at risk because of the flash flood as most of them are dependent on the agricultural economy. After spending a lot of money on their cultivable land, they lost almost everything because of the flash flood. As they experience floods frequently, they are also developing their livelihood diversification strategies. In the last twenty years, they have developed different kinds of adaptive strategies to manage their livelihood by adopting indigenous knowledge and taking support from Government or non-governmental organizations. However, livelihood strategies are also dependent on the intersection of gender, class, and education. The political ecology of these char areas is also complicated. From the feminist point of view, the livelihood of female char dwellers is influenced by socio-cultural factors. The adaptation strategies of livelihood are also influenced by the structure and culture of society which has a different standard for men and women. To adapt to the flooding situation, they developed different kinds of adaptive strategies and diversified their livelihood over the years which has a changing pattern (Ahmed et al., 2021; Ferdous et al., 2019).

### **Background of Char or Riverine Island**

According to the satellite image, every year there is an accretion of around 20 km<sup>2</sup>. Considering the density of people, almost 26000 people lose their land every year. Those who lose their land due to river erosion are normally shifted to this newly accreted land. Moreover, there is no legal entitlement in our country for these people. The newly accreted land becomes the property of the government. The chance of this family is to receive Khas land from the government whose land has been washed away. Land settlement to the landless household is normally conducted by the government's land offices under the Char Development and Settlement Project (Char Livelihood Program, 2010). This project is run by Bangladesh Government and the Ministry of Foreign affairs of the Netherlands and all of these chars are not included in this project.

To give a brief idea about char land it can be described as a sunken river island or sandbar which mainly exists in the deltaic parts of the river system. These areas are usually developed from the riverbed which is the result of accretion. Every year these char areas are shaped and restructured through silt deposition and erosion. There are normally two kinds of chars. For instance: Attached chars and Island chars. The attached chars are connected with the mainland whereas to reach the island char need to cross the river. However, during the floods, many attached chars become island chars. The riverine chars mostly exist on the northern island. Because of the chars' geographical location, the shifting of the river sometimes washes them away (Sarker et al., 2003).

All of the major four big rivers like Padma, Meghna, Jamuna, and Brahmaputra, and their tributaries have char lands. The char area of the Jamuna is the largest. People of char lands mainly depend on agriculture including fisheries and livestock-rearing. In some long-lasting island chars, there are infrastructures, like permanent and semi-permanent houses including buildings, roads, plants, age-old trees, markets, schools, etc., which may be called permanent or attached char. The land type and soil characteristics of the chars are dependent on the distance from the river origin. Usually, the north and middle region chars of Bangladesh are sand or silt dominated, and the coastal chars are clay dominated. The crops and cropping varied largely due to the flooding pattern and land types. Flooding was very common in the northern and central regions (Karim et al., 2017). The study area has been selected because that area covers the greater part of the lower Teesta Basin so it would be easier to collect study-related data as they have flooding and river erosion history and farmers of this area are also trying to adjust to the changing climate situation diversifying crop techniques and livelihood.

### **Flooding History of Bangladesh**

The Delta area of Bangladesh is mostly affected by floods. According to the flooding history of Bangladesh, it has been noticed that flood-affected us severely in 1987, 1988, 1998, 2004, 2007, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, etc. For the char people, it is kind of a regular event of their lifestyle that they cannot ignore because of their geographical location. They used to depend on relief from the government and non-governmental agencies. However, some people try to migrate temporarily after losing their households. Additionally, some people take pre-caution as a livelihood strategy. Nowadays, people are becoming conscious ahead of time and trying to save their money for flooding time and they plan these kinds of crops that will be able to sustain during the flooding time too. After searching secondary documents, it has been noticed that 1987 was the biggest flood in history. Because of flash floods in an unexpected time, the vulnerability of char people is unbelievable (Banglapedia, n.d).

### **Feminist Political Ecology**

The Ostrom theorizes that the commons prevent resource exploitation more effectively than international institutions or private owners (Lapinewska, 2016). As a political scientist, Elinor Ostrom pointed out the importance of empirical research. Ostrom pointed out the reconstruction of the basic theoretical grounds of collective actions and individuals. Though Ostrom's work is suggesting new ways of studying environmental problems which are also emerging areas of growing concern for economists. She disaggregated her work from the experience of women so that feminist political ecologist criticized her for not considering the positioning of someone within the society whereas feminist political ecologist intersects with the study of commons focusing on gendered power relation and intersectionality perspectives. Ostrom did not mention anything about gender so her works created another problem for female farmers, as their existing status in society is unequal in comparison to men. The collective maintenance of the natural resources can decrease the access of female farmers to land as well as to the cultivation system (Lapinewska, 2016, Lonergan, n.d). Feminist economists like Dr. ZofiaLapniewska raised the question that does Elinor Ostrom's work has anything to do with gender equality or not. She also mentioned it is necessary to include gender analysis in the theory of commons (Lapinewska, 2016).

Feminist political ecology is a term, that is commonly used for rural commons in terms of agriculture or pastoral activities. This concept raises the question about the structural forms of power and also describes how inequality is determined by different identities like gender, caste, class, race, etc. (Clement et al.,2019). This concept also helps us to analyze the power, politics, and difference inside the institutions. Feminist political ecology sees gender as part of intersecting power relations and they believe that these kinds of power relations are changing day by day. They keep a particular focus to see the response of communities to socio-natural and economic changes. They believed that 'Values do enter processes of scientific reasoning.' This theory is applied here to understand the diversified experiences of female farmers in char areas/ riverine islands/sandbar areas. Feminist Political ecologist pays particular attention to the narrative of the farming community in a collective way to understand community people's strategies in response to climate, economic, and environmental changes, and gender analysis of power relations.

## **II. Methodology**

This study has been conducted in Rangpur which is the northern part of Bangladesh. Rangpur division has a total area of 16,185 km<sup>2</sup>. Rangpur city is very popular for char areas as different kinds of agricultural extension programs and the increasing participation of women in agriculture is happening in these areas. In the Rangpur district, there are fifty-one island char villages and eight attached char villages (Char Livelihood Program, 2010). Therefore, this study will try to focus on the chars of KauniaUpazila to ensure the diversity and participation of respondents. This location has been selected considering the active number of female char dwellers in agricultural activities, newly adopted livelihood strategies and frequencies of flood in every year. The diversity of respondents from char areas helped to explore different kinds of livelihood diversification approaches as well as the gendered nature of livelihood choices. To analyze the livelihood choices from gender perspectives this study followed a qualitative methodology approach. From different char areas, 9 couples of a combination of different age groups have been purposively selected to understand the diversity of livelihood choices, underlying factors of livelihood choices, and how these choices are controlled by the existing inequalities, social norms, and values. Considering the nature of this study, purposive sampling has been done to conduct this research. The study area has been selected because that area covers the greater part of the lower Teesta Bhasin so it would be easier to collect related data with the study as they have flooding and river erosion history and farmers of this area are also trying to adjust with the changing climate situation diversifying crop techniques and livelihood.

After studying the documents of the Char Livelihood Program, I have got to know about these char areas. These areas are far from the Kaunia main town so I consulted with one of the leading NGOs, RDRS of the northern part of Bangladesh. I went to their branch office in KauniaUpazila and after talking with them I traced the location of these char areas. This study has been conducted from the middle of January to the end of February, 2022. To conduct this study, unstructured observation and semi-structured interviews among 9 couples (9 men, 9 women) from 3 areas have been done. To ensure research quality, I took my two research assistants with me to take notes, transcribe and translate data. I selected chars based on the 3 different varieties of geographical features which are attached char (AraziHarishwar), island Char (Dhusmara), and peninsula char (CharGonai) which helped me to understand livelihood techniques after flooding situations. To understand their livelihood choices and techniques I continuously visited these three char areas for almost two months for regular basis and observed their livelihood techniques. This study also followed the combination of primary and secondary data. The existence of secondary data helped to develop the direction of this current study. To maintain the confidentiality of respondents' identities, numbers have been used whereas for male the initial (M) have been used and

for female the initial (F) have been used with their ages. To analyze data findings, memoing and coding have been done. Based on the coding of data findings and using unstructured observation notes, livelihood diversification of these char areas has been critically analyzed from feminist political ecology perspectives. The reflection of this theory helped to understand the interconnection between adopted livelihood techniques by different genders and pre-existing inequalities in our society.

### **Challenges during the Flooding Time**

The situation during the flooding time at char areas is quite different. It also depends on the access and resources of a particular livelihood and depends on the geographical location of the char area. If flooding happens during the expected time, the scenario could be different as they can take measures or save their food and money for flooding time. However, if a flash flood happens, it washes away their home and cultivable land. In the last twenty years, they have always remembered the flood of 1987. Every year, they experience a flood. Most of the study respondents mentioned their drastic experience of the flood. Recently, they experienced a flood in 2019 and 2021. Because of the river erosion during flooding time, the char keeps shifting & moving so that the char dwellers keep shifting as well. According to respondent 1(M) (75), Dhusmara,

*“It’s been a long time. I mean, there was no house at this place. The house was over there. The river erosion is happening every 5/7 years. The house was flooded. We went to the middle char first. After staying there for 6/7 years we came here.”*

The shifting from place to place is also very regular in island char in comparison with attached char areas. Because of the uncertainty of livelihood and income char dwellers need to move frequently. Many people moved away to different places just because of frequent floods and river erosion. Some of them came back after earning money being temporarily migrated and building houses to live in. Many of them have been moved to different districts and maintain their livelihood as wage laborers. Due to frequent floods, the population of the northern part of the char areas has been deducted. Though they are included in the voter list, a big portion of them do not live in char areas on regular basis.

### **Saving and Earning Food as Livelihood Strategies**

After talking with the respondents from the char area it has been noticed that saving food for the difficult situation is one of the main livelihood strategies they follow. At present, they have a ‘food bank’ which is one of the community initiatives encouraged by GO & NGOs to save food where they keep a certain amount of food in every monthly meeting. Those who do not have enough food to maintain their livelihood after or during a disaster situation, take the food from the food bank. After a certain time, if they don’t need this rice, they sell it to the community people and earn money. So, this food bank is managed by the community people and served to them whenever it is needed. Even though they use different options to store their paddy, nuts, and potato which are normally stored by women. During the flooding time, they used to work at the raised house. In return for that work, they used to get rice, potato, and vegetables. According to the Dhusmara Char Dwellers, 1 (65) (F),

*“We used to work in the rich family when we could not cultivate anything. Nowadays they are giving money in return for labor. We used to get rice, potato & vegetables or sometimes we used to get paisha (a little fraction of taka) for our work.”*

However, her husband 1 (75) (M) mentioned, *“During the flooding time, we had normally nothing to do. Sometimes, we used to go outside for temporary work purposes. Nowadays we are trying to earn money doing other things.”* Among this couple, transformative gender relationship has been noticed and they are trying to diversify their livelihood by doing different things together.

### **Migration as Livelihood Strategies**

During flooding time, the most agro-based family does not have anything to do. They have to search for other options for work. Sometimes, it is also very difficult to find other options for work in the particular riverine flood-prone area. Therefore, they go to other places in search of work. Sometimes, they work for a daily wage in the factory or agricultural field or they work as auto-rickshaw pullers. On the other hand, women who migrated themselves to other cities are working as garment workers. Therefore, the choice of profession is also different based on gender. However, the migration of men and migration of women is taken totally in a different way among char dwellers. Women from male-headed households do not prefer to migrate rather they take care of their household whereas women from female-headed households migrate to Dhaka city in search of work. According to 2 (50) (F), Char Gonai,

*“It is not good to migrate. We do not consider them as good when women migrate to another city. If there is a man in the household, the woman should not be migrated. If there is no man in the household, there is no way sometimes without being migrated.”*

Her husband 2 (61) (M), Char Gonai, *“It is not possible for women to go outside as well as they have to maintain their household chores, taking care of babies. They can’t go outside & work leaving everything.”*

According to 3 (75) (M), AraziHarishwar, *Women should not go outside without maintaining their veils. They are not like you. They should maintain veiling so they should not be migrated to another place. It’s not considered a good way to live in our area.*

His wife 3 (65) (F), *“We don’t prefer to go outside rather we prefer to work at home & maintain our family.”* Taking migration as a livelihood strategy these couples are following traditional norms possessing the stereotypical idea of gender roles and creating a distinction between private/ public dichotomy. However, in 4 (F) (20), Dhusmara mentioned, *“I want to go outside to help my family. I used to work in Dhaka. After being married to him I am here but he does not allow me to go outside.”* Her husband 4 (M) (28), also thinks that *“If we cannot do that much development after sending our wives outside, what’s the point of sending them outside rather people will talk about us.”*

Though the perspectives regarding migration have gendered characteristics from the society of char areas, it has been changed a little among young women those who are also interested to take part in economic activities & decision-making. However, their mobility is controlled by the patriarchal society. They appreciate men if they migrate to manage livelihood for their families. However, they do not appreciate women who do the same for the family. They have different standards for men and women.

### **Taking Loan or Borrowing Money**

They also take loans to maintain their livelihood. Without taking a loan, it is very difficult to maintain a livelihood during a flooding situation. Sometimes, they take a loan from neighbors or relatives. The interest rate is comparatively high so they also depend on the bank or cooperative society to take the loan which provides fewer interest rates. However, they used to borrow money at high-interest rates from the influential people of their community. Now, they try to take loans from banks or village co-operatives where they need to give less interest. Those who have good exposure and knowledge regarding the initiative taken by Government, also take help from the bank and repay after selling their crops. According to 5(34) (F), AraziHarishwar,

*Some people are also taking a loan to do business. It is very difficult to take loans from community people as the loan interest is very high. Therefore, we take loans from the bank, PalliBiddut Samity, Asha Samity, etc. Moreover, these organizations take 10% interest from our loan.*

As she has the exposure outside and took different kinds of training so that she knows where she can borrow money with less interest where we find her husband 5 (41) (M) keeps little knowledge about it in comparison with her wife. At the same time, her husband, 5 (41) (M), used to do work in the urban area. After being unsuccessful to maintain their livelihood, they have been shifted to the attached char which is AraziHarishwar where they would be able to maintain their livelihood. As he used to do business and now, he is working as a farmer so that it is a little bit difficult for him to understand farming things. In this case, how to adapt to the flooding situation, or how to maintain livelihood by borrowing money is normally done by 5(34) (F) and she has also good exposure to NGOs where she is working as a leader and managing other women as well. Here, non-hegemonic men and self-conscious women are showing examples of transformative gender relationships who have well-adaptive strategies to the flood.

### **Community Support**

The livelihood strategy also depends on the class of char dwellers. For instance: There are some houses which are a little bit higher than other houses. Even Char Livelihood Program also took steps to raise households by the char dwellers themselves. During the flooding season, those who lose their household because of the flood, take shelter at others’ houses. Those who are a little bit wealthier than others, try to support the most disadvantaged community people. During the flooding time, they cook and eat together. Those who do not have any food, also call them to join. They also come to neighbors’ places with their pet and other valuable things.

The people who lose their land usually survive with the help of community support. According to 6 (28) (M), Dhusmara,

*During the last flood of 2021, it was very difficult to move from one place to another in our char areas. As our house is a little bit higher, we called other neighbors to stay with us. We saved food and other things ahead of time. Thus, the way we tried to be together.*

According to her wife 6 (20) (F),

*During the flooding time this year, we saved earlier. My husband came to the house doing shopping for seven days as it is impossible to move during the flooding times so he did not go outside. We allowed our neighbors to stay here. They came here to stay with their valuable things, cattle & sheep. Moreover, I had to manage extra household responsibilities during flooding time.*

Therefore, during the flooding times, people who are in need are supported by the community people those who possess comparatively good positions and their income is also good in comparison with other people. This couple is following a conservative couple pattern as men have hypermasculine traits and do not share the household responsibilities with women during the flooding time as well. According to the background information, they belong to the higher income group in Dhusmara island those who are supporting others and those who are supported by community people their income is in the below income group and living in Dhusmara island on a rent basis. Even during the flooding time, they also take shelter at school or other high raise places where they can live with security.

Consequently, community support is very important during flooding time to maintain a livelihood. Though women have to take the double burden of responsibilities maintaining diversified work during flooding time. To provide community support, they need to work a lot where hypermasculine men do not share the responsibilities rather women need to maintain their household work.

### **Surviving on Relief Material**

They used to survive on the relief material in previous times. For instance: After every flood, the government used to send relief to the char area. The government people come by boat to distribute food, dry food, washing powder, and bucket so that they can survive during the flooding situation. However, it has also been noticed that the chairman and members of a particular union Parishad do not include the name of disadvantaged/marginal people. Sometimes, the list of chairmen Parishad is biased because of nepotism and corruption in the bureaucratic system too. Consequently, the most disadvantaged people are not included in the household and when they count, they consider a male-headed household as a family or they excluded people who do not have anything. Thus, the way many people in char areas do not get relief. However, when the government or non-governmental organizations come door to door, they give relief to everybody without making any discrimination.

According to 7 (34) (F), Char Gonai, “We received relief from Government in the last flooding time where we get rice, dry food, detergent, and bucket. All of us received this relief. It helped us to survive during the flooding time.” On the other hand, char dwellers, 8 (40) (F) from Dhusmara Char mentioned, “We did not receive any fund during the last flooding time as this place is little distant from the Kaunia and they need to cross the river so that people don’t come that much far to help us.” Consequently, it is also mentionable that providing relief is also dependent on the location of the community people so that island char people are little deprived in comparison with attached char & peninsula char.

### **Differences of Livelihood Strategies Based on Gender**

The livelihood strategies of char areas are driven by traditional beliefs and gendered customs. As women are expected to be connected with the household and men are expected to be connected with the outside work, their livelihood strategies are also dependent on these factors.

<b>Livelihood Diversification of Men</b>	<b>Livelihood Diversification of Women</b>
Working as a day labourer in other’s cultivable land (in terms of money)	Working as a day laborer in other’s cultivable land (sometimes in terms of community support and get rice and food in return)
Working as an auto-rickshaw puller, auto-cng puller	Working in a milk-producing group, working in co-operatives
Working as a mason, working as a temporary day laborer They are also working in other areas during	Working to produce vegetables, pumpkin, long beans, bottle gourd in the yard and selling these

the harvesting season	vegetables or ensuring daily food security
Taking loans and investing in microbusiness	Rearing sheep, cattle, and calves and selling cattle before flooding time
Fishing during the flooding time and selling catfish, and wallago fish at an expensive price	Rearing ducks and pigeons and selling eggs during the flooding time
Washing the bundle of jute	Washing jute and using dried jute bundle to make fire
Temporary migration during the flooding time	Saving food and money for the flooding time
Working as a street shopkeeper, hawker, boatman, or horse rider	Earning money by sewing dresses and caps, making wigs at household

**Table 1: Gendered Livelihood Diversification**

Women of char areas are trying to diversify their livelihood inside the char areas doing homestead gardening or business whereas men of char areas go outside to cut paddy or being temporarily migrated to other places they are trying to maintain the livelihood of the household. During the monsoon/ flooding season, they try to stay away from their household and earn money in the urban area working as day laborers whereas women take care of the household this time. Sometimes, they raise vegetables or paddy beds inside the households too.

Livelihood Strategies of Women in AraziHarishwar	Livelihood Strategies of Men in AraziHarishwar	Livelihood Strategies of Women in Dhusmara	Livelihood Strategies of Men in Dhusmara	Livelihood Strategies of Women in Char Gonai	Livelihood Strategies of Men in Char Gonai
Homestead Gardening	Working as a day laborer	Homestead Gardening	Horse riding	Homestead Gardening	Working as a construction worker, mason, auto-rickshaw puller
Sewing	Driving auto, tractor	Day Laborer in nearside agricultural land	Boat riding	Working as a day Laborer during sowing & harvesting time	Fishing
Making Wig	Rearing cattle & sheep		Working as a day laborer to other places/ temporary migration during flood	Sewing	Working as a day laborer
Working in the agricultural field	Giving or taking land as a contract		Rearing cattle & sheep		
Selling Milk	Working as the seller of seeds or crops, hawker, selling groundnut in train		Renting agricultural land to cultivate		Renting Agricultural Land to Cultivate

**Table 2: Gender Differences in Livelihood Diversification at Specific Areas**

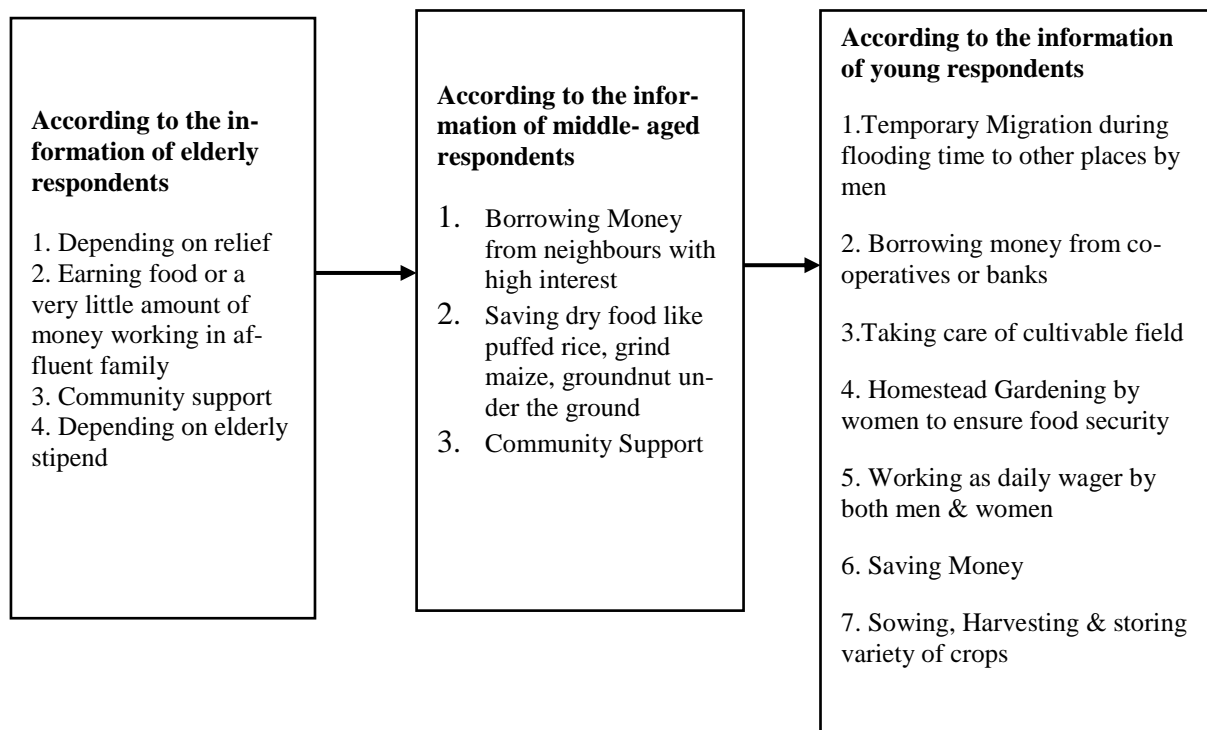
However, there is an interesting fact that those who are trying to diversify their income are comparatively educated in comparison with other people. Normally, people who have land ownership, don't like to work on other

people’s farms as it is considered a disrespectful thing and they try to sustain the existing ideologies of gender roles maintaining private/public dichotomies of gender. Also, the old people sustain the conservative ideologies of stigmatizing work outside. The uncertainty of flood makes farmers helpless as well. After spending all their savings, they cultivate rice, groundnut, or chili. However, it is difficult to manage profit if a flash flood happens.

Moreover, the mobility of women is also controlled in Dhumara in comparison with other char areas which is visible in background information. The char Gonai area people tend to include their women as a day laborer and during the potato harvesting season of fieldwork, it has been noticed that women are going to nearby places to harvest potatoes as Char Gonai people does not have that much cultivable land where they can cultivate and they believe they can get more money if they work as day laborer as they will get their wages at the end of the day. They don’t know how to do any other work; they don’t feel much confident to do other work so they work as a daily laborer on other people’s farms.

**Changing Livelihood Strategies over the Years**

The adaptation of livelihood strategies has been changing over the years. First of all, people were less concerned about taking precautions for flooding as at that time they did not get a signal. However, people in char areas are becoming conscious because of the increased communication of social media, news agencies and peer exposure, etc. now they are getting warning & dangerous signals during a disaster situation. They know that flooding will happen during monsoon time. They have indigenous knowledge to cope with the situation. The problem is the flash flood situation. During this situation, the community people are not prepared as this flash flood is very sudden so it can create huge problems for them. Analysing the interview of the respondents, it is noticed that relief dependence was the main livelihood strategy among char dwellers. However, nowadays all of them are trying to diversify livelihood & income by adopting different strategies.



**Figure 1: Changing Livelihood Strategies over the Years**

Moreover, their strategies are different based on age. The elderly people depend on elderly allowance or children’s money whereas young people try to diversify their income, take community support, or borrow money from co-operatives. After talking with the elderly respondents, it has also been noticed that during the flooding time they depend on the money given by the Government as elderly allowance. However, they have to face huge problems to get that money. According to 9 (62) (F), AraziHarishwar,

*People who come to count the numbers of households and population counted it in a wrong way so that my son’s age becomes more than his father’s and my husband could not be enlisted as elderly member*

After being enlisted as elderly members, some of them are not getting the exact amount of elderly allowance that they are supposed to get. According to the new rules of Bangladesh, they are supposed to get 1500 taka (Bangladeshi Currency) after every 3 months which they are not receiving on regular basis. Even some-



times, they need to pay a bribe to the chairman to be enlisted for elderly allowance as all of them are not getting an elderly allowance. According to 9 (75) (M), Dhusmara char,

*My age was recorded less. With the wrongly documented information, when I passed 60 years, I got an elderly allowance. They have taken a bribe to enlist me for elderly allowance. He enlisted me after bribing him with 3000 takas. However, there is no fixed amount of money for us. Sometimes they send us 1300, sometimes 1425, and sometimes 1500.*

There is less transparent behavior to maintain the elderly allowance which should be taken into consideration.

### **Differences of Livelihood Strategies Based on Education**

The livelihood strategies are also based on education. The level of education also decides what kinds of strategies are going to be adopted to cope. In 3 char areas, for both men & women, they don't have much education. Most of them studied till primary only, and a few of them studied till high school but their peer group pressure and family traditions don't allow them to go for other options. Therefore, they choose either agricultural work or work as a daily laborer. Women, those who are educated in comparison with other women, also get pressure to get married and they have to. Consequently, they become engaged in income diversification activities that are popular in their area.

### **Differences of Livelihood Strategies Based on Location**

As this study was focused on 3 char areas of KauniaUpazila, it has been noticed that geographical diversity also determines livelihood. For instance: the land of AraziHaishwar is more fertile than other land. Though flood-affected every island as most of the people in AraziHarishwar(attached char) have their land so they like to be connected with agricultural activities even after the flooding time. Moreover, they use different kinds of technological approaches to growing crops. Here, women are also very engaged with agricultural activities as they have their land too. There are many NGOs like RDRS, Jagoroni chakra foundation working in this area. They are engaging women in agricultural activities. Now, women are taking care of homestead gardening.

On the other hand, In Dhusmara char (island char) most of the char dwellers are landless so they are given rent for living in the char area. They don't have their land for agricultural activities. They need to take contracts again for cultivating in other lands. Therefore, they prefer to work as daily laborers in other lands as there is no risk and they will get money at the end of the day. Some of them are also working as street shopkeepers, hawkers or horse riders, and fishermen. In Char Gonai (attached char), men prefer to migrate to other places as they have very less area to stay and most of them don't have that much land for agricultural activities. After being migrated to other places, they engage themselves in daily wager activities. If we talk about the relief materials, the most distant char like Dhusmara does not get enough relief in comparison with other chars as it is very difficult to reach that area so their community support system is very strong. On the other hand, AraziHarishwar and Char Gonai received relief materials as these chars are comparatively nearer to the urban area and many NGOs are working in that area too. However, women of these char areas are engaging themselves in other kinds of livelihood activities like sewing dresses and caps, selling eggs of chicken and duck, selling homestead vegetables, etc. Some of the members of female-headed households are also in search of better job options. They are going to the city in search of better jobs. They are working as garment workers and one of them also working as a call center agent. Yet, livelihood diversification is not that applicable for the women who are living in Dhusmara Char as they are surrounded by water. It is very difficult and risky for them to go outside of their char area. Furthermore, there are no NGOs are working right now after the CLP project. Therefore, they are not able to diversify their livelihood.

### **Discussion**

The Analyzing the livelihood strategies, it has been noticed that livelihood choices are different based on gender, age, education, and location. Moreover, considering the pre-existing inequalities and power relations, women char dwellers are facing problems from the community to access the resources and increase their capacity as their mobility is controlled. The livelihood diversification to adapt to floods has changed over the years. It's not the same as previous days. Now, community and ngo support are playing a vital part. Following the private and public dichotomy of gender, women are more trying to diversify their livelihood maintaining their household chores whereas men are migrating themselves in search of better livelihood options. Following gender ideologies of society, the women who work outside are considered bad women in most cases, and they are supposed to carry religious and cultural superstitions and expectations which is controlling their mobility. Moreover, the situation is worse in island char areas like Dhusmara char because of the geographical detachment of char areas. However, those who are getting encouragement from family, are also taking part in decision-making. Though the livelihood choices are driven by gender, the inclusion of women in livelihood diversifica-

tion are ensuring the presence of their voice in the community. However, the discrimination of wages among day laborers because of their gender is following the stereotypical nature of patriarchal society. Using the theory of feminist political ecology, it is possible to identify the limited opportunities of women char dwellers regarding livelihood options.

### III. Conclusion

Livelihood diversification has changed a lot over the years. First of all, it was only a relief-based approach. Nowadays, they are trying to adopt a new livelihood diversification approach to adapt to flooding. Combining their indigenous knowledge with acquired knowledge from Government and Non-governmental Organizations' programs they are adopting different techniques. The socio-cultural construction of gender is creating obstacles for women to search for new livelihood options and shows inequality is determined by intersectional identities like gender, education, etc. (Clement et al., 2019). Keeping the private-public dichotomy in mind, NGOs and Go agencies are targeting women to diversify cropping patterns as they are living in the household most of the time. Thus, the way women of these char areas are also trying to maintain their livelihood. Additionally, they are also searching for other kinds of income-generating options like sewing dresses, caps, and wigs, working as a day laborer in neighbor's fields during the weeding and harvesting time. However, the less exposure of women and the detachment of geographical location of char areas also prevent them from adopting diversified livelihood as their mobility is controlled and the situation of char areas are not ensuring security for women. Moreover, the hypermasculine husband is limiting the opportunity for women whereas non-hegemonic husbands believe in developing their wife's skills and consider women as human resources. To develop the situation of char dwellers our government should take sustainable livelihood approaches to implement any initiative in this area.

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