



# Gender Roles in the Jute Value Chain in Bangladesh

Experience from the USAID AVC project impact evaluation

Alan de Brauw

Markets, Trade and Institutions Division

International Food Policy Research Institute

(co-authors: Berber Kramer, Mike Murphy, Deborah Rubin, Emily Myers, Salma Akhter)

Canberra | 3 April 2019

## Market Systems Approach to Agricultural Development

- Idea is to better link all actors within the value chain by seeing them as a “market system”
  - In other words, improving trust of other actors is a primary goal
  - As is brand recognition (as a quality signal)
- Often in value chains in LDCs, actors only see/think about next link in chain
  - E.g. input manufacturers see wholesalers as customers, not farmers
- By teaching them to think about input retailers and farmers as customers too, can lead to improved outcomes
- In practice, project (AVC) works with *lead firm* to implement the approach

## Gender and Market Systems Interventions

- Wait! The word “gender” did not appear on the last slide!
- Challenge is if one works indirectly through private sector, gender roles must also be addressed indirectly
- In fact, even “architects” of market systems are neglecting gender;
  - In a review of the grey literature on market systems, Ocasio-Cortez and Lundy (2018) only use the word “gender” 5 times in 69 pages
  - And... largely in the context of crops grown by women

## Our research focus

- We study the role of gender in a market systems intervention run by the Bangladesh Agricultural Value Chains (AVC) project
- The AVC project worked in nine value chains; mostly food but some non-food value chains (jute, coir, cut flowers)
- We focus on jute
- As noted from AVC website, gender played a role in at least some value chains...

### Portrait of a Successful Female Entrepreneur



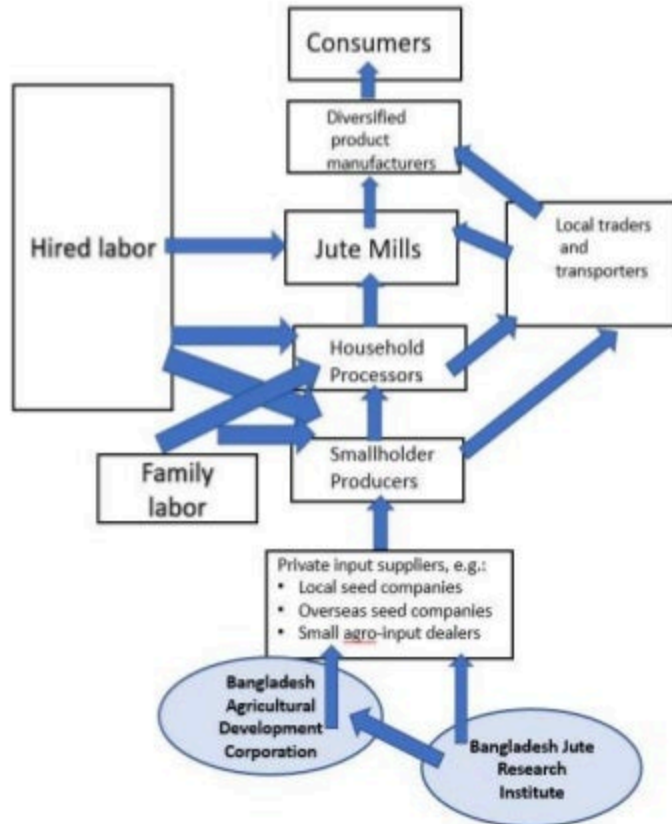
## Research Questions

- What is the role of women within the jute value chain?
- What is the *potential* role given societal boundaries? (How much heterogeneity is there in those boundaries?)
- Are those roles being enhanced by the AVC?
- How can we take this example to understand how to better incorporate gender programming into market systems interventions?

## Our research approach

- Mixed methods
- Qualitative work in 2 divisions, 4 districts (Faridpur, Jhenaidah, Madripur, Narail), 8 villages
- Included focus groups and interviews of:
  - Key informants
  - Input retailers
  - Traders
  - Agricultural Officers
- Quantitative surveys, included the a-WEAI and pro-WEAI (depending upon household group)
  - 50 villages, same 4 districts in 2 divisions

# Jute Value Chain



## Findings

### Input Purchasing

- Largely done by men (both retailers and “consumers”)
- Women tend to only enter shops if no men in shop already

### Cultivation

- Most women do not work in the field at all
- Clear stigma associated with women working in fields
- Only exceptions— weeding and spreading fertilizer
- Consistent with the quantitative data



## Findings (cont.)

### Processing Fibers

- Two main activities: soaking (or retting) stalks and extracting fibers
- Women (socially) can only do jute extraction as it can be done near homestead
  - But quant data does show in about 1/2 of households, women are involved in retting jute

### Marketing

- Perceived as a men's task
- Women can sell jute sticks, typically near home

## Findings (cont.)

### Final Notes

- In villages with only “market systems” intervention, clearly no change in gender roles etc. (no impact from intervention)
- Women’s wage rates <1/2 of men’s (150 taka versus 400 taka/day)
  - Qualitative data: Due to task differences
- Some “men’s” tasks, when done by women, associated with poverty
- Heterogeneity by district, even though it’s a really small area!
  - *Examples*
  - At harvest, no women involved in Jhenaidah, but 44% of households had women involved in Narail (70 km away)
  - Women’s participation in washing: 76% in Narail, 16% in Jhenaidah

# Gendered Division of All Jute Activities

Task	Jute activities	Involvement of Men/Women by Task			
		Qualitative Findings		Proportions In Midline Data	
		Men	Women	Men	Women
Cultivation	Land preparation, Plowing	✓		84.3%	6.4%
	Purchasing seeds	✓			
	Purchasing fertilizer	✓			
	Cultivation	✓			
	Transplanting, Sowing seeds	✓		92.5%	2.7%
	Applying fertilizer/manure	✓		90.1%	11.2%
	Weeding	✓	✓		
	Thinning	✓			
	Irrigation and drainage	✓			
	Harvesting	✓		82.1%	3.9%
Processing	Carrying jute to home or ponds for processing	✓	rarely		
	Soaking jute plants in water	✓	rarely	80.9%	48.6%
	Extracting jute fibers	✓	✓		
	Peeling jute/Bailing	✓	✓	60.3%	29.0%
Marketing	Taking jute fibers to market by self for sale	✓	rarely	63.1%	3.8%
	Selling jute fibers in large scale at market place	✓			
	Selling small scale jute fibers in the neighborhood	✓	✓		
	Sell jute sticks		✓		
	Trading jute	✓		36.1%	19.6%

## Implications: How to better integrate women into a market systems approach?

1. Choose partners open to working with women in the long-term
2. Innovative marketing to overcome gender constraints  
(Uber Eats, but for Fertilizer)
3. Target promotions towards families rather than men, and potentially towards activities conducted by women
4. Find the right entry point (for jute, not likely inputs if want to induce gender equality)
  - Some women are employed in jute mills, for example— could intervene to link back to farmers through improvements in mills instead of through input retailers

We would like to acknowledge all CGIAR Research Programs and Centers for supporting the participation of their gender scientists to the *Seeds of Change* conference.



Collaborative  
Platform for  
Gender Research



Photo: Neil Palmer/IWMI



Global Affairs  
Canada

Affaires mondiales  
Canada

