

# **Bargaining with social capital**

**- A picture provided through the lens and context of poor, rural women in  
Bangladesh**

*Ragnhild Madland*

**Master of philosophy (M.Phil) in Development Studies  
Department of Geography  
Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology Management  
Norwegian University of Science and Technology**



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## **Abstract**

Drawing on participatory knowledge creation, this thesis examines the diverse ways in which social capital of poor, rural women in Bangladesh serve as a “capacity of individuals to command scarce resources, by virtue of their membership in networks or broader social structures” (Portes 1995:120). It addresses how women’s capacity to command resources, needed for their livelihood and for a dignified life, is influenced by cultural practice, power- and gender relations, which interplay within and around their networks. Women are represented as active participants who are shown to celebrate, adapt, sustain, negotiate and resist the circumstances of their lives. Women find space to manoeuvre in the situations they face, strategize in their dealings with various actors, and manipulate resources and constraints.

The author argues that the social capital of women and the portfolio of bonding, bridging and linking relations that women have, or do not have, are keys to an understanding of the bargaining processes in their households and communities. Among the research participants, women’s ability to eventually change cultural practice, power- and gender relations depends upon whether women, individually or collectively, have a variety of bonding, bridging and linking relations to strengthen their bargaining power.

### **Key words:**

Social capital, women, culture, development, agency, bargaining, rural Bangladesh



**Map 1. Bangladesh and Bagerhat District**

Source: Asiatic society of Bangladesh (2007)

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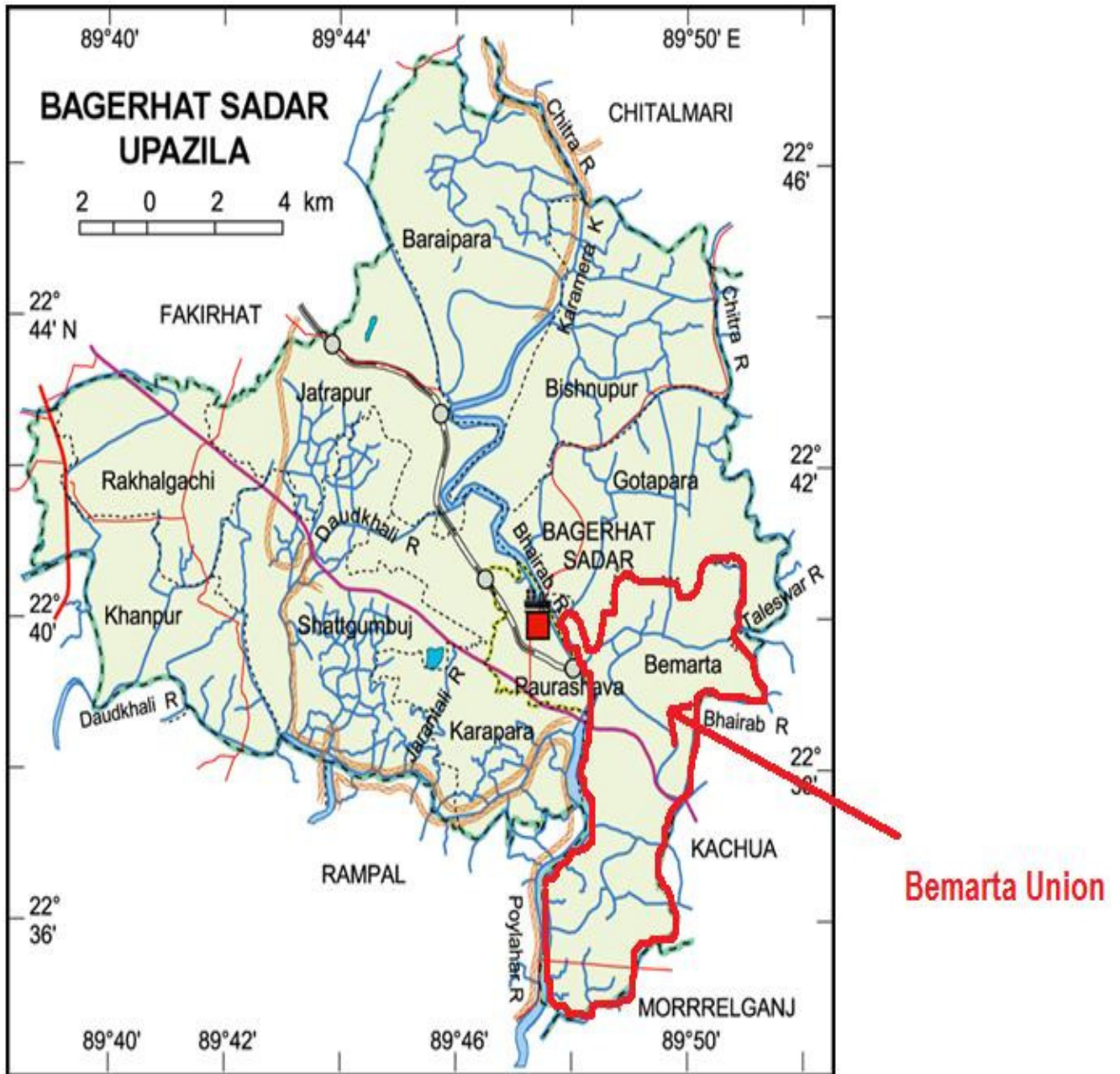
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Map 2. Bagerhat Sadar Upazila and Bemarta Union - the study area

Source: Asiatic society of Bangladesh (2007)

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## List of Acronyms and non-English terms

<i>Appa</i>	Sister (term of address for sister)
AW	Awami League, national political party in Bangladesh
<i>Bari</i>	Cluster of houses, which consists of two to six households around a courtyard.
<i>Bishas</i>	Belief, or faith in something
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
<i>Burkha</i>	Usually a covering, multi-layered garment that is worn over a sari or a dress.
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party, national political party in Bangladesh
<i>Cata</i>	A bedcover, with traditional embroideries
Codec/MJ	Community Development Centre/Manusher Jonno, gatekeeper NGO
<i>Committee</i>	NGO or MFI initiated formal group, which membership gives access to credit.
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IGA	Income Generating Activity
<i>Imam</i>	Muslim leader of the prayers in the Mosque
<i>Matbar</i>	Village leader or powerful person
MP	Member of Parliament
MFI	Microfinance Institution
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PLA	Participatory Learning and Action
<i>Purdah</i>	Code of conduct for both Muslims and Hindus, which guard people's modesty and purity. It is a practice of cultural tradition and religious custom.
SEGA	Socio Economic Gender Analysis
<i>Salwar kameez</i>	A long dress worn over trousers, accompanied by a scarf to cover the chest.
<i>Shalis</i>	Local arbitration
UN	United Nations
UP	Union Parishad, local level, rural government
Upzilla	Administrative unit, or sub district of Bangladesh
VGF card	Vulnerable Group Feeding card
WCD	Women, Culture and Development



## **1 Introduction**

During the last decades the concept of social capital, defined here as the “capacity of individuals to command scarce resources by virtue of their membership in networks or broader social structures” (Portes 1995:120), has gained interest and support both within and outside the development discourse. Along with the popularity of the concept extensive critiques have been developed. One of the loudest comes from contemporary feminists who argue that the discussion of social capital has been almost gender blind by denying inequalities (Molyneux 2002). Several feminist scholars distance their research from this discourse (van Staveren 2003) and, consequently, analyses of gender in social capital research are few and far between.

Aiming to contribute to the discourse rather than avoiding it, this thesis approaches social capital of women with a feminist, actor oriented and participatory perspective. To meet the broad feminist critique and take a gendered approach to women’s social capital, the Women, Culture and Development (WCD) approach is proposed as a lens through which to study women’s social capital in all its diversity and difference.

The thesis draws on a participatory field study conducted during the summer of 2007 among poor, rural, female, residents of Bemarta Union in southwest Bangladesh. The knowledge base of the thesis was obtained through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) facilitated in two villages of the union with a total number of 24 participants. Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) exercises supplemented the FGDs to ensure participation and variety. The research builds on women’s voices as they portray their life events.

The study explores and analyzes women’s access, use and management of social capital and how social capital is generated and distributed or, sometimes, not distributed. Key benefits of this research include improved knowledge about how women value social capital, as defined above, and increased awareness of how cultural practice, power- and gender relations affect social capital of women. The study also draws attention to how the different portfolios of bonding, bridging and linking relations women have, or do not have, may influence their bargaining power in their households and communities. It argues that through engaging in diverse networks the women in the study gain bargaining power to challenge and resist cultural practice, power- and gender relations.

## **1.1 Rationale of the Study**

### **1.1.1 Personal and Political goals that guided the research**

To give a self reflective account of a feminist student of development's participatory research among poor, women in rural Bangladesh it is important to explicitly formulate the political and personal goals that guided the research.

The study process can be said to have started five years ago when I worked as a volunteer in a local Microfinance project, close to the research area. During my 7 months stay I got to participate in different women groups on a long term base, following their daily lives and challenges. From this I gained a great appreciation of the rural women's knowledge and the power of their agency, while feeling on my body the complexity of maneuvering agency within the confines of a patriarchal culture.

The decision to study the women was prompted in part as a reaction to the encounters with naturalized images of Bangladeshi women as oppressed and passive victims of patriarchy and culture in scholarship. However, as Parameswaran (2001) argues it is important to have in mind that feminists writing about Third World women's agency to contest Orientalist representations must "resist the desire to minimize the power of traditional patriarchy on women's lives merely because such a representation might weaken Western notions of cultural superiority" (ibid:94). She continues that despite pressure from community members to produce celebratory accounts for glorious traditions in their culture one should call attention to that this culture may give unfair and oppressive norms.

Another compelling reason to study the women's social capital were located in the curiosity to investigate the importance of social capital of women, after lessons learned about the gender dimensions of social capital remaining under-recognized in the study of social capital and in social capital literature. Social capital is generally conceptualized as gender-blind, paying little attention to gendered intra-household issues of power and hierarchy. Silvey and Elmhirst (2003) argue for a more complete picture of social capital, one that includes attention to the gendered and intergenerational conflicts and hierarchies within social networks.

### **1.1.2 A feminist approach**

A feminist approach to research provides a framework for alternative knowledge creation, which acknowledges how power, knowledge and context play when undertaking research (Moss 2002). Harding (1987) suggests that a feminist approach to knowledge building, recognizes and adds important elements to the knowledge base. First, it puts essential

importance of examining women's experiences and it values the real life stories women provide about themselves as empirical and theoretical resources for social analysis. Second, it provides research for women about social phenomena that women both want and need. Third, it provides a subject matter of inquiry (ibid). Research conducted within a feminist framework is attentive to analytical issues emerging from engaging in the research process, it recognizes differences in social location, emphasizes issues of difference, questions social power and how knowledge is legitimized, reproduced and presented. While positioning this research as having a feminist approach it is important to acknowledge that there are several feminisms, broad in content, methodology and epistemological positioning, and that the concept of a universalized "woman" is problematic (Hesse-Biber et al. 2004).

One of the most important criticisms from feminists of contemporary development theory, discourse and practice is that it is Eurocentric (Mohanty 1988). By referring to universalism, it represents depreciation, underlying its visions and depicts a tendency towards reductionism as well as superiority of some over others (Rigg 2003). It represents a worldview perpetuating the ideological, economical and cultural hegemony of the West. Hence, it neglects cultural and regional distinctiveness by lacking sensitivity to cultural variation (ibid.). By examining women's experiences, real life stories and perspectives on cultural practice, power- and gender relations, I seek to acknowledge cultural distinctiveness, variation and women's diverse response.

### **1.1.3 An actor oriented approach**

Following an actor oriented approach, one acknowledges and emphasizes the degree to which individuals have control over their life (Rigg 2007). People themselves shape their life, have considerable latitude in terms of decision-making and engage in processes of change and development in multiple and often ambivalent ways. An actor oriented approach recognizes that people actively resist, negotiate, change, adapt or sustain the structural constraints within which actors operate (Long 2001).

Rigg (2007) argues that actor oriented approaches have shown some shortcomings giving insufficient attention to examining how individual choices are shaped by larger frames of meaning and action and distribution of power and resources. An explanation of social behavior in terms of its roots, causes and effects implies some notions of determinants, hierarchical patterns and systems. I will argue that by applying a Women, Culture and Development (WCD) approach to study women's social capital, it is possible to investigate

the agency of women, while at the same time take cultural practice, power- and gender relations into account. Such an approach acknowledges the processes of change and adaptation that characterizes cultures, and how groups in societies, whether based on gender, class, ethnicity or generation, experience and see such processes in very different ways as a decidedly mixed blessing or curse. Through such a framework I claim that it is possible to investigate the strengths of social relations, while neither neglecting gender and difference nor undermining local cultures.

#### **1.1.4 A participatory approach**

An actor oriented approach implies a clear epistemological standpoint (Long 2002). Relying upon this approach one acknowledges the existence of “multiple social realities” where people have a multiplicity of understandings, beliefs and commitments. Moreover, one recognises that knowledge emerges out of a complex interplay of elements, is essentially provisional, partial and contextual in nature (Arce and Long 1992). I argue that having an actor oriented approach, one may choose a social constructionist epistemology viewing knowledge as situated and discursively produced, focusing on meaning and power. Methodologically this calls for a detailed understanding of everyday life and of the processes by which meaning, knowledge and social practices are shared, contested, negotiated, and sometimes rejected by the various actors involved.

This research will emphasise the coproduction of knowledge through participatory qualitative means of collaboration. The research will build on knowledge produced through focus group discussions (FGDs) together with some elements of participatory learning and action (PLA), in which the participants of the study bring their perceptions and analysis of their reality to the centre to create a negotiated reality. Hence, the research design is within a social constructivist epistemology because it involves interpreting how people themselves understand the phenomenon of their everyday life.

## **1.2 Research Question and Objectives**

In investigating the social capital of women, this research relies upon Portes’ definition of social capital as the “capacity of individuals to command scarce resources by virtue of their membership in networks or broader social structures” (1995:120). The following questions and specific objectives have been identified for research:



*How do poor, rural women value their membership in networks or broader social structures to provide capacity to command scarce resources, and what may limit this capacity?*

- To understand the dynamics of social capital of women, through investigating how women perceive, build and use social capital.
- To develop a better understanding, through women's perspective, of how the interplay of cultural practice, power- and gender relations might govern access to, benefits from, use of and control over social capital.

*How does social capital influence women's collective and individual agency in the bargaining process where cultural practice, power- and gender relations are sustained, negotiated or resisted?*

- To explore the ways in which the construction and use of social capital affect how women bargain cultural practice, power- and gender relations.
- To facilitate the recognition of the pluralistic nature of social capital and how it affects women differently.

### **1.3 Limitations**

There are a number of limitations accompanying this study and the reader should bear these in mind while reading this piece.

First to be mentioned is the lacking in the recruitment of participants. The research participants are only women and the voices of men are not included in the study. This is on one side, because cultural barriers limit a female researcher's access to male participants in this particular context. The local culture do not facilitate for a female to interact on an equal basis with men in a research context. On the other side, trying to shed light on the voices of the poor women should not need an explanation as the voices of women have been neglected too many times in development research.

Additionally, the participants were recruited on the basis of being part of an informal network of women. Those excluded from the network should also have been taken into consideration for the study to be covering the voices of women in the area. The study is only done among women in a small area and is specific to the context. Leading from this, the findings of this study may not be used to generalize across settings as the findings are context specific and the

participants were few in numbers. However, following the qualitative nature of the study, that was never the aim.

It is a daunting task for a woman, from one of the richest countries in the world to venture into a subject area of women in a different cultural context, in one of the poorest countries of the world. The difficulties were faced partly from initially inadequate knowledge, which I have done and continue to do what I can to cure. The difficulties were also brought about by the prevalence among feminists of charges of “essentialist”, or what R. A. Putman (1995) calls “substitutionalist” feminists. She argues that western feminists allegedly commit the mistake of subsuming all women under the category to which one self belong and substitute their own experience from their own context for that of all women. Who is this researcher then, to have anything to say about the situation of the women under study whose life circumstances are in many respects different from those of her own? Okin (1995) replies to this anti-essentialism arguing it is “overblown, overvalued and largely invalid” (ibid: 275). Okin believe that if an outsider with a critical distance finds out as much as one can about the culture, the meanings of its practices and different allocation of resources, through knowledge from its members, trying to understand people’s own perception of their situation, the committed outsider may come up with helpful and relevant analysis and critique that might be difficult to do for an insider living with the relevant culture (ibid).

Feminists have drawn attention to the politics of location that shapes knowledge production and argued that representations are necessarily partial, constructed and situated (Haraway 1988, Harding 1991). It is within the context of arguments for located and positioned knowledge that I anchor this self reflexive account for field work that was carried out in a Bangladeshi village among poor, rural women.

#### **1.4 Organization of the Thesis**

The thesis is organized in seven chapters, through which the thesis aims to focus on better understanding the interplay between the social capital of women, cultural practice, power- and gender relations, and women’s bargaining power.

**Chapter 2** contextualizes social capital of women. It presents images of poor, rural women’s status in their households and communities, and notes that women and their community participation are influenced by negotiable, but slow changing, patterns of patriarchal practice

and strong codes of conducts. It also presents the context that surrounds women's everyday lives in their localities.

Theoretical considerations are offered in **Chapter 3**. It presents the concept of social capital, its relevance in the development discourse and the critique of the concept. This critique shows the relevance of including the Women Culture and Development (WCD) approach in the study of women's social capital. The chapter argues for an analytical framework for research that combines lessons learned from social capital and WCD scholarship.

**Chapter 4** demonstrates how the social capital of women is studied. It expresses how and why the research design draws from qualitative methodology and methods, and outlines how FGD and PLA tools and techniques are applied. The careful preparation prior to the fieldwork, the constant adjustment of research design, considerations made and decisions taken throughout the research process are described in detail, to account for the trustworthiness and accountability of the research and the representations made.

**Chapter 5** draws a picture of how the participants of the study value social capital. It sums up the knowledge provided of how women use, construct and perceive social capital by examining the bonding, bridging and linking relations the women have or do not have. It investigates how the social capital of women is influenced by the interplay of cultural practices, power- and gender relations. It also reveals that there is variation in between the two groups of women in the study, when it comes to their portfolio of bonding, bridging and linking relations.

The role of social capital in relation to women's bargaining power is examined in **Chapter 6**. The chapter compares how the two groups of women use their space for maneuvering agency, individually and collectively, and choose differently when it comes to bargaining cultural practice, power- and gender relations. The chapter highlights a potential link between the portfolio of social capital and women's bargaining power in their households and communities.

Finally, **Chapter 7** sums up the study. It revises the proposed analytical framework and highlights the lessons learned from the research.

## 2 Contextualizing social capital of women

This chapter of background is formed to explain the constructed category of “poor, rural Bangladeshi women” applied for the study and the circumstances of such a category. A Bangladeshi woman’s identity and relationships are influenced by the effect of a certain historically and cultural specific mode of patriarchal culture. The chapter is pointing to how these social and cultural practices and norms that influence women’s lives are maintained while at the same time emphasizing that these practices of culture are challenged, negotiated, and transformed. The chapter displays in brief the context of women’s lives. It is observed that despite serious problems related to a dysfunctional political system, weak governance, and pervasive corruption, Bangladesh remains a shaken democracy. It also introduces the rural governmental, judicial institutions and the intricacies and the effects of the particular patron client relations and power networks that observers note characterize the rural power structures in the country. Religious and nongovernmental institutions are presented in brief before the last part of this chapter offers the particularities of the local study area wherein this research is conducted.

### 2.1 Who is a “poor, rural Bangladeshi woman”?

*“Mentioning women in Bangladesh and you are likely to conjure up one of three sharply contrasting images. Predominant is the picture of urgent need: women with pleading hands outstretched, desperate in the wake of the latest disaster. Next is the picture of submission: sari-shrouded women clinging to the shadows or hunched mutely over laborious work. Alternative pictures show women working, demonstrating, in groups or defiantly alone. Again the message is clear: these women, though poor, are militant and strong. They claim solidarity, not pity; support, not charity” (White 1992:1).*

In the scholarly literature Bangladeshi poor, rural women are represented by different images. Each image may hold a fragment of the truth about the women in Bangladesh, but the picture also say something about the interest which the image represents (White 1992). “Women” as a category of analysis is constructed by the context and the particular situation (Alexander and Mohanty 1997). There is no easy generalization of women in Bangladesh or elsewhere. In this text “women” refer to a heterogeneous group across class, ethnicity, generation, religion and culture. Women in all their plurality have different status, roles and needs. For this study there have been constructed a category of “poor, rural Bangladeshi women” for the purpose of analysis.

Statistics from the World Bank says that, “Poverty in Bangladesh is primarily a ‘rural phenomenon’, with 53 percent of its rural population classified as poor, comprising about 85 percent of the country’s poor” (WB 2008a). Recent research has provided a portrayal of poverty in Bangladesh which moves beyond the World Bank statistics. Sen (2003) provides a picture of rural households through a panel survey using the standard headcount measure for household poverty. The data from the study indicate that more than 31% of rural households are found below the poverty line. Hossain et al. (2002) investigates self-perceived economic condition and find that about one-eighth of their rural household sample perceive themselves as extremely poor while 34% see their status as either extremely or moderately poor.

A “poor, rural Bangladeshi woman” is neither a victim nor a hero in this context. Women resist, challenge and subvert the processes of poverty at various junctures. They are wives, sisters, daughters, mothers, activists, and protesters. The women who participate in this study perceive themselves and each other as “poor”, from scarce livelihoods, having a low socio-economic status. They are rural and Bangladeshi as they reside in Bemarta Union under the Bagerhat Sadar. The union is situated only 4 km from a town. However, in Bangladeshi standards the area may be categorized as rural.

## **2.2 Women’s status in Bangladesh**

The constitution of Bangladesh (GoB 2008) provides the equality of rights for both men and women. All women are guaranteed these rights by the constitution although divided by class, location, age, and religion. However, looking at recent reports from the UN (UN and GoB 2005, UNDP 2008) it is evident that Bangladeshi women face inequities, including: Low economic and political participation, low literacy, poor health and nutrition, social discrimination, unequal legal provisions, and gender-based violence and trafficking. A range of social commentators attribute these inequalities to the effects of a certain historical and cultural specific mode of patriarchal culture which affect rural women's lives in Bangladesh.

### **2.2.1 A culture of patriarchy**

Despite great variations and agency among women, scholars have given emphasis to inherent patriarchal structures as product of local cultures, underlying aspects of decision-making that may act to reduce female autonomy both within the household and in the wider society. This distinctive cultural arrangement operates in subtle ways as an aspect of institutional ideologies, rules and practices (Mohanty 1991). Patriarchal cultures are not homogenous or static constructs but may be manifested in kinship norms or rules, inheritance patterns

resulting in the lack of property rights (Agarwal, 1994), or cultural institutions such as the practice of dowry or *purdah* which gives standards of female respectability and restrict female mobility (Minturn 1993). Rahman and Rao (2002) argue that patriarchy may be seen as a constraint on the female's capability set as they determine the restrictions on the free expression of choice. The choices made in turn affect human functions that have a direct effect on mobility and decision making authority (ibid). While possibly changing over the long-term these structures and constraints are resistant to change in the short run.

### **2.2.2 Women's status in the family**

In Bangladesh kinship structures are predominantly patrilineal (White 1992). Thus, descent rules that define socially recognized kin groups through chains of parent-child ties are traced through the male parent and property are generally transmitted through the male members. Marriage tends to be exogamous and follow the cultural patrilocal ideal (ibid). Marriage is a fundamental institution fulfilling a social obligation rather than individual choice (Sultana and Karim 2005). Usually, women marry outside their kin and often outside their village community, leaving their own homes at marriage to join their husband's family. The payment of dowry by the bride's family to the groom is the norm and customary practice among both Hindus and Muslims, though not legal by state laws (Huda 2006).

The family has a stronghold upon individuals and the power to exercise social control over male and female activities. Households are organized along highly corporate lines, with strong conjugal bonds and cultural rules (White 1992). Within this system, the father, or in his absence, the oldest male kin is the head of the household, emphasizing male responsibility for protecting and provisioning women and children. Household resources and income are pooled under the management and control of this male patriarch.

Traditionally, a woman in Bangladesh derives her status from her family (Sultana and Karim 2005). Women are generally viewed in their reproductive roles and are given a subsidiary status as economic dependents. A woman's role is primarily centered on household maintenance, child-bearing, and child-rearing. Female sexuality is controlled through a strong public-private divide, with women secluded in the private domain. It is important for the many women to maintain the practice of *purdah* to maintain their female chastity and status.

### **2.2.3 Purdah and the female activity space**

The practice of *purdah*, often referred to as "female seclusion", is based on norms of honor and shame that set standards for morality (Amin 1997). These "codes of conduct" is practiced

by both Muslims and Hindus in Bangladesh and have important implications for women's interactions with men inside and outside the household. It also influences women's access to gainful economic activities, as going against traditional female work patterns are connected to notions of shame and loss of status (Feldman 2001). The specific construction of purdah is context, religious and cultural specific. The form of purdah practices varies by social status, according to what women can or cannot afford, and it varies after religion. Purdah is often connected to the symbolism in dress codes such as *Burqa* or veil wearing among rural Muslim women. The extent of female activity space or the spatial behavior, of rural women in Bangladesh is closely linked to the purdah (Paul 1992). To be able to follow the codes of conduct, daily activities of women are generally confined to the *bari*, or nearby neighborhood.

#### 2.2.4 A negotiable practice

The life of a woman in Bangladesh is influenced by this social and cultural system that sustains a division of labor that influences women's mobility, roles, responsibility and sexuality. However, as this system is grounded in culture it is not determined or unchanging. These notions and practices of culture may be challenged, negotiated, and radically transformed not only from positions of the "patriarch", but from resistant positions by women.

White (1992) presents a rich anthropological description of women's lives in rural areas of Bangladesh. She grapples with the real and symbolic importance of purdah and documents innovation and originality in how women negotiate the challenges they face within the family and community. A briefing paper on Bangladesh from The Asian Development Bank (Adab 2001) observes that women's role, responsibility, and mobility are increasingly changing due to persistent poverty and the gradual erosion of the "familial umbrella of support".

Kandiyoti (1988) argues that women in general actively negotiate and strategize in dealing with patriarchy. She refers to what she terms "patriarchal bargains", which "exert a powerful influence on the shaping of women's gendered subjectivity and determine the nature of gender ideology in different context" (ibid: 86). Women exert active and passive resistance in the renegotiation of relations between genders. On the other hand, they are also maintained, uphold and even reinforced by both men and women in the society (ibid.). She shows to an example of a mother in law in a patriarchal extended family internalizing the patriarchy to claim her power in the household. Another example of this may be the practice of inheritance. In Bangladesh, Muslim women can inherit land and property but only half the share of their brothers, and one eighth the property of their husbands. However, Muslim women often

waive the right to inherit their fathers' property in favor of brothers (Adab 2001). If inheriting property, they often pass control of their inheritance to husbands or sons. In both instances, the man provides protection to the woman in return for control over her inheritance, thus the practice directly reinforces a patriarchal tradition (ibid.).

### **2.2.5 Rural women's social networks**

As illustrated above a rural Bangladeshi woman's identity and relationships are traditionally influenced by patriarchal practices and purdah norms. These norms limit her involvement in community life by prohibiting women from gathering in "public" or "male" spaces. But their absence from public spaces does not mean women are invisible (Kabeer 1994). Instead, women have their own informal institutions (March and Taquq 1982) formed among kin and neighbors when washing clothes, processing rice or caring for children. However, unlike men, rural Bangladeshi women rarely have the opportunity to establish networks outside their kinship groups. Because of purdah restrictions, women's relationships are primarily cultivated among those with whom they share kinship ties (Larance 2001). Despite these cultural norms and limitations there has been a growing acceptance for women to participate in Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) based activities. Larance (2001) claims that additional to the programs provided by the NGOs the involvement with NGOs in itself may affect the cultural dynamics. For example, while attending regular meetings in the village organization, members have the opportunity to build new networks and strengthen existing ones (ibid.).

## **2.3 The context of rural women's lives**

### **2.3.1 National context**

Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world, categorized as a least developed and low-income country (UNDP 2008). Characteristics such as densely populated, disaster prone and periodically hunger stricken are combined with harshly eroded by corruption, severe gender equalities and weak local democracy. The government has developed a National Strategy for Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction (GED 2004, UN 2005) and begun a broad process of reforming and planning, applauded by the multinational development institutions and donor organizations. But put in practice, the national reforms have been proven incomplete in areas such as health, electricity and banking. The national economic growth has not been adequate, measured up to the massive population growth. A lack of public confidence in the integrity and efficiency of the country's political and administrative institutions has spread and shaken the democracy and the development process. Bangladesh



has scored near the bottom of the Transparency International's Corruption Perception index the last 5 years (TI 2008) and it is also found in the bottom part of many of the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WB 2008b). This leads to vast challenges for the service provision regime.

### **2.3.2 National political context**

Elected political leaders govern Bangladesh with the aid of a permanent bureaucracy. Since 1991 two parties have shifted on having the power in Bangladesh. These parties are Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Awami League (AL). The country was until recently governed by Khaleda Zia, (AL) whose won over (BNP) Sheikh Hasina Wajed's in Bangladesh's election in 2001. The two women are locked in an intense personal feud. It is said that over the past 16 years during which two parties ruled alternately, each of their governments misruled more extravagantly than its immediate predecessor. The parties have striven to politicise the institutions, especially the judiciary, the bureaucracy, and also the media and the NGO sector. The political scene is now chaotic. Bangladesh's army seized power in early January 2007 and ordered the President to declare a state of emergency to forestall a rigged and violent election planned on January 22nd. Basic rights were suspended and a technocratic caretaker government appointed, delaying scheduled elections indefinitely. The new military-backed government has presented necessary ideas for solving Bangladesh's problems. It vows to depoliticise the institutions. It has appointed a new electoral commission and put new energy into the anti-corruption authority. The military-backed government is "cleaning up" the corruption and both parties stand accused of massive looting and misrule.

### **2.3.3 Local governmental context**

Bangladesh has a long tradition of local government, and autonomous, democratic local governance is an integral part of the Bangladesh constitutional system (Westergaard and Alam 1995). Bangladesh is divided into Zila Parishads on district level, Upazila Parishads (or Sadar) as subdivisions, Union Parishad as the local rural administration, and Gram Parishads on village level, even though not active everywhere (ibid.). The Union Parishad (UP) represents the formal, rural, local government. It has an active role in government and its functions include a range of duties related to socioeconomic development, general administration and local arbitration. Each UP consists of 13 elected representatives or members including a Chair, nine general members and three female members. Anyone may stand for elections for the general seats, including women. The three female seats are reserved for direct elected women representatives only. 13 standing committees undertake and execute

the various functions of each UP. Women are to head one third of them and are further mandated to head the committee on women's and children's welfare, culture, and sports (Ali 2003). Members of parliament (MPs) are not mandated to involve in local concerns, however they usually do and the people expect them to do. The MP elected from the Bagerhat Upzilla Parishad, where under the study area is governed, is a businessman from Bagerhat town belonging to the BNP party. Although under investigation for corruption allegation, he has great power and confidence in the local context.

#### **2.3.4 Jurdistical and legal context**

The "access to justice" for poor, rural Bangladeshi women is seriously limited. An annual report from (Blast 2006) observes that "most Bangladeshi women live in a "culture of silence," where injustices are borne with patience and fortitude and justice is never actively sought" (ibid: 5). The report shows to perverse justice demands, such as, in cases of rape. A just solution is commonly perceived in the local Shalis for the rapist to marry the victim to protect the victim's chastity (ibid.).

The government operates courts in the regions, districts, and Upzillas that make up the formal judicial system. However, these formal courts are largely inaccessible for the commons. They are commonly perceived to be corrupt, costly, non transparent, and as a dragging process that may last for years. Especially for women, these institutions are inaccessible as women are less likely to have the required resources, their mobility is constrained, and the consequences of an unfavorable verdict are severe (Blast 2006). In the rural area the judicial system begins with Village Court which is considerably more accessible. The Village Court is a rule bond dispute resolution and arbitration services at the Union Parishad level. They are UP institutions that resolve civil disputes and are meant to offer immediate, more transparent and inexpensive resolutions. Next to the Village Court, an informal Salish often exists in rural villages (Riaz and Riyaja 2004, Riaz 2005). This is an age-old traditional mode of arbitration to conduct dispute resolution in rural areas in Bangladesh. The Salish is used to represent a forum where various forms of conflicts between neighbors, couples and siblings, are to be resolved through mediation. The Shalis has no legal status and is a body usually composed of respected village leaders (*matbars*), village elders or influential persons. The Salish is a traditional institution without any legal standing, and its resolutions are non-binding to any parties involved in the mediation process (Rahman 1995). Reports are showing evidence that the Village Courts prove dysfunctional in some areas. As a result, the Village Court and the Shalis sometimes merges. This is evident in the study area, where the Shalis is being conducted by UP

representatives. The non-rule bound format of the Shalis is showing to be more preferable to offer judgments more in tune with the traditional values of justice held by most villagers and local power alignments (Riaz 2005). Additionally, the Shalis allows UP members to use the mechanism as a means of distributing political favors and of enhancing their voter base through special privileges.

### **2.3.5 Patron-clients patterns in the local power structure**

The informal local power structure in Bangladesh normally refers to the configuration of the local elite, their networks and resources, and their links with both formal and informal institutions. The formal links are demonstrated through their influence in local government structure and the informal links are indicated through engagement in the dispute settlement mechanisms and a culture of patron clientelism (Hossain 2006). Kochanek (2000) explains the Bangladeshi system of “patrimonial patron client relationships” through a small rural elite in power, which leadership is highly personalized, based on charisma, patronage and patrimonial authority and loyalty. It is maintained through a complex informal network of patron client relations. The elite who commands resources are expected to distribute resources and goods to clients, and in return those in command expect to be both feared and obeyed (ibid.). “Clients” acquire their prosperity from the patron legitimized by the client’s feeling that they have a moral right to command food and subsistence from those who are well-placed.

### **2.3.6 Religious institutions**

Religion is an essential part of community identity for Bangladeshi citizens and plays a significant role in the life and culture of the people. The ideals and values of the religions are deeply embedded in the Bangladeshi society and outlooks and practices are blended into people’s lifestyles in complex ways. The Constitution of Bangladesh (GoB 2008) establishes Islam as the state religion, yet it provides for the right to practice the religion of one's choice. According to the population census of 1991, Sunni Muslims formed 88.3 percent, and about 10 percent of the population constitutes Hindus. The rest is mainly Christian, Buddhist and small populations of Shi'a Muslims, Sikhs, Baha'is, Animists, and Ahmadis (BBS 2006). The Constitution also states that every religious community has the right to manage its religious institutions. A whole range of institutions with persistent impact on people, entrench the importance of religion in the society. The total number of religious institutions in Bangladesh was 188 963 in 1995. Of which 88 per cent were mosques, 11 per cent temples and one per cent church and pagodas (ibid). While the Government publicly supports freedom of religion, the International Religious Freedom Report (IRFR 2007) informs that attacks on religious

minorities continue to be a problem in Bangladesh. They refer to reports from religious minorities of societal abuses, discrimination and victims of harassment and violence, based on religious belief or practice by the Muslim majority.

### **2.3.7 Non-Governmental Organizations**

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have significantly expanded their services and approaches in Bangladesh the last 20 years. There are many types of NGOs in the country, but most focus on development or poverty alleviation. Large networks of NGOs are providing services they find lacking in the governments' provision of services, in areas like health, education, social security nets and banking. Bangladesh is considered to be the pioneer of the microfinance movement and microfinance has long been seen as "the solution to eradicate poverty". This has been met by a range of critics, and it is now noticeable to many that micro financial services alone may not solve poverty, but can serve as a complementary tool within a broader strategy to reduce poverty. Many NGOs have targeted women as the international development policies has called for a mainstreaming of gender equality.

## **2.4 The study area**

Women from two villages under Bemarta Union were invited to participate in the research. The two villages where the participants reside are situated in different parts of the Union. They are located in opposite outskirts of the Union, whereas one borders the main road, while the other borders agricultural land and forest. In these villages there are both Hindus (2/10) and Muslims (8/10) residing. However, only Muslim women participate in the research. Generally, all are from the same ethnic group. While caste is considered important among the Hindus, it is said to be of less importance among the Muslims.

### **2.4.1 The socio-economic status of participants' households.**

The participants are mainly married "housewives", a couple is unmarried and some are widows. Most of the participants live in extended households together with their husband's kin, while some live in nuclear families. Generally, the married women have two to four children and everyone sends their children to school. The participants introduce themselves by referring to the occupation of their husbands. Their husbands are day laborers, van or rickshaw pullers, servants working at fish farms, keepers/employees of various shops, tailors, mill employees, bus drivers, teachers, employees in light engineering workshop, and farmers. More and more of the husbands are day laborers as the fertility of the soil in the area is decreasing by high salinity of the ground water and thus they cannot grow crops. While some

rent, most own their own plot of land where their house is built and some of them also have a small pond behind their house. Vegetable growing, duck and chicken farming, cow rearing and small fish farms are sources for side income, often administrated by the women as Income Generating Activities (IGAs).

#### **2.4.2 The characteristics of the area**

The Bemarta Union is situated within Bagerhat district and Bagerhat Sadar Upzilla under Khulna division. In Bagerhat Sadar Muslims constitute 77.45%, Hindu 22.06% and Christians 0.42% of the population (Kamal 2005). The society is fairly mixed with Muslims and Hindus living together in many villages. The population comes from the same ethnic group as 98% of the population in Bangladesh is Bengali and the ethnic minority is concentrated in the north.

The area is bordering the Sunderbarn, the world's largest mangrove forest, and is still home to lungs of such forest. It is a riverine area, near the coast of the Bay of Bengal, prone to flood hazards both from tidal water and flooding rivers. It has been fertile land and well known for its rich agricultural products. Under Bagerhat Sadar there are 20553 hectares of cultivable land and 200 hectares of fallow land (ibid.). The production is mainly based on single crop and double crop production by irrigation. Arable land per capita is 0.08 hectare. Big landowners, population increase and inheritance law has caused agricultural plots per family to increase and many only have access to fallow land. Among the peasants 11% are landless, 23% marginal, 33% small, 24%, intermediary and 9%, rich farmers (ibid.). The development of export oriented fisheries and prawn cultivation in the area has brought changes in the agrarian structure (Ito 2004). People are still engaged with crops related activities and rice production, but more and more land are used for scrimp culture as prawn farming has spread among the agricultural producers. Both freshwater cultivation and shrimps cultivated in brackish water are common in the area. The actual process of shrimp aquaculture is argued to damage the surrounding natural environment, groundwater and ecosystems (ibid).

At the time when the research was carried out, the inhabitants of the Bemarta Union were greatly affected by decreased soil fertility due to the salinity of the groundwater. Peasants were unable to cultivate subsistence crops, which led to an increased market dependency and unemployment. The local market was in turn affected by the global rise in food prices. The price of rice had nearly doubled the last year, and skyrocketing prices showed to give vast pressure on the livelihoods of the poor.

### **3 Theorizing social capital of women**

This conceptual framework gives attention to the theoretical basis of the study. First, it presents the concept of social capital and how it has been applied in social science and in the development discourse. Then, it is outlining some recent research that connects social capital to development opportunities and outcomes, as well as presenting how the negative sides of social capital are being increasingly recognized. The chapter will show how the researcher positions their research within the social capital concept. It briefly explores the six dimensions of social capital that are applied in this research as a framework for investigating how the participants in the study perceive, build and use social capital. Further, some of the general critique against previous social capital research is presented together with the more specialized critique from feminist scholars.

Second, the chapter presents an alternative framework for social capital research in development studies namely Women, Culture and Development (WCD). This approach proposes to address the limitations of the foregoing gender and development paradigms by putting women and their agency at center stage, together with local context and culture, arguing that culture is a 'lived experience'. The dimensions of the WCD approach are to be elaborated before the relevancy of WCD for social capital research is explained. Towards the end of the chapter an analytical framework for the research will be proposed. This framework combines the social capital with aspects of the WCD approach, placing women in the centre, looking at gender and power relations both inside and outside the household and placing culture and context close to social capital.

#### **3.1 Social capital**

The general saying "it's not what you know, it's who you know" largely sums up the conventional view of social capital (Woolcock and Narayan 2000). This perception comes from the experience that social networks and relationships may act as a means through which individuals or groups secure or are denied access to and control over important resources (Portes 1998, Lin 2001, Dudvik et al. 2006). Relations are developed through people's daily activities - talking with neighbors, sharing meals with friends, participating in religious gatherings, or volunteering for community projects (Woolcock and Narayan 2000). To obtain membership in an exclusive network requires inside contacts, and close competitions for

resources and opportunities are often won by those with “friends in the right places” (Bourdieu 1985). Hence, those who have access to, or occupy key strategic positions in, networks are said to have relatively more social capital than those who do not (Dudvik et al. 2006).

On the other hand, social ties that people do not have may have an equally important impact by denying access to key resources. The distribution of social capital within any given society is unequal and often stratified, and social capital may function as a mechanism of inclusion as well as exclusion. Woolcock and Narayan (2000) assert that a defining feature of being poor is that one is not a member of, or is even actively excluded from, certain social networks and institutions.

### **3.1.1 Social capital and development**

The concept of social capital has long been used in sociology referring to social cohesion, in political science referring to collective action, and in economics referring to wellbeing and economic growth (van Staveren 2002). It has been embraced as the “missing link” in economic analysis and integrated as a preference in utility functions as a resource next to other capitals, and as a mechanism to address market failure (Van Staveren 2003). With the premises of a new development agenda that emerged in the 1990s, social capital entered development research and practice (Molyneux 2002). The World Bank, United Nations agencies and development agencies have enthusiastically endorsed the concept in recent years (ibid) and articulated the idea that promoting development is about increasing the stock of social capital within a given societal context.

The concept of social capital has become important in development studies for several reasons. Following Bourdieu (1977), social capital is understood as those aspects of social relations that are interchangeable with other forms of capital such as cultural, symbolic or economic capital. Thus, an analysis of social capital would help explain how individuals can improve their positions in society (ibid.). Pieterse (2003) argues that current interest is more concerned with social capital as an indication of economic capital or as “an asset in the process of accumulation” (ibid: 123). Looking at social capital in this sense Fukuyama (1995) argues for how civil society serves as a counter to the state, addressing state failure. This might be seen as the “right wing” perspective (Pieterse 2003). In reaction the “left wing” perspective counters these arguments. The concept is thus claimed to have much to offer in directing attention towards aspects of development other than economic growth. Among other

things, it calls attention to the details of people's livelihood strategies, and how people access resources and decision-making spheres (Bebbington 2002). Furthermore, the concept is viewed as constructive in conceptualizing the role of civil society as a complement to the state in addressing problems beyond reach of both the market and the state (Uphoff 1993, Ostrom 1996). Fukuyama (2001) observes that social capital is not a panacea to development but that an awareness of social capital is critical to understanding, fostering and guiding development.

### **3.1.2 Resent research on social capital and development**

A growing body of empirical evidence suggests that the density of social networks and institutions, and the nature of interpersonal interactions that underlie them, significantly affects and mediates development opportunities and outcomes (Dudvik et al. 2006).

Narayan's (1997) "Voices of the Poor: Poverty and Social Capital in Tanzania" was conducted as part of the World Bank's effort to define poverty more holistically and to include social capital in poverty-oriented studies. This multi-country qualitative study outlines how those communities endowed with a rich stock of social networks and civic associations will be in a stronger position to confront poverty and vulnerability. This study directly contributed to the World Development Report 2000/2001 (WB 2001) that stressed the importance of working with the networks of poor people to increase their access to resources and link them to intermediary organizations, institutions, and international markets.

Schafft and Brown (2000) point out that those communities endowed with a rich stock of social networks will be in a stronger position when it comes to resolving disputes and taking advantage of new opportunities. Varshney (2000) shows that where there are cross-cutting ties to connect different groups, such as associations that bring together Hindus and Muslims in India, conflict is addressed constructively and rarely descends into violence. Where such ties are lacking, there are no established channels for dealing with difference (ibid.). Barr (1998) reports similar findings from work on firms in Africa, where poor entrepreneurs are shown to have a limited and circumscribed set of "protection" networks, while the non-poor have a more diverse set of "innovation" networks.

Krishna's (2001) survey from India attempts to include variables that link social capital to poverty in households. Additionally, the study includes variables on individual agency and hierarchical and patriarchal power. The study observes that social interaction will only have a positive impact on household wellbeing through a combination of social capital with individual agency.



### **3.1.3 Acknowledgment of the negative aspects of social capital**

While the above contributions have mainly focused on the “positive dimensions” of social capital, there is also a growing recognition of the potential “negative aspects” of social capital (Silvey and Elmhirst 2003). These negative aspects are related to the “cost” of the process through which social capital is generated and that ties which serve to bond together members of a group or fraternity, simultaneously serve to exclude non-members (Portes 1998).

Through his extensive research on social capital, Portes (1998) observes that the negative consequences of social capital are as important as the positive ones. The negative consequences are found in four distinct phenomena. First, the exclusion process of outsiders as a result of the strong ties that exist within a particular group or community. Second, exaggerated claims against members of groups often as a result of ‘free-riding’ on the part of some group members. Third, conformity within the group or community resulting in infringed individual freedom. Fourth, the phenomena of “downward leveling norms”, which is a result of group solidarity arising out of opposition to mainstream society and inter-generational experience of exclusion or discrimination (ibid).

Putnam (2000) also confirms that social networks can be used for negative purposes. Networks can bind certain groups together in ways that are undesirable for society as a whole, for example, by reinforcing the practices of nepotism or corruption. Putnam acknowledges this in differentiating between “bridging” networks that are socially inclusive, promoting interactions between heterogeneous social groups with different backgrounds, and “bonding” networks which tend to exclude outsiders.

### **3.1.4 Positioning within the concept of social capital**

The concept of social capital has received impressively rapid acceptance within the community of development professionals and gained much acceptance in development theory and practice. However, the concept remains a highly contested and elusive construct. There are many definitions of social capital, and some scholars are critical of the concept for this reason. Woolcock (1998) says that social capital has “become all things to all people, and hence nothing to anyone”. Many scholars (Edwards and Foley 1997, Arrow 2000, Fine 2001) have also criticized the labeling of social phenomena by the term “social capital” calling them instead “social capabilities”, “social cohesion” or “social infrastructure”. While being aware of this contestation, in this text the term is applied in order to take part in the discourse around the concept.

Bourdieu (1985:248) defines the concept as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources, which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition”. Further, he argues that social networks are not natural givens and must be constructed through investment strategies oriented to the institutionalization of group relations, and usable as a reliable source of benefits (Portes 1998). This approach locates the social capital possessed in any given network for the use and strategic advantage of the individual. However, other definitions are more explicitly social in orientation, saying social capital is located within the social structures, the space between people, and not within the individual. Putnam provides the most commonly used definition, one that clearly locates social capital within social structures. Putnam (1993:167) defines social capital as “those features of social organization, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions.”

Portes (1995) focuses more on the role of human agency, compared to the abovementioned. He describes social capital as the “capacity of individuals to command scarce resources by virtue of their membership in networks or broader social structures (...). [T]he resources themselves are not social capital, the concept refers instead to the individual’s [and group’s] ability to mobilise them on demand” (Portes 1995: 120). Norman Long (2001), an advocate for an actor-oriented approach to social science, uses Portes’ description of the concept and explains how social capital is embedded in a set of socially situated and culturally defined relations. “[T]hese connections and commitments acquire particular significance once they are activated by specific actors in cooperation and/ or competition with others in seeking to gain access to critical resources, or in attempting to deny or block access to others. Such resources encompass not only material or tangible benefits but also less tangible properties such as knowledge, skills, trust, shared values, organisational principles and representations” (ibid:132).

Additional to the focus on agency, Portes’ view of social capital serves a number of purposes. First, it rejects the view that has characterized much recent research where social capital is seen as an asset which can be strategically mobilized by individuals for particular ends (see Lin 2001). Second, this definition calls for a relational definition of social capital (Portes 1995), recognizing that important features of the concept, such as trust and reciprocity, are developed in an iterative process. Third, it permits the incorporation of different dimensions of social capital and recognizes that individuals or groups may have access to more or less of

them. Fourth, it acknowledges the negative effects of social capital or “the downside of social capital” as well as the positive. Dimensions such as trust, tolerance, and cooperation can be either positive or negative, depending on the circumstances.

### 3.1.5 Exploring six dimensions of social capital

As explained above, different scholars disagree about the definition of social capital. However, most agree that it is important to recognize that social capital is multi-dimensional in nature and not a single entity. Trying to capture this multi-dimensionality, six dimensions of social capital are proposed to explore the concept. These six sometimes overlapping dimensions of social capital are used in Grottaert et al. (2004) and Dudvick et al. (2006). The dimensions integrate different ways of thinking about social capital, acknowledge the strengths of different views on social capital in the literature and incorporate both sources and consequences of social capital:

**Dimension 1: Groups and Networks:** This is the dimension most commonly associated with social capital and its structural functions (Krishna and Uphoff 2002). It is exploring the types of groups and networks that people may call upon and the access to these (Grottaert et al. 2004). It considers the nature and extent of people’s participation in various types of formal and informal groups, organizations and networks, and the range of contributions that one gives to other members and what one receives back from them. Additionally, it considers the diversity of a given group’s membership and how its leadership is selected (ibid).

**Dimension 2: Trust and Solidarity:** This dimension explores the cognitive aspect of social capital (Krishna and Uphoff 2002). It investigates subjective perceptions of the trust and trustworthiness or credibility of other people and key institutions that shape people’s lives. It seeks to gain knowledge about perceptions of trust towards members of the household, neighbors, key service providers, and strangers (Grottaert et al. 2004). It looks at both particularized trust, which is person and situation specific trust, and generalized trust, which is neither situation nor person specific (Uslaner 2002).

**Dimension 3: Collective Action and Cooperation:** This dimension explores the norms of cooperation and reciprocity that surrounds attempts to work together to solve problems. In doing so it investigates whether and how people have worked with others in their community on joint projects or in response to a crisis. It looks at normative reciprocity, i.e. considering the consequences of violating community expectations regarding participation (ibid.).

**Dimension 4: Information and Communication:** This dimension explores the ways and means people receive information and the extent of their access to communications infrastructure.

**Dimension 5: Social Cohesion and Inclusion:** This dimension considers everyday forms of social interaction and acceptance of moral rules and norms or adherence to certain values. It gives particular attention to identifying and understanding the various forms of division and difference within the community and the nature and extent of these differences. It aims to examine the mechanisms by which this is managed, which individuals or groups are included in or excluded from groups or key services, how this is sustained, and the processes by which divisions and differences can lead to conflict (ibid.).

**Dimension 6: Political Action and Empowerment:** This dimension explores people's capacity to influence both local events and broader political outcomes, and their perceptions of that capacity. It investigates how individuals are "politically empowered" in their measure of control over institutions and processes directly affecting their well-being (ibid).

Using these dimensions, to investigate how women perceive their membership in networks or broader social structures to provide capacity to command scarce resources, it is possible to examine how different types of social relations and networks help or hinder access to and capacity to command key resources (Chapter 5) and how participation in different types of groups shapes women's capacity to bargaining in the household and in the community (Chapter 6).

### **3.1.6 Conceptual distinction of social capital**

Investigating network access and forms of participation, a common distinction is made between "bonding" social capital and "bridging" social capital (Narayan 2002). The first refer to ties between people with similar characteristics, such as family members, neighbors and close friends, while the second describes ties between people who do not share many characteristics (Van Staveren 2003). Van Staveren (2003) argues that what defines the boundaries between different bonding and bridging groups vary across contexts, but identifying where they lie, and how they are constructed and maintained is crucial. Woolcock (1999) suggests an additional conceptual classification called "linking" social capital. "Linking" refers to ties across power difference (Van Staveren 2003), for instance, linking political elites or other people in positions of authority with the marginalized. Where bridging

social capital is basically horizontal, linking social capital is more vertical, connecting people to for example key political resources and economic institutions.

The bonding, bridging and linking relationships of the women under study will be investigated in Chapter 5. However, the distinction are sometimes more apparent than real and bonding, bridging and linking may not be easily distinguished (Bebbington and Carroll 2002). For instance, a successful bridging relationship may ultimately break down more pronounced distinctions and thereby become a bonding relationship. In practice many groups serve both bridging and bonding functions (Norris 2003) and relations to institutions may be based on both bridging and linking. Hence, this conceptual distinction should not be seen as a dichotomy but rather as a continuum, where networks are classified as falling closer to one end of the spectrum or the other (ibid.).

### **3.1.7 The critique of social capital research**

Over the last decade the capability approach of Amartya Sen (1985, 1999) has emerged and contested the standard idea of development as economic growth. Clear commonalities between Sen's work and the field of "social capital" are evident. However, Sen is an opponent of "social capital" as he considers the concept unclear and argues that its proponents are treating human life as "instrumental" for economic growth (Drèze and Sen 2002: 108).

Many investigations of social capital have been conducted in the last decade and a range of research has extended the concept of social capital; simultaneously, its assumptions have rendered broad critique. As mentioned above social capital has been criticized, for the capital metaphor and the integration into economic theory (Foley and Edwards 1999, Arrow 2000, Fine 2001). Additionally, the widespread adoption of the idea of social capital has led to some analytical problems and inconsistencies. Several scholars (Edwards and Foley 1997, Fine 2001, Van Staveren 2003) have pointed to a gap in the analysis of social capital and presented broad critiques concerned with its measurement. They put the question, "How does one measure trust, norms or values?" They call for methodological and operational refinements. Further lines of critique are concerned that the popularity of the concept has led to analytical explanations being transferred across contexts and sectors as if social capital could simply be compared across domains and institutions (Woolcock 2001).

Contemporary feminists have also criticized social capital research, demonstrating that social capital research has been remarkably silent and reticent from a gender perspective (Molyneux 2002). A range of feminist scholars have argued that the debates within the field of social

capital have created a masculine ontology of the social (Adkins 2005). This is arguably evident concerning the assumptions about the family. Social capital theorists assume the family to be the crucial source and location for the accumulation and reproduction of social capital (Kovalainen 2004). They tend not to offer an analysis of the family; rather they simply assume a normative family structure with a traditional gendered division of labor whereby it is assumed that domestically defined women are key bearers of social capital (Lowndes 2000, Adkins 2005). Feminists argue that social relations must be understood as far more ambiguous than social capital theorist assume as relationships are often infused with issues of power and inequality. Van Staveren (2003) stresses that hierarchies, power, exclusion, and repressive norms have to be taken into account along with the social construction of individual choices. Supplementary critique concerns an idealized notion of trust, reciprocity and collective products which make up social capital, to always offer social benefits. It is important to recognize that different forms of social capital can be used for purposes that hinder rather than help an individual's welfare, that social capital may not necessarily be an unproblematic social good, and that networks may exclude as well as include (Adkins 2005).

A tension has developed between feminist perspectives and those of social capital exponents and several feminist scholars distance their research from social capital discourse (Van Staveren 2003). Molyneux (2002) on the other hand demonstrates that rather than disengaging, the different perspectives may contribute vitally to each other's discourses. The overall lack of attention to issues of gender, ethnicity and other axes of differences within the social capital debates, calls for a gender perspective.

## **3.2 Women, Culture and Development (WCD)**

### **3.2.1 Gender and development**

From the early 1970s, different approaches and theoretical frameworks have been used to analyze and understand the situation and needs of women in developing societies and women's conditions in development (Moser 1993). Western feminist researchers first recognized women and their needs in the developing world as unique. This was followed by different UN conferences on women and development, the development of international women's movement and NGO effort to integrate women into planning (Visvanathan 1997). The complex nature of societies in development, the dynamic of the change processes and conflicting outcomes of development have led to the evolution of different phases (Singh 2007). Among these phases are Women in Development (WID), Women and Development

(WAD), Gender and Development (GAD), Women, Environment and Development (WED), Post-feminism and Development (PAD) and Women, Culture and Development (WCD).

All phases share some basic tenets and a similar foundation (Singh 2007). They build on feminist and development discourses and thought, but represent differing perspectives within the discourses. Each is unique in their perceptions of women, development, indigenous culture and their relationships to each other. Each phase has been based on concurrent social ideologies and each built on the previous phase by addressing the changing realities of developing societies (ibid). Nevertheless, they all inform current development practice and research.

### **3.2.2 The Women, Culture and Development approach**

Women, Culture and Development (WCD) has been suggested as an alternative framework for research with women in a developing context. It is a lens through which to look at the ways women resist and celebrate the circumstances of their lives and through which to recognize women's contributions and regard for culture (Bhavnani et al. 2003).

WCD argues that the forgoing approaches to gender and development "fall short of a larger analysis of the ways in which capitalism, patriarchy and race/ethnicity shape and are shaped by women's subordination and oppression" (ibid: 6). Western feminisms and economic development, have been the primary guide of the foregoing approaches and they have provided ethnocentric suppositions. They have mainly used a liberal framework that too often makes broad generalizations about developing societies and the women in them. This homogenizes women in developing countries into one category and makes generalizations about male-female inequalities across social systems and processes. They have tended to be preoccupied with male-female inequalities and to see only exploitation and conflict rather than the positive and beneficial relations between men and women. They also fail to take culture sufficiently into account, and when they do, they portray it as static and unchanging, and women as victims in need of being rescued from their culture (ibid).

The proponents of this "new paradigm for development studies" argue for culture as 'lived experience' and foregrounds women's agency in political, economic, social and cultural contexts. They observe that the dynamic interactions between culture and gender should be recognized and acknowledged as key elements in meaningful development that aims to improve living conditions of all poor people (ibid). WCD integrates some critical concerns of feminist studies, development studies and cultural studies and challenges established

structural and economist approaches to development. Putting these fields of studies together they improve each other's limitations as "each needs the others to see its own blind spots" (ibid: 11).

### 3.2.3 Exploring the dimensions of the WCD approach

**Women:** Women should be seen neither as victims nor heroes. They should be seen as housewives, mothers, lovers, activists, citizens etc. Putting women at the centre stage, learning from their great variety the "WCD needs to grapple with ways of acknowledging the power and place of gendered values and ideologies in conjunction with the centrality given to women" (ibid: 14).

The WCD approach prefers "women" to "gender". This is because it is claimed that the latter is used in reductionist modes, failing to grapple with issues of power, conflict and the larger social, cultural and political context. Additionally, "gender", as used in GAD, is understood too narrowly, leading to a large emphasis on structure and institutions at the expense of seeing women as active change agents and losing sight of the resistance, that women bring to their situations. Hence, the proponents of WCD stress that "women" is more able to connote agency, while at the same time entailing the need for a women-centered analysis (ibid.).

WCD argues that the productive and reproductive roles of women cannot and should not be separated. Bhavnani et. al (2003) explains that capitalism forced a sharp split between the spheres of public and private and the domains of production and reproduction. This led to the reproductive activity being less visible in discussions of productive activity. However, paid work done outside the home is in intimate relationship with the work done inside the home. She argues that by integrating production and reproduction, alongside women's agency, the approach may examine issues of ethnicity, gender, religion and livelihood in chorus. Acknowledging that these aspects of women's lives cannot be omitted from analysis, WCD may provide a nuanced framework for examination of social processes and how inequalities are produced and reproduced.

**Development:** The proponents of WCD highlight that development has failed in many instances, partly due to modernization theory and a dependent development. They argue that there is a desire for better development, and puts the question, "but what development?" Their answer is that one must get away from assumptions of a linear development process. Development should be seen as a nonlinear process where actors from the developing countries are contributing to the construction of discourse and practice of development (ibid).



**Context:** The WCD criticizes the limited inclusion of local context in research and the inadequate representation of local culture, values and realities. WCD makes explicit the importance of theorizing women's agency in a larger context of often but not always, suppressive structures. The approach emphasizes the need to address and recognize the interweaving of culture and economies that frame women's existence and how the women respond, adopt and challenge the specificities of local context (ibid.).

**Culture:** Drawing focus away from the reductive understanding of culture that permeates much of mainstream development literature, where women are often depicted as being in the grip of culture, as oppressive traditions. WCD leans on Raymond Williams's (1977) notion of culture as lived experience and a "structure of feelings". In consequence, culture is understood as a way to comprehend how people actually live their lives, insisting that human beings are active agents (Bhavnani et. al 2003). Thus, culture is not simply seen as a set of habits, traditions or a singular property that resides within an individual, group or nation. But it is rather understood as "a dynamic set of relationships through which inequalities are created and challenged" (ibid: 4).

In the influential *Marxism and Literature* (1977), Raymond Williams describes culture as "structures of feeling". He presents this as an aid to understanding and bridging the relationship between structural constraints and the dynamic elements of individual's everyday lives. The structures of feeling are concerned with "meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, and the relations between these and formal or systematic beliefs" (ibid: 132). In this way "structure of feelings" denotes a blend of pattern and agency in cultural analysis. According to Williams, an analysis of society should aim to describe its dynamic cultural life and address life in its daily possibilities and impossibilities. Williams states that he is interested in the actual, lived-in relationship of people in their daily life and "in relationships that are more than systematic exchanges between fixed units" (ibid: 130). This includes representation of sentiments, subjectivity, agency, dreams, visions and consciousness as threads woven together with lived experience forming the fabric of people's lives.

Drawing on culture as lived experience a WCD approach brings women's agency to the foreground, side by side with, and within, the cultural, social, political and economic spheres (Bhavnani et. al 2003). Women are not suppressed by culture; they actively negotiate, and reproduce it. WCD emphasizes that culture should be taken up in both planning and research

on women and development as a means for understanding how inequalities are challenged and reproduced.

**Agency:** Women in the developing countries face many challenges. They meet and confront these challenges actively. The WCD approach foregrounds women's agency in perpetuating inequalities, challenging them and achieving change (ibid.). In the revised 2005 edition of *Feminist Futures* the notion of agency is directly link to Norman Long. He (Long 1992) has long stressed the importance of an actor-oriented analysis of development. Long calls for a critical observation of the field of development to challenge certain "received wisdoms" in development theory and research, as well as a reification of local culture and knowledge, to uncover the particulars of people's "lived-in worlds". The actor-oriented approach emphasizes the central significance of human agency and self-organizing processes. The approach is concerned first and foremost with mapping relationships and flows of information to provide a basis for reflection and action (Long 2001). It is a dynamic approach to understanding social change, which stresses the interplay and mutual determination of 'internal' and 'external' factors and relationships, and which recognizes the central role played by human action and consciousness. The actor-oriented approach draws attention to how social actors must not be depicted as simply disembodied social categories or passive recipients of structure, but as active participants who process information and strategize in their dealings with various local actors as well as with outside institutions. Applying the actor-oriented approach one begins with an interest in explaining different responses to similar structural circumstances, even if the conditions appear relatively homogeneous (ibid). Thus, one assumes that the different patterns that arise are in part the creation of the actors themselves. This stands as a kind of counterpoint to structural analysis in development research.

**Relational asymmetries of power interaction:** An analysis of relational asymmetries of power interaction should be included as a dimension to a gender analysis (Moss 2002). Drawing on traditional models of power as negative repression, feminist theories have tended to assume that the oppression of women can be explained by patriarchal social structures which secure the power of men over women (Rose 1997). In consequence, WID was regarded as a reaction to patriarchy within the family, WAD associated patriarchy with discrimination practiced by the haves against the have-nots, while GAD emphasized women's vulnerable position in society in comparison with men (Gottfried 1998, Singh 2007). However, the character of power and hierarchy has changed meaning over time and these assumptions are being called into question.

The WCD approach tries to counter oversimplified conceptions of power relations (Bhavnani, et al. 2003). Power is not merely possessed, accumulated and straightforwardly exercised. Power is complex and it implies much more than how hierarchies define social positions, opportunities and access to resources (Long 2001). Furthermore, while the foregoing view entails a picture of women as simply passive, powerless victims, a WCD approach stresses the representation of women as active agents negotiating power relations (Bhavnani 2004). For the proponents of WCD, patriarchy is considered a product of local cultures rather than a homogenous construct (Amadiume 2003). Carruyo (2003) declares that the emphasis on agency and culture provides a way to understand and analyze differences in power based on hierarchies of wealth, gender and race. In this way, WCD gives equal importance to the agency of women as it does to social systems, such as culture. Referring to power, the WCD engages with the work of Foucault and Gramsci and their concepts of power as discourse and hegemony (Escobar and Harcourt 2003).

Foucault's (1980) genealogy of "power-knowledge" and power as discourse challenges the traditional ways of thinking about power. Foucault's notion of power is not linear, deployed from above to oppress those below, but rather circulatory, operating in diffuse and productive ways which imbue all actors with degrees of agency to collaborate, negotiate or resist within the effects of power. He addresses the relations of power underpinning the production of meaning and the processes by which certain knowledge and discourses are caused to be true. This understanding that power is constitutive of that upon which it acts, exercised rather than possessed, productive rather than repressive and circulating rather than originating from the top (Sawicki 1998), has enabled a more complex analysis of the relations between gender and power and the role of power in women's lives. Foucault's notions of the cultural construct and power have enabled researchers to explore the often complicated ways in which women's experiences, self-understandings, behaviors and capacities are constructed and influenced by the power relations which they are seeking to transform. Gramsci (1971) uses the term hegemony to describe the capacity of a dominant group, or class, to exercise control, not through visible force, but through the willingness of the dominated to accept a subordinate status by their acceptance of cultural, social and political practices. Hegemony is dynamic and cultivates a "collective will" through "intellectual and moral reform" (ibid.). Hence, patriarchy, or other forms of unequal deployment of power, is seen as a result of making a dominant culture, its values and its practices, natural routine and incorporated in everyday practices and institutional arrangements (Ashcraft and Mumby 2004).

Sen (1990) and Agarwal's (1997) *bargaining approach* should also be mentioned in relation to the above views of power. They deploy the bargaining approach as a way to understand power differences at household, community and state levels. Central to this bargaining approach is an understanding of power (and gender) relations as constituted through a process of bargaining between actors with very different positions in relation to social, economic and political power. According to this approach, a person's bargaining power underlines their cooperation or resistance. Agarwal (2001) demonstrates an important link between social capital of women and women's bargaining power in the household, the community and with the State (see Chapter 6).

#### **3.2.4 WCD and Social capital**

The lack of attention to issues of differences in power and gender within the social capital debates, calls for a gender perspective. Molyneux (2002) suggest that those elements that comprise social capital must be understood within a broader analysis of the relationships between social capital accumulation and inequalities, hierarchy and stereotypes in households, families, communities and associations. Following this, it is important to include the culture where relationships and social interactions occur. The women, culture and development approach does not address issues of social capital directly; however, social capital is arguably a WCD concern. A women-centered analysis through the WCD approach offers a new lens to assess social capital, identifying different kinds of differences and drawing attention to the gender inequalities and asymmetries of power. Endeavoring to include a more nuanced picture, WCD is applied as a research tool, to explore how cultural practices, gender and power relations interplay and affect the accumulation and investment of social capital, and how social capital may influence women's collective and individual agency in the bargaining process where cultural practice, gender and power relations are sustained, negotiated and resisted.

#### **3.2.5 Women and social capital**

Women as well as men are social beings participating in a range of networks, groups and associations. Their social relations, networks and institutional connections may provide public and private benefits that can be called upon when they fall in hard times, leveraged for benefits or enjoyed in itself. However, men and women access, use and manage social capital differently. These gendered realities are not usually acknowledged in many research projects on social capital resulting in serious gaps in the theory and discourse of social capital.

Therefore, some insights from those scholars who have contributed to the literature of social capital of women are worth mentioning.

First, it is suggested that women's networks are qualitatively different from men's. Agrawal (2000) has found that women often depend more on informal relations based on everyday forms of collaboration such as collecting water, fetching fuel wood, and child rearing. Such informal networks provide solidarity and access to household resources and may form stronger kinship and friendship relations than men, who tend to rely more on formal relationships, such as project groups and community councils that improve access to economic resources and decision making. Molyneux (2002) also observes that in contrast to men, women do not usually belong to the networks that bring economic advantage and that women's networks rely more on time and non-monetized labor exchanges. Goldstein (1999) suggests that in many poor communities, women primarily possess intensive "protection" networks, while men have access to more extensive "innovation" networks. Gotschi (2007) presents findings from Mozambique, saying that men and women equally invest into groups, but the benefits of social capital are notably unequally distributed. The women in her study find it challenging to transform social relationships into benefits.

Second, Agarwal (2000) reveals that women may be more dependent upon social networks as the gender division of labor often obliges women to work in groups. She explains, saying:

*"women have a greater need to build up social capital through localized networks, since women's avenues for accumulating economic resources and their physical mobility is typically more restricted than men's. They also have a greater need to sustain these networks, given their fewer exit option and lesser intra-household bargaining power." (ibid: 292)*

Third, it has been argued that for collective action to be doing well, it depends on the degree of women's participation (Molinas 1998). This may be consistent with White (1992) who argues that in Bangladesh, women exhibit more cooperative behavior than men due to greater interdependency and altruism. However, Molyneux (2002) criticizes the assumption that women are more altruistic, pointing out that power relations limit women's participation in formal organizations. Additionally, she argues that these assumptions could be abused by targeting women for voluntary "unpaid" work.

Fourth, it is argued that women are better able to overcome social division and conflicts because of their greater interdependency and their everyday experiences of collaboration. (Moser and McIlwaine 1999, Agarwal 2000).

A final contribution worth mentioning is More (1990), who argues that while gender is an important aspect, other structural variables such as age, income, occupation, and marital status, can be more important for explaining differences in social networks than gender.

### **3.2.6 Culture and social capital**

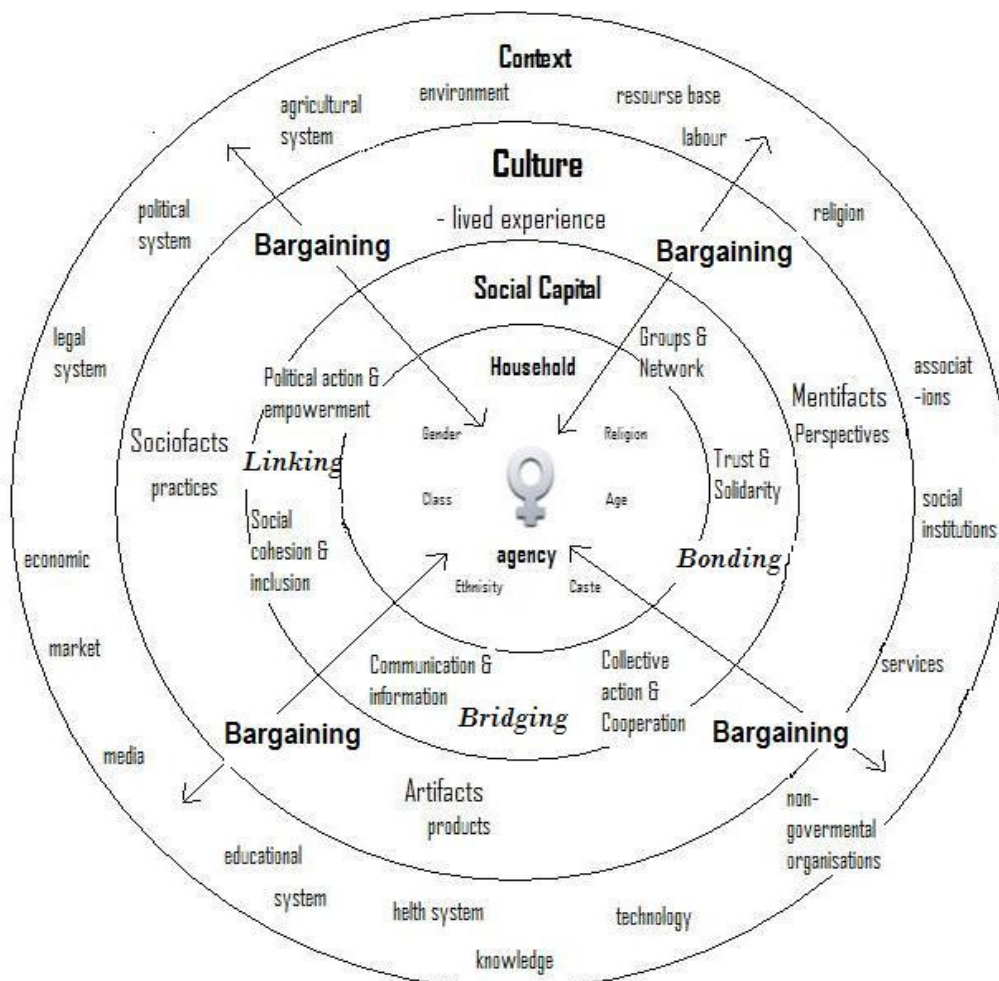
The relations between culture and social capital are manifold and culture extends across all the dimensions of the social capital of an individual or group. Mutual trust and confidence, responsible civic behavior, solidarity, and degree of cooperativeness all involve underlying cultural elements.

Among other cultural aspects, the values held by a society are emphasized to strongly affect the social capital of its members. Schwarts (1992) explains that values are trans-situational goals that vary in importance and serve as guiding principles for life. These goals are acquired through individual's interactions with others and they direct, energize and serve to justify behavior (ibid). Chang (1997) observes that values raise the bases for the concern of one member of a society for another above considerations of plain personal well-being. Values of solidarity, altruism, respect and tolerance are essential for building and using social capital. These values are deeply rooted in the prevailing culture and are either strengthened or impeded by the local culture. The behavioral codes of members affect their inter-relations. If these codes place emphasis on values of mutual trust, cooperation, reciprocity and solidarity, they might favor or stimulate social capital; if not, they may obstruct the formation of social capital or hinder its use. In this way, culture has a crucial role in determining whether there will be creation or strengthening of social networks, norms and mutual confidence.

Culture has a deep-seated relevance to all social networks and relations of individuals and groups. Hence, I adopt a view of culture as the context within which relationships operate. This is a context that is negotiated, maintained and resisted. The theoretical perspective underlying the choice of focus for this thesis combines or centers on the connections and the relationships of action and structure, women's lives and the cultural domain. The study will reference cultural phenomena in the broader cultural universe and therefore it is important to explicitly assert the concept of culture. This follows in the analytical framework below.

### 3.3 An analytical framework leading the way ahead

For analytical purposes an illustration of the framework for analysis has been developed with inspiration from the Socio-Economic and Gender Analysis (SEGA) model (Thomas-Slayter et al. 1995). The SEGA model was introduced “to ensure that development professionals apply effective and appropriate tools and actions for meeting the needs and interests of local people” (ibid: xii). It is people-centered, emphasizes diversity, local experience, and issues of power, and it is based on a commitment to social and economic justice (Panda and Lund 1998). Used in analysis, the SEGA model facilitates synthesizing complex issues. The model is adapted to this specific research and the conceptual framework of social capital and WCD. This thesis argues for a holistic approach to the study of social capital and the illustration below helps to clarify the analytic process that this thesis uses.



**Figure 1. An analytical framework**

The illustration derives from the SEGA model (Thomas-Slayter et al. 1995), modified to fit the research.

In the figure, different factors are graphically represented as concentric bands with women at the center. However, society is dynamic, negotiated and struggled over and there are processes within these bands that maintain it or make it change. In the illustration, the bargaining processes that exist between the individual, the household, social capital, the culture and the context are marked as arrows crossing the different bands.

**Women** are centered as the basis for analysis; hence, women “as active agents”, and their agency, are placed at the central point of the framework. The WCD approach ensures that the women’s agency, the room wherein women maneuver agency, and the bargaining, negotiation and resistance that women bring to their situations is visible. This study will try to investigate the space wherein women’s agency maneuver, bargain, negotiate, resist and sustain cultural practice, power- and gender relations that may affect the social capital of women.

**Household** is not a static or homogenous entity, but rather a site for intra-household bargaining, contestation, conflict and cooperation (Nash 1953, Moser 1993). Households are “experiencing co-operative conflict” over perceptions of interest, wellbeing, value and contribution that, among other things, form intra-familiar divisions and inequalities (Sen 1990). Women are not only seen as gendered individuals, but also as parts of religious, age and class groups. The WCD lens guarantees that these factors are not omitted from analysis. The relations between these groups are influenced by discursive relations of power that may construct hierarchies as well as by-products of local cultures such as patriarchy. An engagement with difference is an integral component of the WCD approach and, hence, it demands that the local is analyzed simultaneously with the structural. In so doing, this study will take interaction of inequality and axes of differences such as power, discursive hegemony and hierarchies, into account along with the social construction of individual agency. Negotiation, bargaining and resistance both within the household and the broader society will be investigated.

**Social capital** is the “capacity of individuals to command scarce resources by virtue of their membership in networks or broader social structures” (Portes 1995). It has been argued before that by relying upon Portes’ (1995) relational definition of social capital, one may include human agency more than other scholars in the field of social capital do. Additionally, the works of Portes (1995) and Long (2001) reject the conceptualization of social capital as the purposive investment in social relations for concrete material returns, which has made social capital a popular concept within the development discourse as it specifies a resource which



can be tapped for development. Instead, both Portes and Long envisage social capital as social networks that are dynamic and negotiated. By doing so one considers that social capital both enables and constrains human agency or individual actions, and may actually reproduce structural inequalities of class and caste, gender and generation. The downside of social capital, that it may simultaneously be productive and perverse, should be an integral part of work with social capital. Recognizing the potentially negative aspects of social capital draws focus to issues of power and inequality. This is highly context specific and requires an account of culture and agency to understand the iterative process and the causal relationships that determine the realization of productive, or perverse, social capital. A detailed study is conducted and six, sometimes overlapping, dimensions of social capital (Grootaert et al. 2004, Dudvick et al. 2006) are used as an integral part of this framework, which tries to capture the multi-dimensionality of social capital and investigate how poor rural women perceive, build and use social capital in their local context.

**Culture** is viewed as “lived experience”. Following Williams’ perspective culture is the “whole way of life” of a social group as it is structured by representation and by power (Schech and Haggis 2000). From this perspective culture is an active component of social life, which shapes every aspect of social life. Schech and Haggis (2000:27) explain that social groups unite around a variety of circumstances that form “the basis of a sense of shared identity”. The most important categories of identity formation are class, gender and sex but it also includes a range of other axes. These all intersect in ways which often conflict and contradict one another. Consequently, built into this presentation of culture is the dynamic of difference. Hence, culture becomes a site for contestation and resistance (ibid).

Seeing culture as lived experience structured by power and representation, those institutions, groups or individuals who have the power may formulate the cultural values and codes of conduct that are seen as “true” or correct. This form behavior and justify or legitimizes power. But at the same time cultural values and codes are resisted and struggled over. People challenge the code of conduct expected from them and there exist non-hegemonic voices and practices, subversive activities and resistance. But culture is more than only values and codes of conducts. The varieties of culture are manifold and include products, practices and perspectives. Cultures are themselves difficult to study (Holland et al 1998) and the pattern that makes up *culture as lived experience* may not be apparent. The usual way to study a culture is to find evidence of its influences. Cultural effects are reproduced by mediums such as persons, objects and actions. Influences can only be seen by studying interactions, which

are often difficult to study. To account for the variety of culture, and for analytical purposes, many studies of cultures focus on these influences as a three-part structure composed of mentifacts (cultural and social perspectives), artifacts (cultural and social products) and sociofacts (cultural and social practices or norms of appropriate behavior). Originally, the biologist J. Huxley (1957) made this classification as three components of culture. However, they are not culture *per se* but rather access points or ways through which cultures are studied, since they are things that cultures affect. These analytically separate components are integrated as each reacts on the others and is affected by them in turn.

Following the WCD approach the study will emphasize that women are not in need of rescue from their culture, rather women's maintenance, contribution and regard for culture will be recognized. Persons, individually and collectively, are not merely products of the culture or respondents to situations, but also critically appropriators of cultural artifacts that they and others produce (Holland et al. 1998).

**Context** consists of "structures" in society and includes systems, institutions, organizations, and associations that allocate resources, services and knowledges. Woolcock (2001) proclaims social capital has to be understood as inherently embedded in an institutional context. A proposed framework for research on social capital has to be adapted to the local context of the research project to obtain a context-specific depth (*ibid*). As mentioned before also the WCD approach emphasizes the need to address and recognize the interweaving of culture and context that frame women's existence and how the women respond, adopt and challenge the specificities of local context.

**Bargaining** influences the prospects of women to use their room for maneuvering agency, individually or collectively, to adapt, sustain, negotiate, resist or change their social capital, culture and context. In terms of this framework, women's ability to negotiate, resist and change rules, norms, perceptions and distribution of services and resources, in a gender-progressive direction would depend especially on their bargaining power with the community and the family (Agarwal 1997). Agarwal displays that the determinants of women's bargaining power vary by context. Even so, she argues that they may include women's command over economic resources, support from external agents such as the State and NGOs, women's group strength, and enabling social norms and social perceptions (Agarwal 1997, 2001).

## **4 Studying social capital of women**

The research for this study has used qualitative methodologies. It has been based on participatory methods conducted in groups, based on dialogue among participants and the researchers to share knowledge and gain new insights. Primarily, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) have been used for gathering knowledge and for jointly analyzing information. Secondly, exercises built on Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) have been included to generate tangible visual illustrations and to assist the discussion. The different dimensions of social capital have been explored and in some cases, social capital was even used and enhanced through the group work. The realities of the participants have been prioritized and a gender-centered analysis has been applied when investigating the knowledge provided by the participants. I argue that such a co-product based on collaboration, emphasizing positionality, reflexivity as well as subjective ethics, increases the accountability of the research and the representations made (Haraway 1991, Nagar 2002).

This chapter will first present the methodology and methods used in the study. Thereafter, a description of the preparatory phase of the study is presented as the careful preparations were crucial for conducting of such participatory research. The chapter continues by presenting the main research phase and by explaining how the methods have been applied. Knowledge treatment and analysis will be described and justified. A team approach to the research is emphasized and in-between this text some pieces of individual comments of the research team have been added to get subjective experiences from the whole team.

### **4.1 Qualitative methodology**

Qualitative research involves an in-depth understanding of social phenomena, human behavior and the reasons that govern human behavior through analysis of social, political, and economic processes (Kitchin and Tate 2000). Furthermore, qualitative methodology includes an appreciation of the context of various local situations and is vital for examining complex issues of causality, process, and context.

The literature on social capital has largely been built on quantitative research and drawn from large representative samples on universal measures (Dudvik et al 2006). Even so, Mikkelsen (2005) points to growing empirical evidence which indicates that social capital is best measured using a variety of qualitative and quantitative instruments. Other scholars request

more focus on qualitative methods for social capital to be properly investigated and to capture local realities (Woolcock 2001). This study employs qualitative and participatory methods to understand the causes and nuances of relationships and the contexts within which they exist. Social capital is relational and exists between people and groups, therefore asking a group of people to participate together to respond to certain questions may provide knowledge that is more nuanced than data derived from surveys (Dudwick et al. 2006). This may also tilt the balance of power and expertise in research away from the researcher toward participants and community members (Chambers 1997). Furthermore, social capital theory stresses “processes” and means as much as it does “products” and ends, and qualitative methods provide especially fruitful techniques for unpacking the mechanisms behind those processes (Woolcock 2001).

The researchers acknowledge that analysis of qualitative information demands interpretation of the research, and that two researchers looking at the same information may arrive at somewhat different conclusions. Moreover, the researchers acknowledge the limitations of the research design and try to make a good-faith effort to minimize them through the research process. Thaagaard (1998) emphasizes that the reliability and validity of quantitative data stem from the basic ground in which knowledge rests. Drawing from social constructionist epistemology, the use of these terms from the quantitative tradition is not always applied explicitly in a qualitative study. In this written document it is done implicit by accounting for procedures for knowledge construction, use of analytical framework and how the results are interpreted.

#### **4.1.1 Focus group discussion (FGD)**

For this study focus group discussions (FGD) has been used as a method for gathering knowledge with the purpose of obtaining in-depth information on concepts, perceptions and ideas of the particular group. In the study FGDs were conducted in small groups of 12 participants. The group discussions were guided by a moderator or a facilitator, which encouraged group members to discuss freely and spontaneously about the particular issue or the certain topic in question. The intent of the using FGD was to reach consensus on key issues. The idea is that if a group reaches consensus on a particular issue after some discussion, this consensus will be representative of views in a given group, because outlying views would have been set aside in the process of debate (Mikkelsen 2005). For this technique to work, the discussion must be extremely well moderated. The moderator must be sufficiently dynamic to steer the discussion in a meaningful direction, deftly navigate his or

her way around potential conflicts and, in the end, establish a consensus (Kruger and Casey 2000). The moderator's role is thus the key to ensure that high-quality information is gathered from a group discussion. An inadequate moderator can affect the quality of the information in a manner that is much more acute than an equivalently inadequate interviewer working with a structured quantitative questionnaire (Dudvik et al 2006). Furthermore, Chambers (2005) reminds practitioners that groups may be dominated by some participants, while others stay silent or are bullied into consensus.

#### **4.1.2 Participatory learning and action (PLA)**

PLA is an umbrella term for a wide range of similar approaches and methodologies, including Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). It is a set of tools and techniques for gathering, sharing and analyzing information and for learning and action (Mukherjee 2002). They are participatory as they involve a number of people other than the researchers in the research process. The participants are “stakeholders” in the outcome of the research and actions. PLA tools and techniques have to be adapted to the local context and the particular research questions (ibid). In this study such tools have been used to uncover and understand the perspectives and insights of the participants, enabling them to express and analyze their realities, with outsiders playing a facilitating role. Participatory methods, both verbal and visual, including drawing, ranking and mapping, were used by the researchers striving after the idea of “non-dominating behaviors”. The common theme for these approaches is the promotion of interactive learning, shared knowledge, and flexible, yet structured analysis (Chambers 1997). In applying PLA it is important to be aware of the pitfalls of the tools and techniques used. Failing to put behavior and attitudes before methods is a major threat to the quality of participation (Mikkelsen 2005). It is also important to be aware of who participates, where, when, with whom and with what equality (Chambers 2005).

## **4.2 Preparatory phase**

Before conducting any field work careful and extensive preparations have to be done. Much of the success of this fieldwork may be dedicated to a detailed preparatory phase. The preparation started in September 2006 by literature review and by gradually developing a project proposal. Theory and methods were carefully chosen and studied. A checklist for the study was developed based on the six dimensions of social capital. I had earlier been working as a volunteer in an NGO working on microfinance in Bagerhat, Bangladesh. The area and its context were known and a network of contacts established. A NGO, Codec/MJ, gave

permission to be used as a gatekeeper for the study. The NGO provides different services to women and children in the area, under the project; “Integrated Development initiative for coastal children and women project”.

#### 4.2.1 Creating a research team

For the study to be conducted and the methods to be applied, there was a need for organizing a research team. Two “research assistants” were to be employed. Their role was to be co-researchers rather than “research assistants” as the methods requires equal participation of the research team. Hence, they were to take an active part in the study and also to have a certain ownership to the process. The co-researchers were to conduct the facilitator’s role in the FGD sessions as I have limited language skills. The University of Khulna, a partner university of the Norwegian University of Technology and Science (NTNU), facilitated finding appropriate co-researchers among their students. Two female students of social sciences or a related field, with research experience were requested to be employed for salary. “Rima” and “Shoma” was selected as they were eager and motivated, they had the best communicating skills, clearly capable to lead a discussion and they had an open, polite and humble appearance. They had done quantitative research among poor people before and had just handed in their papers for their bachelor courses. They were some of the best students in the economy department and they had both written thesis’s related to development projects. Both of them were from conservative families and wore *Burkha*. They were from local middle class families, familiar with the district, its history, context and the local dialect.

#### 4.2.2 Preparatory workshops

Mikkelsen (2005) argues that practicing and facilitating FGD and PLA requires a variety of skills and capabilities, of which attitudes count as much as technical and pedagogical skills. To retain credibility, it is important that the practitioners possess sufficient capabilities and knowledge of the strengths and pitfalls of the FGD and the PLA tools. Self-reflective perspectives should be the foundation of the capabilities of a practitioner.

Some knowledge using FGD and PLA was held by the research team. However, applying these tools in research was new to all and it had to be a learning process. A series of workshops was organized to learn the tools, to adjust the techniques and the research project to the context and the language, to discuss the topics of investigation, and to elaborate on the different concepts under study. The team discussed what Bengali words that would be applicable for various English concepts. For example, trust is an essential part of the study, but there is not a direct single word for trust in Bengali. A professor of sociology at the

University of Khulna assisted us with valuable inputs and crucial support. He recommended using *bishas* which means belief or faith in something, as an alternative to trust. He also volunteered to translate the whole check list for discussions into Bengali, to make sure the proper translations were applied. Days were spent discussing the qualitative methods, focus group discussions and PLA. The local NGO, Codec/MJ gave an introduction to the area and the local context. They provided a day's workshop with their expert on PRA and focus group discussions. This was followed up by discussing the differences of the NGO applying PLA as a tool and the academic use. Reliability and validity requirements and the concept of bias were given great emphasis.

From this the team redesigned the initial research design to fit time and space, encompassing the local context and going through the check list for discussion and the PRA tools. Questions and discussion topics had to be redefined after available data and information on the types, forms, and levels of social capital of the local community being studied. We had to contemplate how questions, instructions, or exercises were best communicated. It was crucial to consider gender issues, power relations, religious differences and age sensitivities. Additionally, it was necessary to construct instruments to measure social capital and to find simple local terms for words to ascertain the most appropriate way to ask the necessary questions. A pilot study was organized in a nearby village. This pilot study was essential for the research team to understand how to ask questions, how to get a discussion floating, and also the importance of building rapport. Again the project was redesigned and the final sketches for the fieldwork made. These preparations were of fundamental significance to ensure that all team members understood the procedures that would be followed and to ensure consistency. Additionally, it was important to anticipate challenges to uniform translation and application of the study topics.

### **4.2.3 Preparations for FGD**

Before starting the FGD, the roles played by the different research team members had to be clearly decided. One person was to act as facilitator, another as recorder, and the third as assistant. The facilitator in a FGD should preferably be as close as possible to the participants in their characteristics (Kruger and Casey 2000). As the research team consisted of only two Bengali researchers, they were shifting on the role as the facilitator, holding one series of FGD each. The team agreed upon a managing procedure where the main facilitator for the session was the only one to put question and moderate. The responsibility of the recorder was to keep a record of the content of the discussion, emotional reactions and important aspects of

the group interaction. The assistant was to keep additional written recordings and control the video recording used to assist in capturing information. The recorder and the assistant should participate as little as possible in the discussion although following the discussion carefully. However, in some situations it proved useful for them to assist the facilitator; they could draw the facilitator's attention to quiet participants, missed comments or topics. The team decided to speak as little English as possible during the session, and as far as possible all communication was to be in Bengali.

One single FGD may be seen as a small study in itself. Thus, it requires a determination of the purpose for every section by clear objectives. The six research questions were divided on the three different sessions and two research questions were put as objectives for each discussion. From the objectives a written list of topics to be covered were formulated as series of open-ended, easy to answer, and precise questions for discussion (see discussion guide Appendix I). The discussion would follow these discussion guides; however, it aimed to be more than a question-answer interaction. The idea was that group members discussed the topic among themselves, with guidance from the facilitator.

#### **4.2.4 Preparation for PLA**

The PLA/PRA "guru" Robert Chambers (2002: xiv) states that, "Participatory processes cannot be 'properly planned', where 'properly' refers to fixed content and strict timetables". He continues saying that, "good participatory processes are predictably unpredictable" and "optimal unpreparedness liberates a facilitator [...] to go with the flow, roll with the punches, and steer by sailing and tackling the wind". Nevertheless, some flexible planning and logistics are crucial for a PLA session to work. The research team had to understand the tools and techniques properly and to be able to adjust them to the setting. Introducing the tools for the participants, the team emphasized to explain as little as possible of the procedures, while at the same time trying not to confuse them. "Look, listen and learn" and "facilitate, do not dominate or interrupt" (ibid.) were the main procedures. To facilitate discussions who, what, where, when and how were frequently used.

#### **4.2.5 Selection and recruitment of research participants**

Three FGD/PLA sessions with groups of 12 participants were planned in two villages. The Bemata Union was selected because Codec/MJ operates in the area. Among the 11 villages in the union, two villages were randomly selected. The Codec/MJ has one female member/spokesperson in each village in the area and these members were chosen as entry



points to recruit participants to the FGDs. The member was requested to invite 11 neighboring females from her personal network to participate in three sessions.

By asking one woman to invite her contacts among the neighbors she was in fact asked to apply her social capital to make a group from her network. This recruitment of participants may be called purposive selection or “systematic, non-probabilistic sampling” (Schutt 2006). The purpose is not to establish a *representative sample drawn from a population*, but rather to identify a specific group of people who possess characteristics relevant to the social phenomenon being studied (ibid.). The characteristics of individuals are used as the basis of selection. For this study the criteria used is a belonging to one person’s network of female neighbors. In this way, participants were identified because they were seen to enable exploration of a particular aspect of behavior relevant to the research. This approach allows the researcher deliberately to include participants with access to important sources of knowledge. In total, 24 participants contributed in the FGDs and only two did not show up for all three sessions.

#### **4.2.6 The local NGO as a gatekeeper**

The Codec/MJ, offered the research team great support, nevertheless, both the research team and the NGO were aware of the requirements to minimize the potential bias such relationship might create. One of the local NGO officers working in the Botpur Union served to be gatekeeper for the research team. He is a respected man in the field area. Respected, because he is an inhabitant of a village inside the union, he is Muslim and from a conservative family and he is working on gender issues with the women. Ten days ahead of the FGD sessions to be held, the officer went to the villages and requested the NGO members to recruit the groups and introduced the research team before the team’s arrival in the villages. Prior to this, the research team explained him the study and its intentions carefully so that he could clarify everything in the villages. The team emphasized the research as independent from Codec/MJ and as not being of any benefits for the participants. The general purpose and procedures of the FGD was explained, in order to obtain their consent to join. The local NGO officer is well known to the villagers and his request for the researchers visiting them was the initial step of the building rapport. At this first visit the local officer also asked the members for the time and place that was suitable for participants. It was decided to meet after the children had gone for school and before lunch preparations. The local officer led the way for the researchers to locate the community for the first visit. This most likely helped to build trust. But being aware that it also might lead to bias, he was explicitly asked to not stay for the session.

#### **4.2.7 Establishing rapport and trust**

There lie many windows of opportunity in FGD and PLA-type inquiry but whether these are providing the knowledge needed depends a lot on the person that applies this methods and the relation to the participants. Mukherjee (2002) underlines that interaction with the participants must be held with utmost respect shown towards the group. Rapport building should the first step towards interacting with local people. There are different ways to establish the rapport but it is only done gradually (ibid).

The research team arrived in the village early in the morning aiming for a transect walk to build rapport and trust. This was done simply by walking through the village stopping to greet people along the way introducing our self and learning about the community before the session. We first went to the member's house, identified by the NGO official, and asked her to introduce the village. She took the lead in describing the village and the team visited the houses of the participants. The team was doing small talk and was given small children to hold. The researchers asked about household activities and watched different income generating projects. The transect walk also allowed the research team to explore and better understand the spatial differences in the community by gathering an overview.

The team arrived at the agreed place an hour before the time that was scheduled, to be sure to arrive before the participants, and to be ready to greet them. As the participants arrived, some informal discussions were done before the actual session started. It was crucial that an open and friendly environment was established. Participants and the research team were seated equally, in a circle on woven mats, and everyone could see each other's faces. The sessions were held in competition with the surrounding noise of children playing and inquisitive passers-by. The team tried to make some norms for the sessions, such as: "Children who are too small to play alone, was permitted to be with their mothers. However, bigger children should be encouraged to play elsewhere. In the session everyone should focus on the main discussion, other subjects should be dealt with after wards. Inquisitive by-passers should be informed about the purpose of the session and the importance of the group not to be disturbed". It was not always possible to make sure that there would be no disturbances, especially the first sessions in each village was subject to some attention. However, the participants were remarkable in the way they sent away their relatives and neighbors.

The research team were aware that the women have busy schedules, and knew that inviting the busy women for a two hour section would be taking valuable working hours from them.

Several options were discussed of how to show that we valued their working time. The local officer recommended to bring small-snack packs to give the women after the meeting as this would be in line with NGO procedures and local values. These snack-packs were to be given after the sessions and they would contain a locally produced sweet, a *samosa* and a banana, as a polite gesture.

### 4.3 The main research phase

#### 4.3.1 Introducing the session for the FGD

As the session was to start, the research team greeted and welcomed all participants. We tried to show a polite and respectful manner, a humble attitude and an appreciative expression of the valuable knowledge sharing. The research team was carefully introduced and the facilitators explained the objectives of the visit and the research vigilantly, to solicit their co-operation. Then all participants were to present themselves. They introduced themselves as they wished. Most stating their name, number of children and husband's occupation. The research team expressed gratitude for the participation, the time they were willing to spend and the importance of the knowledge they were to share. The facilitator explained the purpose of the FGD, the kind of information needed, and how the information would be used. It was emphasised that there is not any right or wrong answer but that the team wanted to learn what each participant's views are. Additionally, the facilitator underscored that there were no benefits for the participants other than sharing knowledge, and learning from each other. Ground rules or norms for the discussion were elaborated. Permission to use a video-recorder was carefully asked for. Confidentiality of opinions was ensured and co-operation from the group members were asked, to keep what were to be discussed confidential.

*“Even from the first session the participants were very much cordial to us. We were strangers for them, but they soon opened up and told us many intimate stories of their lives”. - Rima*

The first introduction of the session is critical to create a tolerant and open atmosphere and to set the tone of the discussion. Much of the success of group interviewing can be attributed to the development of an open environment (Kruger and Casey 2000).

#### 4.3.2 The FGD session

During the session, communication and interaction during the FGD was encouraged in every possible way. All answers were welcomed, all involvement encouraged, and the facilitators tried their best to react neutrally to both verbal and non-verbal responses.

*“From our side (the research group) we always tried to make our faces smiling. We tried to express by our body language that we were very eager to their stories. We expressed sympathy hearing a painful story as well as we*

*participated in their jokes and laughter when a comic story was told. However, this was not possible at all times and often difficult. Sometimes we became angry or disappointed with the participants or outsiders that interrupted. But we tried to cover it and rather show our smiling faces". - Rima*

The facilitator tried to avoid only questions-and-answers. To get the discussion going the facilitator asked for clarifications by saying; 'Please sister, may you tell me more about. . ?' One of the most important functions of the facilitator was being able to listen carefully. The participants were encouraged to tell their stories and the facilitator had to show interest in any story and then move the discussion from topic to topic. However, it was important delicately to control the time allocated to various topics so as to maintain interest. To reorientate the discussion the facilitator might say; Thank you sister, for sharing this with us, but what do you think of..?

*Sometimes we had to jump some of the questions in the checklist. We had to listen to some irrelevant stories with interest. And we had to ask people to listen to someone's story, if everyone were talking at the same time. We used the body language to show interest in one speaker at the time". -Rima*

In a group there are always a couple of more dominant participants. A method to re-orientate attention from one participant to another was to say; 'This sister said . . . , but how about you, sister?' Sometimes, it was even necessary to avoid eye contact or turning slightly away to discourage a person from speaking. Many of the women were often reluctant to speak. Then, the facilitator had to turn the attention to her, making more frequent eye contact or directly request her opinion or encourage her participation. However, information should not be pushed or enforced. Especially, on sensitive issues the facilitator allowed the participants not to answer. On some issues it could be hard to get the conversation flowing. If the discussion stopped when for example dealing with a sensitive topic, the facilitator gave examples on opinions or contrasting opinions for the group to discuss.

*"We soon also realized that the women were not always so conscious or aware of some of our topics, or they did not want to elaborate their opinions. For this we had to use examples or cases to explain the questions and capture their eagerness to answer. Often, we found that the answer of the question was known to the participants, but due to lack of awareness they could not formulate an answer. Then we encouraged the participants to use stories to explain their views. If they still remained quiet, we had to apply some examples that were closely related to the question without giving any answer. This is a big challenge for the facilitator. Sometimes we had to give examples on answers even. Then, they could say that it was familiar to their life and first then they would provide the practical experiences from their life". - Shoma*

### **4.3.3 Pros and cons of using FGD**

The FGD showed to be a powerful research tool which provided valuable spontaneous information in a relative short period of time. Nevertheless, there are limitations of using FGDs as a single tool because used alone it may be instrumental in purpose. Sensitive issues are not easily addressed, however they should be aired. In group discussions, people tend to centre their opinions on the most common ones or on 'social norms' and the focus on

consensus may mask difference. In reality, opinions and behavior may be more diverse. Therefore it is important to explicitly solicit other views during FGDs. Ensuring that the most vulnerable are present and that their voices were heard, is also an issue. Being aware of these issues enabled the researchers to take a sensitive stand towards these issues and account for them in the preparation, throughout the process, and in exposure of the findings. Additionally, the FGD was combined with PLA techniques such as use of mapping and ranking, to address some of these limitations.

#### **4.3.4 The PLA application**

PLA tools may be used in different ways; however the research team emphasized on doing them as simple as possible. The team used a set of diagramming and visual techniques based on principles of active participation. This involved rethinking power relations between the participants and the research team. By the use of these tools it was the participants to facilitate for the learning of the research team.

***Participatory mapping:*** Drawing a visual participatory map, the participants were to do a situation analysis by sketching a map themselves to bring out information and to initiate discussion on community issues. The aim of applying this tool in the first session was to provide knowledge about the community context and to map differences between community members. The research team had to be aware of these differences, not to miss important topics or different participants and to be able to contextualize the information (see Appendix II).

***Venn diagram:*** The Venn diagram, also known as a Chapati diagram, is a map of a community's social and institutional structure. The participants mapped out what institutions that prevail in their society, gave them symbolic representation and value after importance, trustworthiness and accessibility of the institutions. The knowledge gained from the Venn diagram and the following critical discussion is presented in chapter 5, demonstrating the relative importance of public and non-governmental services and programs (see chapter 5).

***Visual photography:*** To assess the participants trust, they were given portable cameras and asked to take pictures of whom they trust. The knowledge gained from the pictures and the following discussion is presented in chapter 5, demonstrating trust in relations. Even though the pictures gave great contributions, the photos are not presented here to ensure confidentiality.

Problem ranking: Problem ranking was chosen as a tool to appraise how the community work together or do not work together to solve different problems. Some of the information on collective action and collaboration provided from this exercise is presented in chapter 6 (see Appendix III).

#### **4.3.5 Pros and cons of using PLA**

Focus on the tools in themselves may not facilitate discussion but rather be too much focused to draw the map and diagrams efficient. Doing PLA in a group of mostly illiterate women is a challenge in itself. The women did not have much confidence in their own drawings and presentations at first. The social map, especially, sought to be a bit complex and thereby time consuming. However, by the use of these tools and working together a lot of learning was facilitated and new issues arose. Some of the tools proved especially revealing. The Venn-diagram emphasized the importance of institutions that the research team had not thought of and the pictures got more quiet participants to contribute actively.

### **4.4 Information treatment and analysis**

Analysis of qualitative data is primarily an inductive process, meaning that the researcher endeavors to discern patterns in the data rather than formally test pre-determined hypotheses (Kitchin and Tate 2000). A common saying in research is that the quality of data analysis can only be as good as the quality of raw material.

#### **4.4.1 Knowledge processing and a circle of adjustments**

The FGD discussions were documented in writing and by using a video recorder. This was done for practical reasons. The research team decided to tape the sessions as it was not possible for the recorder to write down everything said in a discussion. There are sometimes several voices on top of each other and a video recorder, rather than a tape recorder, was used to identify the speaker. Before starting to film it was asked for permission to make a confidential tape for the research team only. The camera was placed in a distance as discreet as possible.

Immediately after the FGD the research team transcribed the discussions. We went through the written records and the video parallel, carefully distinguishing raw data from own interpretation. A full report of the discussion was prepared which reflects the discussion as completely as possible, using the participants' own words. Key statements, ideas, and attitudes expressed were listed for each topic of discussion. Doing this in collaboration the

construction of transcripts and additional interpretations resulted from the participation of three different persons in viewing and commenting. Sometimes there were cultural or context issues that I, the foreign, did not understand and the co-researchers had to explain.

To process the knowledge immediately was important in order to evaluate the sessions and draw knowledge from each session to the next. The team sat together to analyze the day's activities and study findings. Every field visit was evaluated and discussed. Strategies for the next day was then discussed and planned. In this process the research team shared experiences as well as decisions and made tactical decisions about what was working and what was not. Sometimes when transcribing, new issues and questions came to the surface and the discussion guide for next meeting were added additional questions to clarify on issues. In this way implementation of FGDs is an iterative process. Each focus group discussion builds on the previous one, with a slightly elaborated or better-focused set of themes for discussion. Some questions were repeated in a next session formulated a bit differently, to check the trustworthiness of explanations.

#### **4.4.2 Preliminary participatory analysis**

A special feature applying FGD and PLA tools is the enabling of participants themselves to serve as partners in data collection and analysis (Mukherejee 2002). The preliminary analysis was carried out by the groups itself by making consensus and responding to findings. Additionally, divergence from the consensus reached in the focus groups also provided interesting insights. One of the groups had a mixture of Hindu and Muslim participants and their discussion was particularly revealing. In the FGD a focus on consensus and divergence from consensus was the initial step towards an analysis. If a general consensus was found on an issue, it was to be brought back to the participants to elaborate and cross-check information in a next session. After transcribing the discussions the research team coded the transcripts and made a summary of findings. These were presented for the participants along the way to get comments on findings and empower the participants in the process. The participants commented on whether the research results were consistent with their own experience and alerted the research team to inconsistencies if they were not.

#### **4.4.3 A women-centered analysis**

Exploring and understanding the real life stories women provide about themselves, a women-centered analysis is applied. By doing so, we are contextualizing social capital, cultural practice, power relations, gender relations and women's bargaining through the lens of women. Drawing from the WCD approach, the research emphasizes how context, culture and

the differences in social location, such as age and belonging to a religious group, may structure the way women experience their lives. The differentiation of preferences, perceptions and responsibilities that exists on the basis of gender is recognized and taken into consideration in the analysis.

Analyzing knowledge from focus group sessions is not very different from analyzing any other qualitative data. The investigations had been done on the six dimensions of social capital and with a women-centered lens an analysis was done along these dimensions. The transcripts were coded following the topics and finer sub-codes were applied. The team applied special categories for certain types of narrative, such as “joke” and “irony”, and types of interaction, such as “questions”, “own initiated story”, “different opinion from others”, “censorship”, or “changes of mind”. It became important to try to distinguish between individual opinions expressed in spite of the group from the actual group consensus. Also deviant case analysis was crucial to give attention to minority opinions and examples that did not fit with the researchers’ overall interpretation. When all the data was categorised and the FGD sessions were numbered for session (1-3) and group (A and B), the information was to be organised per topic, summarized, analysed and compared.

Having done this there was left a large amount of information. An important selection had to be done to report the major findings of the FGDs in a narrative. In this selection there was constant tension between the need to present and represent the diversity of views and opinions of poor people and the need to have a sharp, focused, and message-loaded presentation of findings. Difficulties emerged when dealing with the challenge of not losing participants’ voices and realities while imposing some structure.

The distinct feature of working with focus group data is the need to indicate the impact of the group dynamic and analyze the sessions in ways that take full advantage of the interaction between research participants. Thus, this report includes some illustrations of the talk between participants, in context additional to presenting more isolated quotations.

#### **4.5 Ethics of participatory methods**

Narayan et al. (2000) points to four continuing ethical challenges that the field researcher faces while doing research with poor people. She emphasizes that these ethical challenges arise especially when the prime objective is not to directly empower and benefit the participants, but to help outsiders learn about the experience and realities of poor people.



The first challenge is taking people's time. The participants were busy in the fields and with household activities, and being aware of them spending valuable time the team put careful attention to effective and efficient plans for the discussions. The snack provided was an effort of hospitality to remunerate participants for their time and trouble. However, Narayan states that more important, when poor people express and analyze their realities, they often themselves learn and gain satisfaction from the experience, enjoy it and develop solidarity with others. The second challenge is the raised expectations that the intervention may give. At every stage in the process it was emphasized that this was a voluntary project. It was also underlined several times that the participation did not give any benefits other than learning and sharing. Even so, it might be unavoidable that to some degree expectations will be raised. Feedback is a third challenge. The use of PLA implies that researchers will feed information back to the communities before leaving them or upon return. The initial findings were shared with participants and the research team also invited the general members of Codec/MJ in the union to present and share information of the findings. In this meeting female representatives from all villages in the union were present and the aim was for them to communicate the results back to their villagers. A fourth consideration is follow-up action. Findings can be fed into ongoing programs or used to raise attention to missing action. Sustained efforts have to be taken to ensure follow-up at all levels. Copies of this final report will be sent to the Codec/MJ office for them to communicate the findings to the communities and then it may be used by the participants themselves.

#### **4.6 Ensuring plausible and believable qualitative research**

Qualitative research is often criticized for lacking "scientific rigour" (Kitchin and Tate 2000). It is argued that qualitative research is a collection of personal impressions strongly subject to researcher bias; it lacks reproducibility as the research is so personal to the researcher that another researcher would come to radically different conclusions; and it tends to generate large amounts of detailed information about a small number of settings (ibid.). Various strategies are available within qualitative research to protect against this "bias" and enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of findings. First, the central approach to ensure plausible and believable qualitative research is systematic and self-conscious research design, data collection, interpretation, and communication. Second, qualitative researchers should seek to create an account of method and data which can stand independently and to produce a plausible and coherent explanation of the phenomenon under study. Consequently, this chapter of methodology aims at giving adequate descriptions of the research teams' assumptions and

methods, particularly with regard to data analysis. This is for the integrity of the qualitative project to be protected throughout the research process.

### **“Bias”**

*“I had a strong bias as I did not trust the politicians because of the reports on corruption. I also mistrusted the Muslim majority on their treatment of the Hindu minority. However, I had strong belief generally in the women themselves to act on their own behalf. My belief was that they are so strong that they can manage everything and that they are generally not regarded this strength. These assumptions clearly influenced my understanding of the knowledge produced through the sessions.*

*The co-researchers had a bias towards not trusting the political system and the NGOs both in terms of corruption and in the way they thought the institutions did not work on behalf of the poor, but rather on behalf of their own benefit. They also believed that the Hindus were treated equally with their Muslim brothers and that claims otherwise was due to the minority’s nature of complaining. The co-researchers believed that the poor women were subordinated and that they did not believe in their own power to resist the subordination.*

*The research team had divergence in both how we were biased and how we assessed the research findings. This gave broad discussions and great dialogue around the research findings. As the team worked and lived together these discussions lasted long nights and showed to be very fruitful. It was a great experience of cross-cultural exchange and learning of the discourses the other person was a part of”. -Ragnhild*

The term bias is used in social science in multiple ways. Often it is used to indicate a particular source of “systematic error” that derives from a conscious or unconscious tendency of something to influence the data or the interpretation of data. Hammersley and Gomm (1997) argue, however, that such “foundationalist” epistemological assumptions have been discredited. Now, bias form parts of an essential framework for research as a social practice, and as a matter of collegial accountability (ibid). This presentation of findings has been written aiming at allowing the reader to distinguish the data, the analytic framework used, and the interpretation. The chapter of methods is extensive to produce a convincing account of the research and for the reader to trust in the integrity of choices made during the research.

### ***Safeguarding trustworthiness***

The emphasis the research team made on building rapport and trust was prioritized to assess trustworthiness of the data collection. The participants clearly explained that because of the good relations to the research team they wanted to participate in the sessions and contribute with their knowledge. Spending time before and after every session in the village the research team had time to become familiar with the environment under study and the participants had the time to become accustomed to having the researchers around.

The data was collected directly from the participants’ experience. Knowledge was constituted when consensus based or conflicting claims were argued in a dialogue. In this way knowledge was decided through the argumentation of the participants’ in a discourse. Being aware of the power differences within the group, difference in power has been highlighted when coding

and presenting the research. The participants' reactions to the evolving analysis became part of the emerging research data. Additionally, the preliminary analysis was presented to another group of women, representatives from all villages in the union to get other evidence of the plausibility of the research account since different groups are likely to have different perspectives on what is happening. This added strength to the study by adding layers of interpretation and weaving a thicker description than could be accomplished by one analyst alone.

#### ***Ensuring the consistency of the analysis***

The data collected in the sessions were recorded in writings and from video recordings that afterwards were transcribed into conversations. To ensure the retest consistency of the analyses, careful records of interviews and observations has been maintained and the process of analysis has been documented in detail. Assessment of the emotional tone of the meeting and the group process enabled the team to judge the trustworthiness of the information collected during the FGD. The preliminary analysis was done by an explicit group approach. A coding frame was developed to characterize each utterance in relation to the age and role of the speaker and the topic, and the transcripts were coded by all three researchers. All three researchers assessed an independent analysis and the level of agreement between us was assessed. The trustworthiness of the analysis may be enhanced by such independent assessment of transcripts by different researchers and comparing agreement.

#### **4.7 Positioning and representation**

The research team was actively aware of our position as active partners in the field. An ongoing self-critique and self appraisal was crucial through the whole process. The question, "Who were we to practice qualitative research?" was continuously asked. Limb and Dwyer (2001) highlight that subjectivity and positioning within the research process has to be acknowledged. The research team are outsiders intervening in the "insider's world". Limb and Dwyer argue that how these roles are negotiated, and how the people are represented in the written outcomes of the research has to be reflected upon. Hence, the researchers have to write themselves as well as others into the research. Many scholars use distinctions and categories such as self/other, native/western and insider/ outsider when talking about positionality (Parameswaran 2006), but these binarities are avoided by rather showing the multiple positionalities occupied by the researchers in relation to encounters in the field as well as the positionalities occupied by the participants.

**Positioning of the participants:** Participant's perspectives and meanings are partly formed by the participants' social status, sex, class, religion, age, and other social identities. All the 36 women who participated in the FGDs were Muslims, from poor socioeconomic backgrounds and low-income households. Most of the participants were illiterate. They defined themselves in relation to the occupation of their husbands and fathers. As poor, rural women they have a general low social status in the society, relatively much lower than that of men. They see themselves having fewer opportunities and being more marginalized than others in their society. There are also many differences among the women. For example, a few was unmarried and some were widows. Their age ranged between 18 and 60 and consequently they represented different generations.

The participants came to the sessions out of curiosity to newcomers and because they expected benefits from the research team. Soon, the objectives of the team were made clear and that there were no direct benefits for the participants were underlined. However, the participants continued to show up for each session and were eager to discuss and share opinions. They said it was because of the team's *good behavior*. The women's emphasis on good behavior showed to be important for them also when formulating their statements in the FGD sessions. Hence, it might be argued that participant's perspectives and meanings are partly formed by what is expected of them from the group.

**Positioning of the researcher:** I am a Norwegian, female, feminist, young, unmarried student with a distinct appearance. I am from a middleclass, Christian, Norwegian family and has always had multiple opportunities. I had lived 7 months in the local area before and was familiar with customs and norms. I was "raised" by my Bangladeshi, Muslim uncle to behave respectful and sensitive to the cultural setting. I wore a conservative and modest dress, and greeted everyone after the rules of their religion. Even though adapting behavior, my background was not to be hidden. I am much taller, much bigger, much paler and much blonder than all my Bangladeshi sisters. My presence in the village always gave many question and concerns and people were coming to take my photo on their mobile phones. I do speak Bengali, but my formulations are on a child's level. The research team decided to use as little English as in-between as possible, because English is not understood by the women. The team tried to exchange messages in bangla as much as possible. I always said something in Bengali in the beginning of every session. In the first sessions I introduced myself and my background stating respect and appreciation for them to participate by the following:

*“Assalam u- aleikum. How are you? It is nice to meet you all. My name is Ragnhild. I am a university student. I am to conduct a study from Bangladesh and for that I ask for your help to help me understand. My home country is Norway. In Norway I have my family. I have two older sister and they are both married. I am not married yet, but I plan to marry when my studies are finished. Do you have any questions to me? Thank you so much for your participation and help. I really appreciate being here with you. Thank you”.*

When I was asked questions from the participants I tried to answer as honest as possible to exchange information and knowledge. Many people have a positive and curious perception of outsiders, while some are mistrusting outsiders. For example, religion is a sensitive issue in the area and it was sure to be an issue under question. I had told the co-researchers that my religion was “a student still in search for a religious conviction”. In the first meeting the participants did not ask of my belief, and they said afterwards they thought I was a Muslim because of my good behavior. However, in the second meeting the question was asked and the facilitator tried to tell the student’s approach. However, this is not acceptable in a setting where everybody has a strong religious belief. The facilitator explained that my family was Christian, which was the truth. In the last session two Muslim women did not show, and the explanation was that because I was a Christian they were not to participate.

***Positioning of the co-researchers:*** The co-researchers are Bangladeshi, female, unmarried, young students, from middleclass, urban, Muslim families. They had an open, respectful and trustful behavior and warm smiles. They showed tolerance and patience and they always directed respect, honor and politeness towards the participants. They were modest and conservative dresses, usually a colored Burkha, and they covered their heads. In the sessions the participants always looked at what the research team wore and always commented on the dressing if there were anything to comment on. The team always dressed modest and neat and wore plain glass or handicraft bracelets as the participant did.

*“One morning the first week, when we were gathering to leave for the village, the co-researchers came in beautiful shining dresses and had small shining ornaments in their ears. I burst out with, ”Wow, you look great. Are you going to a party?” They understood my irony and answered for their defense, ”You see, we did not bring too many Salwar Kamizes”. I apologized for my impolite way of using irony and repeated as I had told before, “I would like for us to dress casual. I know you are beautiful girls that usually dress very nice, but I would like for us not to be too different from the women in the villages... I know we will be different anyway, and I know, that they know, that we usually dress fancier...But anyhow...” They understood, changed their dresses and we went”. - Ragnhild*

Even though the team adjusted their behavior, their identity was not hidden in the research process. One day, in a session the facilitator asked a question about gossip, “What do you gossip about when you go to collect water together?” The participants did not seem to have understood the question. The facilitator tried to demonstrate by an example for what she meant, “When I meet my friends we always talk and gossip about clothes and makeup. Do not

you?” The answer came quick and demonstrative, “We are poor women. We cannot afford clothes or makeup. Of course, we do not talk about that. What do you think!?” The participant demonstrated how young and ignorant she thought the facilitator asked, and the facilitator was clearly embarrassed. Then, after a small air break, the rest of the group followed up with a big discussion about what they rather gossip about. The question showed the class difference between the two, and might have resulted in creating a distance between them. But because of trust and rapport built and the understanding and respect between them, it resulted merely in a correction from a mother to her daughter and then the example worked as the facilitator had anticipated - sparkling discussion. In the team’s repeated interactions with the women, the team members were gradually assigned the role of a sister, or *appa*, and gradually earned friendship, trust, solidarity and affection of the women. It allowed the discussions to enter into gossip and more sensitive concerns.

**Positioning of context:** Social, cultural, political and economical context highly influences how people live their life and engage in social interactions. Hence, attending to the context is essential. This particular research may be seen as a case study carried out, in considerable detail, in order to produce a naturalistic account of the everyday life of the participants. The issue of what can be learnt from such a single case arises. In chapter two the context and the particulars of the case study is described. The chapter shows that there are both similarities and differences between the case study and other settings of the same type. Other unions in Bangladesh may have the same culture, religion and gender issues, but they might have different challenges towards resources and institutional issues. However, the case of corruption is widely investigated all over the country and news reports at the time told about corruption in the VGF benefits nationwide (see Chapter 6). In this way the case study contributes to and fits with the body of social theory and other empirical work.

## 5 The value of social capital of women

This chapter will assess the value of social capital of women through the picture provided by the participants of the social dynamics of women's everyday life. The discussion will address the commonalities and differences between the two FGDs, A and B, and how the women by virtue of their membership in networks or broader social structures perceive themselves to have a better capacity to command scarce resources. It illustrates how the social capital of women and their command of resources are influenced by the interplay of cultural practices, power- and gender relations. It also addresses how membership in close-knit networks without much access to bridging and linking may influence the capacity to command scarce resources.

The information presented in this chapter builds on knowledge gathered through the FGDs and PLA exercises; Visual-photography and Venn-diagram. Different aspects of how social capital is constructed and used or sometimes neither constructed nor used, will be discussed in relation to the context, through investigating the bridging, bonding and linking relationships women have or do not have. While doing so, it is important to have in mind that, the conceptual distinction of bonding, bridging and linking relationships should not be seen as a dichotomy but rather as a continuum, where networks are classified as falling closer to one end of the spectrum or the other (Norris 2003). Statements from the participants are marked with A or B after which group they belong to, and 1-3 after the number of the FGD session in which the statement was uttered.

### 5.1 Bonding

Bonding social capital involves ties of trust and reciprocity, between people in similar situations, in relatively closed networks in which members know other members often by kin or neighbor relations (Narayan 2002). Such bonding networks based on kinship and strong ties represent the opportunity to create an atmosphere of mutual trust between people. A participant defines her perception of trust, thus:

*“A trustworthy person is respected and reliable. He or she is not selfish. The person does the right judgment, without self-interest and does not try to gain personal advantages by helping. He or she can be trusted with money and secrets” (B2).*

Trusting relationships strengthen links between people, and may facilitate forms of intra-group interaction, or co-operation between people. Especially, in case of a situation of

emergency or need, the trusted relationships between a participant and her family and close neighbors construct her safety net.

### 5.1.1 Kinship-based networks

Bangladeshi ethnography has long emphasized the importance of kin-based networks (White 1992). These kin-based networks are both informal and formal and play important roles in families' and individuals' attempts to access private and common resources and institutional services. Kin-based networks for the women include both female and male kin. Gender, as well as generation, constitutes an important axis of difference within the kinship-based networks and influence roles and trust as well as access to resources and decision-making processes. The organization of the family is generally based on patriarchal practices where decision-making power traditionally is held by men and the elderly members of the kin. This tends to promote men's and the elder's concerns and access to resources. However, these practices are continuously changing and both men and women of different ages bargain the dynamic power structures and the priorities of concerns (see Chapter 6).

In the PLA exercise, when taking photos of trust relationships, most participants rank the husband and the son as the most trustworthy. This is because they are reliable when it comes to bringing economic resources and helping in a crisis. They argue that husbands are their economic security but also companions, guardians, lovers, supporters, fathers of their children etc. Additionally, it might be argued that the ranking corresponds to or reflects the gendered labor division in the household where men are seen as the principal breadwinner. It might also be an expression of a discursive value, meaning it is expected to say one trust the husband the most and the behavior of the women is regulated among other things aimed at living up to the expectations of their family and neighbors. Nevertheless, one participant had taken a photo of her whole family, except her husband. She says that because her husband is abusing alcohol and local drugs she does not trust him. Another, participant notes:

*“If my husband had murdered someone I would not tell anyone, but if I was the one who committed the murder, he would tell. If I murdered anyone, my mother is the one that would come forward to help me. She would do so rather than saving her own life” (B2).*

Thus, after husbands and sons, mothers are most trusted “*as the pillar of life*”. After mothers, mother-in-laws are to be counted upon. Mothers-in-law are expected to be respected and valued, but also they substitute the mother-role when the woman leaves her biological mother's house. Blood-related brothers and sisters, brothers- and sisters-in-law, uncles, aunts, nieces and nephews are portrayed as supporters and helpers. Especially, the male relatives are



valued to do errands, which the women do not see themselves suited for according to women's codes of conduct.

The participants were asked whether they had any duties or things they felt they were bound to do. They said that, first of all they have the responsibility to get their children educated and then to make sure for the marriage of their children and helping their male children to get a job.

The participants illustrated that kinship bind tightly, but it also excludes. Kinship groups often come into conflict with one another over efforts to gain exclusive access to land or other resources. The participants told that if one kinship member is in conflict with another member from another kin, all members would exclude and sanction the other kin.

### **5.1.2 Local neighbor-based networks**

Neighbors have strong ties, often strong by kin and friendship relationships. They help each other in the process of *getting by* in life on a daily basis. The women do not include unrelated men in their trust relationship, and it is not acceptable for them to meet men who are outside their kin. The participants were asked if they have any not related brothers that they trust. Their answer was negative, they said, "*We do not have this type of brothers in our community. There are too many that only do harm, not anything good*" (A2).

All participants emphasize that they value relations to close living neighbors. They demonstrate that female neighbors share joy and sorrows. Their relatives mostly do not live close and for this it is not possible for them to come forward when a woman fall into a problem. If the husband or sons are not at home, then the neighbors come forward. Participants trust the neighbors, and they are trusted especially in an emergency because they stay close and they get the news of the crisis first. After this they inform the relatives, and then the relatives will come. Neighbors are trusted for help, but also for keeping secrets, giving advices, taking choices and making decisions. However, financial help are trusted to be given from close relatives or the committee.

It is argued that bonding networks that connect similar people sustain particularized reciprocity and particular trust. It is supposed that by repeated interaction, members may reinforce these factors and mobilize solidarity (Miyata et al 2008). When asked about duties or things they felt they were bound to, they said helping ones neighbor is a duty. They would

help their neighbor in case of disease or an accident. They also felt the responsibility to help poor villagers to marry away their daughters by arranging money for a poor girl's wedding.

Moreover, these repeated interaction with close-knit networks, also constructs normative pressure and as it bind tightly, it also excludes. For example, the women do include persons of *good behavior* in their neighbor-based networks, while excluding those of *bad behavior*. Creating strong in-group loyalty may also create strong out-group antagonism. Class, gender, generation and religious affiliation constitutes important axes of difference within the neighbor-based networks, influencing access to resources and decision-making processes.

### 5.1.3 Informal networks and groups

The participants are members of a whole variety of informal groups and associations. The relationships cultivated through these associations exist primarily among close neighbors and those who share kinship ties. They are often formed within their *bari* and close neighborhood and, they are based on everyday forms of collaboration such as collecting water, washing clothes, fetching fuel wood, and cooking together. Such informal networks provide solidarity, exchange of information, mutual assistance, reciprocity, and access to household resources like water and firewood. Because of a gendered division of labor and codes of conducts that does not allow women's informal interaction with men outside their kin, these informal networks are highly gendered. The participants explain that they meet ad hock and after a more or less planned pattern:

*“After finishing the morning work, the morning prayers, food preparation and sending children to school, we have some time when we are washing clothes, taking bath by the pond or collecting drinking water. In this time we meet our neighbors and friends by the pond or the tube well. Mostly we gossip: “Pani ana amon shukh, dhekha hoi dos joner mukh”. [The bangla proverb could be translated to: Bringing water is such a joy; it gives the opportunity to meet many faces at the time] “After lunch we send the children again away to school or tutors and we sometimes get some leisure time. Then we mostly go to the neighbors houses to chat and gossip. We would return before evening to be with our family and to prepare dinner”.*(A3)

Participants state that group members participate for the sake of meeting, to do daily activities together or for sharing information. They are *gossiping* on different subject but mostly about daily challenges, their family life or marriage situation. They talk about the good behavior of their children's father and about fathers that do not care enough or do not provide enough money for his family. They talk about children in school and their future. They also talk about challenges in the village such as the water situation or credit problems when it is impossible to have the installments for next week's committee meeting (microfinance group).

From participating in the informal groups there are both individual gains such as resources or higher personal status, and contribution to group or community benefit. The incentives or purposes of participating in the groups are manifold including access to collaboration and mutual help, opportunities to socialize and the psychological benefit of belonging to a group. Group members may also give access to credit from other members or access to decision making. There are high values related to collaboration and much solidarity among group members especially in situations of emergency or need.

March and Taqqe (1982) has observed that because women in Bangladesh are generally excluded from formal groups, women's informal associations are especially important as information channels and support system. Agarwal (2000) goes further and argues that women are often dependent on these social relations of informal networks for access to household resources. This may be seen through the picture provided above. The informal collaboration is based on reciprocal relationships, which women depend upon, especially when they fall upon hard times. Mutual assistance is provided regularly and this may help maximize the utilization of the available resources. Through societal exchanges among the members, the women tend to obtain a sense of normative recognition that if one woman helps another, she will be helped by other women, not necessarily only the woman whom she helped. This reciprocity may be called for in a social dilemma.

The informal networks of these women are generally manifested spontaneous, informal and unregulated. Asked if there are leaders of the formal groups they say there are no leaders, but people they respect more or less. To enter a group the person who wish to enter should have *good behavior* to be accepted as a new arrival in the group. The women would include the persons who are likeminded and similar to them; those with similar interests and habits and same social and economical situation (*being poor*).

*Good behavior* is important for the women. They express that it is similar to proper behavior or good manners. It is about politeness, honor, solidarity and following the accepted codes of conduct of female chastity. Included in the *good behavior* concept is the abovementioned normative recognition, where a woman who assists another may expect to be assisted by the rest. This normative recognition is similar to how they expect the members to behave well, according to their concept. A member would be sanctioned if she is not helping a woman in need or if she does not behave as according to the norms of good behavior. What the participants term *gossiping* is exchange of valuable information and news, as well as it is

forming norms and rules of behavior. Together with like-mindedness *good behavior* is crucial to be accepted as a part of an informal network or group. Those who show less good behavior or a bad character are excluded when the informal groups meet, from the network and its benefits. Though a general norm for good behavior in the society, it seems like their concept of good behavior and what is accepted and what is not, is maintained, contested, and negotiated strongly by the women in-between, in these strong bonding networks.

#### 5.1.4 The focus group as a network

The focus groups for the research may be said to represent the local neighbor-based network of one of the women. The three women who were asked to invite the others were randomly chosen among the members of the gatekeeper NGO. The member-criterion of the NGO is that the member is the leader of a committee (under any NGO). Hence, the women inviting the others were expected to have a broad network. All the three women chose participants to the FGD from female neighbors which they had good relations with. In the groups all perceived themselves and the others as *poor*. Their network did not cross religious group belonging and constitute only Muslims.

The characteristics of the FGD networks shows that such informal networks are most often connected through horizontal relationships and bonding of social capital. However, there are also some bridging elements as there are big age differences in their networks, and such intergenerational relations are clearly marked by power difference in the discussion. Elder women and especially mothers-in-law are to be shown a lot of respect and younger women are to be obedient.

The participants said they came to the group meetings because of the woman who had asked them to come. However, they also emphasized that there are strong connections between all the women as well as to the woman that invited them, because their connections and relations overlap. All the women meet regularly or daily. They see themselves as an informal group. They state that this is because they like each other, they do not harm each other, and they help each other. They believe each was invited to join the group because the *good behavior* of each participant. The consensus is; that *good behavior* is the main criteria they have been selected after. Good behavior means that; they behave “well”, they are affectionate towards each other; they provide help and support; they often invite each other for meals; they all come forward and do good deeds; they always come forward if any of the others needs them; they treat each other well and keep and maintain each other’s secrets. To portray how important they see

good behavior one participant state that, “*when you die you lose everything except your good behavior that remains in your memory*” (A1).

The participants were asked what type of unity they have inside the group. Most say the unity is well and that if it was not they would not agree to sit next to each other. They explain that they perceive unity among women as stronger than among men. However, they say that there is also stronger criticism and talking behind peoples back among women, than among men. A participant explains that, “*women take little time to unite as well as to map each other’s faults*” (B2).

### **5.1.5 Formal networks and groups**

Formal groups that prevail in the society are mostly organized around men’s activities and participation. The formal networks are often seen as project groups and community councils that improve access to economic resources and decision making or power (Agarwal, 2000). In Bangladesh women have traditionally been excluded from formal institutions (March and Taqqe 1982). The women in the FGD provide the information that they do not participate in formal groups in their community other than the committees initiated by NGOs.

Across rural Bangladesh, Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) have implemented group lending to provide especially poor rural women access to credit and thereby offer economic opportunities. A committee is a savings and credit group with usually 4-20 members. Small loans are allocated from these committees collateralized by group accountability rather than tangible assets. A range of NGOs organize these activities in the area and they arrange formal weekly meetings among their members. It has been argued that the model used by Grameen bank and other MFIs, initiating committees where a formal group meet on regularly basis, has led to other benefits for the members beyond economic opportunities. It has been assumed that these committees form social capital through horizontal and vertical networks, establish new norms, and foster a new level of social trust in addition to the collective action of solving the problem of access to capital (Dowla 2005, Larance 2001). However, these characteristics are not attributed the different committees these women participate in. The discussion shows that the members’ specific incentives or purposes of collaboration are access to credit, especially if they fall upon hard times. However, the additional benefits mentioned above are claimed by the women not to be found.

In committees group members meet on weekly basis, in meetings held within the village, organized by an NGO officer or a group leader mostly selected by the NGO. Asked if they are benefited from their membership in these groups additionally to the access to credit, they reply that in most meetings money are collected and economic transactions performed, and there are no additional benefits. In the local committees there are between 10 and 25 female members, they are all from the same village. The members are usually also members of informal networks and meet daily in their neighborhood and had already established trust relations before their involvement in the committee. A participant explains the group membership in a committee below:

*“To enter a committee you have to be familiar or known to the other members and they check the income source of your family, and if the members think it is stable enough you may be included. Newcomers are introduced by someone that is already a member. In some committees, if the newcomer fails to pay, the one recommending her is left with the loan” (A1).*

The participants have not got new contacts in these committees, as the members are villagers they already know and trust. They do not include outsiders as they do not want to take responsibility of people they do not know. Hence, the relations between the members are generally based on bonding between already existing strong relations. Linking and bonding aspects of the committee are few.

The committees prove to include some people and exclude others. Generally, the young participants of the FGDs are members of 2-3 microfinance committees. The participants assert that taking loans are only benefiting those who have some personal savings, they are less vulnerable. The participants claim that the poorest are formally allowed entering by the other members, but they do because they are afraid they will not manage their loans. As they are poor, recovering from a loss is difficult and it makes them vulnerable. They do not have the opportunity to take a risk. Hence, the more vulnerable, elders and the poorest who usually involve with the committee members in informal groups, are excluded. Additionally, the participants argue that Hindus are not members of the committees, because the Hindus themselves do not want to involve in such groups.

If a member's repayment of loans is not managed, the loan taker is collectively pressed and sanctioned by the other members, they have to “sell pans and pots to get the value of the tin” or take loans from neighbors and kin to repay. This affects their status and their reputation. A number of researchers (Folbre 1994, White 1992) have found that while men exhibit more individualistic behavior, they are more engaged in types of formal collaboration than women.

However, the stories provided by the participants demonstrate that involving in the formal committees women are highly individualistic, using one's elbows, and often trampling upon each other.

### 5.1.6 A Unified society

Talking about the relationships within the villages there is consent in that they reside in a good community, and that they feel unified. Only silly conflicts occur such as problems over ducks and chicken running around. There are very good relationships between the inhabitants of the village and neighbors always help each other, especially in a crisis. The participants from group A explained the situation as follows:

*“If a problem exist in my house close neighbors come first to help. Love and affection grow between neighbors, because of this neighbors come running if there is a problem”.* (A1)

They explain that the reason for good relations is of the attitude of the villager and that everyone has a good and polite behavior: If someone falls in a problem everyone comes forward to help. One participant emphasizes values and says that if thought and perception matches there is a good relationship. The participants also point out that people actively interchange goods and services with their neighbors. Many attest to this fact:

*“We interchange money and food, such as rice, chilly and onions” “We interchange information as well, if some do not know the way to the doctor, we explain them or we follow each other. If I have a good relationship to the doctor I would ask him not to charge so much” “We also give loans to neighbors if the neighbor's daughter is to be married”* (A1).

This interchange is intensified during hard times or an emergency, when they provide food and clots for each other as well as providing loans. Some participants relate their experiences and express their comments:

*“If my neighbor faces problems, I will try my best to help them. If the neighbor is ill or her finger is cut I would bring her to the doctor. We always come forward to help each other” “If someone is hurt and cannot do her work, neighbors help by providing their service” “If there is no rice in my neighbor's house, I would give them some of mine and if it is necessary we make available some money”.* (A1)

However, the unity among the villagers is said to be strong, but decreasing. In group B they declare that the unity was better before. They claim that previously there were better relations among villagers and if there were quarrels, the villagers managed to solve quarrels among their selves, while today the chairman is needed to mediate. The participants state that the decreasing unity is because today people think more about only securing their own maintenance. *“Due to money, it is increasing. Everything is about money nowadays”* (B1). They explain that, decreased agricultural productivity, dependency on the market with

skyrocketing prices of food, and lack of employment have caused them living with tension and always worrying about what they will eat and the management of money. One participant provides her insights, thus:

*“Before, there were so much fruits in our gardens and in the forest. There were fruits on the trees and so many fellow fruits also under the three that there were swarms of flies. Now, there are no fruits found on the ground. People are standing under the three to wait for the fruits to ripe. Before, neighbors gave each other fruits. Now, there are neither fruits to give nor a good relationship to nitrate. Such good relationships are not found now due to increase of wealth and the perceptions that have changed accordingly. Increasing of wealth is decreasing relationships. This is because the increasing wealth takes time and this time is taken from the time that before was spent on relationships. Now, neighbors steal fruits from each other, while before, when people always provided fruits for their neighbor, stealing was not necessary”. (B2)*

The participants observe that today the women involve in different IGAs that require effective use of time, while before women were gossiping while they were working. They declare that before women also had leisure time, which they used for sewing *cata* combined or separately, however: *“Now, women do not have leisure time and they do not sew cata” (B2)*.

The participants claim that unity among women is decreasing due to factors of increased demands on their livelihoods. How the women describe the networks in the village indicate that their networks are much shaped by a variety of environmental factors including culture, market and economy. In the literature it is often assumed that women reveal strong relational and altruistic behavior due to their role and responsibility for reproduction (Folbre 1994, Sharma 1980, White, 1992), and that they are not much motivated by selfish individualism (Molyneux 2002). Bhavnani et al. (2003) argues that the productive and reproductive roles of women cannot and should not be separated. The participants do not separate these roles while arguing for the decreasing unity. They rather emphasize that the IGA is in intimate relationship with the work done inside the home. In their activities in informal networks there is no dichotomy between “altruism”, working for the common good, versus “selfishness”, participation for personal benefit, but they stress that increased demands on their livelihoods decreases their participation.

## 5.2 Bridging

Bridging social capital comprises relatively more distant ties and relations of respect and mutuality between people who are more or less dissimilar (Woolcock 1998, Narayan 2002). These bridging relations include bridging between groups or communities, and bridging to organizations and institutions. These mechanisms strengthen links and understanding between



groups and other actors and organizations. Bridging ties with people from different networks can provide access to opportunities and create opening for participation (Bebbington 1997). Bridging networks that connect diverse individuals sustain a sense of generalized trust, reciprocity and solidarity (Uslaner 2002, Miyata et al. 2008). Bridging is thus important to increase understanding and solidarity between groups in society.

### 5.2.1 Inter class networks

In the villages there is a class divide between those considered *rich* and those considered to be *poor*. The rich are landowners who are involved with sharecropping and tenure ship arrangements or aquaculture based on shrimps or fish production. These are seen as richer than the rest, and to have a lot of power in the community. The participants express that their informal networks do not include the richer people in their village and that there are clear power relations between the rich and the poor in the village.

The relationships between the rich and the poor may be seen as a patron-client. The local elite may be seen as barriers to development through the control of land and tenancy relationships. They capture external resources flowing into the village for use in pursuit of their own interests and by the construction of patronage networks for personal gain. Bode (2004) claims that the practices of the elite construct systematic barriers which prevent marginalized groups from participating in democratic processes and gaining access to public resources. The participants argue in similar veins that these rich people occupy political and governmental positions of authority or at least have the power to influence people in such positions. Illustrating for this is the example of big fish farms occupying common ponds and rivers, while the protests from the commons are not heard by the people in authority of sanctioning them. The participants explain the power of these patrons by saying: “*Boro lock der pichone onek lok take*”. This may be translated to: Behind big people, there are a lot of people and support.

A range of recent studies state that agricultural changes and new technology has benefitted sections of the poor and has made them less dependent on the rich (Westergaard and Hossain 2005). Hossain (2006) observes a change in the local power structure and the dependency of the poor on the power structure. He observes that villagers are more mobile and gets more opportunities through non-farm work. Thus, he claims they become less dependent on land and the anti poor land-based patron client relationship of the past, has been broken down. Now, the elite in the power structure values reputation and pro-poor policies and the sources

of patronage are now diversified opening up opportunities for the poor to change patronage (ibid). Makita (2007) even detects that the Bangladeshi agrarian society has gradually experienced a collapse of traditional patron-client relationships and ties.

The picture provided through the FGDs supports the view that the patron-client relationship is dynamic and changing, but there are reasons to argue that it has not collapsed. The participants stories of patron-client relationships between rich fish owners and small peasant farmers and political patronage (see Chapter 6) continues to fit into the traditional patron client system of big power inequalities that has long characterized the Bangladesh country side and continuous to do so.

### **5.2.2 Inter religious networks between Muslims and Hindus**

The participants say that the relationship between Hindus and Muslims are good. Their networks and links of mutual reciprocity do interact and cross, however mostly they remain separate. This is because there are some limitations in their relationships based on religious beliefs not manageable to compromise, and also because of suspicion and unequal power relations between the groups. However, there are said to be no conflicts between them as they adjust to each other's habits. For example, Hindus and Muslim do generally perform prayers at sunset every evening. Asked if there had been any challenges regarding praying at the same time they say that the Hindus have stopped using their instruments, because they were asked to by the Muslims. It disturbed their concentration. Now, Hindus take their prayers after the Muslims. They utter that the Hindus say that they do not have any problem with doing it later, but this might be an indicator of the power relation between the two religious groups.

Johansson-Stenman et al. (2005) recently conducted a study on trust and religion in rural Bangladesh using survey questions and a standard trust experiment. They investigate the effect of social distance on trust and trustworthiness both within and between Muslims and Hindus. In the trust experiment based on fractions sent or returned they found no significant evidence that religious allegiance affects the level of trust or trustworthiness. They state that it may reflect that social distance with regard to religious belief does not matter for trust and trustworthiness, or that it matters only to a small degree. However, the survey data provides a very different picture. The responses to the survey questions indicated noteworthy effect of the social distance between Hindus and Muslims. They found that Hindus, the minority, trust other peoples less in general. Hindus trust other Hindus less than Muslims trust other

Muslims, and Hindus trust Muslims more than Muslims trust Hindus. This distance between Hindus and Muslim seems to be similar in this context.

Muslim participants say they do have good relations to the Hindus. They explain that Hindus are good and do no harm. They do not have quarrels with the Hindu families nearby. However, they claim that Hindus do not trust Muslims. The Muslim participants assert that Hindus may ask the Muslims for help in a crisis, but when the problem is not there Hindus will say that the Muslims are only to harm them. They argue that the Hindus always blame the Muslims because Hindus feel sorry for themselves. The Muslim women explain that the background for the hesitations from the Hindus in trusting Muslims is because of the current political situation. Traditionally Muslims have supported the political party, BNP, and Hindus have been seen to be sympathizing with their opponents, Awami league. After last election, many Hindus were treated badly as they were seen to be in opposition. The political situation in the country has been tense for a long time. The participant explains that if the leader in power is from BNP, the Muslims are so powerful that the Hindus lay low. If Awami League is in charge, they come forward again and get new strengths. And then, they would always help their Muslim neighbors. Following this, it might be a link to Alesina and Ferrara (2002) who conducted an empirical analysis using individual level data drawn from US localities. They found that belonging to a minority, which is often a group that has historically been discriminated against, or a recent history of traumatic experiences is associated with having low trust.

### 5.2.3 Inter community networks between villages

The participants observe that relations to their neighboring villages are generally good and there are no problems. Especially, in village B the participants go to the neighboring village frequently. The actual picture suggests good relations as indicated by these comments:

*“We collect water there without problem. We use the market and health facilities. We have to go to the school ones in a while for talks with the teachers to be informed about our children, or leave their children. On sports-day the parents are always invited to watch sports activities by their children. Then adults from the three villages meet. We chat and gossip”. (B2)*

Social events such as the sports day build relations between people from the different villages. They also highlight that some have relatives staying in the neighboring village, and sometimes their children are married to someone in the neighboring village. Religious gatherings and celebrations are also mentioned to bridge across village networks. Such events play an important role in the women's lives, promoting hospitality and interaction, and a sense of well-being.

**5.2.4 Networks to urban or abroad living residents**

The participants were asked whether they have relatives or friends you trust in other areas or abroad. Most did not have any relatives or acquaintances abroad. However, a couple has a cousin working abroad. When these cousins visit, they give money and clothes according to need of their relatives. One has a son-in-law in Greece. If he knows about his mother's illness he may provide money. Yet another say she has relatives abroad, but they do not help her in any way. Though, many have relatives in the nearby bigger towns. Brothers, sons in law or brothers in law living in urban areas may be of help in a crisis or after need. They may also give gifts for festivals. Additionally, they may be of financial or administrator help to purchase medicines, furniture or to registering a child in high school in town. The villagers inform them if there is a problem over mobile phone. If there is a problem they will help. The urban may also check on the villagers to know what their condition is. Not related acquaintances are uncommon. However one participant has a close female friend, whom she trusts in a neighbor town. She is more than a sister to her and she always gives support and strength, both mentally and moneywise, according to the participant.

**5.2.5 Bridging to organizations**

NGO health workers come to the villages regularly, however these health workers are not much trusted and their services less valued.

As mentioned before, linking and bonding aspects of the committees are few. The committees are neither affective in building bonds among different local groups or bridges with external actors, nor facilitating links to institutions nor inter-institutional forums through which the members of committee could pursue their concerns. Committees are part of a larger structure of a NGO or a MFI. The link from the committee to the NGO goes through the officer that collects the money directly or through the committee leader. In such, the NGO officers are a bridging aspect of the committees and have obtained a special status in the community. They are often males, who are accepted by both the women and their family to interact weekly with the women. Several Muslim women demonstrated that the officers were highly trusted mostly because they would lend them money for installments or cover up for missing payment. However, the participants reveal that they have no functional links or decision-making power towards the NGOs who have initiated the committees, through the officer.

### 5.2.6 Bridging to institutions

In village A, a local, private doctor is coming to the villages if called upon. They do not need to leave the village and he is an important trusted link for the villagers and prove a safety option as they might get treatment on credit.

Generally, all the participants emphasize that mothers are very conscious about the teachings of their children in the school. In group B, they tell that mothers go to the school regularly to get information about the educational conditions of their children and the teachers may come to their houses to inform about children's performance and behavior. The teachers of the schools are trusted, because of their good behavior and because they are very conscious about the children. Teachers have obtained an important social role, thus:

*"The school teachers may help us in taking decisions and they may also help in times of crisis with moral support and advice". (B3)*

Today, they are very satisfied with the services of the school and pleased with the teachers. However, it has not always been so. The participants are explaining some important changes in the educational services in the village:

*"Before, teachers in primary school entered the classroom and said "read". Then he went to sleep in the corner. After a while the behavior of the teachers improved and they were sitting, in upright position, on a chair and demanding activities. Now, they are standing in the classroom. They take active part in the classroom, walking in-between the pupils assisting them". (B1)*

Asked for the background of the change, the villagers were pointing to conscious parents, awareness among the teachers and governmental effort. *"Now, no teacher can go to sleep, as there would be protests"*, a woman notes. The relations to the parents are keys to the change:

*"The behavior of the teachers is good as their behavior is checked by the parents. If they misbehave we will go there and ask why. This makes a pressure for the teachers to follow up the students. If the students are absent from classes, teachers come to the house and inquire about the students". (B1)*

For a long time social capital and parental participation in school activities have been seen as a key determinant of educational quality (Coleman 1988). Coletta and Perkins 1995 suggest that the involvement of parents in school may improve teacher attendance, morale and effort. In contrast, Gugerty and Kremer's (2002) recent study from Kenya did not find a significant effect of parental participation in school projects and meetings on teachers' effort. Learning from the insights provided by the participants in this study, it might be assumed that in this area the bridging relations and two way communication between teachers and parents has given betterment in the teachers' performance.

### 5.3 Linking

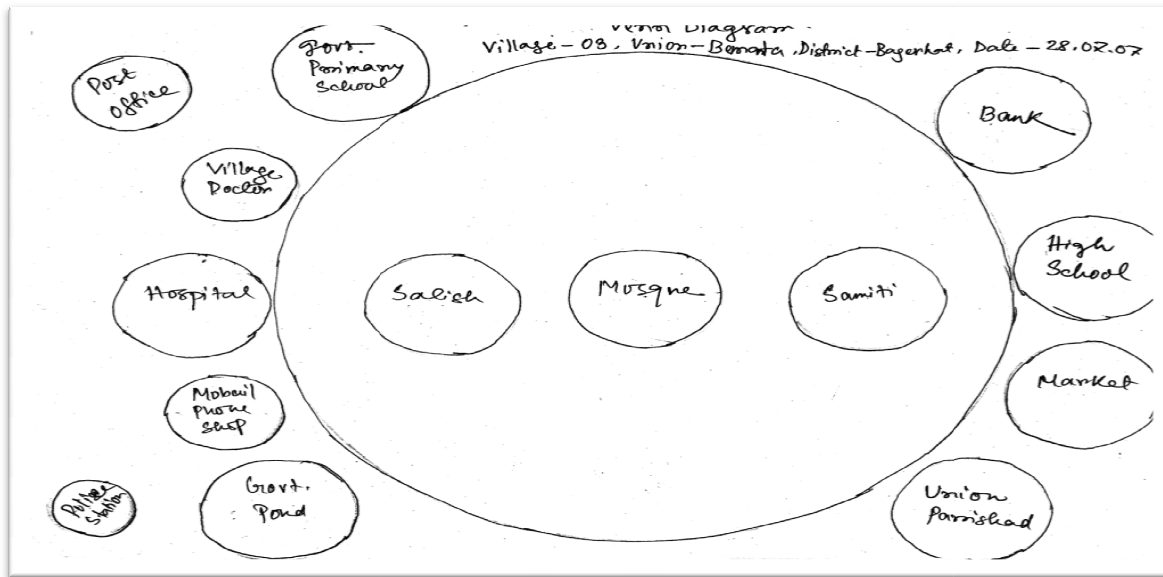
Linking social capital involves social relations based on norms of respect and networks of trusting relationships to unlike people in dissimilar situations, such as those who are in authority, which might be used to garner resources or power (Woolcock 1999). Linking is interactions across authority gradients in society and links to institutions and systems that can help people and communities to gain leverage and resources. Such engagement with socially heterogeneous others nurtures generalized trust (Uslaner 2002). Linking between people of authority or institutions and the people, could empower people to be able to solve their problems and participate in the processes of society. Resources are often controlled by institutions in society that make decisions on the allocation of these resources. The extents to which these institutions allow equitable distribution of resources depend on policies, programs, plans, budgets, and the mandates of the institutions. These could be amended and accessible through the participation of the people in the decision making. Linking between the commons and the institutions is thus crucial in order to inform the decision-makers of the real situation and problems, which their resource-allocation decisions should address. It might be argued that vertical ties between citizens and institutions of power might not only make people feel they can do something about arising issues and be part of civil society but also it might increase their chances of securing promotion of resources in their neighborhoods.

#### 5.3.1 Trust in strangers.

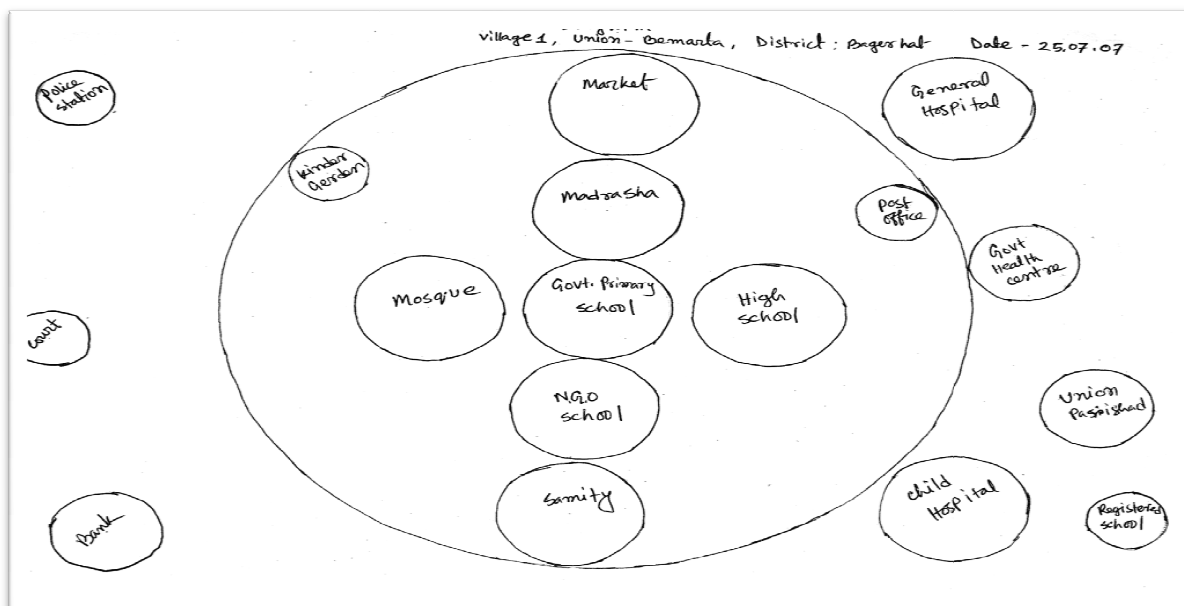
Many investigations on trust investigate whether people believe that most people can be trusted. It is commonly investigated through putting the question, “Generally speaking, do you believe that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?” This is supposed to express faith in strangers. In this investigation such a hypothetical question was seen useless by the participants. They do not trust men outside their kin. If they meet women they would only trust them after repeated confirmations of their “good behavior” and intentions. Hence, they do not trust people they do not know until otherwise are confirmed.

#### 5.3.2 Linking to institutions and services

Describing the institutions and services, the participants discussed access to institutions and their services and what trust they held in them to either assist them or at least do them no harm. Making Venn-diagrams through PLA exercises, institutions were ranked in most, less and least trusted.



PLA drawing 1. Venn-diagram, Group A



PLA drawing 2. Venn-diagram, Group B

***Most trusted and accessible***

Mosques form an important feature of Muslim society and culture. Foremost, the mosque affords opportunity to offer prayers, one of the fundamental pillars of the Islamic faith. Furthermore, it is a vital contribution to the maintenance of Islamic tradition and social identity. All the Muslim participants emphasized the importance of the mosque, indicated below by the remarks by a number of them:

*“We believe in Allah, and the mosque is the home of Allah, for this it is the most important” (A3) “It contains our religious feelings and our husbands and male children go there every Friday to pray. So, we trust it the most” (B3) “The imam also helps in times of crisis he gives us moral support and advice”. (A3)*

The mosque as an institution is highly trusted in itself even though the female participants generally have no access. However, two women in group B who know the reading of the Holy Quran provide lessons for adult women in their village. They are employed by the mosque, and have a bridging relationship to the institution they value. All the participants tell that among their duties in the society Mosque maintenance is an obligation they put as important.

The discussions clearly showed that education of children is valued high by the women and both governmental and non-governmental schools are much trusted in group A, much because of the bonding links the women have obtained with the teachers. The social bonds the women have to the school are strong and to ways. They point to their bonding to teachers as the reason for the betterment of the quality in service provided. Additional to the formal education, many trust and send their children to part time, religious education organized by the mosque.

In the villages there are some people the participants consider as “village leaders”. These “village leaders” seems to be different in the various villages. In village A the older, respected or educated “intelligent” people of the village are the village leaders. In this village the village leaders organize a local village justice, marked *Salis* in the diagram, if any quarrels occur in the village. This *Salis* is ranked very important in village A. However, in village B the leaders of the village are the rich people in the village or those with occupations that imply power. The villagers explain that the village leaders are not trusted as they only support on the basis of wealth and power: *“People of the village do not say against them, because of fear for their children. They might be abused or killed by the leaders or their families” (B1).*

Committees (*Somity* in the diagram) are trusted by the women for secure and regulated access to credit. The function of and trust in committees is expressed in a few comments below:

*“In case of a crisis when no one can help us, the committee will provide money”.*  
*“Through the committee we get money access and thereby opportunities that we did not have before”. “We trust the committees, because we involve in them all year around”. (B3)*

Asked what they use the money for most say they take the loan when they are in a financial trouble and the neighbors refuse to lend them. Additional use is portrayed below:

*“From the committees we get loans and thereby we involve in various business or we give the money to our husband to help him in his business”. “A daughter’s marriage requires a lot of*



*money, and this is only possible to access if you are a committee member”, “Building a tin shed house requires a loan”. “Some take loans from committees and loan it to others with high interest”. (B1)*

The market shows to be a place for exchange of both merchandise and information. While, the women of village B go to the market accompanied by a male relative, few of the women from village A have access to the market due to the code of conduct for female behavior that limits their activity space.

### ***Less trusted and accessible***

The health services provided are clearly accessible and trusted after economic capital. The free services provided by the government are less trusted than the more costly private services. Those who poses money has access to better services than provided locally if needed. There are also a vast number of NGO health clinics in the villages, which within participants hold surprisingly little trust. Group B mostly use the government provided health service, while villagers from village A prefer the local doctor in their village who they have a bonding relation to.

NGOs are surprisingly ranked to be less trusted, taken the variety of the services offered. However, the women claim that they do not provide the services they would like to have. While the women would like to have training on IGA and employment opportunities, the NGOs provide only insurance and microloans. Many organizations are not offering decision-making power to its “beneficiaries”, or additional capacity building services. NGO health clinics are not trusted at all, even though there are many in the area. It is argued that among the NGOs Brac is less trusted because it is a foreign run organization. This is surprising given that Brac is a national NGO, reckoned to have great impact and trustworthiness both nationally and internationally.

Local governmental linkages are claimed to be less trusted and accessible but still used by some. The participants declare that corruption is widespread, accountability low and irregularities usual. Especially, irregularities in the distribution of relief affect the poorest and most marginal. The elite groups are the persons in power or at least controls the people in power. This affects their trust in the institutions. Most participants vote in the local election, but argue that the elections are so permeated of corruption and cheating, that their votes do not count. Only a few of the women are political active, meaning publicly supporting a male candidate for elections. There are three elected female members in the UP supposed to be the representatives of the women in the union. Nevertheless, the participants state that these

women serve only symbolic roles and do not have actual political voice, role or power. They only sign the papers that are acquired of them to sign to please the national government policy of women's participation. Hence, women's voices are not heard, their opinions not consulted and their participation not guaranteed. The participants relate to the local government differently. Group A does not like the acts of the Union Parishad (UP) or the Shalis and they want to solve the village's problems with in the village by the village people. They do not trust or involve in any governmental officers. They say the relationship is not good and they never demand anything of political leaders and do not get any benefit from them. Group B relies upon the services provided by the government. They claim that the local government always is on the rich and powerful side and feel they always lose in the end. However, they do not have any other option. The general assumption seems to be that the Union Parishad helps people not on the basis of marginality or vulnerability but rather on according to relations:

*"Those with a recognized face, those that have good relations to the UP and some political supporters get help from the UP". (B2)*

The general assumption seems to be that everyone may go to the UP office and thus have access, but people are treated unequally. Most were also pointing towards corruption in the local government, indicated by the remarks by a participant:

*"Before, meat was sent from Saudi Arabia to the poor for our religious celebrations. They still send it, but we do not see it or get any".*

*"If any help comes, the rich people take the large portion". (B2)*

*"Poor people get the help openly, while the rich people get it secretly. The poor bring back the rice they are given from the VGF card on a van. Everyone see it. They need the help and deserve it. The rich do it secretly and no one can identify them". (B2)*

Asked about trust in politicians the participants say that they generally have no trust in political leaders or the chairman. They exhibit that the politicians are biased and only concern about the richer people. However, in contrast to the initial opinions of the groups the conversations that followed tell that they approach the member, chairman and even the MP if they are in a serious crisis. They distinguish between "good" and "bad" elected members. A good member may be approached for access to services or resources and if there is a quarrel in a marriage, the good member may be called upon to mediate. The following statement shows that if "good" members have an important function and are trusted in the village:

*"The member helped me once. I left my husband's house, after a quarrel. I gave him a divorce, and moved into the member's house. But after two years, I wanted to go back to him. The member took initiative to solve the problem. So, we married again". (B3)*

In case of any serious quarrel or problem in village B the villagers call for justice through the UP organized Shalis. The Shalis is the local arbitration in the rural area and it usually involves disagreements over dowry, divorce, repression of women and children, land issues and cases of theft. Each party to a dispute should get a chance to present his or her side of the issue, and the members of the Shalis suggests a solution. The results may be settlement and awareness building, mediation and resolution of the problem, or collective beating of a violent person. The participants stress that villagers have no contribution in the selection of a member to the Shalis. UP members, rich and powerful people of the village select the members and they only select among themselves. There are no female members in the Shalis. The participants argue that they may only get a case mediated if they have a good relation to some of the members in the Shalis. A participant explains the effect as follows:

*“My daughter fell in problems in her husband’s house. I went to the rich (village leader). He advised me to arrange a Shalis. Then I went to the Chair and requested him to arrange the Shalis. But the rich person said to the Chair, “why do you support this poor woman? She and her family are not good people”, so there were never any Shalis taking place. If I had begged judgment from the Chair, I would not have got my case anyway as I have no important figure behind me” (B3).*

The facilitator followed up the discussion by “What do you do then when you do not get proper judgment?”, and the participants answered as following:

*“We tolerate it all, by not saying anything. If we raise our voice, we may lose our house or earth [life]”. “There was a man who fell in conflict with his powerful neighbor for quarreling over a piece of land. The poor went to the UP and the police. But he did not get proper judgment. He now has to be satisfied with the portion of land the neighbor left for him”. “The powerful persons that enjoy these properties may also take your property, so you will not face them”. “It is better to live in peace and not involve in conflicts” (B3).*

They say that no one take initiative to improve these conditions. Asked if the Imam say anything or might help, they say no. Asked if they could take a combined initiative to protest the answer was:

*“No, in these times, if one comes forward, then the other stays behind or retreat. If I go with you they may kill me. For this, I retreat” (B3).*

The participants assert that Kin based solidarities sometimes link individuals involved in Shalis, government or services and may provide access to positions of authority and privilege. However, this may also easily turn into or be perceived as favoritism or corruption.

### ***Least accessible, trusted and least used***

Least accessible, trusted and least used are the kindergarten and register schools because of high entry costs. The participants steer clear of the police. They explain that the police are not

to be trusted by anyone and the villagers avoid involving in the police, if possible. The police use violence, and *Rimand*, a method of interrogation which includes mental and physical torture, is normal procedure in any police station. Bribes are necessary for any involvement with the police, and the people who possess money for bribes will be favored. A participant explains the procedures as follows:

*“We do not use the services of the police. We do not like them or trust them, because we have to spend a lot of money involving in the police. We have to bribe them to file the case, and more to arrest the person. For bribes, the police may arrest anyone, also a total innocent. The arrested person is then beaten, and has to pay money not to be beaten anymore. He also has to pay to get out. If the opponent to my problem is a powerful person, he will easily bribe them more than I might. The police will then seal their mouths. They do not say anything in favor of the poor”.*

The court is not reckoned to be a service provided ordinary people. The participants say they never go there and wish they never will. A participant explains the reason why thus:

*“The court is not for us. We do not possess land. People who use the court have quarrels over land”.* (A3)

## **5.4 The imbalance of bonding, bridging and linking**

The picture provided above shows that different types of bonding, bridging and linking relationships provide particular types of support. From this follows that the overall balance of different forms of social capital is important. Looking at both FGDs it may seem like there is a lot of bonding relations based on particularized trust. There are some bridging relations also based on particular trust, while there are fewer bridging relations based on generalized trust. When it comes to linking relationships, there seems to be a general distrust. However, looking at the different FGDs there is a clear pattern of difference between them. Hence, it is possible to highlight clear differences concerning the two women's social networks.

### **5.4.1 Group A**

Within the group discussion, group A strongly emphasized the unity of their group, the solidarity and reciprocity between its members. They showed strong unity and particularized trust within the group and demonstrated that there was a strong unity in the village in general and especially solidarity and trust between neighbors. On the other hand, group A were a bit suspicious concerning the researchers as they distrusted strangers and had less generalized trust. Two of the women stopped coming to the session because the foreign researcher was perceived as a Christian. The group also showed high distrust towards males in general and towards local institutions and government. The women in this group never went to the market and they went less frequently to the school. A local village council of elders is governing in

the village and they are respected and trusted. They may be mediating in a dispute and the women say they are mostly satisfied with the decisions made. The participants would not interact with the UP, the Shalis or the MP. They were not political active and would not like to involve with politicians, because they did not trust them. The following discussion in the group illustrates their view:

*“We do not involve in political rallies or meetings. We try to avoid it as it only makes quarrels and conflicts”. “We do not believe in politics. We believe in whatever suits our bellies, and politics do not (Rajniti noi, amra pet netite bishwas kori/komi)” “If we say anything about one party, it always causes a quarrel from the opposite. So, we avoid everything that has to do with politics”. “If you say anything about politics, it might be used against you”. (A3)*

Consequently, it might be assumed that within this group there are strong bonding, weak bridging and nearly no linking, which may be referred to as the thickening of social capital (Bebbington and Perreault 1999). For the women in group A strong networks also included stronger social control of their behaviors. It was evident that the normative proscriptions on women’s behavior and the emphasis on *good behavior* were relatively stronger in this group and partly produced within the social networks they were linked to. The intimate *gossip* among the women may be seen to create such normative pressure to conform to prevailing codes of conduct. The women exerted moral social pressure on each other, for example, in not crossing the restrictions of *purdah* or in maintaining their family. The relations of solidarity and trust thereby bring obligations and claims. This may be seen in light of Silvey and Elmhirst (2003) who based on their research among women argues that the stronger the networks the greater normative pressure to conform to prevailing notions of appropriate female behavior in terms of chastity. Group A tells strong stories of sanctioning *bad behaviour*, following strong codes of conduct and social control. The participants note that sanctions are done by avoiding people or boycotting them over periods. In this period they do not speak to each other and do not go to each other’s houses or occasions. It is complicated as the person sanctioned is supposed to be sanctioned by the whole family and a person/family who sanctions another does not want to go to any other occasion where the opponent is present. The reasons for sanctions are many. There might have been a quarrel between two persons or someone have assaulted or dishonored another. For example, someone might tell a friends secret and thereby get sanctioned. Bad behavior and lack of values is another reason for sanctions. The below statement shows that sanctions may occur if a person is too self-conscious:

*“We sanction a cruel woman. She think that she is too god and so beautiful. She always wants to prove that she is self-sufficient and do not need anyone. She thinks that she is better than everyone else and she does not want to be with anyone else” (A2).*

The picture provided by the women shows that social trust, strong ties and norms that exist within a particular group or community that allows group members to act together and support each other, also serve as a basis for excluding others who are not in the group. Strong social capital within a group may thereby lead to both distrust and discrimination of those outside the group (Portes and Landholt 1996). The participants clearly say *“there are people in the village that we do not like”* and who thereby are excluded from participation. They say that a *bad character* is the main reason for excluding. They would exclude a woman who does not respect anyone, or with a behavior that makes quarrels with others. They emphasize that previously, the whole society excluded these women and there were more of exclusion.

One may claim that there is a dual nature of social capital, as inclusionary and exclusionary in which the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are in constant flux (ibid). The women express that they exclude those of *bad behavior* and include those of *good behavior*. Inclusion gives individuals' sense of belonging to the group, with a sense of solidarity and equality with the other members. Conversely, alienation from, and a sense of inequality in, social relations and networks will lead to social exclusion and hinder the development of social capital.

#### **5.4.2 Group B**

Within the group discussion, members of group B were highlighting that they were a bit afraid of the other FGD members spreading the information they shared in the group to other villagers. They were afraid that sensitive issues could be exaggerated by the other members when gossiping after the session. They argued people were not afraid to gossiping or exaggerate their answers. They showed weak unity and relatively less particularized trust while also indicating less social control and sanctioning within the group. Moreover, group B welcomed the research team with great respect and solidarity and did not fear the researcher would spread their words. They showed trust towards strangers and generalized trust.

In this group many of the women went to the neighbouring road market, and they had regular interaction with the school teachers. They did not trust the village leaders and said there were big power differences them-in-between, but they interacted with them if they had to. The bridging aspects were clear and so were the linking relationships. In this group there were several political active women. One of the women went with a group from house to house and informed people about a candidate for the last UP election. Both participants and their family

members had participated in political rallies. One of the participants is vigorous and devoted a part of the Member of Parliament's (MP) local group. She has participated in both political meetings and rallies. She trusts the MP and as a fieldworker for the MP she may go to his house. As she knows the MP, she says she also has a good relation to the chairman: *"He has a good behavior with me"*. Hence, through her links to the MP she also has a good relation to other powerful figures. The other women say they would go to the member if they had a concern, then the UP, and lastly the MP. They cannot jump to the MP, even though the other woman may. While arguing that they do not trust the MP they picture how they actively use the relations they have:

*"When my brother was ill, we went to the house of the chairman and the member where we got some financial support, but not sufficient for his treatment. They also signed a paper that we took to show the MP. In the MP's house first we met silence, and then he said: Am I sitting here with money for you? He would not help us. Other villagers collected money for his treatment, but now he is not alive. The chairman and the member helped us, but the MP did not". (B3)*

In this group there was less strong bonding, and much more of bridging and linking relationships. The picture provided correspond to Putnam's (1993) arguments that it is expected that people who engage in diverse networks may show higher levels of generalized trust, than those who has less diverse networks. For the women in group B their networks also included social control of their behaviors. There were normative proscriptions on women's behavior, emphasis on *good behavior*, stories of sanctioning and exclusion. However, this pressure and social control showed to be relatively weaker in this group, and the social networks they were linked to proved to be more open and tolerant compared to group A.

## **5.5 Summing up and the way forward**

This chapter has confirmed that in the social dynamics of everyday life of the women, there are constraining and enabling elements encountered in specific social processes, and there are cultural and normative repertoires embedded within these processes. The discussions reflected in this chapter display that women see their social networks and relationships as key elements in these processes. Networks contain within them power processes while at the same time constituting power that may be used by the individual members. Hence, the picture provided by the women illustrates that women perceive themselves to have a better capacity to command scarce resources by virtue of their membership in networks or broader social structures.

Moreover, the picture illustrates that bonding relationships of trust, reciprocity and cooperative behavior are generally strong within kinship ties and the close neighborhood where the participants interact on a daily basis. The participants reflect a high trust towards their kin and close neighbors and are dependent upon the informal groups they participate in. From these bonding relationships they say they get access to, and more or less command over, resources such as solidarity, information, assistance, reciprocity, collaboration, opportunities to socialize, the psychological benefit of group belonging, personal status and access to household resources. However, they also demonstrate that to different degrees networks form aspirations and meanings of their members. The normative codes of the networks are used in evaluations of situations, helping to form opinions and consolidate social commitments. To be part of and maintain their membership in the bonding networks they have to follow the code, or contract, of maintaining good behavior and the norms agreed by the group. This might create infringed freedoms of the individual, strong social control and normative constraints (Portes and Landholt 1996). Those who do not follow the code may face sanctions and even exclusion.

Bridging ties and relations are built on respect and mutuality and it may also foster that same. The discussions show that rather than relations, there are divergence between social groups based on class and religious belonging. The picture provided of bridging relations to teachers show that bridging to institutions may improve the services of the institutions. However, these ties are less common and few institutions and organizations facilitate for such bridging. Linking ties and relations are rarer among the women in general. It might be because of gendered inequalities; but, the participants argue that it is due to other axes of differences, such as general distrust in the institutions due to corruption and irregularities.

Compeering two FGDs, there were clear indications of difference between the groups. Participants from group A base their relations on bonding, particular trust, the cohesion of small closed groups, strong in-group networking and “thick social capital”. On the other hand, group B shows less particularized trust to each other and less unity in their community, but they demonstrate both bridging and linking ties as well as generalized trust. Group A showed high unity and strong social control they also had limited mobility and were more reluctant to challenge established practices, while group B showed less unity and less social control they also had more mobility and were more dedicated to challenge established practices. These remarks raised the issue of the relationship between social capital and bargaining culture power and gender relations.



## **6 Bargaining with social capital of women**

Actors deal, individually or collectively, in different ways with problematic situations and accommodate themselves to other's interests and design for living (Long 1989). Following an actor oriented approach, women are seen as active participants who process information and are capable of strategizing in their dealings with various actors. Women find space for manoeuvre in the situations they face and manipulate resources and constraints (Villarreal 1992, Long 1992). In this room for maneuver, actors will bargain things they need from other actors and things other actors need from them. Women's ability to eventually change rules, norms, perceptions and endowments in a gender progressive direction would depend on their bargaining power (Agarwal 2000).

This chapter aims to investigate how social capital influences the bargaining power of the women under study. The chapter compares the bargaining approach of the women of group A and B. It will argue that individuals can mobilize personal networks to improve their bargaining power and that the social capital of women may positively influence a person's power to affect household decisions, as well as issues concerning them in the community. I claim that it is not the unity of the group, but the openness of the group and that it is not the amount of social capital, but the portfolio of bonding, bridging and linking social capital that influences whether women individually and collectively may use their room for maneuvering and their bargaining power to address, bargaining, negotiating and resist issues of cultural practices, power and gender relations, or to sustain, maintain or enrol to obedience and consent.

### **6.1 Women's agency and space for manoeuvre**

Long (1992: 22) states that in "general terms the notion of agency attributes to the individual actor the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life, even under the most extreme forms of coercion". While focusing on agency, Long (1992) also recognises the structural constraints within which agents operate and he stresses that it is important to emphasize that agency is differently constituted and that exercise of agency result in great variation (ibid.). Structural, cultural, economic and political considerations, life experiences and particular everyday circumstances are relevant to individual agency. In such, Archer (2000) emphasizes the effects of culture and the difficulties of acting beyond the roles

in which society places us, as constraining for individuals, whilst Douglas (1987) expands on the many ways in which social institutions and the accepted ways of thinking and doing, invisibly or visibly, as constraining for individuals. However, crucially, for Long (1992) agency is not simply comprised of reflexive action, but strongly constituted by the non-reflexive nature of much everyday practice; where there are both purposive acts and intended effects as well as unintended effects of individual actions that might generate change (Clever 2007). The last chapter displayed that in the social dynamics of everyday life of the women, there are constraining and enabling elements encountered in specific social processes, and there are cultural and normative repertoires embedded within these processes. In this context the concept of women's agency refer to the ways women deal with and manipulate these constraining and enabling elements encountered in the specific social processes they face in their context. Agency also affects the "management of interpersonal relations and the kinds of control that actors can pursue *vis-à-vis* each other" (Long 1992:26). When it comes to gender, differential conceptions of power, culture, and knowledge may shape women's responses and strategies and shape the responses and strategies of others such as husbands or network relations. Women are not merely overcome by gendered inequalities: they interpret, bend, and negotiate it through their agency. Discourses and power form structuring elements, but in their multiplicity lays the room for maneuver for actors to renegotiate them.

Long uses the "the room for maneuver" as a concept to illustrate how actors and agents find space for manoeuvre within a given situation they face. It is a room wherein individuals are capable of developing effective strategies to manipulate, negotiate, resist or sustain social structures, resources and constrains. Long argues that whether and how actors see themselves as able to maneuver is contingent to struggles they see themselves capable of battling over. For the actor to maneuver or resist, there has to be some consent, some negotiation, some power and some capacity for action over a long period or for flicker moments (ibid).

### **6.1.1 The room for maneuver and bargaining power**

In the room where actors maneuver, deal with and manipulate the constraining and enabling elements they encounter in their context, they bargain and negotiate, sustain and maintain, constitute and contest, challenge and resist. The outcome that will emerge from this bargaining depends on the relative bargaining power of the actors involved in the negotiation (Agarwal 2001). Agarwal purposes a set of factors influencing the bargaining power of women in the household and in the wider community.

According to Agarwal (1997), intra-household interaction is characterized as containing elements of both cooperation and conflict. She argues that “household members cooperate insofar as cooperative arrangements make each of them better-off than noncooperation” (ibid: 9). She explains that within the household, some cooperative outcomes are more favorable to each party than others, and there are underlying conflicts between those cooperating. Intra-familial bargaining is complex and often revolves around issues such as more equitable sharing of benefits or tasks, or for greater freedom to participate publicly (Agarwal 2001). Agarwal outlines four types of factors that are likely to impinge on a woman’s bargaining power in the household: “Her personal endowments and attributes (educational level, whether or not she earns an income, property ownership, age, marital status, etc.); her ability to draw upon extra-household support from friends, relatives, women's groups in the village, gender-progressive NGOs outside the village, and the State; social norms (which might define who gets what, or who does what within the household); and social perceptions (say about deservedness)” (ibid:19). Inequalities among family members in respect of these factors would place some members in a weaker bargaining position relative to others.

The community is also an important arena of bargaining. In the community, implicit or explicit bargaining can occur over the rules and norms governing (Agarwal 2001). Women's bargaining power within the community would depend on a complex set of factors. Agarwal (ibid.) highlights whether women function as a group or as individuals and the cohesiveness and strength of the group which within they operate, as one such important factor. She uses the example of an individual woman who breaks seclusion norms (Agarwal 1994). Alone she could easily be penalized by aspersions on her character. However, if a group of women decide to transgress such norms, reprisals are less possible. Agarwal (2001) claims that the bargaining power of a group is likely to be higher the larger and more unified it is, the more political weight it has, the greater its command over economic resources, the more support from NGOs, the media, academics, international donors, the State, the local government, and the more the local governmental officials are influenced by gender-progressive norms and perceptions.

This thesis focuses on the household and the community as two arenas of bargaining, while there are others arenas such as bargaining with the State, which also could be taken into account. The different arenas for bargaining may be seen as interactive. Each arena embody pulls and pressures that may either converge or reinforce happenings, or even move in contradictory directions and provide spaces for countervailing resistances, in other arenas. For

instance, in Bangladesh the State passes laws, defines policies, and promotes programs that favor women's interests, while the local communities within the country often resist the implementation of these measures.

### 6.1.2 The bargaining power of the participants

Searching for visible manifestations of women's power in the picture provided by the participants, they are hard to find. Rather there are small flashes of command peeking out from behind, for flickering moments of different forms and consistencies (see also Villarreal 1992). Drawing on Foucauldian ideas, power is conceptualized as multi-locational. It is "normalized" in the networks of everyday life and regulates social practices and relationships. Looking at the factors Agarwal (2001) points out to determine or influence women's bargaining power in the household, and the community there are several similarities between the women of the FGDs.

Looking at *personal endowments and attributes* of the women under study, they may be represented as wives, aged between 18 and 60. Their formal educational level is poor as they are illiterate. They grew up in a time when female education was undervalued. However, they have vast skills and knowledge from informal education provided through their families. They do not legally own any land, but usually have access to common resources in the area. Some engage in income generating activities confined around their homes, providing a side income to the livelihood. It is accepted that they engage in IGA as long as they manage to accomplish their household tasks. Those who take the risk, also have access to credit through committees.

The *social norms* which define who gets what, or who does what within the household are mainly based on traditional culture and patriarchal practices. It might be assumed that these cultural practices facilitate for a better outcome for the men and the elders in the household, who by these practices have the relative legitimized bargaining power in the household compared to other members. The gender division of labour is another callous norm. Women bear the main responsibility of "housework" and childcare. The work done by the women is undervalued work both by the women themselves and by other household members. There are high work burdens and expectations of juggling many tasks. This seriously affects women's time and ability to maintain social networks as well as IGA. There are allotted gender roles, not only with regard to their families, but also to their different networks. The female code of conduct is formed by the context of purdah, the patriarchal culture, and as highlighted in the previous chapter, the expectations and normative pressure from their kin and close bonding

networks. These codes of conduct emphasise “good behaviour” and place strictures on their behaviour, visibility and mobility. The female activity space, or the spatial behaviour of the women, is formed by the context of purdah, the patriarchal culture and the spatial organization of rural settlements. The activity space is based on strict female seclusion norms and subtle gendering of physical space. In difference to men, rural women seldom have the socially sanctioned opportunity to convene in common spaces beyond the confines of their homestead village (Larance 2001). This restricts their mobility as well as extra-familiar social ties and opportunities for exposure beyond the boundaries of their close neighbourhood (ibid). It limits their capacity to acquire information and takes away their access to labor markets, or the possibility to reside in a house without a male guardian. These pervasive norms impinge directly on their autonomy and ability to participate effectively in the community. Norms are sometimes internalized by the women, imposed on them by threat of gossip, reprimand, sanctions, exclusions and even violence, or they are negotiated, manipulated and resisted.

*Social perceptions* about needs, contributions, and other determinants of deservedness are influenced by the cultural practices mentioned above. Prevailing perceptions held by the women themselves and others regard women to lack abilities and women’s contributions to the household and the society less valued relative to men. In turn, this impinges on women’s self-esteem, self-confidence and emotional satisfaction.

Women’s *abilities to draw upon extra-household support* from kin, neighbors, women's groups, NGOs, and governmental services were pictured in last chapter. It became evident that the women all use, build and value social capital, however; they have very different portfolios of social capital when it came to bonding, bridging and linking relations. This influences their access to resources, services and support systems. It is necessary to investigate how this affects their bargaining power in the household and in the community.

## **6.2 The bargaining approach of group A**

The last chapter pictured the social capital of the women of group A to be based on strong bonding relations, and less bridging and linking relations. The picture provided by the participants of group A showed that there were strong normative constraints put upon the women and sanctioning, reprimands and even exclusion of those who did not follow the codes of conduct.

### 6.3 Bargaining in the household

#### 6.3.1 Maneuvering agency to get bargaining power within the existing system

Talking about behavior, norms and values in everyday interaction the participants express that they see a decline in the *good behavior* of people in generally and women especially. The participants express that when their mothers were children, people were polite and respected each other and they got respect back. They were honest, they would not manipulate when talking, and their norms and values were high. Today, they find this politeness and respect missing, and norms and values decrease day by day. They say it is because the parents are not conscious about it when the children are growing up. The children do not learn important norms and values. *“No one respects or encourage good”*. Before, the young always respected the elders. If you had done bad deeds, the parents refused to see you anymore. Now, it is different. You forgive your bad child’s activities. By watching bad movies the norms and respect in the young generation is decreasing. They are “fast and modern”. They are only open for new things and beneficial things, not good behavior. They watch bad programs and bad foreign DVDs. By seeing the dramas and the films the girls know how to dream about leaving their life for something better. Also the education of girls is to blame for the decreasing values. A participant wants to express her view, thus:

*“Educated girls that go to college very often fall in love. When the girls get the opportunity to go to college, they get more time for love than education. Now, these girls have an affair to their mobile phone. At all times, they are gossiping with their boyfriend in the mobile phone. Girls sneak out and meet boys on the bridge. It is possible to see a single boy and a single girl meeting at the bridge” (A3).*

They contrast this immoral behavior by telling that in their grandmother’s time, women were not allowed to go outside and they strictly maintained *Purdah*. Even if they were starving they kept inside and did not involve in anything. By this behavior, women got more respect and thereby they were mentally happier. The security was good and they were less afraid.

*“Our grandmothers were so conscious about their religious Purdah. Their activities in the house should not even be heard as it could create an attraction for outside males. My grandmother prepared coconut milk, breaking the nut and digging out the meat, so secretly that not a sound left the house. She never kept her wet clothes outside to dry, as it might bring attraction. I admire her for her dignity”. (A2)*

*“My grandfather was the imam of the mosque. All the women in his house had to remain inside under Purdah. They would rather starve than go out. It was a prestigious matter not to behave dishonorable”. (A2)*

In their mother’s period, the women also respected the *Purdah*. They sometimes left the house but used black robes and masks to cover more of their face. But, they seldom left their

neighborhood. Now, women leave the house for different activities. They involve in everything from breaking bricks to NGO work. They might bring income to the house, but they are less respected. Participants note that one should of course go out of the house and work if ones family starves, but women were more respected when they kept strict to the *Purdah*. They say that when leaving the house they themselves always try to maintain the religious norms as strictly as they can do, with *Purdah*. If they leave to the near village localities with a guardian, they use the new designed *Burkha* and some cover their face. They claim that the *Burkha* gives them freedom to move without meeting disrespect from the society.

Despite some romanticism in older women's narratives in recalling the cultures of their childhood, their perceptions were, nevertheless, grounded in specific temporal contexts. Hence, a generational deficit can be overdrawn; there were contemporaneous examples of what they saw as downward leveling norms. These women define and interpret their status within the outlines of culture and do not conceive their everyday life negatively (see also Tiengtrakul 2006). The women are shown celebrating the very structures, forces and cultural codes of conducts that for an outsider seem to constrain them. They want to keep them and even reinforce them by upholding the restrictive gender code while actively sanctioning those who act otherwise. They do not see the need to create cultural alternatives and signify continuity and adherence to the code of conduct. Instead of referring to IGA they refer to domestic housework and its accomplishments to provide power and agency. They fulfill their social roles and see the existing cultural practice as empowering women. In the household they do not have big quarrels between the spouses, because they try to adjust to the situation and accept the rules of the head of the household. Sometimes they subordinate their own activities and concerns to those of their husbands, or accept roles for themselves.

*"If I complain when my husband brings only one kilo rice to the house and we need more, then it is my fault, because I know I will, definitely, be beaten by my husband".*

*"The wife has some choice. If my husband earns 50 taka and he gives 20 taka to the household, but hides the rest. Polite, I will say "we will manage". Rude, I will shout "what will I do with such amount". If I follow the last option, I know there will be quarrels". (A2)*

The women themselves extend their visibility and silence to describe inner strength. They portray a harmless conventional image of themselves, which they find necessary in order to create space for other projects. They elude a form of agency used to promote and allow them a sense of freedom, where the freedom is orchestrated within the confines of a constrictive

code of conduct. While keeping within tradition, their agency presents them with a voice. However, the structure of their world may be unchanging. They argue that rather than resisting they accept. In this it follows that they sustain and maintain. They do not want to resist in the household as they want to sustain their good behavior and they fear the sanctioning of their families and also the other women in their neighborhood. The women tell a lot of stories about bad deeds of women not maintaining their roles in the household and how these women are sanctioned by the group. Women become their own worst enemies and the worst enemies of other women in their effort to please each other, their families and husbands. It may be seen as a kind of psychology servitude to the group with a constant desire and anxiety to please the group.

There are some statements implying domestic violence by husbands as a reaction to both provocative and un-provocative behavior of wives, as usual in both villages. The women tell that them getting beaten, is a natural response from the husbands side. They are explaining that they are beaten with love and that the women themselves are mostly to blame for always causing the fights. The participants explain that the husband, who beats the wife more, also loves the wife more. Most showed deep affection towards their husbands indicated by the remarks by a number of participants:

*“If my husband beat me, he will also call me cordially, with love and affection. But if you beat me, you will not call me in this way. He earns only for us and brings all his income to my family”.*

*“You are the women full of juice, and there is no way for your husband without loving you. When he comes home I hug him with warmth and deep love, and for this he loves me very much”. (A2)*

The women often think they are to blame themselves as they often make conflict over things they are expected to accept or handle. The women, in this group, engage in a kind of self-flagellation; blaming themselves for domestic violence and the immanently and intrinsically inconsistent nature of women (Vatuk 2006). This may be an effect of patriarchal practices and power but may also be an effect of the strong women-group norms. The facilitator asks if there are any initiatives taken against the beatings in the household by the women or villages. However, the women say it is not possible to take initiative to stop it as the one who tries would also be attacked:

*“We do not do anything because involvement makes a fire”. “If I intervene as my neighbor is beaten, I may also be the victim”.(A2)*



They say they would not say anything to the man who beats. They would not show how much they dislike it or show how they “hate him”. But they would go to the wife, comfort her and advice her not to do the same thing again. Rather than sanctioning males they see it as the woman’s fault if she is beaten.

Whereas they do not see many conflicts between husband and wife, they explain that quarrels within the family occur between mothers in law and daughters in law. Many of the families are extensive with 2 brothers and 2 wives living together, with the parents in law. Even if they do not live under the same roof, they reside in the area and interact daily. A mother in law tends to keep a strong tie around her daughters in law and wants to have a saying in everything from her cooking to how she raises her children. Sometimes she may come with accusations and allegations such as: *“There is too little rice left. What have you done with it? You sold it, didn’t you not?”* The actual picture suggests that the mother in law sometimes try to initiate quarrels between the husband and wife, as indicated by these comments:

*“Suppose there is a quarrel between the mother in law and her daughter in law. When the husband comes home after work, the mother in law uses to say bad words about the daughter in law. She does this aiming to influence him to make a quarrel with his wife. If he then does so and his wife responses with arguments a big conflict may occur”.* (A2)

A mother in law argues that the elders are less sympathetic to the younger, because of the decreasing values of daughters in law; not obeying the elders:

*“Before, daughters in law worked hard in the household. They never made quarrels with the others in the house. But my daughter in law is not working hard and the relations to my daughters or the sisters in law are not so good. Before, a daughter in law feared the mother in law. She would never serve herself food before the mother in law. It was the father and the mother in law that chose the wife for their son so the daughter in law always behaved very polite. Today, the son chooses his wife and the daughters in law are often impolite to their in-laws”.* (A3)

By the threat of losing position and outcomes within the household by a fear of change in the patriarchal practices, mothers in law try to control daughters in law. This argument by a mother in law corresponds to Kandiyoti (1988) who has described the mother –daughter in law relation in the patriarchal family as a circular relation, where the mother in law wants to maintain the position of power that she has finally obtained in the household, after years being the daughter in-law herself. In this way the older women wants to maintain the patriarchal practices, which the younger women daily negotiates. Nevertheless, it is not only the mothers in law, but also the other women in this group show compliance and argue for an adaption to the maintain to sustain the conditions of their everyday life. They even actively resist changes they see threatening the existing system.

The last reason for quarrels in the family the participants name “unsocial activities”. This is a concept they use for their husband’s gambling, watching adult movies, addictions to alcohol or drugs (fensidel, gaza), smoking and “drinking tea all day long”. The wives are very upset about their husband’s activities. The gambling takes place in someone’s house, in bus stands, in gardens, or in some fallow lands. The women explain the gambling by “greediness to increase the income”, and some has experienced that their ornaments are sold in funding their husband’s gambling. The men are working outside the house and come home in the evening. A normal daily salary for them is from 150 to 250 taka. Less than two thirds of their income is spent on the family. The rest “disappears” into “unsocial activities”.

*“I try to give him politely advice but he does not pay attention”. “I cannot protest strongly against it. I am a needy person. If I raise my voice, it will affect my children”.*

Women are expected to accept that their husbands use 1/3 of his income on “unsocial activities” and give the husband the quota of power. This is in comply with the village or the networks clearly expressed norms in terms of respecting the authority of her husband, so that he, in turn, could be respected by his neighbors, kin and networks.

## **6.4 Bargaining in the community**

### **6.4.1 Strong unity, no problems and lack of solutions**

The women of group A declare that they function as a group, with great cohesiveness and strength. The group which within they operate is based on strong bonding ties and as last chapter illustrated, strong norms of conformity. The group would penalize an individual woman’s act breaking seclusion norms by aspersions on her character. Even though they emphasize strong unity, they would not collectively transgress such norms, because they do not see it in their interest. Rather they will maintain the norms or even strengthen them as they see it is beneficial to the balance of society. The women do not have many bridging and linking relationships to draw capacity from and consequently they have arguably less bargaining power in community issues.

### **6.4.2 The female code of conduct and female activity space**

Generally, the spatial behaviour of rural women has been expanding over the last decades (Paul 1992). This can also be seen in the stories provided by the participant in this group. Paul (1992) refers to women in rural areas daily activities being confined to a *bari*, or close by neighbourhood and that movement of women beyond their neighbourhood is rarely required and is not permitted unless she wears a *Burkha*. This is similar to the patterns from the

participants' pictures. However, accompanied by a man in their kin they have a much broader activity space. The women persist on using their *Burkha*. They say they choose it themselves to maintain their respect and chastity, and they claim that they get greater agency by wearing it. The poorest of the women may leave their neighbourhood for paid work; these are showed pity by the others for their bad fortune having to expose themselves in public arenas. The rest of the women do their income generating activities within their *bari*, and sell their products in the market through male relatives. They would never go to the market and when they go to their children's school, they are accompanied by a related male. This limited participation in the community and the lack of opportunity to obtain social capital in these arenas, influence their bargaining power.

### **6.4.3 Strong unity and few conflicts**

The participants argue that in their community, there is great unity and cohesion. Participants state that social cohesion comes from good behavior and strong relations of love, affection, reciprocity, trust and sociality in the village. Organization of occasions and festivals may be an indicator of unity in the community. The participants explain that occasions are arranged by the villagers themselves and most have a religious program and a feast where everyone eat together. The villagers themselves provide money or food, and it is all prepared by some villagers. Everyone contributes after the resources they have got.

The participants also claim that there are few conflicts, only small quarrels and few problems in their village. The village has a village council mediating if there are potential conflicts coming to the surface. The council is respected and trusted for arbitration. Berkman and Kwachi (2000) link social cohesion to the presence of strong social bonds and the absence of latent conflicts. The social bonds should be measured by levels of trust and reciprocity, the large quantity of associations that bridge social divisions and the presence of institutions of conflict management. Looking at social cohesion in this village it is evident that there are strong social bonds between the villagers (bonding). But at the same time there are much social control and exclusion that closes the society. Community relations to the government (linking) are lacking, much because a corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy. Polarization within and between communities of religious belonging and great disparities in political participation and wealth inequality between poorer and richer groups, are apparent. These last factors are all associated with poor social cohesion and are intervening variables with latent conflicts (ibid). So why are there no conflicts to be highlighted? The women say it is because they do not want to make quarrels. They do not want to create trouble. Those who make quarrels are

less respected in the community and a source for negative gossip. This may indicate that the strong social control that prevails in the society limit latent conflicts to come to the surface. When asked in the PLA exercise, problem ranking, about the problems they faces in the community they first say: “*We do not have any problems*” (*Konno shomosja, nei*).

#### **6.4.4 Strong bonds of traditional patronage**

The participants demonstrate that they have strong bonds of traditional patronage to the richer segments of the rural population. The “rich” are called upon when they fall in economic trouble, and in return, they would never argue against the activities of the rich. The participants claim that there is a decrease in unity between poor and rich and they find it negative. To exemplify their strong bonds of patronage and the unequal power relations between the groups, it is possible to look to their explanations of their relations to the richer owners of the fish farms.

The participants assert that by the introduction of aquaculture farming new types of social challenges and issues concerning water began to arise in their village. The aquaculture farming damages the soil and the crops, and thereby jeopardizes the food security of local people. Arriving in the Union in the rainy season, the effects of water logging is immediately and clearly visible. People’s houses are imprisoned by water, roads are flooded and the soil swamped. A participant illustratively put, it: “*There is now water under my bed*” (A2)

The damage is mainly attributed poor construction and inadequate maintenance of the flood protecting bank and sluice gates along the big river next to the Union. Especially, when the tide is coming up the river in the afternoon, the water floods the village. The problem is further worsened by farmers living near the river breaking embankments at high tide to channel water into their fish farms. The problem is compound because the brackish water reaches the village areas uncontrolled and stagnates in paddy fields or compounds. Originally, there were some public channels leading a way through which the water could pass back to the river. But the fish farms in the area have started using these channels for fish and shrimp cultivation and created barriers, so the water cannot pass and cause no drainage of water and no exit back into the river. The brackish water is locked inside the village and can remain there for long periods and the saline water decreases the fertility of the land. Inundated by brackish water, ponds become saline, rice fields have been destroyed, trees are dying and the villagers cannot produce vegetables. The participants explain that it affects everything:

*“We can’t even use our ovens, to prepare our food, as the ovens are built by mud and they are too wet to be fired up”.*

The rivers and the natural ponds in the coastal areas are in legal terms the property of the government. Local residents have been using these resources as common property for fishing, collecting water, washing and various daily income activities. Some of these areas have been captured by shrimp farmers more or less approved by local government. This has been at the expense of local peasant smallholders and villagers by effectively wiping out local access to traditional and supplementary means of livelihood. The following comments from the FGD reflect their general picture:

*“Before, we had one common water channel that everyone could use and also catch fish in. This channel is now used privately, for fish farming. We cannot catch fish from the channel anymore as it is now closed and not fellow property. Before, we could catch this fish and sell it in the market, now there are no opportunities”.*

*“Some rich persons took these channels for private use. They bribed the governmental officials so now they can do what they will”.*

*“If we collect fish from the old channel, the owners of the farms hunt us, saying we stole their fish. This causes quarrels and conflicts and the local fishermen are often beaten by the farmers as they have fished in the channel or are suspected for having been fishing there”.*

*“Today only those who have a fish farm have fish. We, the others, buy fish from the market. But we only assess sea fish. The local fish, the Hilsha, is not available in the market like before. The local fish is exported. Before, there were a lot of fish came to the rivers and the channels. Now, the fish is gone due to overfishing or closed channels” (A2)*

The government started on building more secure river banks, but the work has stopped and the village is not protected. There is an ongoing process building a barrier in the river so that the water will not flow in to the village, and some of the channels that were illegally privatized have just been opened. The participants say that, *“the government has broken the barriers once in one channel, but not again or in the rest”*. Asked if they take any initiative to complain to the fish farms, they say that they are close to those who own the farms and they get benefits from the farms so they do not want to lose the benefits. Rather, they have accepted water logging as a part of their lives. They also emphasize that the power of the fish farm owners are too big to argue against, as these comments show:

*“The owners of the fish farms are in power, and the poor who do not have a fish farm cannot say anything as they are the minority. So we do not take initiative”*

*”We cannot do anything and we are afraid. The representatives and the chairman are in the hands of the rich fish farmers. That is why no collective action is taken. We are afraid that this information may fall into their hands so how can we take action?”*

*“As we are poor, we cannot do anything about this. No one comes forward to help the poor. While there are many people supporting the rich people (boro lok der pichhone, aane lok take)”. (A2)*

**6.4.5 No solutions to lacking services**

In the area there are a lot of water resources. There are water channels and ponds and shallow tube wells everywhere. However, as the brackish water from the main rivers has been brought into the area, the water from these sources is generally highly saline. Arsenic contamination of the ground water is common and has further worsened the situation regarding drinking water. The government has sent teams to identify the arsenic contaminated tube wells and marked them with red symbols. They have tested water in all the tube wells of the Union and raised community awareness about the health problems related to chronic arsenic exposure from drinking water. However, providing alternative safe water option for the exposed population is a different issue. There are some grave differences in the distribution of fresh water in the villages. Sources for pure water are few and because of much use they are malfunctioning from time to time. Some sweet water, deep tube wells or sweet drinking water reservoirs are provided, but only a couple in every village.

In the village where members of group A reside, there is only one functioning deep tube well, and one currently dysfunctional. The participants residing in this village has to collect water in the neighboring village, causing long lines of waiting water collectors there. The male members of the household have to collect the water, because it is dishonorable for the women to go to the other village. If there is no male in the family, the women go to the other village after dark, or they hire someone to go for them. If they employ anyone, they have to pay 4 taka per pot of water.

Establishing a deep tube well in a village requires a payment between 5000 to 10000 taka from the villagers to the UP council. If the money is provided the local government is to cover the rest of the money needed for the installment and provide the facilitation. The participants inform that the villagers have collected the money needed and paid the UP council. They promised the facility, however; this was one year ago and nothing has yet happened. They are still waiting for the allotment from the government. The villagers do have the unity to collect the money needed; however, they do not have the bargaining power required to get the facility from the local government, because lack of linking social capital.

## 6.5 The bargaining approach of group B

The last chapter pictured the social capital of the women of group B to be based on bonding relations, as well as bridging and linking relations. Group B shows relatively less particularized trust to each other and less unity in their community, however, they show both bridging and linking ties as well as generalized trust. The picture provided by the participants of group B showed that there were less strong normative constraints put upon the women.

## 6.6 Bargaining in the household

### 6.6.1 Maneuvering agency to get bargaining power through changing the system

The participants of group B start by telling that they feel that norms and values are eroding and people's behavior is not as good as it was before. They also explicate that this is because of lacking parental discipline, immoral cultural influences and because of increased importance of education of girls. First, it seemed like the participants were idealizing the former situation. However, asked if this was a positive or negative change, they answered that it was positive. They do not want to idealize the past; they do seem to want and need to come to terms with it. These women are also shown, to a certain degree, to celebrate the very structures, forces and cultural codes of conduct that constrain them. Nevertheless, their narratives show that they challenge them:

*“Before, women obeyed and respected their husbands very much. Women did not talk loudly and they listened to the advices of the husbands. They always respected the father in law and feared the elders. They always respected and covered in front of their older brothers in law. Females were always afraid and always tried to live together with other women in extended families. The daughters in law obeyed everything the mother in law told.*

*This is now changing to a certain degree. At this time, women are independent. They do not bother about these norms and they do not obey anyone. Now, they talk loud and do not listen to anyone. Currently, women do not like to live in extended families but wish to remain in nuclear families and today's girls do not tolerate everything from their mother in law and sometimes does not respect the mother in law. Nowadays, the daughter in law might not respect her mothers in law. The daughter in law tries to get a better position than the mother in law and she fights for her position. If the mother in law utters anything, the daughter in law tries to beat her argument”. (B2)*

The stories of the participants showed a high degree of intra-household bargaining and agency of women. The women bargain the traditional and cultural specific practices of patriarchy, about positions, roles, decision-making and priorities of the household. A participant made these assertions about the conflict in her house:

*” Conflicts in my house, starts as small disagreements that have a tendency to grow into large conflicts. Through the disagreements the matter grows and arguments that follow may be rude and hurting. Sometimes my husband search for issues to make a quarrel. And he turns small*

*into large. He may come home and say; why have you not prepared lunch yet? And you are here, spending time outside! He indicates that I should stay home and not go around with the neighbors". (B2)*

The participants observe that they are very dependent upon their husbands, especially for hard cash. Because of inflation and high prices in the market and that this time of the year gives less income, it is hard to get the ends to meet in the household. The participants note that economical distress is the main cause for quarrels and conflict in the house hold. Also these women choose battles worth fighting for. They show active resistance to some components of the conditions of their everyday life, while other times they compromise. Mostly they negotiate actively and take the consequences, however often they rather remain silent. This is illustrated in the below statements:

*"When we are unable to get something we need or want from our husbands, like a sari, then we may make quarrels or we just turn sad". (B2)*

The husband and the wife prioritize differently in the household. The importance of children's education and the need of school material and tutoring expenses are issues that the women have to argue for to be prioritized, thus:

*"When my son is not attentive in his education, I always tell his father. It often happens. One day he became angry. Fed up of my concerns and also with the boy, he beat all the members of the family. Because of this I left for my parent's house. However, I could not stay long as I missed my family too much. I went back to my husband's house after one hour". (B2)*

They display resistance, but it is rarely an overt, collective undertaking. Nevertheless, individual acts of subtle defiance, muffled voices of opposition and mobilization of whatever forces that is available to counter others. A participant shows how she uses IGA, consciously or unconsciously, to achieve more space within her household:

*"I sell eggs when there are extra demands in my family for example when my son needs a pen. It is not wise to ask the father, so I sell eggs when my family needs me to". (B3)*

They demonstrate that it is necessary to pick your battles and that the compliance in one case may open up for battles elsewhere or crucial decision-making moments where one can get ones point across or win arguments This kind of accommodation and strategic compliance feature their everyday interaction. They challenge the social and culturally defined role of women and the expectations towards them and thereby establishing agency. Their actions are enacted openly or secretly.

The below conversation in one group indicate that mostly people do not sanction domestic violence, but sometimes they may intervene:



*“Sometimes I go there, but it results in me being beaten to”. “Some listen to their neighbors, some do not”. “Sometimes some protections are done by the villagers”. “All the husbands are not of the same manner”. “It is not always the fault of the man, also sometimes the women are the one to blame”. “I would advise the women to fly away when she knows he is to beat, and to come back when he is in a better mood. That is the only solution to the problem”. (B1)*

When it comes to “unsocial activities” women have tried to stop the activities of their husbands, however they face great challenges as the following remarks indicate:

*“Gambling is illegal but these activities are not possible to stop. One does not inform the police. The police would only have beaten the gamblers. We informed the UP representatives too many times. They said that the people may do whatever they like. One time they played in my house. I used the spice stone to threaten them out”. (B3)*

There are encounters of multiple alternatives of using agency confronting challenges in everyday life as well as structural codes of conducts. Their stories show that they react contradictory to culturally defined goals and show critical faculties and a will to demand changes.

The participants explain that the family is in crisis after the education of the girls. They allege that the educated girl protests and wants to have her saying in matters. Due to education the girls get conscious of their rights and *“their unrest increases”*. Educated women ask questions and are argumentative. They are independent and have awareness. They leave their houses and go outside as they wish. The older participant says that an educated woman does not like to obey her mother or father in law and sometimes she does not take properly care of her mothers in law. The suppression by the mother in law is met by the girl’s arguments and her formulation of her rights. However, through education the girls get conscious about both “good and bad rights”. She will leave her husband if she does not like him. Sometimes it happens that an educated woman has an affair. Educated women may leave their husband and children and may make a new family in another house. One of the participants puts a closing remark stating that not all female educated are bad: *“Education makes people great. Education should not be the only to blame for these bad choices. It is the actual mentality of women forming their behavior”*, she argues.

While the women see the bargaining and change of values and norms within and outside the household as necessary there are also practices that are negative in the change. Clearly there is a gap in meaning and value between the elder participants and the young in the group. An older woman says independent is good, but not all the time and in all matters. Sometimes it is necessary, but not always. Today’s girls are too much independent. Education gives the girl unrest and no patience. Too much independence of the younger women is not acceptable and

unmoral behaviour is to be sanctioned. They have a clear perception of what is accepted and what is not. This form part of a process of negotiation in which they attempt to change some components of their conditions while at the same time striving to maintain certain elements as they are. The younger women say that they want the present situation of change, resistance and conflict. They argue that they face challenges today by the situation, but they hope it will not be challenging their children. They actively change the situation and have a long perspective in that they see it as a necessary fight to better the situation for their children.

The participants claim that the cause of their strengthened bargaining power is because of education of women that has created awareness and transformed the values of behaviour to include women's rights as a new value. Often the younger educated women lead the "battle", which is legitimized by these new perceptions and values. Female education has introduced a new value that has become social and legal legitimated. In this way changing norms and perceptions has given legitimacy of their claims. The responses to their act of defiance by their networks and relations is not sanctioning as their networks are open to find alternatives to cultural barriers and work towards breaking tradition. The picture provided by the women illustrates how local traditions can evolve and change in response to the events of everyday life but also how policy emphasizing female education is finally showing results.

## **6.7 Bargaining in the community**

### **6.7.1 Many solutions to diverse problems**

The women of this village declare that they function as a group, however with less cohesiveness and strength. As the last chapter illustrated, the group which within they operate is based on bonding ties with less norms of conformity. The group would not penalize an individual woman's act breaking seclusion norms; they would rather encourage it and stand together with her. The women would collectively transgress such norms, because they do see it in their interest. They declare that change is necessary and that it is legitimized by their rights. Additionally to the bonding ties of their group, the women have individually or collectively, a more vertical network with both bridging and linking relationships. The women of this group identified themselves as effectively maneuvering within a more vertical network which arguably may be used for increasing their bargaining power and benefits in certain situations.

### **6.7.2 Code of conduct and activity space**

The women of village B have an expanded activity space relatively to the women of village A. The women of village B do not usually wear *Burkha*, many of the women frequently visit the close by market and they all travel to the school daily. This shows that the code of conduct and the activity space is in constant change, it is context specific and a negotiable practice. The participants explain that the women themselves are negotiating and bargaining the former and existing expectations that their surroundings hold, and actively change the codes, the activity space as well as the expectations from the context.

There seems to not only be a spatial pattern to their mobility but also a pattern regarding the status of location. The market is not a place where all of the women would go, but they would move without any hesitation to the school in a neighbouring village. This is not primarily because they feel more or less physically threatened by either, but because of the code of conduct accepting the school to be included in their activities. This seems to be a new practice, negotiated and changed by the women themselves as they see a regular interaction with school teachers as crucial for their children's education. If it is so, the women has changed the accepted boundaries of their activity space, so that they may build social capital through their relations to the teachers, and use this social capital to make sure for the quality of their children's education. Their remarks raised the issue of the relationship between women's code of conducts and access to particular arenas.

### **6.7.3 Lack of Unity and many problems**

The women stress that there is a lack of unity in their village. They argue that there is a lack of dynamism among the villagers causing an inability to pull together and exploit their own potential. Looking at unity through how the villagers organize occasions and festivals, the participants assert that there is currently a problem with arranging such programs. Illustratively for the lack of unity, a participant observes:

*“Two villagers, that died recently, always arranged the cultural events. One was a school teacher, another a respectful person. All the events were arranged due to their initiative. There were so many good programs and many were knowledge based cultural activities. Now, no one else take the same initiative”. (B2)*

Asked if there is any organization, group arrangement or meeting arranged by the villagers, the participants say no and express that they are too busy and are short of time because of the current economical challenges they face due to high prices. They also explain that the villagers do not have decision making power thus:

*"When the villagers themselves organize a meeting, it will be of no importance, it will not help anyone and no one will be benefitted. So no one will come to the meeting" (B2)*

They express the villagers lack unity and explain how people worked combined together before. For example they worked on the roads in the village together. If there were no space for the road, someone sacrificed some land for making it. A participant explains:

*"The thought was that if you give some mud, and I give some mud, we will get enough mud. Now, it is the opposite. Nor labor neither land is provided for a much needed road. Everyone is thinking; if you do not give any mud, why should I give any?"(B2)*

In the PLA exercise, problem ranking, they put on display a long list of problems in their village. Small conflicts occur all the time in the neighborhood, but it is mostly solved among the neighbors directly. Small conflicts grow into big when forms of wealth inequality, religious tensions, and polarizations such as disparities in access to linking ties are associated with it. As there is poor social cohesion in the neighborhoods there are also many small conflicts that turns big. Especially, the class based inequalities between small peasant smallholders and rich shrimp farm owners causes a lot of tension in the villages. Before, these tensions were mediated and solved in the village, but increasingly these conflicts have to be mediated in the Shalis. The Shalis is believed to favor the rich, and the villagers believe that their bargaining power is less. Powerful people are involved in the local justice system. They play a vital role in it and many ordinary people think that the verdicts of the Shalis are unfair.

Consequently, they do not take all the fights they would like to, and inequalities between the groups widen and the richer may "do whatever they want". However, they do protest. They said their husbands informed the chairman and the UP about the problems they face because of water logging a long time ago. They got information that the work in the river had started, and that the construction workers were working on the challenges. Regarding the wrong doings of the fish farms no action has been taken on behalf of the UP. The participants claim that the UP only judge and assist on the basic of "seeing the face of the person". A participant notes: "Only, if I had a powerful face, they would favor me". The consensus in the groups accentuate that the rich are supported by many but the poor stand alone. They do have the functional links to the government, but in this case the government is in the hands of the rich, and their voices are not heard.

#### **6.7.4 Negotiating patronage**

As the above mentioned arguments shows, the women of village B is less dependent on the patronage bonds. They do not ask the rich for money and they stress that they are not

trustable. However, their resistance towards patronage practices is limited as they have relatively less bargaining power towards the government compared to the rich. The local elite may be seen as barriers to development through the control of land and their power. All the Union Parishad (UP) members and the chair, including female members, are from or closely linked to the local elite. They capture external resources flowing into the village for use in pursuit of their own interests and by the construction of patronage networks for personal gain. Bode (2004) argues that the practices of the elite construct systematic barriers which prevent marginalized groups from participating in democratic processes and gaining access to public resources.

Nevertheless, the women of village B negotiate and resist these patron-client practices. This may be shown through their stories about how the VGF card is distributed. The Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) Program is a targeted feeding program for the very poorest households organized through the Government of Bangladesh. It aims to reduce the chronic food insecurity of extremely poor households by providing them with rice or wheat each month over an 18 months period (Matin and Hulme 2003). It is evident that the VGF card distribution fits into the patron client system (ibid).

One of the most important roles of the UP, seen by the participants is the allocation of VGF cards. If a person is selected by local elected officials to receive a VGF-card, that person has the right to 30 kg rice a month. However, all groups emphasizes that the actual amount allocated is only 22-25 kg. They note that they do not know where the rest is gone and no one asks about it, in fear of losing their card. However, in this village they told that they had complained to the UP office. The UP office sent employees to monitor the measurements. For a while thereafter they got the actual amount. Nevertheless, now it is back to “normal” again.

The participants observe that there are about 2000 people in her village, and 11 VGF cards. In each group approximately one or two women have been selected within the criteria. Many of the others feel that they should be regarded to receive one. One of those who had the card explained that she had gone to the rich persons and UP members in the village telling about her poverty and out of this she received it. The participants think the poor owns the VGF cards in most cases. However, there are other elements than poor and marginalized deciding the allocation. Those who have good relations with the powerful or with political leaders get the card. In BNP rule only their supporters got the VGF card. In Awami League rule only

their supporters got the VGF card. Those who look beautiful get the card. Some women “bribe” the members, exposing their bodies to get the card.

*“If a woman comes to the member for a VGF card, she gets it if he likes her look or if she wears her sari unconcealed. I am needy and old but I do not get the VGF card as I am not showing my starving belly”.*

*“There is a rule saying that one cannot get the VGF card twice. But I heard that someone had got it for the second time, so I went to try. I got a negative answer. He said: I cannot give the card to a thick person, only to a healthy person. The one who uses lipstick, black the brews, wear the sari in the way that the belly can be seen, that one may get opportunities with him”.*  
(B3)

As the above comment show the rule of not receiving the VGF card twice is not handled as an absolute. One of the women in the group had a VGF card before, and feels the need for it again. She went to the UP office and said that as others are getting it she wanted the same. She got a negative answer, but they said that they would handle her complain and remove the person she referred to as receiving twice from their lists.

### **6.7.5 Solutions to lacking services**

Before there were not enough deep tube wells for water collection in the village, but the villagers managed to collected the 5000 taka necessary among them self and the shops witch use the water source. Providing the money, they got a new tube well from the government. Now, there are five deep water tube wells in the village, which are safe and provide sweet drinking water. If a tube well is not working they collect money among themselves and the shopkeepers for the reparation. The participants say there are no problems anymore when it comes to the distribution of the water.

The women of this village identified themselves as effectively maneuvering within a more vertical network which put them in a more strategic and beneficial position. They manage to make bridging alliances with shopkeepers to be able to collect the money and they have enough links to the government to make their voice heard, so that they themselves may exert enough pressure on service institutions in order that the services are provided. This claim making capacity of the women comes from their bargaining power. They do not have the bargaining power because of the unity or bonding relations in the village or the group, but because they do have functional links within their vertical networks. They identify, find and create their space for maneuver. This is partly made possible by their bonding and linking relations, and it is facilitated by the openness of their networks and less normative pressure to maintain invisible, tolerant and obedient.

## **6.8 Summing up and the way forward**

Relying upon an actor oriented approach, Long's actors are able to resist domination and create 'room for manoeuvre' in their lives. This chapter has shown that the participants of the study create room for maneuver and their agency is about the ability to exert influence to enrol others in one's own project and to choose levels of enrolment in the projects of others (Long 1992). The picture provided shows that they employ their agency in different ways, and I argue that it is among other factors because of their portfolio of social capital. Agarwal (2005) highlights that, subjects, who, shaped by the exercise of power, may enrol themselves in the projects of others, even when these perpetuate their subordination. I claim that the exercise of power is held by not only the patriarch but as much by the networks and strong bonding groups of women.

The women reveal that they celebrate the culture, or their lived experience. However, they choose to sustain or resist the culture depending on how they value change and how their claims are legitimized. Talking about behavior, norms and values in everyday interaction the participants affirm a decline in the "good behavior" of people in general and women especial. While group A argues this is negative group B stresses that it is necessary.

In the household the women from the two villages have relatively similar bargaining power when it comes to personal attributes and endowments, and contextual norms and perceptions while they have different possibilities while they have quite different positions when it comes to their abilities or capacity to draw upon extra-household support through their networks. Women of group A use their bargaining power in different struggles over priorities and concerns, but they do not want to battle the practices of power exercise in their households. While keeping to traditions they get room for maneuver their agency. I believe this may be because the strong in-group norms of women, limiting their will to resist culture, power and gender relations. In village B the women do negotiate and bargain against the practices of power exercise. While resisting cultural practices, they get room for maneuver. They affirm that it is a hard struggle and that they use their bargaining power actively. They also choose battles and often remain passive in struggles over many priorities and concerns while emphasizing struggles they see may challenge norms and culture. I claim this may be because the environment of their women based networks are dynamic and open to legitimize new values and thereby encourage their will to resist culture, power and gender relations. I argue that all women in the study find room for maneuver their agency in the household. They are able to resist domination, and also to dominate others. The different social capital of the

women makes them bargain over different issues. Conformity expectations of strong, closed, bonding networks may sustain culture, gender and power relations while more open and dynamic networks may facilitate for women to use their bargaining power towards social change.

In the community women of the two villages have very different bargaining power. While village A is based on strong bonding networks and strong unity and conformity, the women do seem to maintain culture and tradition and use the room for maneuvering agency they find within the traditional system. They sustain the code of conduct, the female activity space and the patriarchal bonds of mutual support. They do not emphasize problems as they do not want to cause trouble. Even though there is enough unity in the village to collective action and cooperation, they do not get access to all services because there are few vertical bonds based on bridging and linking. On the other hand, women of village B do have more variety of networks. There is less conformity and they claim that there is less unity. This gives less social control and the women usually raise their voices for issues concerning them. They negotiate codes of conduct and it seems like they have extended the female activity space. The culture of patronage limits women's room for manoeuvre agency; however, the practices may be negotiated. Even though the power of the patrons is strong and far reaching, it is possible to manoeuvre agency and use the bargaining power they have. The women of group B involve in more various interactions, negotiations, and open or hidden social struggles. While Agarwal (2001) claims that the bargaining power of a group is likely to be higher the larger and more unified it is, I argue that the openness of the group which one participates in and the portfolio of bonding, bridging and linking relations the group members have are crucial for the bargaining process.



## **7 Re-theorizing social capital for women**

### **7.1 Summary**

#### **7.1.1 Group A**

The women of group A clearly reveal that they have the capability to command some scarce resources by virtue of their membership in strong bonding networks. They demonstrate that both the construction and use of social capital are strongly influenced by cultural practice, power and gender relations. The women bargain in the household and in their communities on daily challenges, but do not consciously bargain cultural practice, gender and power relations in their households or in the community, largely because their strong networks and in-group relations discourage them to do so. Unity and solidarity make this group strong, but because they do not have bridging and linking relations their bargaining power in the community is weakened and this limits their capacity to command resources.

The women express that they take pride in performing the roles their culture assigns them to the best of their ability. More often than not, they accept the legitimacy of the social and cultural system in which they live, and do not want to question the patriarchal or patron-client based values of their society. They try to conform to their society's understood codes of reasonable behavior. They explain that they gain room to maneuver and control their conditions by keeping to tradition. Their agency is not consciously directed at bringing about social change.

Their networks are characterized by relatively more closeness and less distance that regulates and recreates their networks. Closeness is achieved by strengthening ties, accepting responsibilities and the existence of mutual trust, and reciprocity. Sustaining and adapting codes of conduct are emphasized among those who are close, while a woman acting contrary to these values is gossiped about, sanctioned and excluded. These women dis-encourage other women - their sisters, relatives, neighbors and members of their informal networks - to resist or challenge cultural practice, power- and gender relations. Many of them feel it is their duty to maintain customs and principles and encourage other women in their network to sustain their role and female chastity and thereby show adherence to the dominant gender code.

#### **7.1.2 Group B**

The women of group B also clearly demonstrate that they have the capability to command some scarce resources by virtue of their membership in bonding networks even though their

groups and networks are less united. Nevertheless, these women do have a bonding, bridging and linking relations that provide them with the capacity to command scarce resources. They display that both construction and use of social capital is influenced by cultural practice, power and gender relations, even so they seem to be relatively more comfortable strategizing and maneuvering around these.

These women actively bargain in the household and in their communities over daily challenges, and they consciously bargain cultural practice, gender and power relations in the household and in the community, much because their bonding-based network relations encourage them to do so. Their bridging and linking relations increase their bargaining power in the community and in turn this provides them with the capacity to command resources. The women show evidence that they bargain, negotiate and try to gain control over the conditions of their lives by whatever means available. They themselves provide the basis for improving their situations by trying to change their society's approved model for power and gender relationships. They highlight human agency to contest of meanings, power- and gender relationships and to break away from the mainstream. Their agency is consciously directed at bringing about social change by undermining the status quo and the gendered relations of power that are associated with it. By actively bargaining in the household they shake the family hierarchy as well as codes of conduct on female chastity.

Education has led to a new awareness that challenges the status quo in ways that are considered respectable by the women's networks and thereby legitimized. Hence, a respectable critique is emerging to dominant views on the gender code. The new value of women's rights introduced by educating girls, shows that existing cultural constructions can be altered and reshaped. Seemingly static structures allow latitude and offer possibilities for variation. Their network has allowed this new norm and taken it into their group values. Relatively less closeness and more distance characterize, regulate and recreate their networks. Distance is created by cutting ties, less unity and less social control. Motivated by the collective change in norms among the women, they believe their individual actions may contribute to long term changes in cultural expectations for behavior. They feel that their suffering is not wasted if they can save their children from the same pain. They resist customs and principles that are taken for granted and suggest alternatives. They introduce more or less subversive changes and their lessons of bargaining and resistance are shared among those who are close. They inform each other, give relief and courage, present and suggest alternatives among themselves and spread ideas. These women encourage other women to resist or

challenge cultural practice, power- and gender relations. The openness of the women and their networks encourages profound changes.

## **7.2 The Analytical approach revisited**

The illustration of the analytical approach presented in chapter 4 is comprehensive, and one may argue that such an approach loses considerable clarity. However, the figure has enabled the researchers to conceptualize the research in a complex reality and take into account the centrality of women as individuals and agents, bargaining in their households and communities. While the approach centers on women's agency it also takes into account the structural context of women's lives. The structures in the society include social factors (such as class, gender, age and religion), culture (perspectives, practices and products), institutions (such as the political, the economic, the educational etc) and the resources in the community. The illustration of the analytical approach demonstrates how these structures are bargained over. It assumes that there are axes of difference and interaction of inequality in the society. This inequality is often based on bargaining power, discursive hegemonies and social hierarchies, which often favour a few and disadvantage the majority. These are in turn embedded in social institutions which are designed to perpetuate them through control over resources and services. In this way the figure reveals that power and power conflicts exist between and within every band in the circle. It clarifies the relevance of social capital in determining access to, and command over, scarce resources, and visualizes the interconnected processes in which culture, power- and gender relations interplay with social capital. Using the WCD approach as a lens for studying social capital of women gives attention to the cultural and gendered power dynamics of social networks and their surroundings. In such, the analytical approach reveals the ways in which network relationships are themselves sites of struggle, contest, and negotiation.

This thesis argues for a holistic picture of social capital, one that takes into account the interplay of social capital with culture, power and gender relations influencing the social capital of women, one that recognizes the importance of examining these issues in specific contexts, and one that draws the attention to the broader context of difference within social networks, gendered and intergenerational conflicts and hierarchies, inequality and power within social networks.

### **7.3 Lessons learned**

#### **7.3.1 Social capital**

People are connected by a set of social relationships and networks that enable the flow of resources, services, information and values through them. This thesis illustrates some of the many ways in which women's social relations, networks, organizational and institutional connections may provide individuals the capacity, or ability, to command and gather resources when they fall upon hard times, leveraged for access to additional resources and services, or enjoyed for their own sake. All the women of this study clearly express that they can command scarce resources by virtue of their membership networks and social structures.

The picture provided shows that networks are dynamic and constantly shifting, that within social networks complex social relations are forged, and that conflicts and hierarchies exist (Silvery and Elmhirst 2003). These power conflicts and hierarchies may be gendered, intergenerational or along other axes of differences such as class or religious affiliation. Attention to the power dynamics of social networks reveals the ways in which network relationships are themselves sites for struggle, contest, and negotiation (ibid.). The knowledge provided shows how cultural practice, power and gender relations interplay and may affect how women build and use social capital and whether women have the capability to eventually command scarce resources by virtue of their membership in networks. These factors shape the processes through which social capital is generated, distributed or, sometimes, not distributed. Sometimes they may limit the capacity to command resources, while other times the factors are actively negotiated and even resisted.

So what factors limit the capacity then? Cox and Caldwell (2000) argue that "too much" bonding or inward looking social capital may undermine the development and maintenance of bridging and linking ties. The cohesion of small closed groups is secured through dense in-group networking, sharing, enforced group trust, and hostility towards other groups. This may lead to too little 'bridging' in-between groups and strong particularized trust while little generalized trust. This research supports this argument as it indicates that it is not necessarily the amount of social capital but the portfolio of bonding, bridging and linking relations one has or does not have that matters. The women have confirmed that different networks provide distinct advantages and demand particular contributions from its members in different contexts (Westermann, Ashby and Pretty 2005). They further confirm that social relationships are resources in themselves and can facilitate access to other resources, while at the same time they can actively exclude others from resources (Bebbington 1999, 2002). Groups and

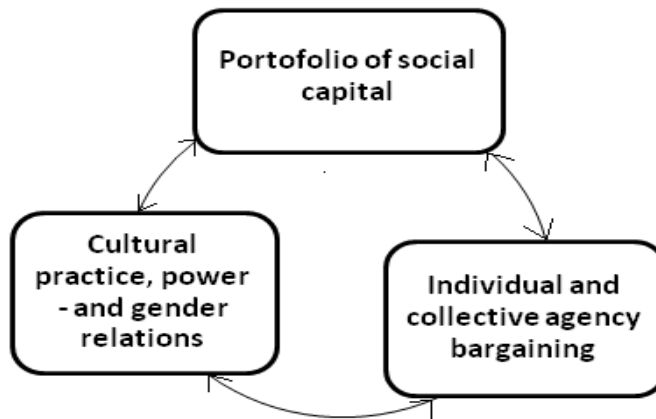
networks based on strong bonding are accompanied by cultural markers (as there is often a shared culture within a group) used to define and reinforce the boundaries of the group (Woolcock 1998). This culture is dynamically reproduced and negotiated. It is potentially beneficial to its members while being relatively closed and potentially prejudicial to the interests of nonmembers. Hence, it includes and excludes at one and the same time (Portes and Landolt 1996). Thus, social capital can have positive or negative effects on the groups and positive and negative effects on the wider society depending on the context.

### **7.3.2 The role of social capital when bargaining cultural practice, gender and power relations.**

People most commonly chooses to operate within the parameters of their culture's codes of conduct, and follow the discursive power and established hegemony without directly challenging it. Women of the study are generally basing their actions and perceptions of freedom on the cultural constructs accepted in their society. The women may appear powerless, in many ways unacknowledged by male actors, but, in striking contrast, appear forceful when they are in positions of command. The picture provided here has drawn attention to ways in which women, even in marginal positions, manage to bargain their circumstances with or without an aim of changing them. This analysis shows how agency and bargaining are used to sustain, reinforce, adapt, resist and challenge symbolic structures of culture, providing a view of multiplicity, ambiguity and power disparities (Tenhunen 2006).

Investigating this ambiguity, I propose a link between social capital and women's bargaining power to negotiate cultural practice, power- and gender relations. By engaging in diverse networks women get more command over situations, both in their household and in the wider community. The picture provided by the participants shows that women are successful at carving out change in their families and neighborhoods if their networks allow them to.

### 7.3.3 A causal relationship?



**Figure 2. Questioning a causal relationship**

Source: Own creation

My goal has been to introduce alternative ways of thinking about social capital and to acknowledge that cultural practice, gender and power relations, in its many forms, interplay with social capital. I propose that social capital in turn may interact with bargaining power in ways other than those hitherto proposed by much of the scholarship on social capital. I argue that for this particular study I may propose a casual relationship between the portfolio of social capital the women have, cultural practice, power- and gender relations, and individual and collective agency bargaining. These elements are multifaceted and they may intervene differently at various points in the causal chain. Their roles and impacts will not be the same in all settings. Nevertheless, this study may indicate that encouraging and facilitating for women's bridging and linking relations, may increase their bargaining power and command over the situations they face.

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# Appendices

## Appendix I. Discussion guide

### Dimension 1: Groups and Networks:

**Social map:** What are the key resources assets and services available in the in the community and how is access to these distributed?

1. Communication and infrastructure
2. Resources and assets such as water sources, ponds, land, property, forest
3. Services; governmental and non governmental institutions, market, judicial facilities
4. Cultural, recreational, religious institutions

Discussion: Provided service, access, trust, satisfaction, problems or conflicts, exclusion, actions taken for betterment

### **Venn-diagram - Institutional analysis:**

- What are the institutions in and around your village?
- Among these institutions, which institutions are the most/less/least accessible? trustable?
- In which way does/does not this institution help you to build trust?

Discussion: Provided service, access, trust, satisfaction, problems or conflicts, exclusion, actions taken for betterment

Additional check list:

- What are the formal and informal groups that prevail in the society?
- What activities are preformed in these groups?
- What information is exchanged (x. through gossip)?
- How often do these groups meet and how much time is spent?
- What are the characteristics of a leader in these groups?
- In what occasions do you gather?
  
- How do you produce your daily necessities? What do you produce yourself? Do any of you involve in any IGA? Do you do this individually or together? What are you not able to produce?
  
- How are the relationships in the village? And in this group?
- Do you exchange anything with the other villagers? Why?
- What are the things they exchange if someone falls into a problem?
- What motives are behind this exchange?
- In your society, what are the things you are bound to do, and what are duties?

- Are there any conflicts between you and another group?
- Why? How do you solve these issues?
- I am a newcomer in your village, what characteristics do I need to possess to become a part of your group?
- Who are the neglected persons in the society? Why do you think so?

### **Dimension 2: Trust and Solidarity**

**Participatory photography:** Describe the image/the person in the photo, why did you take this photo?

Additional check list:

- What does trust mean to you?
- What are the characteristics of a trustworthy person?
- Who do you trust the most?
- Who do you turn to in a crisis?
- Who can you ask for money? For reliable information? For employment? To keep a secret?
- Are there more or fewer persons you can trust now than before? Why?
- Who is the most trustable person in your society? Why is he/she the most trustable?
- How do you build trust in a person? In which way does someone help you to achieve your trust?
- When you fall in any trouble, who will come forward to help you first?
- Do you have any relatives or friends that live in urban areas or abroad? Are there any relatives or friends you trust in other areas? Do they play any role if you fall in a problem?
- There are many people in the society whose main occupation is to provide service such as police, doctor, UP chairman, NGO workers etc. Which person is most trustable to you? Why?
- What kind of unity and trust prevails in this group?
- Iqbal bhai (brother) asked the MJ member to arrange 11 people to conduct this meeting for us. What were the criteria to select these 11 women and not others?
- Each of you came here today because one other person asked you to come, was it? Why did you come? (trust within)
- Why do you think you were asked? Why were you selected for this group?
- When there is a new arrival, a newcomer, coming to the village. Do you do anything particular?
- Are there any Hindu inhabitants in the village? What are your relations to Hindus?
- What kind of unity and trust prevails in this village? Is this increasing or decreasing? Why is it so?

### **Dimension 3: Collective Action and Cooperation:**

- Do you have any organization, group arrangements or meetings in the village?
- How are occasions arranged?

**Problem ranking:** What are the most important problems of your village? Why? Please, rank them in times of importance? Do you take any initiative to solve these problems?

- If yes, describe.
- If no, why?
- How did you work together?
- How did you mobilize?

Do you think the national or local government has any contribution both in case of contributing or solving these problems?

### **Dimension 4: Information and Communication:**

- From which media do you get what information?
- What are the local sources of information?
- How do you get information and awareness about: a) fertilizer b) bird flu c) arsenic d) vaccination programs?
- In case of getting information what source of media do you prefer? Trust? Why?
- What information do you get from; family, other relatives, neighbors, NGOs, government?
- How did your mother or grandmother get information in case of natural calamity? How would do you get this now?

### **Dimension 5: Social Cohesion and Inclusion:**

- You have told that you have good relationships within the village, what is the reason for that?
- What do you think of cohesion/unity between people? Is it better now than in the past?
- What is the unity within this group?
- What are the reasons behind good relationship between people? Now and in the past?
- If someone tells a secret that was supposed to be kept secret, how do you behave?
- Do you sanction somebody? Who are sanctioned? Why?
- Do you exclude somebody? Who are excluded? Why?
- What are the reasons behind quarrels in the family and when are these quarrels turning into conflicts?
- What are the reasons behind quarrels in the village and when are these quarrels turning into conflicts?
- Do you take any initiative to solve these conflicts?

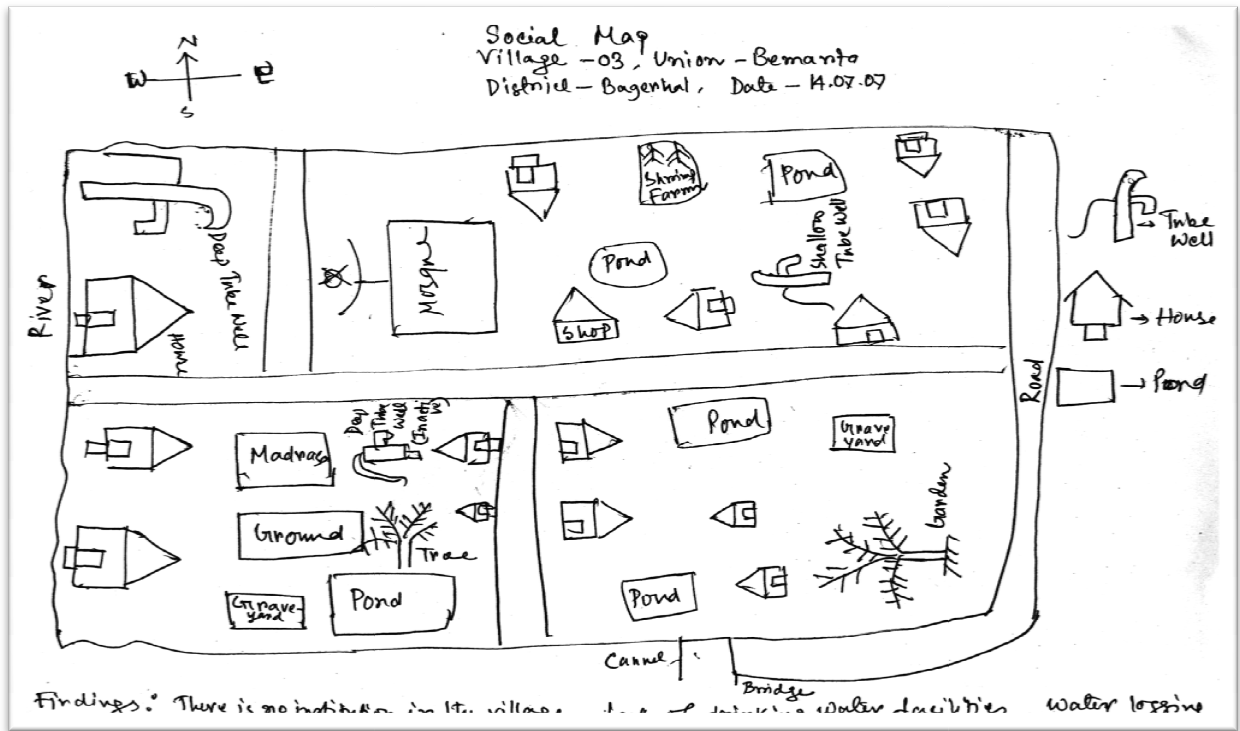
- How do you treat a person who makes various social disorders? Like beating his wife or gambling? (Sanctions)
- When someone's husband beat his wife, do you take any initiative to stop it?
- But do you sanction him in anyway?
- 
- How are your relationships towards Hindus?
- In case of marriage, what bride or groom would you prefer for your daughter or son? Why?
- Is there any case of intermarriage between Hindus/ Muslims, Urban/ Rural, Rich/Poor in your village?
- Do such intermarriages make any problems in the society?
- How were the norms and the behavior of the people in your mother's era, your grandmother's era? And what is it now?
- Do you think people's behavior is better or worse than before? Why?
- How was the social status of your grandmother and your mother?
- Did they have the freedom to go outside their house anytime? What was the reason for that?
- Do you have this freedom now? What is the reason for this?
- By comparing the two situations, which one is the better from your opinion?
- Describe the educational conditions of the women in the past and in the present?
- What are the most important priorities of your households? Does everyone in the household think so?
- How are decisions taken in the household? Do you influence these decisions? How?
- What were the cultural or annual festivals of the village in the past?
- Do you think they are the same now or has it changed? Why?
- Describe the natural resources of the village in the past and in the present?
- Did quarrels occur over these resources in the past? What is the current situation regarding this?

**Dimension 6: Political Action and Empowerment:**

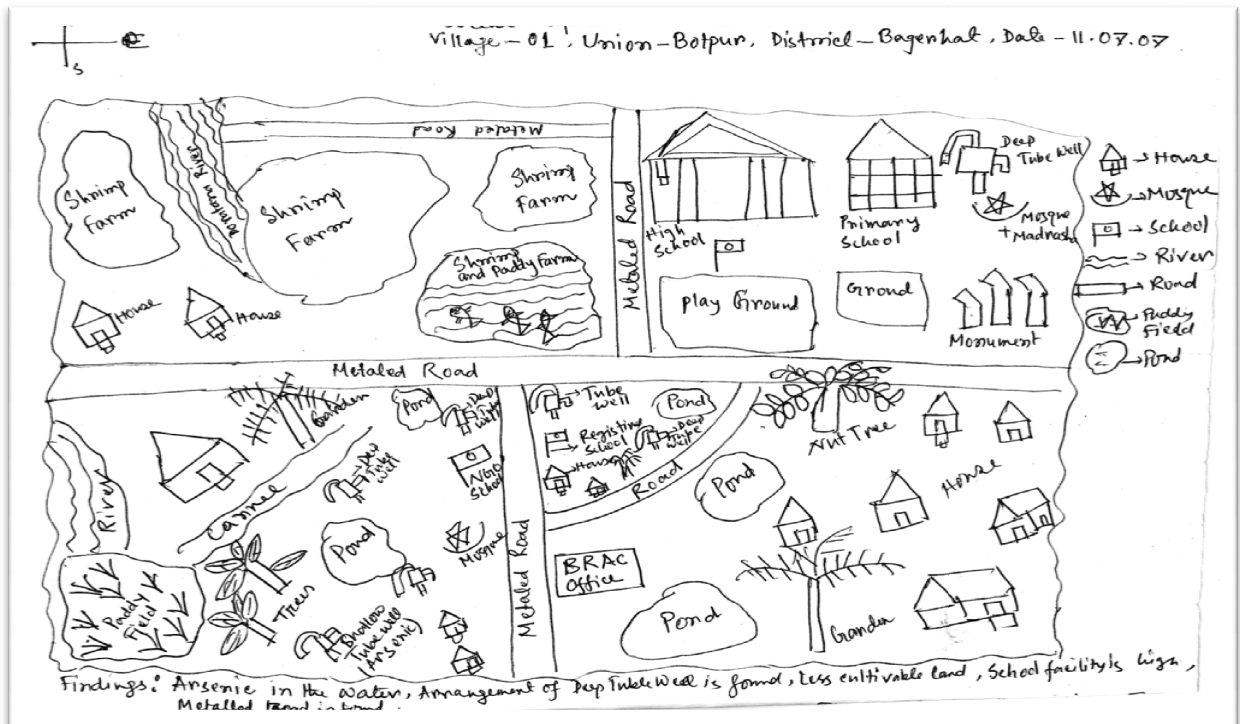
- What are the most important priorities of the community? Does everyone in the community think so?
- How are decisions taken in the community? Do you influence these decisions? How?
- You have mentioned challenges you face, do the government take any initiative to help you?
- Who are the persons that gets benefits from government or UP in your village?
- Do you think they are eligible for the help?
- Do you think that the poor get proper help? Why or how?
- Who gets the VGF card?
- Which politicians among member, chairman and MP do you trust? Why? Why not?

- The member is elected by you to represent the village, are you satisfied? Why?
- Who is a candidate for an election?
- What are the characteristics of the candidates that you would vote for in an election?
- If a representative is not fulfilling the commitments he promised during election times, do you take any initiative against the candidate (accountability)?
- For a representative to be elected twice, what would be his characteristics?
- Have you taken initiative to find a good man for the election and work for him so he may be elected? Why do you not?
  
- Do you recon yourselves as political active? Do you vote? Anyone who has participated in a meeting or a rally?
- Any of you have a wish to be a candidate in the next election? Why? Why not?
- Do you think money is everything/the most important criteria to be a candidate? Why? When you vote, do you consider who to vote for after money?
- If the candidate is poor do you take any initiative to get him/her elected?
- What if all of us decided to vote on a poor candidate, do you not think he would be elected then?
- Have you ever witnessed any buying of votes? How does this happen?
- Have you witnessed any false voting?
- What are the procedures of bribes? Who is it possible to bribe?

## Appendix II. Participatory mapping



PLA drawing 3, Participatory map, Group A



PLA drawing 4, Participatory map, Group B

### Appendix III. Problem ranking

Ranking  
Village 2  
Union - Bemarta  
District - Bagerhat  
Date - 24.07.07

Problem	Frequency	Counting	Ranking
Drinking water Problem	••••	4	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Water logging Problem	•••	6	1 <sup>st</sup>
Fuel wood Problem	•	1	6 <sup>th</sup>
Lack of Medical facility	••	2	5 <sup>th</sup>
Dowry Problem	•••	3	4 <sup>th</sup>
High price of goods	•••	5	2 <sup>nd</sup>

PLA drawing 5. Problem ranking, Group A

Village 1  
Union - Bemarta  
District - Bagerhat  
Date - 18.07.07

Problem	Frequency	Counting	Ranking
Water Problem water logging	•	1	6 <sup>th</sup>
Arsenic Problem	••••	5	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Women suppression	••	4	4 <sup>th</sup>
Unemployment Problem	••••	8	1 <sup>st</sup>
Dowry Problem	•••	3	5 <sup>th</sup>
High Price of goods	•••	6	2 <sup>nd</sup>

PLA drawing 6. Problem ranking, Group B