

## Decision-Making Ability of Tribal Women in Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh

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**Abstract:** Decision making is an important indicator of women empowerment at the household level, where, they can perform their activities at the household and occupational level with their rightful power. This study examined the tribal women's autonomy decision-making ability among the ethnic minority groups (Tribal) of women Chittagong Hill tracts (CHTs). Thirteen Unions from three districts of Chittagong Hill Tracts (Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachari) and 329 women were selected as sample respondents. The tribal respondents in the Chittagong Hill Tracts area were found to have low decision-making ability across the four decision-making variables that were taken into consideration in this study. On the other hand decisions regarding the following aspects majority of men and women took decisions jointly. The current study came to the conclusion that women from ethnic minority groups are less capable of making decisions about their homes.

**Key words:** Ethnic Minority Women • Empowerment • Decision Making Capacity and Mobility Assessment

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### INTRODUCTION

Giving women legitimate authority to carry out every aspect of their lives is another aspect of women empowerment. Women's empowerment is the process of empowering women, as investigated by Kabeer and Naila [1]. According to Bayeh and Endalcachew [2], the term "rising women's status" can be defined in a number of ways, such as by making an effort to seek out women's perspectives or by accepting them. Also, Bayeh and Endalcachew [2] reported that women's empowerment also equips and enables them to make sound decisions that will affect their entire lives and address a variety of social issues. Women who are empowered would be able to actively participate in the process of planning and making decisions, allowing them to make individual contributions to development initiatives. A wide variety of social resources, such as information, authority and prestige within the family and society, as well as food, land, property, money and other types of riches, are readily available to empowered women, according to Hashemi [3]. It has been defined as taking into consideration a range of multidimensional aspects, such as education, occupation, family planning discussions with partners, household decision-making difficulties, freedom of mobility, marriage decision, political

representation and legal rights [4]. In Bangladesh, women have a limited involvement in home decision-making, limited access to and control over household resources (physical and financial assets), less personal assets, greater domestic labour, limited mobility and inadequate education and skills, all of which increase their vulnerability [5]. Bangladesh's women have the lowest status in the world based on 20 variables pertaining to their health, marriage, children, education, work and social equality [6]. According to Bangladesh Minority Rights Group International, there were over 2 million indigenous ethnic minorities living in Bangladesh in 2010. In the past, tribal women were considered to be important for their domestic responsibilities and a source of income for the family. In addition, starting and running a business on her own is not an easy task for a tribal woman.

Women's empowerment through decision-making authority at the household level is the focus of this study. There are a lot of studies that show women's empowerment can be effective and accomplished through activities that generate income, but tribal women are very far behind. Since very few studies have been conducted in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHTs), tribal communities continue to be ignored or ignored in academic research. In addition to the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHTs) region, no studies of this kind have been carried out elsewhere in

Bangladesh; there haven't been many studies on how tribal women make decisions for their families and there haven't been any studies that have statistically linked making decisions for families and women's empowerment. It distinguished itself from other findings due to all of these research gaps. From this point of view, in-depth research was required to determine whether empowerment made them more innovative, risk-takers and dependent on themselves in addition to increasing their decision-making power. In addition, it was essential for the government, policymakers and development organizations to construct a foundation for the empowerment of tribal women in the future. In addition, academics will have the opportunity to conduct subsequent research on the issue of tribal women's empowerment. The study's overarching objective is to comprehend the status of tribal women's empowerment through their participation in household decision-making.

The power of tribal women's decision-making abilities was the focus of this study. To put it another way, this study looked at the sources of women's empowerment in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, tribal women, including their level of economic participation, their relative freedom from dominance within the family and their involvement in major decisions and decisions about making larger purchases. As a result, CHTs tribal women's decision-making abilities must be investigated as a source of empowerment.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The current study has been done based on primary source of data that has been collected on 2020. A cross sectional survey design has been used a multistage cluster sampling technique has been adopted for generating the information. Data has been collected from 17 types of ethnic minority groups including, Chakma, Marma, Saotal, Monipuri, Tripura, Ubaio, Murong, Khaiyang, Rajbonshi, Garo, Hajong, Khashia, Tanchanga, Bam, Khumi and others ethnic minority groups from 7 Upazillas (Rajostholi, Barkal, jurachori, Manikchari, Matirangga, Ramgor and Ruma) and from 13 Unions (Gomoti, Gaindha, Patasora, Shublong, Manikchari, Matirangga, Ramgor, Barkal, bonjogisora, jurachori, Gocchabil, Rumasadar, 2no.ruma) of three districts of Chittagong Hill Tracts area including Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachari. Four stages have been taken into account when taking the sample. Three districts were chosen from the CHLs in the first step of district selection for the sample. Upazillas from each district were chosen at

random for the second stage. Thirteen unions were chosen as a sample for the third stage. The intended demographic of each union level was chosen for the sample in the last and fourth step. A married tribal lady from the Chittagong Hill Tracts area provided the information and 334 tribal women were chosen as respondents. The sample size has been determined using the sampling table from Krejcie and Morgan [7]. Data on socio-demographic factors, such as women's age, religion, occupation, family size, yearly income, farming style, ethnic minority groups and education, were gathered using a structured questionnaire. The purpose of the current investigation is explanation. In order to examine the dimensions and components of women's decision-making abilities in search of their empowerment, the responses were gathered through face-to-face interviews with isolated tribal women. Principal component analysis has been used to validate the elements influencing women's capacity for decision-making [8]. Additionally, descriptive statistics like percentages and frequencies have been employed to examine data. First Individual interviews were conducted with a sample of women who reside with their husbands or partners and the questions outlined in the step below were asked of them. First, assign 1 point to each responder for each activity they fully or partially decided on (corresponding to answers 1, 3 and 5). Second, I determined the total points awarded to each respondent. The total number of questions that were answered was then counted. Fourthly, divide the total points by the total questions that were answered. A woman can be "actively involved" in making economic decisions for her family if her "score" is at least 0.6666 (the closer the score is to 1, the more involved the respondent is in making decisions for her family). Finally, to convert the number of tribal women whose scores were greater than or equal to 0.6666 into a percentage, divide this number by the total number of women interviewed and multiply it by 100.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

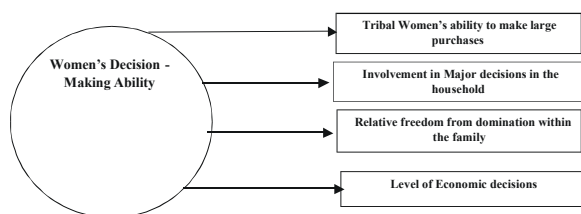
The characteristics of the tribal women were included in the analysis are presented in Table 1 where socioeconomic and behavioral characteristics. Table 1 shows that, the highest category of ethnic minority groups was (37.08%) and the second highest was Marma (27.96%), while the lowest category was Orao (only 0.30%). Chakma, Bawm, Tripura, Tanchangya and Murong also appeared in the CHTs. In this category Standard deviation is 7.20. Among the tribal respondents,

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the tribal respondents of the Chittagong Hill Tracts

SL. No	Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)	SD
1	Category of Ethnic Groups	Chakma	56	17.02	7.20
		Marma	92	27.96	
		Bawm	22	6.69	
		Tripura	18	5.47	
		Tanchangya	10	3.04	
		Orao	1	0.3	
		Murong	8	2.43	
		Others	122	37.08	
		Total	329	100.00	
		Religion	Muslim	8	
Hindu	154		46.81		
Barua	11		3.34		
Christian	156		47.42		
Total	329		100.00		
3	Farmer Type	Landless-less than 5 decimal	68	20.67	0.86
		Marginal-5 to 49 decimal	124	37.69	
		Small farmer-50-249 decimal	117	35.56	
		Medium farmer-250-749 decimal	19	5.78	
		Large farmer-750 or more	1	0.3	
		Total	329	100.00	
4	Family Member	Member (<)	21	6.38	1.43
		Member (5-10)	211	64.13	
		Member (11-16)	97	29.48	
		Total	329	100.00	
5	Age	Under 18	4	1.22	9.63
		18-20	23	6.99	
		21-29	124	37.69	
		30-39	112	34.04	
		40-49	49	14.89	
		50-59	15	4.56	
		60-69	1	0.3	
		70+	1	0.3	
		Total	329	100.00	
6	Education	Never gone to school	73	22.19	3.22
		PSC	193	58.66	
		JSC	38	11.55	
		SSC	19	5.78	
		HSC	6	1.82	
		Total	329	100.00	
7	Occupation	Not Applicable	5	1.52	1.28
		Agriculture	72	21.88	
		Day Laborer	10	3.04	
		Homemaker	228	69.3	
		Shopkeeper	3	0.91	
		Job holder	8	2.43	
		Others	3	0.91	
		Total	329	100.00	
8	Income	Under 50000	37	11.25	157266.32
		50000-100000	94	28.57	
		100001-150000	112	34.04	
		150001-200000	53	16.11	
		200001+	33	10.03	
		Total	329	100.00	

we found 47.42% was Christian which was the highest and lowest was the Muslim (2.43%) respectively and standard deviation is 1.02. With the lowest standard deviation of 0.86, among them small farmer (50-249 decimal) category has the highest percentage (35.56%). Moreover, around 64% of the respondents having the Member of (5-10) while only 6% have the lower member is about (< 4). Maximum respondents of the tribal women were included in the age group of 21-29. Literacy rate including higher education is very low among the ethnic minority groups of women in the CHTs. Maximum respondents of the sample have never gone to school approximately at around 22%. Regarding occupation, among the 329 respondents, homemaker was the highest accounted for 69.3% while the second highest occupation was Agriculture at around 21.88%. Yearly income was highest in the category of 100001-150000.

**Components of Tribal Women’s Decision-Making Ability of CHTs in Bangladesh:**



The decision-making capacity of Indigenous women in the home is an important aspect of women's empowerment. Based on research questionnaires, decisions based on these tribal women were considered. The ability of tribal women to purchase large products, including household items, with their own money without considering the opinion of their husbands is considered an indicator of women's empowerment. I was asked a few questions so that I could decide whether to purchase items such as household items such as frying pans, children's or personal clothing and household items, at least partially with my own money.

Table 2 represents that the responses show that women can takes decision only in their family regarding the cooking menu for daily food consumption accounted for 61.89%. Table 1 shows that about 59.88% of women and men takes decision together in their family regarding the large purchases like a plot of land, houses, furniture’s etc. With regard to the purchasing decision in their family regarding the purchases like pots, daily foods, pans etc. for daily necessities 54.71% (wife and husband both) of the respondents takes decisions together, while 39.21%

of the respondents takes decision together in their family regarding sending your children to school and relevant decisions. Respondents stated that they both (husband and wife) take decision together in their family regarding purchasing your own cloth about 37.99%. Moreover, women/wife cannot take decisions along regarding purchasing her children’s cloth. She must take opinions from her husband (47. 42%).Table 2 shows that about 59.88% of women and men take decision together in their family regarding the large purchases like a plot of land, houses, furniture’s etc. Literature suggests that women are more empowered when they have the opportunity to purchase at least some of the above household items with their own money [9, 10]. It can therefore be argued that women in the study area are less empowered when it comes to their ability to make large purchases.

**Involvement in Major Decisions:** Women's involvement in domestic decision-making within the house is commonly seen as a universal measure of women's empowerment, according to Kishor and Lekha's [11] research. A series of survey questions were used to ascertain the degree to which tribal women are empowered and take part in significant household decisions. Selling little stuff, selling a house, selling the biggest piece of land, deciding how many children to have and preparing for the next are just a few examples.

Table 3 shows that tribal respondents (about 59.57 %) indicates that they are always involved in making decisions regarding selling the largest property without seeking husbands’ permission, because some of them are matriarchal in nature. In terms of the respondents' use of selling real estate like land, 62.92 percent of them make decisions as a family. 61.70% of respondents concur that they cannot decide whether to have a child or use family planning on their own. In this sense, they are requesting their husbands' consent.

Given the large number of tribal women who can resist parting with their money against their will, Table 4 demonstrates that these women do not have the same level of empowerment as other women in the study area. When it comes to relative freedom, women still lack the ability to decide whether to send their child to the hospital (59.57%), leaving the majority of tribal respondents in a position where they must ask for permission before spending their money on visiting or helping out friends and family (52.58%), as well as buying clothes for their children and other necessities (47.42%). They must defer to their husbands for guidance on all of these matters.

Table 2: Ability to make larger purchases

Items	Percentage	Factor Loading	Score
Who takes decision in your family regarding the large purchases like a plot of land, houses, furniture's etc.?	59.88 (wife and husband both)	0.472	0.183
Who takes decision in your family regarding the purchases like pots, daily foods, pans etc. for daily necessities?	54.71 (wife and husband both)	0.459	0.178
Who takes decision in your family regarding the cooking menu for daily food consumption?	61.89 (self -wife)	0.359	0.139
Who takes decision in your family regarding purchasing your own cloth?	37.99 (wife and husband both)	0.406	0.157
Who takes decision in your family regarding sending your children to school and relevant decisions?	39.21 (wife and husband both)	0.455	0.176
Who takes decision in your family regarding purchasing your children's cloth?	47.42 (wife and husband both)	0.431	0.167
Total		2.582	1.00

Table 3: Involvement in Major decisions in the household

Items	Percentage	Factor Loading	Score
Who takes decision regarding selling the property in your family?	62.92 (Husband)	1.169	0.328
Did you take decision regarding selling the largest property?	59.57 (Self-wife)	0.904	0.253
Who takes decision regarding family Planning in your family?	61.70 (Both)	1.497	0.419
Total		3.571	1.00

Table 4: Relative freedom from domination within the family

Items	Percentage	Factor Loading	Score
Who takes the decision for sending your child to the hospital?	59.57 (wife and husband both)	0.441	0.243
Who has been taken decisions for your mobility of visiting friends and relatives?	52.58 (wife and husband both)	0.480	0.265
Who takes the decisions for your treatment or going to the hospital?	57.75 (wife and husband both)	0.459	0.254
Who takes the decision regarding purchasing cloths for your children and their daily necessities?	47.42 (wife and husband both)	0.432	0.238
Total		1.812	1.00

Table 5: Level of Economic decisions and barriers

Items	Percentage	Factor Loading	Score
Can you take your Economic decisions freely?	29.18 (Agree)	0.551	0.139
Can you take your investment decisions freely?	40.12 (Dis-Agree)	0.546	0.139
Can you take your self development/developing decisions freely?	30.40 (Agree)	0.554	0.139
Can you take decisions freely without your husbands concern/opinion?	57.14 (Disagree)	0.492	0.124
Did anyone take your opinion in your family?	53.19 (Agree)	0.642	0.162
Does anyone in your family gives priority regarding taking decisions?	48.94 (Disagree)	0.644	0.162
Do you have any economic barriers, for which you can not express your opinion?	53.80 (Disagree)	0.531	0.134
Total		3.959	1.00

One of the most significant gender power differences is shown in the table, where it is shown that less than half of the respondents (57.75%) can take their children to the hospital without first seeking advice or their husbands' permission [9].

**Level of Economic Decisions of the Respondents:**

Economic decisions may be a significant factor in a woman's level of empowerment; a woman's ability to earn and manage her income is a good indicator of her level of empowerment at the household level.

Table 5 demonstrates that 29.18% of tribal women have the freedom to make their own economic decisions. However, they are unable to use their investment decisions as a means of saving money to fund their operations. Freely (40.12%). 30.40% of tribal women agree that they have the right to make decisions about their own personal growth and development and that their family has benefited from their viewpoint. Responses included

asking for the husband's consent, informing only the husbands, informing and getting the husband's consent and not informing or asking the husband's consent. Despite having the money, the majority of respondents (57.14%) said they would still get their husbands' approval. The current study's findings are consistent with those of the previous study [9]. The tribal respondents, 48.94%, disagree with the statement that family comes first in making decisions. 53.80% of respondents disagree that they face no economic obstacles that prevent them from voicing their opinions.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

This study investigated the elements that led to the empowerment of tribal women in Bangladesh's Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachari districts' Chittagong Hill Tracts Areas. The capacity of the tribal women to make greater purchases, their involvement in

significant choices, their degree of economic decision-making and their relative freedom from domestic dominance was among these elements. The reasons for tribal women's empowerment must be investigated since they have been considered as the panacea for societal issues and a real force for female liberation in the Chittagong Hill Tract Areas by using multistage cluster sampling. Total of 329 married indigenous women were recruited as sample participants. Face-to-face interviews were conducted to get the replies. Educational standards for tribal women in CHTs are lower because of not having the accessibility of resources including transportation, institution, hospital and roads so that they can utilize these resources for their developments along with the plain land areas of Bangladesh. Every tribal woman is very hard working and they all are involved with several occupations for maintaining their livelihood. Remote tribal women from places like Barkal Upazilla, Ruma Upazilla, etc. make economic contributions on par with their male counterparts. All but two of the four decision-making factors examined in this article-the capacity to make significant purchases, involvement in important choices, relative independence from parental domination within the family and economic decisions-were found to be low among the respondents. These two decisions included deciding on the family's daily menu and selling the largest piece of real estate. On the other hand, tribal women said that their family members take their opinion in the family but do not give priority regarding taking decisions. However, tribal respondents can take their Economic decisions freely like as to earn income by home gardening, sewing, stich making, handicrafts jewelry etc. But if they want to take their investment decisions freely, they couldn't.

This study's findings have important contributions and policy recommendations for NGOs, policymakers and local governments to consider. In light of these repercussions, policymakers and governments-local, regional and state-may be able to implement measures that, in the long run, could be crucial to the empowerment of tribal women in developing nations like Bangladesh. To ensure gender equality, policymakers must therefore pay attention to the tribal female community. Furthermore, the majority of educated tribal residents living in remote areas are now working in the public sector. However, tribal people only have a limited number of public sector opportunities in hilly regions. The government should dramatically expand employment opportunities for tribal women in order to eradicate this stage of poverty in tribal areas. The empowerment of tribal women is not possible unless the economy provides opportunities for

investment, job creation and entrepreneurship. It is necessary to develop roads and transportation in the remote areas of CHTs, as well as to develop micro- and small-scale businesses connected to the agriculture and livestock sectors, so that these businesses can easily export their products throughout Bangladesh and occasionally to other nations. Accessibility to credit is essential for business development in this area. Therefore, efforts should be made to provide tribal women with credit in these areas at a minimal markup. The ethnic minority group of women will be able to borrow credit for productive purposes and other purposes, such as building houses, purchasing livestock, etc., by increasing their participation in microfinance activities [11]. The main thing that would help empower tribal women is if there were more jobs and businesses available to them, as well as more opportunities for education, good health care and other welfare services. Improving the economic and social infrastructure in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachari) would also help empower women.

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