



Farmers' Perspectives on Agriculture and Rural Life in Bangladesh: Focusing on Gender Differences

Keiko Yoshino¹, Md. Rashedur Rahman^{2*}, Mohammad Khurshed Alam³ and Joysree Pual Tandra²

¹ Department of Food Environment Economics, Tokyo University of Agriculture, Tokyo, Japan

² Department of Agronomy, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh-2202, Bangladesh

³ Research Institute for Rural Community and Life, Okaya city, Nagano, Japan

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: 26 Dec 2025

Accepted: 09 Mar 2026

Published online: 31 Mar 2026

Keywords

Perception, Farmers, Women, Agriculture, Rural life, Bangladesh

Correspondence

Md. Rashedur Rahman

✉: rashedagron@bau.edu.bd



ABSTRACT

This paper examined perceptions of agricultural and rural life in Bangladesh, focusing on women. The multifaceted value of agriculture was understood, but efforts were perceived as unrewarding, while the comfort and satisfaction of rural life were highly valued. Although women's activities were limited in scope, they found fulfillment in daily routine and relationships. While economic independence is important, satisfaction with daily life should also be respected. Rural life, often labeled poor, is not necessarily inferior when livelihoods are secure, and its environmentally friendly way of life offers lessons for the Global North. The richness of life based on relationships with nature and mutual aid tends to be overlooked, leading to the loss of their traditions and pride. Future policies require a perspective that shares and respects the joys of living with nature.

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1. Introduction

In many countries of the Global North, the decline in agricultural and rural populations has become structurally entrenched. This is not a temporary demographic fluctuation; it is the outcome of a long transition from agrarian systems to urban–industrial economies and, later, to knowledge-based economies. As a result, policy design has grown increasingly complex. A substantial body of research now examines farmers' attitudes, agricultural household strategies, and the willingness of newcomers to enter farming and rural life (Sabillón et al., 2022). The shrinking number of farmers and rural residents is widely recognized as a serious issue, particularly in the Global North (Labianca. & Valverde, 2019).

Japan provides a revealing case. There, both the farming population and rural residents have declined rapidly, placing local industries and even the survival of rural regions at risk. A review of postwar surveys conducted between 1945 and the 2000s shows a marked shift in who

was speaking about agriculture and how it was framed. These shifts can be understood in three stages.

In Stage-1, when farmer numbers were still sufficient, the dominant perspective came from third parties—government officials and business actors. The key question was normative: what should farming and farmers be like, and what roles should they perform?

The stance was distinctly top-down. Farmers were often portrayed as outdated and in need of direction. Rural people were not the primary interpreters of their own lives; they were objects of reform (Watanabe, 2020).

In Stage-2, when the number of successors began to decline, anxiety emerged. The focus shifted to retention: how can local successors be kept? Attention turned to the views of young people and young wives, and policymakers began to incorporate the perspectives of those directly involved. Surveys and discussions sought to identify what improvements might sustain engagement (Ohara and Soda (eds), 1994). Yet by this point, the structural momentum of decline was already strong.

Cite This Article

Yoshino K, Rahman MR, Alam MK, Tandra JP. 2026. Farmers' perspectives on agriculture and rural life in bangladesh: focusing on gender differences. *Fundamental and Applied Agriculture*, 11(1): 30–43 <https://doi.org/10.5455/faa.264703>

In Stage-3, when demographic decline reached a point where local sustainability became difficult, the urban perspective again intensified. This time, however, it revolved around justification. Why should public funds be invested in agriculture and rural areas that had become minority sectors? The search expanded to identifying new supporters and commercial value—especially tourism value. At the same time, rural residents themselves initiated “local studies” (*Jimoto gaku*), re-evaluating their regions and cultivating empathy among community members. They sought to rediscover economic and cultural value from within. The paradox is sharp: as the need for local initiative increased, the number of people capable of leading such efforts had significantly decreased.

Turning to the Global South, the intellectual lineage differs. Since the 1980s, the “farmers first” approach advanced by Chambers and colleagues has formally remained influential. However, contemporary literature suggests a different operational emphasis. Many studies examine how farmers respond to climate change, soil degradation, or newly introduced technologies (Falcão et al., 2024; Appiah and Guodaar, 2022; Addis and Abirdew, 2021). Farmers are treated as given actors within development systems. The research focus becomes: how do we encourage adoption, adaptation, or resilience? The implicit logic resembles the Stage-1 perspective described earlier—attention centers on what farmers should do and how to motivate or enable it.

Studies that directly explore how farmers perceive agriculture and rural life remain limited. Since the 2010s, research—particularly in Africa—has begun to examine youth perspectives. This suggests a transition from a Stage-1 situation of apparent demographic sufficiency to a Stage-2 condition where successor decline is emerging.

Evidence from Africa indicates that many young people hold negative perceptions of agriculture (Njeru et al., 2015; Noorani, 2015). Farming is sometimes culturally framed as punishment. Educational systems orient youth toward white-collar employment. Working on others’ farms reduces motivation. Social influence from family and peers, lack of knowledge, and the perceived unattractiveness of the sector all contribute to disinterest. Proposed countermeasures emphasize agricultural education and modern technology. In South Africa, however, evidence suggests that education and financial support can increase youth willingness to engage in agriculture, indicating conditional optimism (Magagula and Tsvakirai, 2020).

Large-scale survey work provides further insight. CGAP conducted research in 2015–16 across Côte d'Ivoire, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, and Bangladesh (Anderson Learch and Grader Musiime 2016; Anderson Molar and Kretchun 2016; Anderson Marita and Musiime 2016; Anderson et al. 2017; CGAP 2016; Riquet et al. 2017). Around 90% of respondents in each country reported that they enjoyed agriculture. Satisfaction with outcomes, however, was higher in Bangladesh (80%) than in the African cases (50–60%). Approximately 90% wished to continue farming themselves, yet attitudes toward their children’s participation varied sharply. Tanzania showed the highest willingness (74%), other African countries ranged between 66% and 46%, while

Bangladesh stood at 29%. The generational signal is striking.

However, this survey was designed to understand smallholder farmers as potential clients for credit services (CGAP 2019). The framing implicitly asks how to “utilize” farmers as market participants. Moreover, agriculture and rural life are not identical; rural residents often combine multiple livelihoods. Enjoyment of farming does not automatically translate into endorsement of intergenerational continuity.

Parallel to these development-oriented studies, research on subjective well-being has expanded. Initially concentrated in the Global North, it has increasingly appeared in Global South contexts since the 2010s (Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2012a). Findings indicate that subjective well-being is negatively correlated with neighborhood mean income, though this pattern applies mainly to the non-poor. Relative comparison matters.

Research on women’s life satisfaction in the Global South remains limited (Uthso & Akter, 2022). In the Global North countries, income, health, age, marital status, education, and gender were significant correlates of life satisfaction. In Eastern Europe, being married, more educated, having higher income, not having children, and living in rural areas were positively associated with life satisfaction and happiness (Sabillón et al. 2022). These findings are statistically valuable but largely quantitative, isolating variables rather than examining lived experience. They rarely illuminate which dimensions of rural life generate enjoyment or meaning.

Overall, direct investigation into how farmers and rural residents perceive their daily lives remains scarce. In the Global North, there are cases such as Japan and a limited number of European and American studies (Herrera et al. 2022). In the Global South, comparable research is largely absent. Much of the literature is tied to development agendas and intervention suitability. Agriculture, as the primary livelihood, is typically analyzed instrumentally.

If the aim is to clarify the prospects of rural life and agriculture, then understanding how people actually live and think—without predefined agendas—becomes essential. Without such grounding, unbiased evaluation is impossible. Japan’s experience suggests that overreliance on external agendas can foster disillusionment among farmers themselves. Perspectives differ across gender, age, and individual circumstance.

Against this backdrop, present paper aims to clarify how rural residents live, how they perceive their lives, and why they do so, while also examining differences based on gender and age groups. Gender is the range of social, psychological, cultural, and behavioral aspects of being a male, female, or a third gender, but in this paper, we focus on the male and female considering the division of labor between them what is predominant in rural Bangladesh. Focusing on each individual’s state of “satisfaction,” we examine, along with their ratings, what brings joy and satisfaction in rural life from the perspectives of time (whether they have free time), space (whether they have a space they feel attached to), whether there are specific activities that bring enjoyment, and social relationships.

The present study focuses on a rural village in Bangladesh, a country in Asia’s Global South

experiencing rapid economic growth and urban expansion. Bangladesh occupies 144,000 square kilometers along the northern coast of the Bay of Bengal. In 2023, its population reached 171.5 million, with a growth rate of 1.22% in 2022. Approximately 90% of the population is Muslim, followed by Hindu communities. Population density exceeds one thousand persons per square kilometer, ranking ninth globally. GDP growth has averaged 5–7% annually, driven largely by the garment industry, which employs many young women. Remittances from migrant workers also contribute significantly.

Although 68% of the population resides in rural areas (Population and Housing Census 2022), 53% of rural households are non-farm households with less than 0.05 acres of agricultural land (Agriculture Census 2019, BBS 2022). Landlessness is widespread. Numerous poverty alleviation initiatives have been implemented by government agencies, international organizations, and NGOs.

In Bangladesh, much of the research on farmers' perceptions focus on climate change and technological adaptation (Hasan & Kumar, 2020a; Rahman et al., 2022). Respondents are predominantly male. Beyond the CGAP segmentation study, little work examines perceptions of agriculture and rural life. The CGAP survey found that while the current generation generally enjoys agriculture and expresses satisfaction, many would switch occupations if alternatives were available and do not wish for their children to farm. Notably, 93% of respondents were male.

Research on rural women's perceptions is limited and often centers on reproductive health or violence (Perkins et al., 2019; Sarker et al., 2016; Khan, 2014). Bangladesh, despite significant advances in women's social participation, continues to face gender-based human rights challenges (Das, 2025). Studies of well-being and satisfaction remain sparse (Hasan & Kumar, 2020b). Evidence suggests that higher income and relative affluence influence satisfaction (Asadullah & Chaudhury, 2012b), and that rural women's satisfaction increases with wealth, age, and education (Uthso and Aktar 2022).

Taken together, the literature reveals a structural gap. Agriculture and rural life are frequently analyzed as economic systems or development targets, yet rarely as lived experiences shaped by time, space, activity, and social relationships. Understanding what brings satisfaction—whether free time, attachment to place, meaningful activity, or social bonds—is essential for evaluating rural futures beyond productivity metrics alone.

2. Methodology

The study was conducted in Village N, located in Delduar Upazila, Tangail District, within the active floodplain of the Bengal Delta, the characteristic hydrological environment in Bangladesh. This area represents the hydrological environment of Bangladesh, situated at the mouth of the vast Bengal Delta. Village N is located about an hour and a half from the capital, Dhaka, and about 30 minutes by car from Tangail town, the district capital. There is no public transportation from Tangail, and people travel by shared auto-rickshaws and similar means. The village is

divided into three hamlets(*para*): South, East, and West, and comprised 779 households in 2018.

Structured questionnaire interviews were conducted with 247 households in the South Hamlet between March and June 2018. A complete survey was chosen to gain a comprehensive understanding of the perception of adult people in various socioeconomic circumstances, all the male household heads and their wives, or female heads and their sons over 15 years old if any, with all households in certain area. For each household, general household information was gathered from the head of household or their spouse regarding household composition, land ownership, agricultural management practices, gender roles, other income sources, and expenditures.

Additionally, for individuals, male household heads and their wives, or female heads and their sons over 15 if any, we asked about their current understanding of what constitutes satisfaction in daily life (times when they can relax, favorite places, favorite activities, and social relationships), specific evaluations of agriculture and rural area life, overall evaluations, and what they wanted to be when they were young as a comparison to their current situation. Regarding the current state and perceptions that constitute satisfaction, we focused particularly on aspects that bring enjoyment and relaxation. Respondents were asked whether they could secure enjoyable or relaxing time in their daily lives (temporal perspective), whether they had enjoyable or relaxing places (spatial perspective), whether they had enjoyable or relaxing activities (specific content), and with whom they shared enjoyment or difficulties (social relationship perspective). This was also a free-response format. However, for social relationships, respondents were asked to provide specific names, relationships, and locations regarding: everyday conversations, consultations within agriculture, financial consultations, and people they can rely on when facing difficulties.

Regarding the evaluation of agriculture, options were prepared based on items from the Rural Life Research Institute (1987). For the evaluation of rural life, to prioritize each respondent's personal feelings, it was made an open-ended question, and the responses were then coded.

Regarding an overall evaluation of current life, respondents were also asked whether they wish to continue living in agriculture and rural areas themselves, whether they wish their children to continue doing so, and to rate their overall current life on a scale of 1 to 4 (4 for fully satisfied).

The villagers' evaluation of their own lives is clearly reflected in whether they want their children to have a similar lifestyle. While denial of one's own way of life is emotionally painful and may be passed off as "home is where you make it," honest feelings are more likely to emerge when asked if they would want their children to have that same lifestyle.

In addition to the head of each household (referred to as "men" in this paper) and their spouse, interviews were also conducted, where possible, with children aged 15 or older, regarding perceptions of agriculture and rural areas. Analysis was performed using SPSS Ver. 28.

3. Results

3.1. Outline of the Research Village

3.1.1. Population and respondents

The population of south hamlet in Village N was 556 males and 456 females, totaling 1,012 people. Of these, 92 males were working overseas. Excluding them, the male-to-female ratio becomes 101%. The population under 15 years old was 216 people (21.3%), and under 18 years old was 258 people (25.5%). The average household size was 4.10 people. Compared to the 2022 Population Census, the male-to-female ratio in the rural area population was slightly higher (national average: 95.3%), the population aged 14 and under in the rural area was slightly lower (national average: 28.8%), and the household size in the rural area was nearly the same (national average: 4.17 persons).

Among these, the age composition of respondents who were heads of households and their spouses was as follows: for males, 5 (3%) were aged 20s or younger, 23 (14%) were in their 30s, 55 (33%) were in their 40s, 35 (21%) were in their 50s, 33 (20%) were in their 60s, and 16 (9%) were aged 70 or older, totaling 167 individuals. For women, the breakdown was: 30 respondents (14%) aged 20s or younger, 91 respondents (43%) in their 30s, 54 respondents (25%) in their 40s, 26 respondents (12%) in their 50s, 9 respondents (4%) in their 60s, and 3 respondents (1%) aged 70 or older, totaling 213 respondents.

Among cohabiting children who responded to the agriculture/rural area survey, there were 22 participants: 19 males and 3 females. By age group: 6 were in their teens, 9 were in their 20s, 5 were in their 30s or 40s, and 2 were unknown.

3.1.2. Land and agriculture

Of the 247 households, 49 were Hindu, with the remainder all Muslim. There were 11 households headed by women. Only 4 households had no land at all, while 94 households (39%) owned only a homestead or a homestead and a pond.

Regarding managed farmland, among the 240 households for which data was obtained, 95 households were not cultivating any land, 68 households had less than 50 decimals (approximately 20 ares), 33 households had 50-99 decimals, 28 households had 100-249 decimals, and 13 households had 250 decimals or more.

In Bangladesh, the rural population aged 15 years and above, only 52% of men, and 20% of women are engaged in farming (Census of Agriculture 2008). And of the rural employed population, 51% of men and 42% of women are employed in jobs other than agriculture (Report on Agricultural and Rural Statistics 2018, BBS 2019).

In rural areas, many households live there but engage in no agriculture, or only in small-scale gardening within their homestead or raising small livestock. This is also a major characteristic of rural Bangladesh (Yoshino, 2013). In Village N, like many other rural areas in Bangladesh, nearly half of the households possess homesteads and use the rural area as their base of living, but they rely on various livelihoods other than agriculture for their

sustenance. On the other hand, among households that own farmland, the larger the area they possess, the more likely they are to adopt a “landlord-like” behavior, cultivating the land themselves only minimally and having others perform the work.

Major crops were *boro* rice grown in the dry season using irrigation by 150 households, while only 75 households cultivated *aman* rice, the characteristic and traditional crop of floodplain agriculture during the rainy season. Of these, 13 households experienced no harvest due to irregular flooding in past two years. Additionally, 16 households cultivated jute during the rainy season, and 10 households cultivated mustard during the dry season. Households cultivating wheat or legumes were very few (1 and 3, respectively).

In Bangladesh, due to Bengali traditions and Islamic religious reasons, the spheres of men and women have traditionally been separate. Village N as well, in agriculture, men primarily handle fieldwork, while women take charge of preparing crops after they are brought into the homestead (83% of women engage in this). Gradually, women began working alongside men on farmland closer to the homestead, but only 28% of women were involved, remaining a small proportion. Women also played a significant role in caring for plants and livestock within the homestead (76% for plant care, 66% for livestock care). Food management was also a female role, with 65% of women engaged in food processing. On the other hand, women rarely sold at the village market or outside the village; sales were mostly to middlemen within the homestead, with only 26% engaged in this activity. Regarding household decision-making, 38% of women were involved in agricultural management, and 53% were involved in household financial management.

3.1.3. Occupation

Among the 415 males excluding students and infants, farmers (139 people, 33%) were the largest group, followed by overseas migrant workers (92 people, 22%). As in other rural areas of Bangladesh, migrant work to the Middle East, Singapore, Malaysia, and other destinations is prevalent in Village N, resulting in a significant absence of young and middle-aged men from the village. Next were permanent employees (58, with NGOs employing the most at 10), various businesses (44), auto tricycle drivers (11), military/police (10), poultry farm operators (6), and teachers (5). Others included doctors/veterinarians, carpenters, electricians, tailors, and lawyers. Among the 320 women (excluding students and infants), 295 (92%) identified as housewives. The others were engaged in agriculture (6), teaching (3), office work (2), and one each in poultry farming, tailoring, and home tutoring.

Among children of school age, only two males aged 17 or younger were employed, and only one female was either married or working; all others were students, indicating an improvement in educational standards in Village N.

When asked about their desired occupations as children, men answered as follows: white-collar jobs 43 people (25%), civil service 25 people (15%), teaching 15 people (9%), and no specific desire 12 people (7%). Agriculture-related occupations were chosen by only 6 people (3%). Among women, teachers were significantly more common

at 69 (32%), followed by white-collar jobs at 26 (12%), managing the household at 23 (11%), and no specific preference at 58 (27%). While white-collar occupations were preferred by both groups, more women aspired to become teachers, a career they could pursue locally. Among traditional agriculture and rural area occupations (agriculture and homemaking), the aspiration for agriculture was notably low.

3.1.4. Perception on agriculture

As mentioned above, households owning large areas of farmland tend to act as “landlords,” cultivating little

themselves and having others farm their land. Therefore, regarding their perception of agriculture, we should focus not on owned farmland but on the opinions of those actually engaged in farming. We narrow our focus to men and women in households practicing agriculture on farmland outside their homestead.

Both men and women highly supported characteristics inherent to farming itself, such as “Have the joy of farming” and “Can work as a family” (Figure 1).

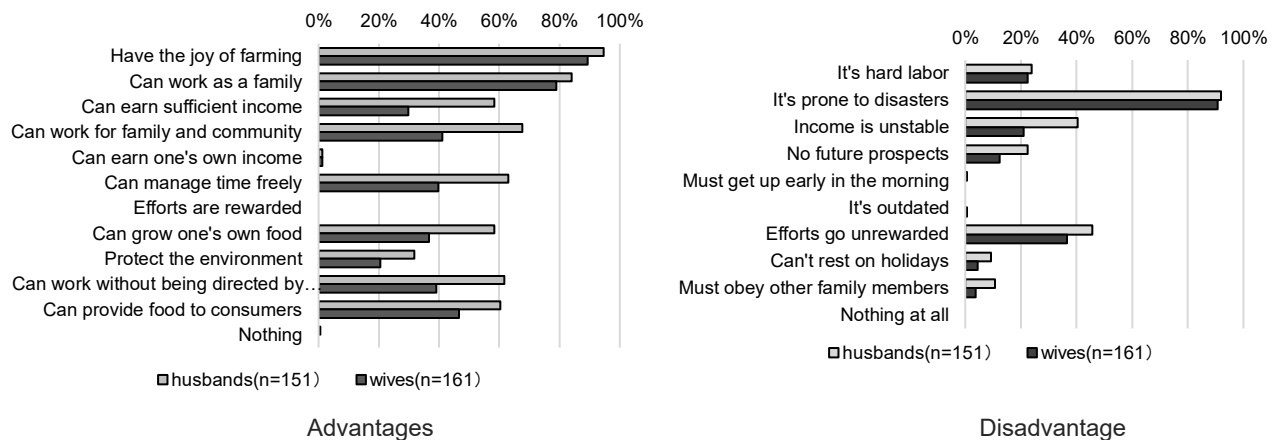


Figure 1. Advantages and disadvantages of agriculture (Village N, 2018)

Furthermore, men agreed with more than half of the options. While women showed a similar trend, their selection rates were significantly lower than men for all options except the two mentioned above. The only other option selected by more than half of the women, besides the two mentioned, was “Can provide food to consumers.” Note that this option was retained despite initial concerns among the Bangladesh research team members that “farmers are unlikely to consider this, so it's unnecessary.” Conversely, “Efforts are rewarded” and “Can earn one's own income” were not selected by most respondents, regardless of gender. Notably, the former received zero selections. It is evident that farmers are conscious of the social role of agriculture. Farmers have access to a wider range of information than researchers assume, and it has become clear that they consider the significance of agriculture from multiple perspectives. On the negative side, “It's prone to disasters” was overwhelmingly chosen by the vast majority of respondents, both men and women, followed by “Efforts go unrewarded.” A major factor contributing to efforts going unrewarded in Village N is the drastic reduction in harvests due to disasters. As mentioned above, 13 out of 75 households that plant rice during the Aman period reported “no rice harvest due to flooding” in past two years.

Let's examine the data in more detail by age group. Among male respondents, the middle-aged group was largely comprised of those working overseas, so only two men in their 20s were engaged in agriculture, and there

were only ten in their 30s. Therefore, these two groups were combined into a single category. There were 45 men in their 40s, 30 in their 50s, and 32 in their 60s. Similarly, with only 11 respondents in their 70s and 2 in their 80s, these age groups were combined into the 70s and 80s category. For women, only 9 were in their 20s, so this group was combined with those in their 30s (81 respondents). There were 42 in their 40s, 19 in their 50s, and 8 in their 60s. No women in their 70s or 80s were engaged in agriculture.

Among men, the overall trends were similar across all age groups, but the percentage choosing each item increased with age. Among these, “Can work for the community” and “sufficient income” were chosen most frequently by those in their 40s (32 respondents, 71% and 24 respondents, 56%, respectively). Those in their 20s and 30s showed particularly low percentages choosing “Can work without relying on others” (6, 32%) and “Can provide food to consumers” (6, 32%). Women also showed similar overall trends across age groups, but for many items, the percentage choosing them increased with age. Among these, “Can grow one's own food” was highest among those in their 40s (20, 48%), while “Can work as a family”, “Can work for family and community” and “Can earn sufficient income” were highest among those in their 50s (16, 84%; 12, 63%, and 6, 32%, respectively).

Regarding the disadvantages of agriculture, not a single man in his 20s or 30s selected “It's hard labor” or “Must

obey other family members' orders." "Income is unstable" was highest among those in their 40s and 50s each at 47% (21 for 40s and 14 for 50s). "Efforts go unrewarded" was selected more frequently with increasing age, reaching 69% (22) among those in their 60s and 67% (10) among those in their 70s and 80s.

Among women, "It's hard labor" was most frequently chosen by those in their 40s (13, 31%). Those in their 50s selected "income is unstable" the least (1, 5%). However, "efforts go unrewarded" was chosen more by them than other generations (10, 53%), followed by those in their 40s (38, 48%).

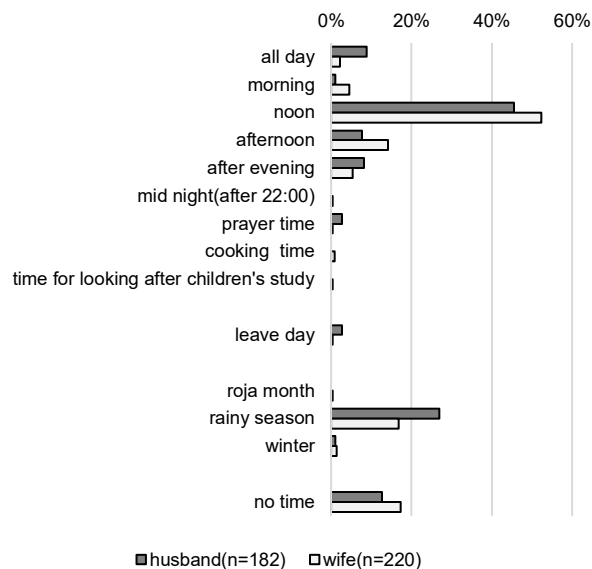


Figure 2. Free time by men and women (Village N, 2018)

About 10% of respondents "don't have" a favorite place to go, and there was a significant difference between men and women in terms of specific places (Figure 3). Bazaars were overwhelmingly chosen by men, and other places beyond their own village, such as out-of-prefecture or neighborhood playgrounds, were also frequently chosen. In addition, many men who went to work outside the community chose their own homes. On the other hand, women overwhelmingly chose their birthplace. If their parents are still alive and well, their birthplace is a place where they feel welcome and at ease, and where they can renew old friendships with people they have missed.

3.2.2. Favorite activities

Only a few percent of both men and women answered that they did not have any enjoyable activities, and most of them found some kind of enjoyment, but again, there was a significant difference between men and women (Figure 4). The activities mentioned by women were those that were carried out in the homestead, and religious activities were also carried out in the home, while men went to the mosque. The most common activity mentioned by women was housework, especially "cooking," and some

3.2. How Villagers Spend Time and Feel in the Rural Life

3.2.1. Favorite time and place

Many men and women chose afternoon time for bathing and napping as their favorite time of day (Figure 2). Many also cited the rainy season, but fewer women than men, since women work less seasonally, mainly doing household works. Thirteen percent of men and 17% of women said they had no free time. The reality is that women are busier working than men, who can spend their time leisurely after finishing farm work.

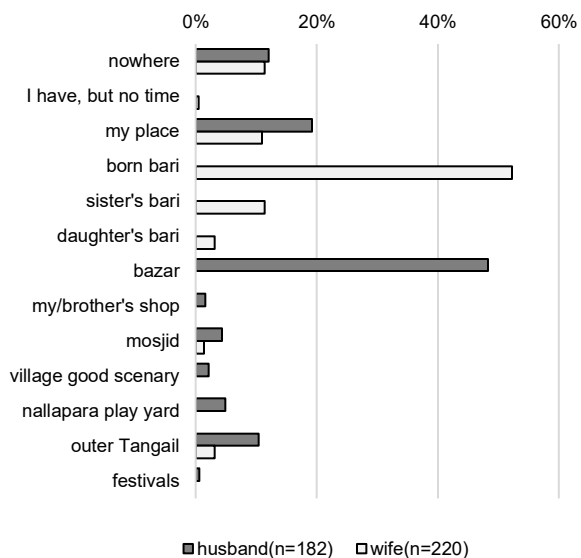


Figure 3. Favorite places by men and women (Village N, 2018)

mentioned making *pitha* (a pastry made from rice flour, especially enjoyed after the fall harvest) and other treats for the whole family to enjoy together. Other activities mentioned were sewing *kantha* (old saris that were stacked and sewn side by side to make a quilt), women sew them spreading out in the sunny yard, often with the help of women from the neighborhood, and chatting with them as they worked. Making clay vessels was also mentioned. The women are busy all day doing household works, but it was evident that they also find enjoyment in their chores.

3.2.3. Those who had no favorite free time, favorite place or activities

Those who answered "no free time," "no favorite place," or "no favorite activity" were considered to be those who had few places to enjoy their daily lives. Let's take a closer look at those who gave these answers, although they represent only a small percentage of the total. Thirty-four men and 31 women responded that they "have no free time." Interestingly, only 3 (9%) of the 34 men answered that they were farmers, while most of them (31, 91%) were employed or in business. Women, on the other hand, were more likely to have men who were farmers (20

respondents, 65%). Since women are also involved in supporting and post-harvest work in agriculture, their workload is naturally higher than that of non-farm women, who are mainly engaged in domestic work. Women who answered “I don't have time” tended to be negative when asked whether they wanted to continue farming or whether they wanted their children to farm.

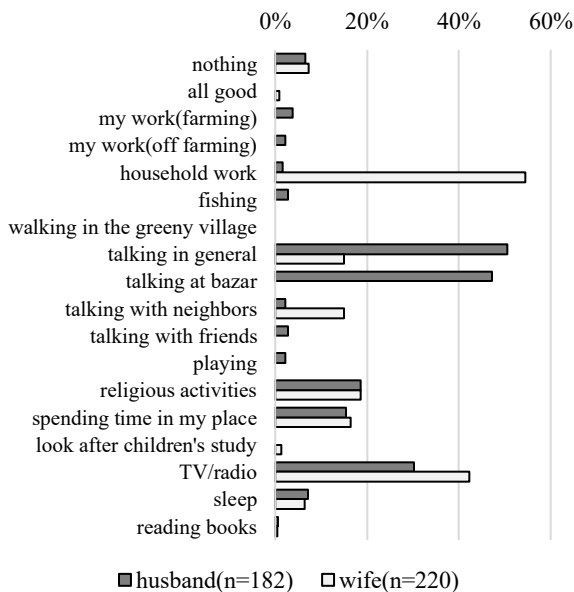


Figure 4. Favorite activities by men and women (Village N, 2018)

Secondly, looking at those who answered “I don't have a favorite place,” 61% (14 out of 21) of men and 95% (20 out of 21) of women indicated that their own or their husbands' occupation was “farmer,” a higher percentage than in the village as a whole. This is also very interesting, but there was no difference in the answers to the questions “Would you like to continue living in the village?” and “would you like your children to live in the village?” It is assumed that some of the respondents “never thought about it because it is a familiar sight.

Lastly, the smallest number of respondents (11 males and 8 females) responded that they had no favorite activity. No male farmers who answered “no favorite activity” said they wished their children would farm, and only 40% of female farmers who also answered “no favorite activity” wished their children would live in the village. The “no favorite activity” situation seemed to reflect a more negative perception of village life than the other two items.

3.2.4. Social relationships of women and men

Figure 5 shows the number of social connections by purpose. for “everyday chatting,” “consulting about agriculture,” “daily cooperation (such as resource

exchange),” “financial consultations,” and “people to rely on when in trouble.” The bar length indicates the average number of people per individual.

Regarding the number of people per individual, both men and women had the most people to chat with. Women had slightly more people they cooperated daily, while men had slightly more people they could rely on. No one reported having no one to talk to about all topics, nor did anyone list only cohabiting family members.

The nature of these relationships differed significantly. For men, the proportion of blood relatives was higher. Living side-by-side daily likely played a significant role here. A few respondents mentioned the Upazila agriculture officer for agricultural advice, but this was very rare. For relying people, similar to women, the range broadened, with neighbors outnumbering relatives, and friends also accounting for a certain proportion. On the other hand, women, who mostly lived on their husband's property after marriage, cited in-laws as the largest group, followed by their own blood relatives. For people they could rely on, the range broadened somewhat, with a higher proportion being non-relatives like neighbors and friends. Notably, for both men and women, excluding their spouse, the person they consulted was almost 100% of the same gender (men had no one other than their wives).

Regarding the geographic range, for both men and women, 95% of those consulted for casual chattering, agricultural consultation, daily cooperation, and financial consultation were within the same hamlet (*para*). For people they could rely on, those outside the village accounted for 24%. While men had a broader range of activity, it became clear that daily social relationships for both men and women were based within the settlement. No particular correlation was observed between the number of friends and satisfaction levels for either men or women.

3.3. Perception on Rural Life

3.3.1. How do they feel about village life?

How do they feel about the good and bad aspects of village life? As for the good aspects of village life, both men and women cited the good environment, specifically described as “pleasant shade from the trees,” “good breeze,” “clean air,” “good scenery,” and “little garbage (Figure 6). Next in the list were good food (“fresh vegetables and fish,” and “cheap prices”) and good communication (“living together with family,” “living with all relatives,” “living with neighbors,” and “being able to come and go between neighborhoods and relatives' houses”). On the other hand, “nothing in particular” was the most common response as a bad point, but what was mentioned were poor road conditions (especially during the rainy season) and a lag in education and medical care (Figure 7). Problems with road conditions and medical care were cited by men, while problems with education were cited slightly more often by women.

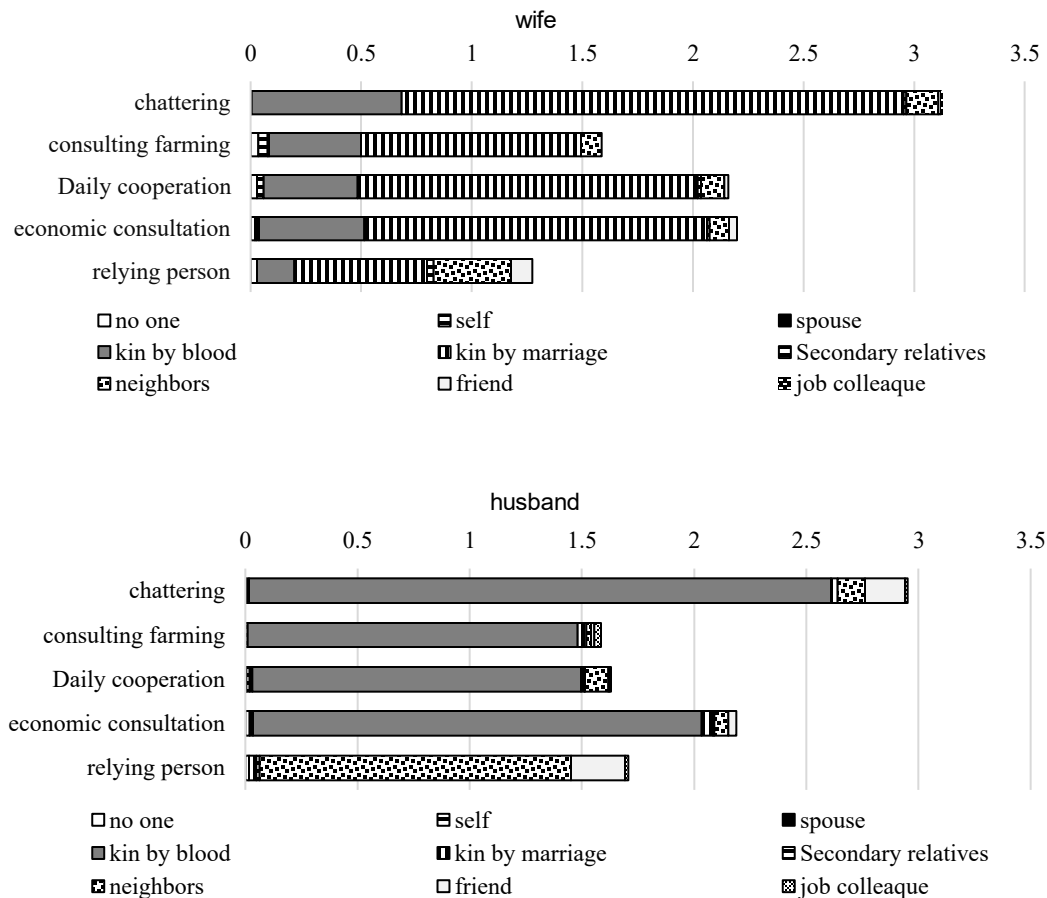


Figure 5. Number of Social Connections by Purpose

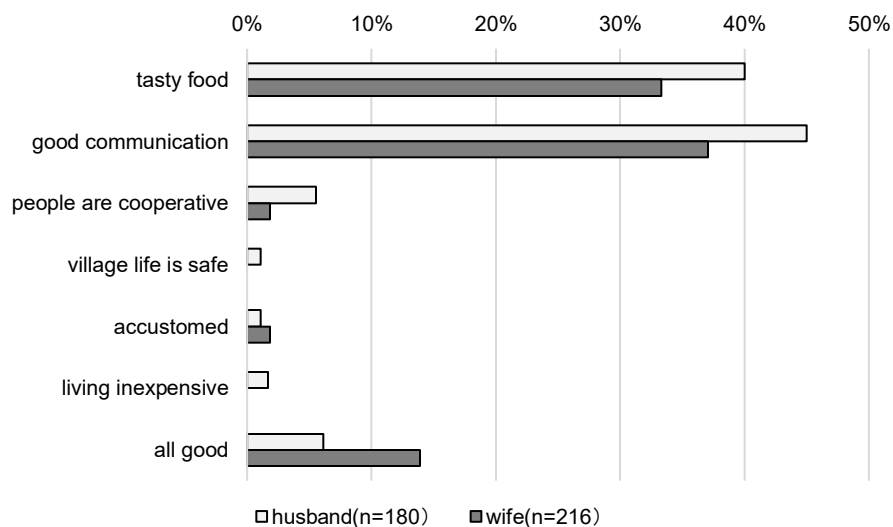


Figure 6. Good aspects of village life by men and women (Village N, 2018)

The differences by age group were as follows. The overall trend was similar across all age groups, but among men, “Environmental quality” was most frequently chosen as a positive aspect of rural life by those in their 20s and 30s (37, 84%). Regarding disadvantages, roads were selected

by 31% (8) of those in their 20s and 30s and 45% (22) of those in their 40s, higher than other age groups. Delays in medical care were cited more frequently by those in their 20s and 30s (3, 12%) and 60s (5, 12%). The highest

percentage stating there were no disadvantages at all was among those in their 50s (20, 56%).

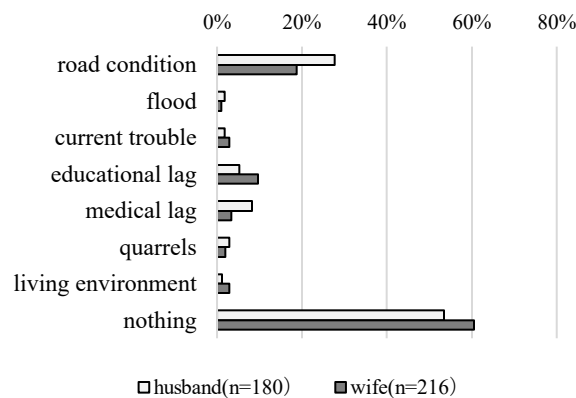


Figure 7. Bad aspects of village life by men and women (Village N, 2018)

Women noted that satisfaction with the environment was highest among those in their 60s and 70s (8, 80%), but was also high among those in their 20s (18, 60%). Communication received high ratings from those in their 60s and 70s (5, 50%) and those in their 30s (28, 42%). As for negative aspects, roads received low ratings from those in their 20s (9, 30%) and 40s (12, 24%), while educational backwardness received low ratings from those in their 30s (13, 15%) and medical backwardness from those in their 50s (3, 14%). This likely reflects the challenges faced at each respective life stage.

3.3.2. General evaluation

The analysis of intention to farm was limited to households with arable land (Figure 8). While 90% of both men and women intend to continue farming themselves, less than 30% would recommend it to their children. On the other hand, more than four fifth of the respondents would like to continue to live in rural areas, and two-thirds of them would like their children to live in Village N as well.

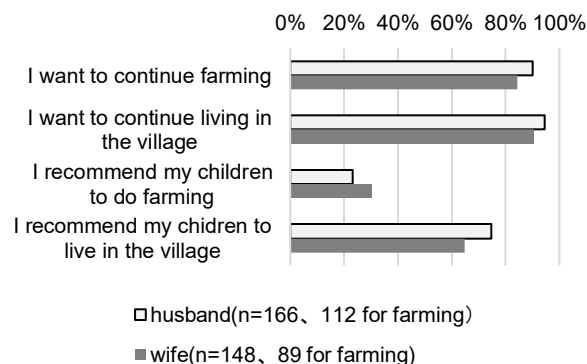


Figure 8. Perception on farming and living in the village by men and women

Looking at the data by age group, regarding whether they themselves wish to continue farming, men showed little variation across age groups. However, regarding the desire to have their children take over the farm, those in their 20s and 30s showed a relatively high intention at 45%, while those in their 40s showed the lowest at 13%.

For women, the desire to continue farming was highest in their 40s (65%), while the desire for their children to take over was highest in their 50s and 60s (29%). It was low in their 20s and 30s at 17%. Regarding continuing to live in rural areas, men showed a higher overall desire to do so, with this tendency increasing with age. Women showed a lower desire among those in their 60s and 70s (80%). Regarding their children, women showed a lower desire among those in their 20s and 40s (59%), while those in their 60s and 70s showed a higher desire (90%).

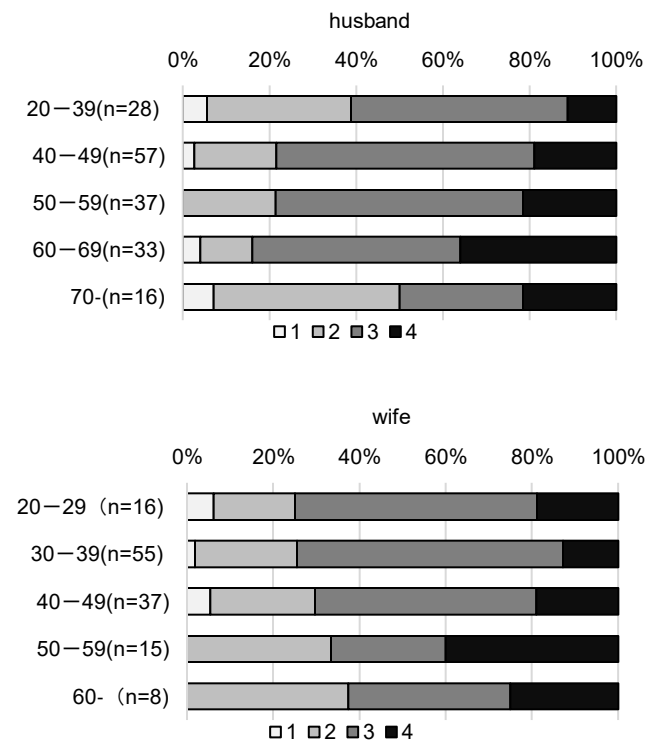


Figure 9. Satisfaction on rural life by age group (source: by authors)

Overall satisfaction increased for men as they entered their 60s but declined slightly for those in their 70s and older. For women, satisfaction was highest in their 50s compared to other age groups (Figure 9).

When examining the relationship between involvement in management tasks such as sales, farm management, and household finances and women's satisfaction levels, no difference was observed in household finances. However, participation in sales and farm management tended to lower satisfaction levels. Increased busyness may be the underlying reason. Regarding educational attainment and satisfaction, a slight negative correlation was observed, though it was weak.

Figure 10 shows how satisfaction levels differ based on household economic status. It is a cross-tabulation chart with respondents' approximate monthly expenditure figures. Note that the median expenditure was 8,000 taka, and the average was 11,055 taka (standard deviation 17,149 taka). According to the 2016 HIES survey conducted by the Bangladesh government, the average

monthly expenditure for rural households was 14,156 taka, with Village N being slightly lower.

Among the 22 respondents from the younger generation, both their views on agriculture and rural areas showed similar trends to their parents'. Regarding agriculture, 71% wanted to continue it themselves, but only 33% wanted their children to do so. Regarding living in rural areas, 73% wanted to continue themselves, and 69% thought their children should continue as well. Satisfaction was also high, averaging 3.41. However, since these were individuals willing to spend time on such a survey, they may have been people with a strong awareness of agriculture and rural life.

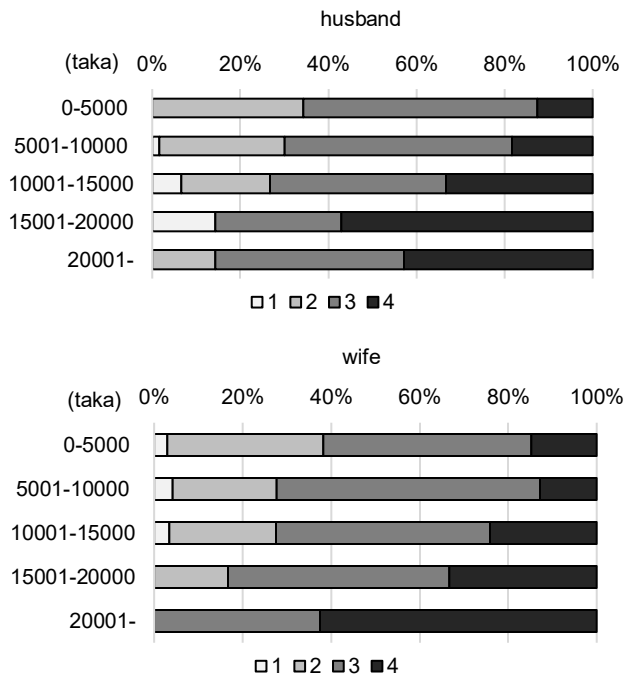


Figure 10. Satisfaction on rural life by economic group (monthly expenditure) (source: by authors)

4. Discussion

4.1. The Value and Unrewarding Aspects of Agriculture

Farmers recognized the multifaceted value of agriculture, including its social role. Beyond whether it was “profitable” or “unprofitable,” the work itself—the joy of cultivation and connections with family and community—was highly valued as a positive aspect. Similarly valued were the time flexibility afforded by the agricultural way of working and the ability to produce one's own food through agriculture. It becomes clear that resentment toward the reality where such work yields unrewarding results and its cause (flood damage) leads to negative evaluations.

Negative views comparing it to something urban or external, like “future potential” or “outdated,” were not highly indicated. Complaints about not being able to take holidays according to the calendar or having to work from early morning were rarely seen. It seems to be naturally woven into the rhythm of daily life.

This contrasts with surveys conducted in 1980's in Japan during periods of significant decline in agricultural successors and their spouses, where agriculture was often avoided as “old-fashioned.” In Bangladesh, relying solely on agriculture for livelihood was never the expectation. Consequently, its practitioners likely recognize the intrinsic value inherent in agriculture itself.

However, this does not mean that it is okay for agriculture to remain unprofitable. Annual flood levels have been significantly reduced compared to the past due to measures like embankment construction. Correspondingly, the traditional deep water rice variety was cultivated during the rainy season. This variety possessed characteristics enabling it to withstand sudden flooding of up to one meter per day. Such extreme flooding no longer occurs, and even during the rainy season, high-yield varieties are now cultivated, which are shorter in stature. Consequently, when sudden changes in water level occur, they suffer significant damage. Historically, Bangladesh experienced annual flooding of varying severity. While these floods brought fertile soil from upstream, they also caused significant damage in some years. To address frequent flood disasters, the government, with support from the World Bank and others, is planning a multifaceted assistance program. Priority is given to strengthening flood prevention embankments, re-excavating canals, and providing livelihood opportunities through initiatives like income generation support for women and job creation via public works. Only then does agricultural support follow (including improvements to irrigation facilities and provision of seeds and fertilizers) (World Bank, 2025). The importance of providing multifaceted support beyond agriculture to flood-prone areas is recognized, and no new agricultural support initiatives are apparent. However, development of varieties resistant to rapid water level changes is progressing and gradually expanding (Bairagi et al., 2021).

Currently, dry-season rice has overtaken monsoon rice as the primary crop, but it requires irrigation, fertilizer, and pesticide inputs, making it costly. Despite rising water usage fees, fertilizer and pesticide prices, and daily labor wages, rice prices remain too low, causing expenses to exceed income. This led to farmer riots in 2019, prompting the government to implement policies such as rice price support (Mainuddin et al., 2021).

4.2. Evaluation of Rural Life

When considering free time, favorite places, and enjoyable activities, most women in Village N did not hold outside jobs. Centered around their homesteads, they busied themselves with housework and agriculture-related tasks. While their husbands would head out to chat at the market or elsewhere once their own work was done, the women remained busy, constantly on their feet. Some said they had no free time, yet household labor like cooking was seen as work with its own fulfillment. Life in the rural area was valued for its pleasant environment, access to delicious fresh food, and the enjoyment of interacting and communicating with neighbors. Many people hoped their children would also live in the village, but very few wanted the next generation to take up agriculture. This is consistent with the CGAP report, where

Bangladesh's low level was noticeably lower than that of several African countries where the survey was conducted at the same time.

Compared to surveys of life satisfaction in the Global North (Sabillón et.al,2022) , a trend was observed where satisfaction with life tended to increase with age and income, but no correlation was found with educational attainment.

Cooking is an important task for women, and it starts with gathering fuel, and more specifically, with growing vegetables in the homestead and raising chickens and other livestock. Fuel gathering is one of the most time-consuming activities in a day's work. Specific cooking begins with the preparation of spices. Women sit on the ground and grind several spices for hours. They cut the foodstuffs by holding a knife with a pedestal with their feet.

Women who cook deftly with one hand while plunging fuel into a handmade clay hearth with the other hand, and who look satisfied when they receive the word "delicious" are dignified. It is the same for Eid's feast or pumpkin *torkari* for tonight's side dish.

Many people cited the pleasant shade of trees, good airflow, clean air, and beautiful scenery as examples of the rural area's favorable environment. This can be attributed to the trees found in rural areas. In this country, where temperatures frequently exceed 40 degrees Celsius and humidity is high, the presence of trees that provide shade to escape the intense heat and generate a pleasant breeze is extremely important. However, the landscapes of Bangladesh's rural areas are actually almost entirely human-made. Much of Bangladesh's rural landscape, including Village N, is located on floodplains. During the rainy season, overflowing waters from upstream inundate the land, leaving little room for natural forests. The trees in rural areas are mostly planted by people (or naturally sprouted but allowed to grow by villagers), forming human-made "forests." And it is these "forests" that shape the tranquil, lush green landscape.

In Bangladesh, statistics include privately owned forests in their total forest area, and these private forests are essentially synonymous with vegetation on the homesteads.

Living with the earth is also another characteristics of Bangladesh floodplain. In the southeast Asia, stilt houses are common (Seo, 2017), but `people in Bangladesh chose to live on the earthen floor, which made people and to perform the hard labor of digging the earth. With this struggle, villagers could secure the place to grow trees. Villagers usually use wooden stool called a *piri*, which has legs about several centimeters high, and when you sit on it, the ground becomes very close by. As"making clay vessels" was mentioned as a favorite activity at the pastime. and 'Being able to live with the soil/earth' was also evaluated. Their living base, homestead, is made of clay, and people feel a strong affinity for a life close to the earth.

The social network of men was broader than women, but the essential network was within hamlet both for men and women. Individual homesteads, originally belonging to a single household, are divided among multiple households through inheritance. Alternatively, new homesteads are constructed adjacent to existing ones, forming compact

clusters of homesteads. During the rainy season, nearly all land except the raised plots such as homesteads is submerged. Consequently, these man-made plots become the only freely accessible, precious space during this period regardless the gender. They are frequented not only by their owners but also by neighbors and passersby as thoroughfares. Though private property, they function as open, communal spaces. In fact, children often freely pick and eat fruit from other people's trees—items of little commercial value and commonplace (Yoshino 2013).

Once a chair is placed on the earthen floor, the place is already a reception space. Many women cited the positive aspects of village life as "being able to move around freely," "being able to visit other villages," and "being able to visit each other." Women in Bangladesh face significant restrictions on their sphere of activity due to the *pardah*. With changes in socio-economic conditions, the sphere of activity for women in Bangladesh indeed expanded. In the past, leaving the village was limited to returning to their parents' home accompanied by a man. Now, they sometimes go shopping or to government offices alone. Few have jobs outside the village, but those who do naturally commute alone. However, when going out, following Islamic norm, they wear a scarf to cover their hair to avoid the gaze of others. Some wear veils that conceal everything except their eyes. Upon returning home, women remove these coverings and feel revitalized. Consequently, village life—rooted in community and free from the scrutiny of outsiders—was perceived as a more livable environment for women. As mentioned above, even men, who appear to move more freely and widely, placed the greatest importance on relationships within their hamlet, their community.

In Bangladesh, religious events are still very important in the lives of both Muslims and Hindus. In terms of cultural standards, the fact that there were only a few comments about lagging behind in terms of education, but almost none in the Village N, may indicate that the cities are oriented toward employment, but are not so much culturally appealing. Bangladesh is characterized by a relatively close proximity between urban and rural areas due to its dense population, so "vague longing" due to unfamiliarity with the country is unlikely to arise.

For village women in Bangladesh (and not only village women, but village women in particular), options for living are limited. It is difficult to secure a place to live on their own, and their sources of cash are very limited, making it nearly impossible for them to live independently. Women's dream of becoming teachers in their childhood may indicate their desire for economic independence and social recognition. The fact that the birthplace is the most favorite place to live may imply conflicts with in-laws. Separation usually results in a return to the birthplace, but the position becomes precarious when the father dies. Although women appreciates the fact that they can freely communicate as neighbors, fights between "*ja*" (wives of her husband's brothers) often occur. They would like to leave, but it may not be feasible, so they simply do not consider it an option. The mind set for the adaptation and rationalization to the long-term deprivations is pointed out (Gajdosikie, 2004; Lewis et al, 1975). The dangers of third-party accounts are pointed out by Spivag (Spivag 1998), and irresponsible beautification is forbidden. On the other hand, however, the lives of urban Bangladeshis are not very pleasant, with narrow dwellings in dusty, smelly

alleys, and little greenery, although gardening is spread out. In recent years, women have begun to go shopping in urban areas, but it takes a lot of energy to travel through the crowded and congested streets to do so. As mentioned above, the distance between town areas and rural areas is relatively close in Bangladesh, and vague longings are unlikely to arise.

The women of the village show little yearning for the urban living environment itself; rather, their daily demeanor reveals how highly they value the comfort of village life. And that comfort is something the people who live there have built up over generations.

5. Conclusion

This paper examined the “perception of agriculture and rural life,” focusing particularly on women—whose voices were heard last—and considers Bangladesh. Until now, this perception has been articulated by third parties with some intent, and countermeasures have been devised accordingly.

From the research, agriculture itself was valued, the multi-dimensional value of agriculture, including its social role, was recognized. It's regrettable that efforts go unrewarded due to disaster damage. Life in rural areas was highly valued.

Most women lived in their husbands' homestead, spending their days within that small sphere. The village, made lush green by generations of planting and tending by the villagers, offered shade and pleasant breezes, making it a comfortable place to live. Amidst their busy lives, they found joy in household works and chatting with family and neighboring women. While the men seemed to have more freedom of movement, both men and women maintained their primary social circles almost entirely within the village.

Women's economic independence and social participation are important. Their aspiration to become a teacher indicates that need. At the same time, isn't it equally important to respect the satisfaction women express in their daily lives?

Bangladesh's poverty has long been noted internationally. Life in rural areas is indeed simple. However, it appears that if a household has a homestead and can secure daily sustenance, villagers consider village life is not so bad, and children should continue living in the village. While it cannot be entirely ruled out that this view carries a bias of rationalization, it would be inappropriate to dismiss it outright. From a sustainability perspective, the importance of reducing excessive resource consumption and environmental impact has long been emphasized. It is particularly noted that the amount of resources consumed by countries in the Global North exceeds what can be regenerated. Indicators like the Ecological Footprint show Bangladesh's environmental impact is considerably low. Shouldn't the Global North learn from the ways in which villagers in Bangladesh find satisfaction in their lives?

In Bangladesh, around 1990, calls grew louder that “women should participate more in development.” Women were encouraged to earn cash, receiving various loans and technical training. Meanwhile, the wisdom and ingenuity women had cultivated were overlooked. Women

in rural areas seemed to be treated powerless, as if they needed to be pulled up from outside by someone else.

In Japan's rural Life policies, too, the focus was on identifying and improving the negative aspects of rural life. After the war, under GHQ (Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers after WW2 lead by the USA) guidance, the foundational elements of Japanese culture were deemed things that should be reformed. It took time to reconsider the wisdom cultivated in local communities thereafter. For example, reevaluating traditional foods took about 30 years (Falcão et al., 2024). Since then, efforts to produce traditional local foods and regional products, primarily led by rural women, have advanced and are now a key policy focus. Life improvement extension workers, who initially rejected earthen-floored spaces to promote urban-style housing for “better” living conditions, later reflected and regretted having overly dismissed the practical utility of these spaces and their role as casual social gathering places (Yoshino 2011).

Odagiri (2011) points out that despite the wide variety of policies proposed and implemented by various ministries and local governments in Japan, the revitalization of depopulated and mountainous rural areas has not been achieved because these efforts have not addressed the deepest underlying problem: the “hollowing out of pride”. Economic modernization has always been largely aimed at obtaining “things” deemed “lacking” through “growth,” measured against some supposedly ‘advanced’ region, and this was considered a condition for “happiness.” In Bangladesh, this process began in earnest in the 1980s and has accelerated since. Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen (1999), from a subsistence perspective, emphasizes the importance of sharing the work of reproducing life with nature and others, making this the source of life's richness. Food sovereignty is an objection raised by farmers who live rooted in their local communities.

In traditional societies, daily life is about steadily building up while interacting with nature, considering the next day, the next week, the next year, and even future generations—in other words, “sustainability” is far more crucial. Yet the joys born from daily interaction with nature, labor, and mutual support are hard to articulate and find. Some may not even be consciously recognized. Modernization has turned a blind eye to this, silently robbing us of nature, farmers, and women. Isn't the issue we now see worldwide, including the Global South countries—such as rural depopulation and abandonment—a result of ignoring these very things? The profound pleasure and joy of village life—which contributes little to urban food supply or GDP—is being neglected. Without a chance to be recognized, village life is rapidly transformed. Amidst the relentless “hollowing out of pride,” people quietly withdraw without raising a loud protest.

In the Global North, including Japan, efforts to preserve rural areas as “heritage” (such as UNESCO's “Cultural Heritage” or FAO's Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems) often begin only after people have left and the bearers of traditions have vanished. Can't the Global South learn from these lessons? In rural Bangladesh' too, village bullfighting, sword dances, village theater, traditional textiles, and embroidery—many traditional cultural heritages have already vanished or are vanishing. Yet the village life on the floodplain, built around

homesteads created by the people themselves, remains vibrant. How can we share in the joys and hardships of building a life through interaction with nature? This is what policymakers must strive to achieve.

Conflict of interest: The authors did this research and wrote the article and there is no conflict of interest with other people.

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